

THE GREAT ONE, WATER, AND THE *LAOZI*: NEW LIGHT FROM GUODIAN

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In 1993, when Chinese archaeologists excavated a Warring States Period (475-222 B.C.) tomb at Jingmen Guodian 荊門郭店 in Hubei Province, they discovered a cache of philosophical texts written on some 800 bamboo slips. In 1998, transcriptions of these texts prepared under the auspices of the Jingmen City Museum by Peng Hao 彭浩, Liu Zuxin 劉祖信 and Wang Chuanfu 王傳富, with additional notes by Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, were published under the title *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 together with high-quality photographs of the original bamboo slips.¹

In Chinese history, discoveries of ancient manuscripts were rare events. The most notable examples were the ancient script texts said to have been discovered in the walls of Confucius' house and the Bamboo Annals found in the third century A.D. in a late Warring States tomb. In the last three decades, however, Chinese archaeologists have excavated dozens of ancient tombs containing manuscripts written on silk or bamboo slips. Even in this context, however, the Guodian tomb—given the number “one” by its excavators—has a special significance because it contained manuscripts of philo-

¹ Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館, *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* (Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1998). This publication was timed to coincide with a conference held at Dartmouth College, which I chaired together with Robert Henricks. See also Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams, eds., *The Guodian Laozi: Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May, 1998* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2000) for a description of these texts and the circumstances of their excavation. Many of the ideas presented in the present article were first broached at the Dartmouth conference. Earlier versions have also been presented at seminars held at Harvard University (1999), Wuhan University (1999), and the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (2002). I have received many valuable suggestions from the participants at these meetings, as well as from the anonymous *T'oung Pao* readers.

sophical works recorded in the local Chu script before imperial unification and the literary conflagrations of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.).

Bamboo-slip texts from a robbed tomb, probably in the same area and from a similar date, also appeared on the Hong Kong antiquities market in 1993. These texts are now in the Shanghai Museum and they, too, include previously unknown philosophical texts. A report on these slips and on unpublished materials from more than ten other sites was made at the International Conference on Recently Excavated Manuscripts, held at Beijing University, 19–22 August 2000.² The Shanghai Museum has also recently published two volumes of a projected six-volume collection of bamboo-slip texts from the afore-mentioned robbed tomb, now in their collection.³ Thus, it can be said that we are entering an entirely new era in the history of early Chinese thought.

The *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* divided the slips from Guodian Tomb No. 1 into 16 texts. Of these, only the *Laozi* 老子 and *Zi yi* 緇衣 (now a chapter of the *Li ji* 禮記) correspond to transmitted texts in the received tradition. A third text, *Wu xing* 五行, corresponds to a silk manuscript text found in an early Western Han tomb at Changsha Mawangdui 長沙馬王堆 in 1973. The other texts were previously unknown. Li Xueqin 李學勤 has suggested that six of them are sections of a lost early Confucian text, the *Zisizi* 子思子. Other scholars have questioned this identification, but at least these texts clearly belong to a Confucian school. Others are difficult to identify with any known philosopher or school.⁴ The textual material that is the subject of this article was written on 14 bamboo slips and separated out as a distinct text called *Tai Yi sheng shui* 太一生水 (*The Great One produced water*) by the editors of the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*. It includes a cosmogony in which the “Great One” first produced water, and from this water the sky, the earth and all else

² Sarah Allan et al., eds., *Xin chu jianbo yanjiu: Xinchu jianbo guoji xueshu yantaohui wenji* 新出簡帛研究：新出簡帛國際學術研討會文集 (Proceedings of the International Conference on Recently Excavated Manuscripts, Beijing University, August 19–22, 2000), forthcoming.

³ Ma Chengyuan, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 2002).

⁴ See Li Xueqin, “The Confucian Texts from Guodian Tomb Number One,” and Xing Wen, “Scholarship on the Guodian Texts: A Review Article,” in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, pp. 107-12 and 251-7.

followed. The first character is actually written as *Da* 大 and I will retain this reading (*Da Yi sheng shui*) for reasons that will become clear below. The piece was entirely unknown before the discovery of the bamboo-slip text, and it has no counterpart in the received tradition.

For the purposes of the following discussion, I use the term *Guodian Laozi* to refer to the Guodian slip-texts, *Daodejing* to refer to the traditional 5,000-character text in its various editions, including the two silk manuscript copies found at Changsha Mawangdui in 1973, and *Laozi* as a general appellation that includes all of the above.

Guodian Tomb No. 1

Guodian Tomb No. 1 is located in a cemetery on the outskirts of the Chu capital of Ying; it may be dated fairly precisely to a period of around 20 years, i.e., to about, or shortly before, 300 B.C.⁵ This dating is based on two major factors: (1) The burial style of the tomb, which is similar to that of other Chu burials—a style that was to change radically after the state of Qin invaded Chu and occupied its capital in 278 B.C. However, it is not the latest in the stylistic sequence of Chu tombs established by archaeologists. (2) Comparison with the nearby Baoshan Tomb No. 2, which can be dated fairly precisely to 323-316 B.C. on the basis of a divination about the occupant's last illness. The artifacts in the Guodian tomb, style of burial, and calligraphic form of the writing on the slips are all typically Chu, and very similar stylistically to those found in the

⁵ These dates have been disputed by Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟 in a number of articles. For an English translation of one of these, "A Discussion of the Composition Dates of the Various Guodian Chu Slip Texts and their Background," see *Contemporary Chinese Thought* (Fall 2000), pp. 18-42 (originally published in *Zhongguo zhhexue*, vol. 20). See also his article "Guodian Chu jian de shidai ji qi yu Zisi xuepai de guanxi" 郭店楚簡的時代及其與子思學派的關係, in *Wuhan daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiuyuan* 武漢大學中國文化研究院, *Guodian Chu jian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 郭店楚簡國際學術研討會論文集 (Wuhan: Hubei Renmin Press, 2000), pp. 644-9. Wang rejects both the date of the Baoshan tomb and that of the Guodian—and indeed the entire corpus of archaeological literature on Chu tombs and calendrics. Wang's arguments are interesting, but ultimately unconvincing, because they are based upon the received textual tradition and a preconceived historical schema based upon that tradition, rather than on an impartial analysis of the excavated materials or the calendrical basis of the Baoshan date.

Baoshan tomb.⁶ This means that the tomb was closed at the end of the fourth century B.C.—around the time of Mencius’s death, and almost a century before the Qin Dynasty’s literary holocaust and the accidental burning of the imperial library.

Different calligraphic styles used for different bundles of slips suggest that the slips were written by more than one scribe, and at least two texts are not in the local Chu script.⁷ The length of the slips in the bundles is also not uniform. These variations in form and style suggest that they were not copied specially for the burial. The deceased appears to have been an old man, possibly the tutor of a Chu prince.⁸ The evidence for any particular identification is weak. Nevertheless, the slip-texts found in the tomb are all philosophical writings: regardless of whether or not the deceased was the tutor to the Crown Prince of Chu, these are not standard mortuary items; both their form and content suggest that they were some sort of personal library that belonged to the deceased in his lifetime.

The *Guodian Laozi*

The bamboo slips that *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* designates as “*Laozi*” include three groups of slips with material that corresponds to passages now found in the *Laozi Daodejing*. The slips in these three groups are of different lengths and they appear to have originally been bound in three different bundles. They are all written in the script current in the Chu state during the middle to late Warring States Period. Two of the bundles—designated *Laozi jia* 甲 and *yi* 乙 (“A” and “B” below)—appear to have been written by the same hand; although the slips in the third bundle (*bing* 丙, “C”) are written in a very similar style of calligraphy, the expert opinion of the scholars who prepared the text for publication, Peng Hao and Qiu Xigui, is that they were written by a different hand.⁹

The material found in these three groups of slips includes alto-

⁶ See Li Boqian, “A Brief Account of the Origins and Development of Chu Culture,” and Liu Zuxin, “An Overview of Tomb No. One at Jingmen Guodian,” in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, pp. 9-23, 24-32; see also pp. 118-20 for discussion.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 133-4.

gether a little more than one-third of the *Daodejing*. In the *A* and *B* groups of slips, there is no case in which a passage is repeated. Thus, it is possible that these two groups of slips were two bundles of the same slip-text. On the other hand, one passage in the *A* group (corresponding to lines 10-18 of chapter 64 of the received text) is also found in the *C* group of slips. This suggests that the *C* group of slips was originally not a part of the same slip-text, but that the three groups drew on a common corpus of material in their composition.

All three groups of slips in the *Guodian Laozi* have substantial differences from the *Daodejing*. The *Guodian* texts include three types of punctuation marks—a short black stroke, a black square, and a “tadpole” shaped symbol that resembles a small character *yi* 乙. The “tadpole,” or small *yi*, is relatively rare and appears to mark the end of longer textual divisions. The other marks are not used consistently. The short stroke usually marks lines or sentences, but sometimes marks longer sections of text that correspond to chapters in the received text. The black square sometimes marks short sections of text, but is usually found at the end of sections that correspond to chapters in the received *Daodejing*, often at the end of a slip.¹⁰

In many places, there are continuous sections of text that correspond to more than one chapter of the received text. In other words, chapters end in the middle of a slip (sometimes marked by punctuation) followed by material from another chapter on the same slip. In these cases, the sequence of chapters is clear and it is usually radically different from that found in the current 81-chapter *Daodejing*. Moreover, the chapters from the *Daojing* and those from the *Dejing* are mixed together. For example, in the *Guodian Laozi A* group, one continuous section of text corresponds to chapters 19, 66, the second half of 46, and 30 of the *Daodejing*. Furthermore, many of the *Guodian Laozi* chapters are not “complete”: some lines found in the *Daodejing* chapters are absent from the corresponding *Guodian* material.

There are also many differences in wording. Some of them are not found in any extant edition of the *Daodejing* and are significant for our understanding of the text. Most importantly, those passages in the *Daodejing* that express explicit opposition to Confucianism are

¹⁰ An important exception to this rule is in *Laozi A*, slips 1 and 2, where it occurs five times within what is a single chapter in the received text.

either absent from the *Guodian Laozi*, or worded differently. Especially important, the line in chapter 19 of the *Daodejing* that suggests that if one “ceases humaneness (*ren* 仁) and discards rightness (*yi* 義), the people will benefit one hundredfold” has no anti-Confucian intent in the corresponding Guodian line, which simply advocates that one “cease acting (*wei* 爲) and discard anxiety (*li* 慮).”¹¹

The primary problem presented by these three groups of bamboo slips is: what were they exactly? How does the material in *Guodian Laozi A* and *B* relate to that in *Guodian Laozi C*, and how does the Guodian material in general relate to the *Daodejing*? Were the *Guodian Laozi* passages selected by someone in the fourth century B.C. from a text much like our present 5,000-character, 81-chapter edition, on the basis of their content? Or do they represent one or more seminal texts current in the fourth century, perhaps based on an oral tradition, that were put together at some later time to form the *Daodejing*?¹²

The received tradition does not have any trace of the sequence of chapters found in the *Guodian Laozi*. This suggests that the latter was compiled at a time when the individual chapters were part of a larger corpus of material that did not yet have a definite order and that it was not widely circulated in the form found at Guodian. Despite differences, all of the material in the *Guodian Laozi* corresponds to material found in the current *Daodejing*; and indeed, this has been an important argument used in support of the theory that the *Daodejing* predated the *Guodian Laozi*. However, this argument is only valid if we exclude the previously unknown material also found in the *Guodian Laozi C* bundle. Although the fourteen slips mentioned above have been separated out as a distinct text and given the title *Tai Yi sheng shui* by the editors of the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, there is no physical basis upon which to distinguish this material from *Laozi C*: the slips are the same length, the handwriting appears to be the same, and the markings of the eroded strings used to bind the slips are in the same positions. This suggests that the slips were bound together as a single text. The reason that they

¹¹ The correct reading of these two Chu characters is disputed, though most scholars agree that they are not *ren* and *yi*. In *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* they are read as “artifice” (*wei* 僞) and “deceit” (*zha* 詐), but I have followed Xu Kangsheng and Qiu Xigui’s revised opinion here; see Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, pp. 236-7. See also pp. 60-1, 66-7, 160-1 for further debate and discussion.

¹² For this debate, see Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, pp. 142-6.

have been separated in *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* is their content, not their physical form.¹³

The meaning of the text of the fourteen slips and its relationship to the *Guodian Laozi* and to the *Daodejing* are the subjects of the present article.

Guanyin and Laozi

In previous analyses, scholars have assumed that the fourteen slips of the *Da Yi sheng shui* are a single unit—either a different text from the *Laozi C* slips with which they were bound (as in the transcriptions found in *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*), or a part of the original *Laozi* (as proposed by another member of the original editorial team, Cui Renyi).¹⁴ Taking the *Da Yi sheng shui* as a separate text, Li Xueqin has argued that it is a lost work by a disciple of Laozi called Guanyin 關尹.¹⁵ The most convincing evidence for this association is a passage from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (chapter 33, *Tianxia* 天下). This passage describes the thought of a number of pre-Han philosophers, from which we can surmise that it was written in the early Han period.¹⁶ The extract below discusses Guanyin and Lao Dan:

Taking the root as the essence, the living thing as the crude form, accumulation as excess, drifting and dwelling alone in the numinous and luminous (*shen ming* 神明)—there was an art of the Way in ancient times that was founded on this. Guanyin and Lao Dan heard rumor of it and were pleased by it. They made that which is constantly not anything (*chang wu you* 常無有) the foundation and the Great One (*Tai Yi*), the principle; regarding softness, weakness and humility as the outside, and emptiness and not harming the myriad living things as the kernel.

¹³ See *ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

¹⁴ Cui Renyi 崔仁義, *Jingmen Guodian Chu jian “Laozi” yanjiu* 荊門郭店楚簡《老子》研究 (Beijing: Kexue, 1998). See also William G. Boltz, “The Fourth-century B.C. Guodian Manuscripts from Chu and the Composition of the *Laotzy*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119.4 (1999), pp. 595-6.

¹⁵ See Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Jingmen Guodian Chu jian suojian Guanyin shuo” 荊門郭店楚簡所見關尹說, *Zhongguo wenwu bao* 中國文物報, 8 April 1998, reprinted in *Zhongguo zhixue* 20 (1999), pp. 160-4, and translated as “Lost Doctrines of Guanyin as Seen in the Jingmen Guodian Slips,” in *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Winter), 2000, pp. 55-62.

¹⁶ A.C. Graham, “How much of *Chuang tzu* did Chuang tzu write,” in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp. 313-21.

Guanyin said: "In the self, nothing dwells; things take shape and disclose themselves. Its movements are like water, the stillness like a mirror, the response like an echo."

Laozi said: "Know the male, but hold to the female and you will be able to act as a runnel for those under the sky."¹⁷

These lines refer to a complex of ideas that will be important in the discussion below: the Way is linked to the Great One and water—the source of everything else in the *Da Yi sheng shui* account—is the dominant metaphor. Moreover, the qualities associated with water here—soft, weak, humble, empty, moving spontaneously without effort, clear like a mirror when still—are those characteristically associated with *dao* in the *Daodejing*, as I have discussed in *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue*.¹⁸

The *Zhuangzi* citation of Lao Dan is found in chapter 28 of the *Daodejing*, which is not included in the *Guodian Laozi*. The words attributed to Guanyin are not found in the *Guodian* material or in any other known text. Although there is a thematic relationship between the *Guodian* text and the *Zhuangzi*'s description of Guanyin's philosophy, there is no firm textual evidence that would allow us to identify the excavated text with Guanyin. Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* passage is significant in understanding the relationship between the *Da Yi sheng shui* and the *Laozi*, for it suggests that Lao Dan, like the mysterious Guanyin, took the "Great One" as his principle. Moreover, it uses water imagery in association with the Great One. Indeed, according to this passage, the association with the "Great One" and water was the defining feature of the schools of both Guanyin and Lao Dan.

Guo Yi, following Li Xueqin's identification of the *Da Yi sheng shui* with Guanyin, has further suggested that there were two people called "Laozi"—a Lao Dan 老聃, and then Grand Scribe Dan (太史儋)—and that the text developed in stages. Thus, Guo Yi argues, the *Guodian Laozi* is an early text by the former, and the *Daodejing* a later one by the latter, with Guanyin acting as an intermediate generation in the transmission of the text.¹⁹ Guo Yi's sug-

¹⁷ *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, ed. (Taipei: Heluo Tushu, 1974), ch. 33, pp. 1093-4

¹⁸ See Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 136-43.

¹⁹ Guo Yi 郭沂, "Shitan Chu jian *Tai Yi sheng shui* jiqi yu jianben *Laozi* de guanxi" 試談楚簡《太一生水》及其與簡本《老子》的關係, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史, 1998, no. 4, pp. 33-8; and Guo Yi, *Guodian zhujian yu xian Qin xueshu*

gestion of a developmental sequence in which the *Guodian Laozi* would be the earliest form of the text, the *Da Yi sheng shui* an addendum to it, and the transmitted *Daodejing* a final stage in its elaboration, has merit. However, the two Lao Dan and Guanyin are extremely vague as historical personages and we know too little about them and about the history of the received and excavated texts to be safe in making this sort of supposition. Unless there is direct textual evidence to support an attribution, as a methodological principle, excavated texts should not be identified with historical persons or texts mentioned in the received literature.

As other scholars have pointed out, many passages in the received tradition—some of which will be discussed below—are conceptually similar to the Guodian cosmogony. This suggests a common intellectual background, to be sure; but, since the publication of *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* five years ago, an intensive search by numerous scholars has not found a single instance where a received text contains language that is a direct citation or even appears to draw directly upon language of the *Da Yi sheng shui*. The *Shui di* 水地 chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子 is the only pre-Han text in the received tradition that discusses water as a first principle in an explicit manner. The origin and date of that chapter are difficult to determine, but it probably belongs to the late Warring States Period. It states that the earth is fundamentally water, as are all the myriad things that live upon it; and as a result several scholars have attempted to relate it to the *Da Yi sheng shui*.²⁰ Not only is the *Shui di* similar to the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony in giving priority to water, but it seems possible that it was originally a part of a larger work in which water was taken as the source of the sky as well as the earth, which would indeed agree with the Guodian text. But in spite of these conceptual similarities there is no specific textual relationship: the texts do not share any common language that would suggest that the author of the one text had read the other, or vice versa.

This absence of direct correspondence between the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony and anything found in the received tradition as

sixiang 郭店竹簡與先秦學術思想 (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Press, 2001), pp. 26ff.

²⁰ This relationship was first noted by Marc Kalinowski; see Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, p. 170. See also William G. Boltz, "The Fourth-century B.C. Guodiann Manuscripts from Chu and the Composition of the *Laotzzy*," pp. 595-6.

well as the absence of any trace of the particular form of the *Guodian Laozi*—its chapter order and textual variants—suggest that the Guodian texts were not widely circulated. This is not surprising: many texts must have been written in the Warring States Period with only a narrow audience. Moreover, many of these texts must have shared an intellectual milieu and subject matter with one another, as well as with texts preserved in the received tradition.

The Pole Star, the Cosmograph, and the One

During the Warring States Period the cosmos began to be represented schematically in divination by a device known as a “cosmograph,” this being the term coined by Stephen Field to describe the divination device called *shi* 式 (*shipan* 式盤 in modern Chinese). On this device, a round heaven mounted on a square earth rotates around a central pole or point, represented, notionally at least, as the Pole Star.²¹ My hypothesis here is that when the cosmograph began to be used widely for divination—presumably sometime in the Warring States Period—it influenced the manner in which the cosmos was visualized.

This device provided a further set of images, in addition to the earlier image of a turtle, that could be used to think about the world, viz. a square earth, round sky and central pivot. Politically, what was most significant about the cosmograph as a conceptual model was the importance it gave to the center as a focal point that did not move, but controlled all else. The Han Dynasty astronomical and mathematical treatise, the *Zhou bi suanjing* 周髀算經, describes the earth as square and the sky as round in a section which, according to Christopher Cullen, uses imagery based upon the *shi*-

²¹ Yao Zhihua 姚治華, “Tai Yi, shui yu Zhongguo gudai yuzhou shengcheng lun: *Tai Yi sheng shui* yu *Tai Yi jiu gong zhan*” 太一、水與中國古代宇宙生成論：《太一生水》與太乙九宮占 (unpublished manuscript), has already argued persuasively that the cosmology of the *Da Yi sheng shui* is related to a tradition of divination using a cosmograph, known as “The Great One and the Nine Palaces.” While inspired by an earlier version of the present article, which I delivered at Harvard in 1999, his analysis goes beyond my original premise. I am indebted to his work in the development of some of my ideas below. See also Li Xueqin, “*Tai Yi sheng shui* de shushu jieshi” 太一生水的數術解釋, *Daojia wenhua yanjiu*, no. 17 (1999), pp. 297-300. Xing Wen 邢文, “*Tai Yi sheng shui* yu *Huainanzi*: *Qian zuo du zai renshi*” 《太一生水》與《淮南子》：《乾鑿度》再認識, *Zhongguo zhexue*, no. 21 (Jan. 2000), pp. 212-26.

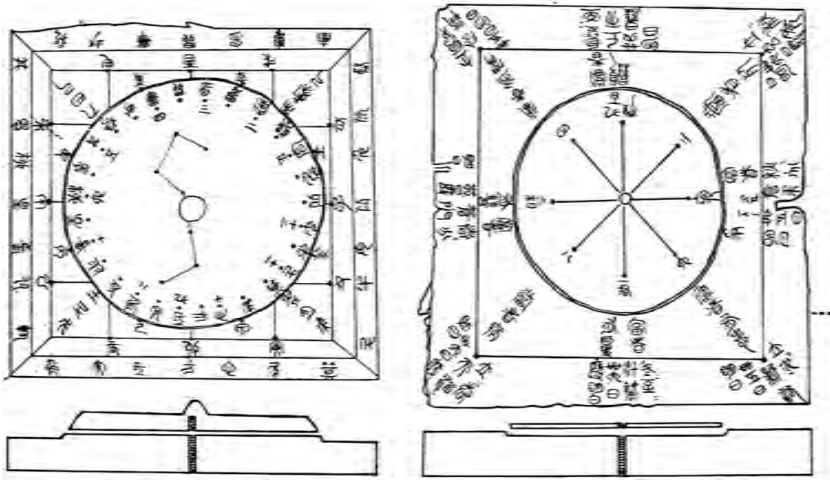


Figure 1. Two cosmographs from Fuyang, Anhui Province. After *Kaogu* 1978, no. 5, pp. 340-1.

cosmograph.²² To my knowledge, this is the earliest textual reference to the earth as square and the sky as round, and it seems likely that this formulation was associated with the schematic representation of the cosmos on the cosmograph.

The use of textual evidence to date the introduction of the cosmograph inevitably leads to a circular argument because the early texts that make reference to the *shi*, including the *Daodejing*, are not firmly dated. The archaeological evidence is also insufficient to determine when the cosmograph began to be used widely. Eight examples of excavated cosmographs are listed in Li Ling's *Zhongguo gudai fangshu kao*, the earliest found in a second-century B.C. tomb at Fuyang 阜陽, Anhui Province (see fig. 1).²³ More recently, third-century B.C. examples have been excavated at Wangjiatai 王家台 and Shashi 沙市 in Hunan Province.²⁴ Other examples, not

²² Christopher Cullen, *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China: The Zhou bi suan jing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Section A, see pp. 45ff.

²³ Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中國方書考, rev. ed. (Beijing: Dongfang Press, 2000), pp. 90-91. This number is unchanged from the 1993 edition.

²⁴ See Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 118 and note 87. The excavation report from Shashi has not been published; Wang cites an unpublished Master's dissertation by Liu Guosheng 劉國勝, Wuhan University, 1995. The Wangjiatai example is mentioned in Jingzhou Diqu Bowuguan 荊州地區博物館, "Jiangling Wangjiatai 15-hao Qin mu," *Wenwu*, 1995, no. 1, p. 42.

yet published, have been found, and there are also some divination boards that did not have a rotating sky but were laid out in a similar manner.

These excavated cosmographs were made of perishable materials, namely wood and lacquer, so that the archaeological record is not reliable in determining when they first began to be used. Moreover, the examples thus far discovered have been excavated from tombs—the richest source for excavation and the focus of Chinese archaeology; but cosmographs were not made for burials and never were standard mortuary equipment. A few other excavated artifacts that feature related imagery are secondary evidence in support of the supposition that cosmographs were in use before the third century B.C.: they include a drawing on a lacquer clothes box from the tomb of Zeng Hou Yi (fifth century B.C.) with the Big Dipper and names of the 28 lunar lodges (for which see fig. 1), and the “Chu silk manuscript” from Zidanku (fourth century B.C.) with its drawing “designed to resemble a ... *shi* ... which is itself a model of the cosmos.”²⁵

The cosmograph presented an idealized cosmology, concerned with temporal change, rather than an attempt at an accurate spatial depiction. As Cullen observes, “the early phase of Chinese astronomical activity... was primarily concerned with the heavens as the source of a series of events ordered in time rather than as a spatially integrated whole.”²⁶ That the cosmograph was concerned primarily with time rather than space explains, for example, why the Dipper handle which serves as a pointer could be placed across the center of the sky with the Pole Star at the center, even though by the time of the *Shiji* 史記 (presented to the throne in 128 B.C.), and probably even earlier, it was known that this was not strictly accurate.

None of the excavated cosmographs are precisely the same. Essentially, they were made up of two plates, a round one representing the sky and a square one, the earth. A central unmoving pivot intersected the sky, which revolved around the unmoving earth, with the handle of the Dipper serving as a pointer. The

²⁵ Li Ling and Constance Cook, “Translation of the Chu Silk Manuscript,” in Constance A. Cook and John S. Major, eds., *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 172. See also, Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, pp. 110ff.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 44.

markings on the circular disk representing the sky and those on the square earth were not standardized, but included such items as the four seasons, the heavenly stems (*tian gan* 天干), the earthly branches (*di zhi* 地支), and/or the 28 star positions. On the cosmograph found at Fuyang, illustrated in fig. 1, the round plate of the sky is marked with the 28 celestial lodges at equal intervals and with 12 numbers next to certain of them, representing the months in which the sun was found in that lodge. A schematized representation of the Northern Dipper is also found on the sky plate. The square earth plate is also marked with the lodges, as well as with the stems and branches. Another type of cosmograph or diviner's board (known in later literature as *Tai Yi jiu gong* 太乙九宮), found at the same site, has "nine palaces", that is a central position with eight positions in the eight directions. (See figure 1)

Xing Wen has pointed out that the excavated cosmographs all present significant differences, and he suggests that these reflect different divination schools.²⁷ As I see it, the variation reflects rather the nature of divination. Divination requires the harnessing of magical power to predict and/or control the future. Whereas philosophers sought to persuade others of the correctness of their ideas and gathered as many disciples as were willing to follow them, a diviner's techniques represented secret, exclusive knowledge, to be passed down only to his apprentices. Thus, each school (that is, each lineage of diviner and his apprentices) would have had its own distinctive paraphernalia. We may call them "schools of divination," but they were quite different from "schools of philosophy."

The imagery of the sky as represented by the cosmograph sometimes informs such concepts as *wuwei*, "doing nothing," which in *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* I have associated with water that moves though it has no will, and *ziran*, "being so of oneself," which I have associated with both the movement of water and the growth of plants nurtured by it. But the model of the Pole Star as a static center that controls the sky is not dependent upon a mechanical device. For example, the *Lunyu* 論語 (2.1) uses the natural

²⁷ Xing Wen, "Hexagram Pictures and Early *Yi* Schools: Reconsidering the *Book of Changes* in Light of Excavated *Yi* Texts," forthcoming. Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, p. 108, divides the cosmographs into two basic types. One of them, the Tai Yi Nine Palaces, uses the star group Tian Yi ("Celestial One") as a pointer. However, I have not been able to find the evidence for this in excavated examples; it seems to be based on textual description.

imagery of the sky: “To govern by means of *de* (virtue) is like the North Star dwelling in its place as the multitude of stars pay court to it.” Nevertheless, such a device enabled the sky to be clearly visualized as having a still center, around which all-else moves spontaneously.

The term *shi* 式 occurs in three chapters of the *Daodejing*, none of which is found in the *Guodian Laozi*. In all of them, *shi* clearly refers to a cosmograph, even though the term is used figuratively. In chapter 28, we are advised to “know its white, hold to its black, and act as a cosmograph for the world. If you act as a cosmograph (*shi*) for the world, your virtue will be constant virtue without deviation, and you will go back again to where there is no ultimate (*wu ji* 無極).” The reference to “black” and “white” here suggests the schematic representation of a divination board. The term “ultimate” (*ji*), as we shall see below, refers to the center of the sky, and the “Great Ultimate” corresponds to the Great One. In chapter 65, we are also told to “know constantly the array of the cosmograph (*ji shi* 稽式): this is dark virtue.”

In the third example, from chapter 22, the term *shi* is associated with another concept that is key to the present study, the “one”:

Thus, the sage embraces the one and acts as the cosmograph (*shi*) for the world. He does not reveal himself; therefore he is bright. He is not self-righteous; therefore he is illustrious. He is not aggressive; therefore he succeeds. He does not aggrandize himself; therefore he endures. It is because he does not contend that therefore there is no one beneath the sky who is able to contend with him.²⁸

Here, the imagery evoked by the “one” that is hidden, but bright, is that of the Pole Star, represented on the cosmograph by the pivot. The ruler who governs by means of the one does so effortlessly, just as the Pole Star stands motionlessly while all the other stars move around it. Moreover, the central point of a circle is the only point (the “one”) that has no point of opposition; thus, he who holds to it does not need to contend.

The term “one” takes on particular importance in certain Warring States texts. One, *yi* 一, is a numeral, and this provides a range of abstract meanings, including both the single and the indivisible

²⁸ The Mawangdui silk texts both have the metaphor “act as a cowherd” (*mu* 牧), rather than “act as a cosmograph,” but the received editions consistently have “cosmograph.” See Gao Ming, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), pp. 340-1.

whole. In the latter sense, it was an important political concept in the Warring States Period. Mencius, for example, advises Duke Hui of Liang that he can “settle [all-under-the-sky] by making it one (*ding yu yi* 定于一).” As Yuri Pines has shown, the idea of *da yi tong* 大一統 (“one that pervades all”) represented an idea of unity under central rule common to different schools of thought in the Warring States Period. The term *Da Yi*, the Great One, which he translates as “great unity,” is key to this discussion.²⁹

The relationship between the One and the Way was of particular significance in the philosophy of the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, as A.C. Graham has observed.³⁰ This text was traditionally attributed to Pang Xuan (ca. 295–ca. 240 B.C.), but considered a forgery, until recent research as well as the excavation of early texts that relate to the ideas in the text gave the traditional dates plausibility.³¹ In the following passage, in which “one” and the *dao* are related, the imagery suggests divination, either directly by the stars or with a cosmograph:

When the handle of the Dipper points east, it is spring everywhere below the sky; south, it is summer; west, it is autumn; north, it is winter. With the handle of the Dipper revolving above, so the work is set below; with the handle of the Dipper pointing in one direction, it is brought to completion throughout the four borders. This is the method (*fa* 法) used by the Way. Therefore, the sun and moon are insufficient to determine light and the four seasons, to determine labor. If the One serves as the method for them to complete their tasks, there are none that are not in accordance with the Way. When the method of the One is set up, the myriad things all act as dependents.³²

As Harold Roth has further observed, in Daoist texts—more specifically, “Laoist” texts—*yi*, “one,” is often used interchangeably

²⁹ Mencius 1A.6; Yuri Pines, “‘The One that Pervades All’ in Ancient Chinese Political Thought: The Origins of The ‘Great Unity’ Paradigm,” *T’oung Pao*, 86 (2000), pp. 280–324.

³⁰ A.C. Graham, “The Way and the One in *Ho-kuan-tzu*,” in Hans Lenk and Gregor Paul, eds., *Epistemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 31–43.

³¹ For the date of the *Heguanzi*, see Carine Defoort, *The Pheasant Cap Master: A Rhetorical Reading* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 17–24.

³² This translation is based upon the *Zihui* 子彙 edition of *Wanyou wenku* as reproduced in Carine Defoort, *ibid.*, p. 320 (5, *Huanliu*, 201). The translation is my own. The passage refers to *fa* 法, which I have translated as “model,” rather than *shi* 式. The use of the term *fa* here is suggestive. Possibly its meaning of regularity and then ‘law’ derives not from a clay mold, but from the cosmograph.

with *dao*. In those texts often classified as “Huang-Lao,” such as the *Neiye* 內業 section of the *Guanzi*, “one” commonly acts as a special term associated with inner cultivation.³³ Roth relates this locution to meditation and he observes that verbs such as “embrace” (*bao* 抱), “get” (*de* 得), “grasp” (*zhi* 執), and “hold fast to” (*shou* 守) are broadly used to describe meditative practice and mystical experience, with the objects “one” (*yi* 一), “way” (*dao* 道), and “stillness” (*jing* 靜).³⁴ He also demonstrates with a series of parallel passages from the *Neiye* and the *Daodejing* that the terms *yi* (one) and *dao* (way) often occur interchangeably.

The reason that these terms may be interchanged is, I believe, that in meditation the body is taken as a microcosm of the cosmos. In meditation, the mind/heart should hold to the still “one.” This metaphor of “holding to the one” evokes the image of a cosmograph. To “hold to the one” (or, alternatively, to “hold to the center”) is to make oneself still, like the Pole Star or pole of the *shi*. For example, according to the *Daodejing*, chapter 10 (not found in the Guodian material),

Wearing your corporeal soul on your head while embracing the One in
your arms,
Can you let nothing go?
Revolving your breath (*qi* 氣, “vital energy”) until it is soft,
Can you return to being a baby?

Thus, in meditating, the breath revolves while the mind/heart stays still (and clears itself, like water in a pond). Moreover, the *Neiye* speaks of “aligning” or “making correct” (*zheng* 正) the four limbs, which I take as analogous to the four seasons, marked directionally, on the cosmograph.³⁵

In the following passage from chapter 39 of the *Daodejing* (also not found in the *Guodian Laozi*), self-cultivation and divination are brought together:

³³ Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). See also A.C. Graham, “The Way and the One in *Ho-kuan-tzu*,” pp. 31-43; Livia Kohn, “Guarding the One: Concentrative Meditation in Taoism,” in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1989), pp. 125-58.

³⁴ See Harold Roth, *Original Tao*, pp. 114-18, 148-50.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 82-3, verse 19.

Those who got (*de* 得) the One in ancient times:
 The sky got the One and became clear.
 The earth got the One and became firm.
 Spirit got the One and became numinous.
 Valley got the One and was filled.
 The myriad living things got the One and were produced.
 The lords and kings got the One and acted as the diviner³⁶ for that below
 the sky.

In this passage, the One is both the progenitor of the myriad things, that with which one divines in the world, and a mysterious power. As we shall see below, the inclusion of the *Da Yi sheng shui* with material now found in the *Laozi* is another manifestation of this association of the “one” with the “way.”

The Hypothesis

In the following, I will make two integrally related arguments. One is primarily textual: I will argue that the *Da Yi sheng shui* has two distinct parts. The eight slips which include a cosmogony that begins with “The Great One produced water...” are a coherent unit, stylistically distinct from anything found in the *Daodejing*. These eight slips represent an appended text—a preface, or coda—to *Guodian Laozi C*. The other six slips do not correspond to any previously known passage(s) of the *Daodejing*, but they are stylistically similar to it. They should be regarded as part of the main *Laozi C* text. In other words, this bundle of slips—including both the *Laozi C* and the *Da Yi sheng shui*—should be regarded as a single work with the cosmogony of the *Da Yi sheng shui* as an appended comment. This means that the *Guodian Laozi* included material not found in the *Daodejing*, and is evidence, together with the unusual sequence of its material and the differences in its wording, that the *Guodian Laozi* slip-texts were compiled from a common source of material shared with the *Daodejing* before it reached its current form.

My other argument will be primarily conceptual. The *Da Yi sheng shui* is not a divination manual, but it has a theoretical relationship to “Great One” divination. The “Great One” was the Pole Star and its spirit, the source of the Celestial River from which the

³⁶ This character is variously written as *zhen* 貞 (Wang Bi editions) and *zheng* 正 (Mawangdui, Heshang Gong, etc.). *Zhen* means to divine or prognosticate. *Zheng* means correct, but I interpret the “corrector” of the world as also referring to divination imagery, as on a cosmograph.

cosmos was formed, an abstract point of origin; and in the tradition most clearly represented by the *Laozi* (including both the *Guodian Laozi* and the *Daodejing*), the Great One was identified with the *dao*. Thus, the text can be read differently in light of the different discourses of divination, cosmology, meditation, and philosophy. This is made explicit by the attachment of the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony to material now found in the *Daodejing*. However, the entire *Daodejing* plays upon themes associated with the Great One cult.

Guodian Laozi C

Before turning to the *Da Yi sheng shui*, let us first look at the *Laozi* material in the third bundle of slips (*Laozi C*) with which it was bound. The prevailing themes in the *Laozi C* material are ruling by doing nothing (*wuwei*), and the avoidance of warfare: if the ruler did not act and let the people be “so of themselves” (*ziran*), they would not be harmed and he could not be defeated. I have noted above the conceptual relationship between the terms *wuwei* and *ziran* and the cosmograph, as well as with water. The particular role of the Great One as a spirit that protects in warfare will be discussed below.

Here, we should keep in mind that in *Da Yi sheng shui*, the first character of the cosmogony, transcribed as *tai* 太 in the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, is actually written as *da* 大 on the bamboo slips. In the texts from this tomb, as in other contemporaneous Chu slip-texts, the characters now distinguished as *da* and *tai* are both written as 大. *Da*, which I translate as “great,” may also be taken as “greatest,” that is, to be *da* is to be overarching, before or beyond all others.

In the *Daodejing*, there is no logical sequence or continuity between chapters. However, the chapters are often linked by the repetition of motifs and words. This may originally have been a mnemonic device, if the chapters were recited orally. As a literary device, it provides a sense of continuity to the text as one reads from one chapter to the next, even when there is no logical pattern. The same type of repetition can be found in the *Guodian Laozi*. Moreover, it provides a link between the chapters of *Guodian Laozi C* and the *Da Yi sheng shui*. This supports our hypothesis that the bundling together of *Guodian Laozi C* and *Da Yi sheng shui* was deliberate: the passages were meant to be read together.

Laozi C can be divided into four sections of continuous text. There is no means of determining the original order of the sections;

the sequence found in the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* was simply an editorial decision. The slips in the *Laozi C* group have four black squares, and these occur at the end of slips: they mark off four discrete sections of text that correspond to the following sections of the received *Daodejing*: chapters 17 and 18; chapter 35; chapter 31; and lines 10-18 of chapter 64. However, we do not know the original sequence of these four sections, nor do we know whether the *Da Yi sheng shui* sections were placed at the beginning or end, or, indeed, interspersed with the *Laozi C* sections.

In the section *Laozi C* 1:1 to 3:21³⁷ (equivalent to chapters 17 and 18 of the *Daodejing*), the terms “great” (*da*) and “being so of oneself” (*ziran*) are especially noteworthy:

As for the greatest ruler (*da shang* 大上), those below know that there is one;
as for the next, they are fond of them and praise them...

Accomplishing things, success follows, and yet the people say ‘we are so of ourselves’ (*ziran* 自然). Thus, it is when the great Way (*da dao* 大道) is abandoned that there is humaneness and rightness...

Here, “great” (*da*) describes both the supreme ruler and the Way in its primeval state, before the human virtues of humaneness and rightness were needed. Moreover, the highest form of rule is that in which the world is unaware of the central power and which operates effortlessly according to the Way.

In the section *Laozi C* 4:1 to 5:20 (corresponding to chapter 35), divination is evoked with the term *da xiang* 大象, which is associated with the Way, and the Way is described in terms that suggest water flowing from an inexhaustible spring:

Set up³⁸ the great image (*da xiang*),
And everyone under the sky will go to you.
Going forth, with no harm,
Great will be the peace and calm.
For music and sweetmeats,
the traveler stops.
Thus, the words expressed from the Way (*dao* 道)
Are insipid, without flavor.
Looking at it, there is insufficient to see;

³⁷ The form of reference established in the edition by Edmund Ryden and given in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, pp. 187 - 231, is used herein. This gives: the name of the text (*Laozi A, B, or C*, or *Tai Yi sheng shui*), the slip number, colon (:), and the character number on that slip. Thus, it can easily be matched to the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* photographs and transcriptions.

³⁸ For the interpretation of this character as 設, rather than 執, see Qiu Xigui in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, p. 62.

Listening to it, there is insufficient to hear;
And yet it cannot be exhausted.³⁹

The term *xiang*, “image” or “configuration,” is common in divination. For example, the hexagram lines of the *Yi jing* 易經 are called *xiang*. Moreover, we find the expression “great image” (*da xiang*) in chapter 41 of the *Daodejing*, in a manner that seems to play upon this usage: “The great image has no shape, the Way hides and has no name.”⁴⁰

The section on the next four slips (C 6:1 to 10:14, corresponding to chapter 31) concerns warfare, described as something inauspicious and to be treated with funerary rites, even in victory: “... To praise [warfare] is to delight in killing people... When a battle is won, treat it with rites of mourning.”

The section on the last four slips (C 11:1 to 14:7) corresponds to the last part of chapter 64 in the received *Daodejing*. This passage advocates ruling by doing nothing:

Those who act upon it cause it defeat;
Those who hold on to it, will lose it.
The sage does not act, and therefore has no defeat.
He does not hold on, therefore...
...
He learns not learning
And returns where the multitude transgress.
This is why he is able to assist (*fu*) the myriad living things in being so of themselves,
And does not presume to act on them.

Here, the character transcribed as *fu* 輔 in *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, which I have translated as “assist,” is the same as the character used for water “assisting” the Great One in the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony. The references to *wanwu* 萬物, the “myriad living things,” and to the concept of *ziran*, to “be so of oneself,” also link this section with the language and themes of the *Da Yi sheng shui*, as we shall see below.

³⁹ For a discussion of this imagery, see Allan, *The Way of Water*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Most received editions have *da xiang* here. The chapter is included in *Guodian Laozi B* (12:13-17), but *da xiang* is written there as *tian xiang* 天象, “celestial image,” as it is in the Mawangdui text. However, the fact that it follows three other “greats”—the “great square,” the “great vessel” and the “great sound”—suggests that the character should also be *da* 大 here, rather than the very similar *tian* 天.

The *Da Yi sheng shui*

The 14 slips separated out by the editors of *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* and given the title “The Great One produced water” include two, very different, parts. One part (slips 1 through 8, as numbered in that publication) is a cosmogony with a clear, logical structure that is stylistically distinctive and gives it a superficial resemblance to the opening of the Confucian classic, the *Da xue* 大學, although there is no close textual parallel in the extant literature. Moreover, the logical style of this cosmogony section is so different from anything found in the *Laozi* that it is, in my view, impossible to regard it as part of that text. But there is a *conceptual* relationship between it and the *Laozi*, and I will argue below that it was an addendum intended to be read together with *Guodian Laozi C*, probably attached by diviners or others associated with the cult of the Great One.

The other six slips (9-14) are entirely different stylistically from the cosmogony in slips 1-8 and have only a loose thematic relationship to it. The main reason for having put them with the first eight slips seems to be that they did not correspond to any of the chapters of the received *Daodejing*. Unlike the cosmogony, however, they are stylistically similar to passages found in the *Daodejing* and can easily be read as part of that text without any sense of disjunction in style or content. Thus, in my opinion, they should be considered part of *Laozi C* rather than attached to the *Da Yi sheng shui*. In other words, they are a passage (or possibly two passages) from an early corpus of material associated with *Laozi* that was not incorporated (or was edited out) when the *Daodejing* reached its present length.

To sum up, the *Guodian Laozi C* bundle of slips included the four sections discussed above (material that corresponds to later *Daodejing* chapters, but in a different sequence and with some differences in wording); a section resembling a chapter (or two) from the *Laozi* but not found in the *Daodejing*; and the Great One cosmogony, which served as an appendix to the main text.

Since I am arguing that the text on slips 9-14 is part of *Guodian Laozi C*, discussed above, let me translate and comment on it before turning to the cosmogony section. Its themes of high and low link it to the section of *Laozi C* (1:1 to 3:21, equivalent to chapters 17 and 18 of the *Daodejing*) that begins with the term *da shang* 大上, which I translated as “greatest ruler” but literally means “great high.” Indeed, *Laozi C* could be read effectively with this as the first

section, followed by the sections as arranged above, with the cosmogony attached to either the end or the beginning.

Slips 9 and 13 are defective, missing the last few characters because the bottom of the slip is damaged, and the sequence of the slips is not clear. Nor is it clear whether this material has one or two sections. In the translation below, words supplied for missing characters are placed in square brackets. I have included the slip number given in *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* at the end of each slip. However, the translation follows the sequence of slips recently suggested by Qiu Xigui rather than that found in *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*.⁴¹

Slip 9 begins with a new sentence. This suggests that it might begin a new section of text. However, since the slip is defective, it is unclear which slip should follow it. Many scholars have suggested that it should be placed before slip 13, and this was the arrangement originally favored by the excavation group.⁴² However, Qiu places it before slip 14. This arrangement results in two sections: 10-13, ending with a broken slip; and 9 and 14. Since slip 13 is broken, we can only guess at its ending. Qiu takes it as the last slip of a section. Slip 14 is marked with the black square, so it clearly ends a section. This sequence makes sense in terms of continuity of meaning and resolves the problem of the missing characters caused by the broken slips. However, it leaves a very short “passage” on its own. Continuity within a single chapter of the received *Laozi* is often loose, and I find little difficulty in reading slip 13 as continuous with slip 9. It is also possible that either one or both sections were originally part of other chapters of the *Laozi*. Following is a translation and commentary.

Slips 10-13, 9, 14

What is below is soil, but we call it ‘earth’.

What is above is vapor, but we call it ‘sky’.

⁴¹ Qiu Xigui, 裘錫圭, “*Tai Yi sheng shui ‘ming zi’ zhang jieshi—jianlun Tai Yi sheng shui de fen zhang wenti*” 《太一生水》“名字”章解釋—兼論《太一生水》的分章問題, *Guwenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究, no. 22 (2000), pp. 219-26.

⁴² 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), p. 127. Other scholars include Cui Renyi 崔仁義, *Jingmen Guodian Chu jian “Laozi” yanjiu* 荊門郭店楚簡《老子》研究 (Beijing: Kexue Press, 1998), p. 37; and Chen Wei 陳偉, “*Tai Yi sheng shui jiaodu bing lun yu Laozi de guanxi*” 《太一生水》較讀並論與《老子》的關係, *Guwenzi yanjiu*, no. 22 (2000), pp. 227-8.

Calling it ‘Way’ is using its honorific; may I ask its name?⁴³ (10)

To undertake affairs by means of the Way, one must be entrusted with the name.

Thus, affairs are accomplished and the person long-lived.

If a sage, in undertaking affairs is entrusted with its (11) name,

Then merit is indeed achieved and his person goes unharmed.

The names and honorifics of ‘sky’ and ‘earth’ were established together.

Hence, if they transgress their correct positions,⁴⁴ they will not match up.

[The sky is deficient] (12) in the northwest; what is below it is high and firm.

The earth is deficient in the southeast, what is above it [is broad and pliant.]

(13)

The way of the sky values weakness.

When one forms (*cheng* 成) by paring away, one produces (*sheng* 生) by piling up.

What is cut down by the strong is amassed⁴⁵ by [the weak].

That is why what is insufficient [above] (9) has an excess below,

And what is deficient below, has an excess above. (14)

The passage begins by setting up a series of correspondences: “sky” (*tian*), “earth” (*di*), and, by implication, the Way (*dao*). Sky and earth are the names of “vapor” (*qi* 氣) and “soil” (*tu* 土); but the Way has no name. That the Way cannot be named is a pervasive theme throughout the *Daodejing*. Many scholars have observed that this constitutes a rejection of the Confucian attempt to assign correct names. While I accept this in terms of philosophical discourse, I am also arguing here that the text takes the Way as the

⁴³ The bamboo-slip characters that I take as *qing wen* 請問 (“may I ask”), following *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, are written on the slips as *qing hun* 青昏. Donald Harper has suggested that the original characters should be used, and should be interpreted as “the clear and muddled”, the “names” of the sky and earth: see Donald Harper, “The Nature of Taiyi in the Guodian Manuscript *Taiyi sheng shui*—Abstract Principle or Supreme Cosmic Deity?”, *Chügoku shutsudo shiryō kenkyū* 中國出土資料研究, no. 5 (March 31, 2001), p. 19, note 34. See also William G. Boltz, “The Fourth-century B.C. Guodiann Manuscripts from Chu and the Composition of the *Laotzy*,” p. 606, who follows Harper’s reading. Qiu Xigui, “*Tai Yi sheng shui* ‘ming zi’ zhang jieshi,” p. 222, rejects this reading on both semantic and contextual grounds and convincingly reiterates the phonological basis for taking these as borrowed characters, with a number of supporting examples. He also notes that there is no tradition in the texts of *qing* and *hun* being used as the name of *dao* or of the sky and earth.

⁴⁴ Here I take *fang* 方 as meaning *zheng* 正; see Qiu Xigui, “*Tai Yi sheng shui* ‘ming zi’ zhang jieshi,” p. 224. Li Ling 李零, “Du Guodian Chujian *Tai Yi sheng shui*” 讀郭店楚簡《太一生水》較讀, *Daojia wenhua yanjiu*, no. 17 (1999), p. 320, has suggested that the character I read here as *guo* 過 should be transcribed as *e* 訛, “shift,” which also makes sense.

⁴⁵ 𠄎 責 taken as *ji* 積.

personal name (*ming*) of the Great One and thus plays upon the convention in which personal names of ancestors are tabooed. I will return to this issue below.

The notes to *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* explain the lines about the deficiency of the sky in the northwest and of the earth in the southwest by citing the myth recorded in the *Huainanzi*:

Long ago, when Gong Gong contested with Zhuan Xu to become *Di* 帝, he became angry and butted Bu Zhou Mountain [in the northwest corner of the earth], breaking the pillar of heaven and severing earth's cord. Heaven inclined in the northwest, so the sun and moon, stars and constellations move in that direction. Earth did not fill up in the southeast, so the water and dust turn towards there.⁴⁶

This myth, which results in the constellations streaming as a river across the sky to the northwest and joining the Yellow Springs (the watery underworld of ancient China), is closely tied to the cosmogony of the *Da Yi sheng shui*, in which the water produced by the Pole Star then assisted it in making the sky and earth. This suggests that all 14 slips have a common understanding of the cosmology. However, the text itself does not refer to this mythology: it is simply a pairing of opposites, in which each extreme is shown to require its opposite, no different in style or content from the *Laozi*.

Slips 9 and 14 similarly continue the themes of high implying low, building up requiring taking away, and weakness being more valuable than strength, that are common throughout the *Laozi*. As we saw, slip 14 ends with the black square punctuation, suggesting the end of a passage.

To sum up, these passages (or passage) are (is) similar in style and theme to passages found in the *Daodejing*; they are related to the cosmogony of slips 1-8 by their common interest in cosmology and by the fact that they are not in the *Daodejing*, but they are stylistically too different from the cosmogony to be read as part of the same text.

⁴⁶ D. C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching, *A Concordance to the Huainanzi* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, Institute of Chinese Studies Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series, 1992), 3/18/25-6 (3 *Tianwenxun* 天問訓). For further related quotations, see Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, ed., *Kakuten Sokan no shisōshiteki kenkyū* 郭店楚簡の思想史的研究: 1 (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku bungakubu Chūgoku shisō bunkagaku kenkyūshitsu, 1999), p. 60-1. See also Sarah Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art and Cosmos in Early China* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991), pp. 68-70 for discussion of this myth.

Slips 1-8 (The “Cosmogony”)

The text on slips 1-8 can be read continuously from one slip to the next, so that there is no difficulty in establishing the sequence of slips, even though there is no corresponding text in the received tradition. However, the end of slip 6 is defective and the characters supplied there are not based upon any solid evidence. Slip 8 is broken and a few characters must be supplied at the end; but these eight slips do seem to constitute a complete passage.

The Great One produced water (*Da Yi sheng shui* 大一生水). The water, on return, assisted (*fu*) the Great One, thus forming (*cheng* 成) the sky (*tian* 天). The sky, returning, assisted the Great One, thus forming the earth (*di* 地). The sky and earth again assisted one another (1), thus forming the numinous and the luminous (*shen ming* 神明). The numinous and the luminous again assisted one another, thus forming *yin* and *yang* (陰陽). *Yin* and *yang* again assisted one another, thus forming the four seasons (*si shi* 四時). The four seasons (2) again assisted one another, thus forming cold and heat (*cang ran* 倉然). Cold and heat again assisted one another, thus forming moisture and aridity (*shi zao* 濕燥). Moisture and aridity again assisted one another, formed a year (3) and that was all.

Therefore, a year is that which moisture and aridity produced. Moisture and aridity are that which cold and heat produced. Cold and heat are that which the four seasons produced. The four seasons (4) are that which *yin* and *yang* produced. *Yin* and *yang* are that which the numinous and the luminous produced. The numinous and the luminous are that which the sky and earth produced. Sky and earth (5) are that which the Great One produced.

For this reason, the Great One hides in (*cang* 藏) water and moves with the seasons. Circling and [beginning again, it takes itself as] (6) the mother of the myriad living things. Waning and waxing, it takes itself as the guideline of the myriad living things. It is what the sky cannot exterminate, what the earth (7) cannot bury, that which *yin* and *yang* cannot form. The gentleman who knows this is called [a sage]. (8)

The Guodian texts follow the usual convention of bamboo-slip texts, in which new texts or discrete sections of a text begin at the top of a slip. At the end of a section or of a text, the slip is left blank after the last character or a final punctuation mark. In *Guodian Laozi C*, with which the *Da Yi sheng shui* was bound, a black square consistently marks each point that corresponds to the end of a chapter in the received text. Thus, if slip 8 was the end of a section, the number of characters cannot be estimated with certainty and several suggestions have been made about how the line should end.

My translation “a sage” assumes that there was a blank space at the end of the slip.⁴⁷

Worth noting here is that some scholars, following A.C. Graham’s research on the *Mozi* canon (in his *Later Mohist Ethics, Logic and Science*), have tried to reconstruct the sequence of lines in transmitted texts through rearrangements based upon the assumption that bamboo-slip texts had a regular number of characters per slip. The problem is that Graham’s research, published in 1978, pre-dated the modern excavation of large numbers of bamboo-slip texts: as it happens, no excavated bamboo-slip text has been found with this type of regularity, and there is no evidence that these texts were ever concerned with such standardization. Indeed, the use of combined characters, duplication signs, and punctuation marks in them makes it unlikely that such texts were ever written with a prescribed number of characters per slip. Moreover, there seems to have been a conscious attempt not to end discrete sections of continuous material at the bottom of slips—presumably to make it easier to rearrange the slips if the binding was accidentally destroyed.

The cosmogony begins with the statement that “The Great One produced water.” The first character, transcribed as *tai* 太 in the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian*, is actually written as *da* 大 on the bamboo slips, as noted above. *Tai* (*Da*) means “ancestral” as well as “great,” and the epithet designates the first ancestor of a lineage, as in *taizu* 太祖, or *taiwang* 太王—the founding king’s father. Thus, Tai (*Da*) Yi is the “Ancestral” or “Grand” One—the ultimate ancestor who was the progenitor of the sky and earth. The translation “Grand” is conventional in Daoist studies. However, just as the transcription *tai* clouds a pattern of semantic relationships with *da* (meaning “great” or “big”), so the English (as opposed to the French) “grand” conceals the relationship between the name Tai Yi and the adjective *da*.

I have already noted that the concept of “one” is closely associated with the cosmograph and that, in the *Laozi* and other “Laoist” texts, “one” (*yi*) is often used interchangeably with “the way” (*dao*).

⁴⁷ Li Ling’s edition in *Daojia wenhua yanjiu*, vol. 17, p. 477, proposes that there were six missing characters, including a negative: “calls it X; not knowing this, calls it X” and a black square. However, Qiu, “*Tai Yi sheng shui ‘ming zi’ zhang jieshi*,” p. 221, notes that Li Ling’s suggested text is based upon the mistaken supposition of a need to fill out the line, which was not necessary if it was the end of a passage.

The gloss in the *Shuowen* 說文 for *yi* 一 is clearly based upon a cosmogony similar to that found in the *Da Yi sheng shui*, except that, in the *Shuowen*, *dao* plays the role of water. The gloss reads: “The beginning; the Great Ultimate (*da ji* 大極). The Way (*dao*) was established by One (*yi*). It created and separated into sky and earth, transformed and became the myriad living things.” This gloss has traditionally been interpreted by a reference to chapter 42 of the *Daodejing* (not found in the *Guodian Laozi*): “The Way produced one. One produced two. Two produced three. Three produced the myriad living things.” Similarly, Li Xueqin has suggested that the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony is based upon this chapter of the *Daodejing*.⁴⁸ However, the numbers do not correspond clearly to stages of the cosmogony. Thus, it is easier to understand the number sequence of the *Daodejing* passage as simply a general reference to the idea that everything began with one, rather than as having a specific relationship to the *Guodian* text.

In *The Way of Water*, I noted that *sheng* 生, often translated as to “give birth to,” refers to plants as well as animals. For this reason, I used the translation “generate.” However, when the Great One is anthropomorphized as a deity, the translation “generate” suggests a male god, rather than a female one, as does the translation “beget” used by William Boltz.⁴⁹ Strictly speaking, the Great One precedes the division into two genders and therefore should have no gender; but the *Da Yi sheng shui* specifically refers to the Great One as the “mother of the myriad living things,” so that if the spirit is gendered it should be female, and “give birth to” would be more appropriate. This being said, because of the level of abstraction in the later section of the text, and its use as a divinatory term, I have used “produce” in my translation.

The feminine gender is important here because of the unusual insistence on the superiority of feminine qualities and consistent portrayal of the *dao* as female in the *Laozi*. The *dao* of the *Laozi* is regularly associated with qualities considered to be *yin* in later *yin-yang* theory: it is mysterious, dark, soft, and weak, and associated with metaphors for females, such as the entry through a dark gate-

⁴⁸ Li Xueqin, “Jingmen Guodian Chu jian suojian Guanyin shuo,” as reprinted in *Zhongguo zhhexue*, pp. 160-4, and translated in *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, pp. 55-62.

⁴⁹ William G. Boltz, “The Fourth-century B.C. Guodiann Manuscripts from Chuu and the Composition of the *Laotzzy*,” p. 606.

way, and birth.⁵⁰ More specifically, a passage found in *Guodian Laozi A* (21:1 to 23:12, corresponding to chapter 25 of the *Daodejing*) refers to *dao* as “the mother of the sky and earth.” And in chapter 6 of the *Daodejing* (absent from the *Guodian Laozi*) we find: “The spirit of the valley does not die. It is called the dark female. The entrance of the dark female is the source of the sky and earth, it seems to exist, like a thread from a cocoon; using it, it never ends.” Finally, in chapter 1 (also absent from the *Guodian Laozi*) where, as quoted above, we were told that “what has no name is the beginning of the sky and the earth; what has a name is the mother of the myriad living things,” we hear further that “These two are the same, issuing forth, they are given different names. Yet both are called dark (*xuan* 玄). Darker and even darker—the gateway of the many mysteries.” In other words, both the named and the unnamed came from the same womb, which is the source of all living things.

Cosmologically, when the Great One is taken as the Pole Star, the water may be understood as a river, namely, the Milky Way, in which the Pole Star may be hidden. The Pole Star/Way is then the ultimate ancestress, a never-ending source for the celestial river and all living things—themes that are central to the *Daodejing*. Chen Songchang has made the interesting suggestion that *sheng* in this passage should be read as though it was followed by the preposition *yu* 于: the Great One did not “produce” water, but was “transformed into” it. This suggestion solves the problem of consistency with the second part, in which the Great One “hid in” water.⁵¹ Moreover, if the Great One is transformed into water, it allows the One and the Way to be identified with each other and might explain the metaphoric model of water as a means of understanding the abstraction represented by the Way.

Water, then, “assisted” or “compelled” the Great One to produce the sky, and the sky, together with water, produced the earth.⁵² As

⁵⁰ This point has been made by Hirase Takao, “The Ch’u Bamboo-Slip *T’ai-i Sheng shui* from Kuo-tien considered in the Light of the Emerging Debate about T’ai-sui,” *Acta Asiatica* 80 (Feb. 2001), pp. 17-26.

⁵¹ Chen Songchang 陳松長, “*Tai Yi sheng shui kaolun*” 《太一生水》考論, in *Guodian Chu jian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*, pp. 542-6.

⁵² The meaning and identification of the character written with wood 木 and 甫 but interpreted as *fu* 輔 in the *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* is unclear. Donald Harper (in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, p. 228) and Chen Wei (“*Tai Yi Sheng Shui*” *jiaodu bing lun yu Laozi de guanxi*,” p. 228) take it as 薄, a term

I have noted in *The Way of Water*, the theoretical concept *qi* 氣 “takes water vapor as its model, but its extended meanings also suggest water in its other forms, from hardened ice, to moving water, to dissipating vapor. [*Qi*] was modeled upon water in its most distended form, i.e. vapor or mist.” It crosses what we perceive (though the ancient Chinese did not) to be the boundary between material and spiritual, and is what makes up everything in the cosmos.⁵³ In the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony, water precedes the sky and earth and everything else in the cosmos. Thus, at least in origin, everything is water, rather than the more abstract *qi*. Significantly, however, the term *qi* occurs in *Da Yi sheng shui* (10:9) in the primitive sense of “vapor,” that is, the air above that we “name” the sky. This suggests that the cosmogony was composed before the theoretical formulation of *qi* as the original substance, or at least, before that formulation had become generally accepted.

The sky and the earth then formed *shen* 神 and *ming* 明. *Shen* and *ming* together produced *yin* and *yang*; *yin* and *yang*, the four seasons; the four seasons, heat and cold; heat and cold, damp and dry. With damp and dry, which marks the seasonal division of the year in the monsoon-influenced climate of China as much as heat and cold, a year is formed and the process stopped—or stops. The use of the past tense in my translation of this section makes for a reading as a cosmogony. It could, however, also be translated in the present tense: “The Great One produces water. The water returns...” Using the present tense suggests repetition. Thus, rather than an account of how the cosmos originated, we would have a repeated pattern in which a series of things happen until the year is formed, and then, presumably, start again. Such a reading better suits a discourse associated with divination.

This section ends with the characters *cheng sui er zhi* 成歲而止, which I have translated as “formed a year and that was all.” The phrase *er zhi* is frequently found in Classical Chinese texts as a final expression similar to *er yi yi* 而已矣, “and that is all.” But as Li Xueqin has observed, the Chu silk manuscript from Zidanku, which is roughly contemporaneous with the *Da Yi sheng shui*, includes the

used for the flooding waters that reached the sky in the story of Gong Gong in the *Yao dian* chapter of the *Shang shu*. This association seems appropriate in the context. However, the same character occurs in the *Guodian Laozi C* group of slips, which were bound together with this text in the context of “assisting the myriad living things to be so of themselves.”

⁵³ See Allan, *The Way of Water*, pp. 125-6.

expression “then it stopped and thus made a year” (*nai zhi yi wei sui* 乃止以爲歲). The line is very similar in meaning, and so it may be used here too as divination terminology.⁵⁴

The sequence is then reversed. In the reversal, however, we are told that the sky and earth are that which the Great One produced—without mention of water. However, the text goes on to say that the Great One is concealed in water, perhaps, as Song Chenchang has suggested, because it transforms itself. As water or as a river, the Great One moves with the seasons and, as the seasons go round, acts as the mother of the myriad living things. As the seasons wax and wane she is their warp or guideline (*jing* 經)—the constant vertical thread that does not move. If the “guideline” is understood as referring to the central, unmoving pole of the cosmograph, then the images make sense metaphorically, for the One is the only point that is both still and not subject to the vagaries of the changes; thus it cannot be harmed by movements in the sky or on the earth.

The name of the Way

The notes to *Guodian Chu mu zhujian* identify the Great One as *dao*, “Way,” citing the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋:

As for *dao* (Way), it is the quintessence, it cannot be given a shape, nor can it be given a name. If you press me, I call it the “Great One” (*Tai Yi* 太一).⁵⁵

This line from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* mimics a line from the *Daodejing* (ch. 25) in which the *dao* is called *da* 大:

I do not know its name and give it the honorific *dao* (Way). If I am pressed to give a name to it, I call it “Great.”

The line also occurs in the *Guodian Laozi*, but in the *A*, rather than the *C* bundle that included the “Great One produced water.” In the Mawangdui silk manuscript version of the text, the line is given a negative form: “not yet knowing its name.” This suggests that, unable to say the name of the *dao*, the author will only hint at it by saying *da* (*tai*). The two passages together suggest that the

⁵⁴ Li Xueqin, “*Tai Yi sheng shui de shushu jieshi*,” p. 298.

⁵⁵ *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 1984), p. 255 (5, *Da Yue* 大樂).

“great” of the *Laozi*, whose name one dare not say, was the “Great One.”

This chapter is critical evidence of a relationship between the *Daodejing*, the *Guodian Laozi*, and the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony. *Guodian Laozi* A, 21:1 to 23:12 (corresponding to ch. 25 of the *Daodejing*), reads:

There is a form that emerged from the murk,
 Preceding the birth of sky and earth.
 It stands alone and does not change.⁵⁶
 It can be taken as the mother of the sky and earth.
 Not yet knowing its name,
 I gave it the honorific *dao*.
 If I am forced to give a name to it, I say “great.”
 Great is called “going past”⁵⁷; “going past” is called “going far”; “going far”
 is called “returning”.
 The sky is great; earth is great; *dao* is great; the king is great.
 Within the state, there are four “greats” and the king occupies one.
 Man models himself on earth; earth models itself on the sky; the sky models
 itself on *dao*, and *dao* models itself on that which is so of itself (*ziran* 自然).

This again suggests that, unable to say the name of the *dao*, the author will only hint at it by saying “*da* 大” (great). Moreover, the passage places the unnamed Way within the textual context of cosmogony. It begins with the unnamed form that “stands alone” and precedes the sky and earth. That it stands alone and does not change suggests the central “one” of the cosmograph; the reference to going far and returning suggests the motion of the sky, which inevitably returns to its previous position. Although the four “greats” do not begin with *dao*, as in the received text, in the final line *dao* is given precedence over sky and earth.

Chapter 25 of *Daodejing* also has a line before “It can be taken as the mother of the sky and earth” that is not found in the *Guodian* version translated above. It reads: *zhou xing er bu dai* 周行而不殆, “Going round, it does not pause.” This line is found in all editions of the received text of the *Daodejing*, but it is also missing from the Mawangdui version of the text. The interpretation of *dai* 殆, which I translate as “pause” (*bu xi* 不息) and understand in terms of cos-

⁵⁶ Harper takes the character 亥 as *gai* (with a sun radical), rather than as a phonetic loan for 改, and notes the *Shuowen* definition, *jian* 兼, to be “paired”; see Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, p. 205, 21:14. The metaphor, then, would be of the central point, which has no point of opposition.

⁵⁷ This character has not been deciphered convincingly; I follow the received text, which has *shi* 逝.

mographic imagery, has always caused some difficulty. D.C. Lau translates this line as “goes round and does not weary,” presumably taking the character as a loan for *dai* 怠. Another possibility would be that the character was actually *shi* 始, “begin,” originally written simply as 台. The line at the end of slip 6 of the *Da Yi sheng shui*: “circles and [begins] again...” (*zhou er you* 周而又...), occurs in a similar context, before a reference to the mother of the myriad living things, suggesting that there may be some relationship.

Earlier in the passage of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* cited above, in which the Great One was identified as the *dao*, we also find an account of the origin of the cosmos (ostensibly of the origin of music):

Music... finds its root in the Great One. The Great One produced the two principles; the two principles produced *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* metamorphosed, one ascending and one descending. Joining, they form a pattern. Mixed and murky, they separate and then come together again. They come together and then separate. This is what is called celestial constancy. The sky and earth rotate on an axis (*tian di che lun* 天地車輪). They come to the end and then begin again; reach the ultimate and then return... That which the myriad living things produce, is created by the Great One, and transformed by *yin* and *yang*...⁵⁸

The cosmological sequence in this *Lüshi Chunqiu* passage resembles “the Great One produced water”: the Great One is described as the originator, first of two principles (sky and earth), then of *yin* and *yang*, and ultimately of the myriad living things. The reference to the sky and earth rotating on an axis also suggests a cosmograph.

As already noted, the theme of the nameless *dao* is pervasive in the *Laozi*. Indeed, the most famous lines of the transmitted *Daodejing* are those with which it begins:

The way that can be told is not the constant Way.
The name that can be named is not the constant name.
What has no name is the beginning of the sky and the earth.
What has a name is the mother of the myriad living things.

Significantly, this passage refers, once again, to the origin of the sky and earth in what has no name (the *dao*). This chapter is not found in the Guodian material, but we do find reference there to the Way that cannot be named: not only in the *Da Yi sheng shui* passage which I have argued is in fact part of *Guodian Laozi C*, but also in *Guodian Laozi A* (18: 9-12, equivalent to chapter 32 of the *Daodejing*), where we are told that “The Way is constant and with-

⁵⁸ See note 55.

out a name.” Moreover, we have already seen the nameless Way in association with the image (*xiang*) that has no shape in *Guodian Laozi B* (12:14, equivalent to chapter 41).

The use of the term “constant” with reference to the Way is significant here. While in the received editions of the text the character is almost always *chang* 常, the Mawangdui texts have *heng* 恆, and this was undoubtedly the original character, which had to be changed because of a taboo on the personal name of the Han Emperor Xuan Di (r. 73-49 B.C.), Liu Heng. Of the twenty-four instances where *chang* occurs in the received *Daodejing*, all but three give *heng* in the Mawangdui text, and the Guodian text accords with the Mawangdui text where the same lines are found. *Heng*, meaning constant, is associated with astronomical phenomena. In the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Zhuang Gong, 7th year), *heng* refers to the “constant” stars: “Summer. 4th month. *Xinmao* [day]. The constant stars (*heng xing* 恆星) were not visible and in the middle of the night meteors fell like rain.” Yang Shixun 楊士勳, commenting on the *Guliang* Commentary, explains that in that month “the constant stars refer to the seven lodges in the south.”⁵⁹ In other words, the “constant stars” were the fixed stars used in calculating calendrical progression.

The *Shuowen* character for *heng* is made up of a heart (心) and boat, between two horizontal lines (二) (See fig. 2a). It follows the Qin script form, as found on the bamboo slip-texts from Shuihudi (fig. 2b), with a boat (舟) substituted for the moon found in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions (fig. 2c). But the *Shuowen* also notes an “old script” form with a moon element (月) (fig. 2d), and cites as a gloss the *Shijing* 詩經 line, “like the constancy (*heng*) of the moon.”⁶⁰ This “old script” form is similar to the Chu script form (fig. 2e) found in the Guodian texts, with a moon on the left and *bu* 卜, “to divine” (originally cracks made on oracle bones) on the right.

The Chu form of the character, in which the lines at the top and bottom could be taken as the sky and earth with 卜 suggesting divination, may point, at least in Chu, to divination using the cosmograph. Although *chang* and *heng* became irretrievably con-

⁵⁹ *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 170.

⁶⁰ See Cheng Junying 程俊英 and Jiang Jianyuan 蔣見元, *Shijing zhuxi* 詩經注析 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), p. 462 (*Xiao ya* 小雅, *Luming* 鹿鳴, *Tianbao* 天保). The editors take *heng* as an equivalent to *geng* 絙, “rope” or “tie.” Similarly, the Mao commentary glosses *heng* as *xian* 絃, “bowstring.”



Heng 恒				
				
Shuowen 13 xia 二 bu	Qin slip Shuihudi (Qin 84)	Zhou bronze (Heng gui lid)	Shuowen 13 xia 二 bu Guwen	Chu slip Guodian Laozi A 1:18

Figure 2.

fused after the reign of Liu Heng, in the *Laozi* text *heng* (later changed to *chang*) was used both to describe the *dao* and as an adjective modifying *de*. The metaphoric root of the concept of *chang* is unclear, but *heng* was clearly grounded in the constancy of certain astronomical phenomena. Thus, the Great One was (theoretically at least) in the center of the sky, and this “Great One”—the *dao* that could not be named—was the only true constant of the cosmos.⁶¹

The motif of “not naming” suggests that in the popular religious cult the name of the “Way” had a power that might be put to practical—that is, to magical—use. We have seen above that a *Laozi* chapter found in both the Guodian slips and in the received version hinted at the name by saying “great.” Why was the name—and not saying it—so important? The most obvious reason for not saying a name is that it is taboo because it is the name of an ancestor or a spirit. I have mentioned above that the Great One was identified with the Way. As a spirit, its name was both powerful and taboo. So, who was it?

The Pole Star and its Spirit

The first modern analysis of the identity of the Great One comes from the so-called “Doubt Antiquity” school. In an article published in *Yanjing xuebao* in December 1932, Qian Baocong 錢寶琮 argued that *Tai Yi* 太一, the Great One, was a philosophical concept that was not identified with the cult associated with the Pole

⁶¹ See also Lian Shaoming 連劭名, “Guodian Chu jian *Laozi* zhong de ‘heng’” 郭店楚簡《老子》中的恒, in *Guodian Chu jian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*, pp. 462-5, who argues that *da heng* is equivalent to *zhong*, “center.”

Star and its god until the Han Dynasty. On the other hand, in an important article published in *Zhongguo wenhua* in 1990 (before the excavation of the Guodian tomb) Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 forcefully argued that the identification of the philosophical concept of *dao* (“Way”) with the spirit known as Tai Yi occurred already in the Warring States Period.

According to Ge’s analysis, the term *tai yi* (sometimes abbreviated as *yi*, “one”) refers to four overlapping semantic fields that are correlated, or, to use his terminology, “coordinated” with one another in early Daoist texts. They include (1) the North (Pole) star, (2) the spirit of that star, (3) *Tai ji* 太極 (the “Great Ultimate”), and (4) *dao* (the “Way”).⁶² The importance of the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony is that it reveals a relationship between the *Daodejing* and a cult surrounding the Great One. As I shall discuss below, the conceptual core lies in the Pole Star and its spirit. The star may be conceptualized dynamically as the heavenly body in the center of the sky that was the source of the celestial river, or statically, as a point on the cosmograph. This identification and the cosmogony are key to understanding the concept of the *dao* in the *Laozi*, including those parts of the *Daodejing* not found in the Guodian bamboo slip-text. The term *tai ji*, on the other hand, is important because it became a specialist term in later Daoism, and its development confirms our hypothesis of a common origin for later Daoist “religion” and “philosophy.”

In ancient China, natural phenomena such as rivers, mountains, and the heavenly bodies were both physical objects and the spirits of those objects, who received cult offerings. The “Great One” is thus both the Pole Star and the spirit with which that star was identified. The cult of the Great One was extremely popular in the state of Chu at the time of the Guodian burial. The Pole Star appears in this guise in the textual tradition associated with Chu, in the *Nine Songs* of the *Chuci* (楚辭九歌), as *Dong Huang Tai Yi* 東皇太一. Li Ling has used archaeological as well as textual evidence to establish the importance of an astronomical cult of the Great One in the state of Chu in the pre-Qin period. Under Han Wu Di (r. 140-87 B.C.), whose officials included many Chu natives,

⁶² Qian Baocong 錢寶琮, “Tai Yi kao” 太一考, *Yanjiing xuebao*, 12 (1932), pp. 2449-78; Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, “Zhong miao zhi men—bei ji yu tai yi, dao, tai ji” 衆妙之門——北極與太一，道，太極, *Zhongguo wenhua* 3 (December 1990), pp. 46-63.

the Great One became the head of all of the spirits in a reorganization of the ceremonial pantheon of the court.⁶³ Donald Harper has extended Li Ling's evidence beyond the confines of Chu to argue that the cult of the Great One was not specifically a Chu phenomenon, but an aspect of the "popular elite culture" of the Warring States and Han periods;⁶⁴ and indeed, if the Great One was the spirit of the Pole Star, we should not expect his/her worship to arise suddenly in the fourth century B.C., but to be traceable to an earlier period. Still, the name "Great One" for this spirit may be a Warring States phenomenon associated with the use of the cosmograph in divination.

The two roles of the Pole Star and its spirit are not separable. Han rites began with worship of the "Great One," and the ruler took the "Great One" as a metaphor for his own central position and rule. According to the *Huainanzi*, "The emperor models himself on the Great One."⁶⁵ The *Li yun* 禮運 chapter of the *Li ji* 禮記 (date unknown) similarly states:

Thus, ritual is always rooted in the Great One (大一). Separating, it made the sky and the earth; revolving, it made *yin* and *yang*; changing, it made the four seasons; ordering, it made the ghosts and spirits. Its descent is called order (*ming*) and its office is the sky.

The subject of this passage is ritual, the object of which is the Great One, i.e. the spirit of the Pole Star with its office in the sky. Just as the Pole Star, which stood still at the center of the sky, appeared to control the other celestial bodies, so the ruler should control the world. Significantly, the cosmogony of this passage is similar to that found in the *Da Yi sheng shui*, even though the simi-

⁶³ Li Ling, "An archaeological study of Taiyi (Grand One) worship," translated by Donald Harper, *Early Medieval China* 2 (1995-6), pp. 1-39. Li Ling 李零, "San yi' kao" 三一考, paper presented at the International Conference on the Guodian *Laozi*, Dartmouth College, May 22-6, 1998; Li Ling, "Du Guodian Chu jian *Tai Yi sheng shui*", *Daojia wenhua yanjiu*, no. 17, pp. 316-331. Although Li Ling's general argument is convincing, his identification of a character as Tai Yi on the Baoshan slips is not. This graph is composed of *da* (*tai*) 大 to which a line has been added on the arm or leg and is read by Li Ling as a combined character (*heven*). However, some examples have more than one additional line, e.g. three lines on the leg of the *da*, which seems to preclude it as a *heven* for 大一.

⁶⁴ Donald Harper, "The Taiyi Cult as an Example of Early Chinese Common Religion," unpublished manuscript.

⁶⁵ D.C. Lau and Chen Fong Ching, *A Concordance to the Huainanzi*, 3/18/25-6.

larity of the language is insufficient to suggest a common textual source and implies only a similar conceptual background.

In the Chu cult, the Great One's particular function was to protect in warfare. For example, the Great One appears on a silk chart from Han Tomb No. 3 from Mawangdui (burial, 168 B.C.), where s/he appears to have this function; thus, Li Ling calls this chart the "Weapon-repelling diagram" (*bibing tu* 逼兵圖). The chart is too damaged for the gender of the figure to be clear. Li Ling has also suggested that warfare was unlucky in a particular direction when the *tian yi* needle (the "precious sword") on the Tai Yi Nine Palace cosmograph pointed in a particular direction.⁶⁶ Metaphorically, this role of communicating magical invulnerability may be associated with the Great One's central position—the "one" point that has no point of opposition, where no one can be your enemy. Thus, if someone "holds to" or "guards" the "one" or the "way," he can never be defeated. Significantly, avoidance of defeat in warfare was a primary theme of the *Laozi C* passages discussed above.

The Great One's central role in the heavens made him/her an appropriate model for the ruler (known as both the 'son of sky/heaven' and the 'father and mother of the people'). This association of the emperor with the Great One is well known as a Han Dynasty phenomenon, but its roots can be found in the cosmology of the Warring States period, or even earlier but without the name "Great One" for the Pole Star. For example, we are told in the *Heguanzi* (in which, as we have seen, the "one" and the "way" were identified): "The center is the position of the Great One; the hundred spirits look up to it."⁶⁷ This line recalls that from the *Lunyu* (2.1) quoted above, "To govern by means of *de* (virtue) is like the North Star (*bei chen* 北辰) dwelling in its place as the multitude of stars pay court to it."

The Dipper, the handle of which was used to mark the changes of seasons, was also known as *di*'s chariot; likewise, in later tradition at least, the Pole Star was also known as *di* 帝 ("lord"), suggesting its superior position and pivotal role as controller of the sky (*tian*). According to the *Kao gong ji* 考工記 chapter of the *Zhou Li*

⁶⁶ Li Ling, "Du Guodian Chu jian *Tai Yi sheng shui*," p. 322. See also Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu xu kao* 中國方書續考 (Beijing: Dongfang Press, 2000), pp. 207-52.

⁶⁷ *Zihui* edition; Carine Defoort, *The Pheasant Cap Master*, p. 345 (10, *Taihong*, 71a).

周禮, “The squareness of the chariot’s body images the earth; the roundness of the canopy images the sky; the thirty spokes of the wheels image days and months; the twenty-eight spokes of the canopy image the stars [of the twenty-eight lodges].”⁶⁸ Chapter 11 of the *Daodejing* (not in the Guodian material), perhaps referring to this constellation, remarks: “Thirty spokes share one hub. Where it is nothing is the efficacy of the cart.”

According to the *Shiji*, “The brightest star in the heavenly pole constellation of the central palace is the regular dwelling of Tai Yi.”⁶⁹ The star identified as Tai Yi has changed over time because of the precession of the equinoxes—the phenomenon by which a star used to mark the position where the equinoctial sun rises slowly changes its position in the sky because of the rotation of the earth’s axis. Since the Pole Star is not exactly at the pole, it too moves with the precession. And, not only is there no star precisely at the pole, but the one nearest, and thus considered the Pole Star, has changed over time: thus, according to Qian Baocong’s reconstruction, this star was Ursa Minor (Kochab) during the Warring States Period.⁷⁰ That the Pole Star was not truly in the center is clearly recognized in the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, which tells us that “The Pole Star (*jì xīng* 極星) moves with the sky, and yet the celestial pole (*tiān jí* 天極) does not move.”⁷¹ Precisely when the precession of the equinoxes was recognized in China is unclear. According to Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, the phenomenon was explicitly recognized by Yu Xi in A.D. 330, but the shifting of the winter solstice among the lodges had already been noticed in the Han.⁷²

As discussed above, in ritual—including both the Chu popular cult and the later Han imperial cult—the Great One was the spirit of the Pole Star. In divination, this star was the center of the sky, represented as a point on a cosmograph. When the cosmos is viewed as natural and dynamic, this single point is the ultimate source of the Milky Way—the water of the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony—and

⁶⁸ My translation is based on Christopher Cullen, *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China*, p. 50. I have been unable to determine when the term *dí* was first applied to the Pole Star.

⁶⁹ *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p. 1289 (*juan* 27, *Tianguanshu* 天官書).

⁷⁰ See Qian Baocong, “Taiyi kao.”

⁷¹ *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* p. 659 (*juan* 13, You shi 有始).

⁷² See Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky during the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), p. 112.

thus of the cosmos itself. The *Zhuangzi* states that “the position of the Great One is empty, ... water flows from that which has no form and streams down into the Great Blue...”⁷³ Wei Qipeng has related this to *hun tian* 渾天 cosmology and argued that the “Great Emptiness (*da xu* 大虛)—which surrounded the world in this theory, portraying the cosmos as something like an egg with the earth as the yolk—was water. This is supported, for example, by the Mawangdui silk manuscript *Yuan dao* 元道, which reads: “The beginning of the constantly nothing is totally the same as the Great Emptiness. The emptiness is identical and becomes one. It is the constant one, and that’s all. Damp and misty, it does not yet have light or dark.” Likewise the *Wenzi* 文子, *Dao yuan* 道元: “... Laozi said, there is something that emerged from the murk, preceding the birth of the sky and earth... Forced to give it a name, I call it by the honorific *dao*. As for the *dao*, it is so high that it cannot be reached, so deep that it cannot be fathomed, it envelops the sky and earth, endowed with no shape, the stream of the spring bubbles up, empty, and yet it does not fill up; dirty, when still, it soon clears....”⁷⁴

Here, then, we have an image of water, presumably the Milky Way, streaming into the sky from the Pole Star. Wei also cites the so-called apocryphal text, the *Chunqiu yuanmingbao* 春秋元命苞: “As for water, it is the curtain that envelops the sky and earth and the five elements begin with it. It is that from which the myriad living things were cast forth, the perspiration of the original *qi*.”⁷⁵ This brings the concepts of water and *qi* together and is evidence of a tradition on the priority of water. Significantly, this text also refers to Tai Yi and identifies it with the North Star: “The star of Tai Yi dwells high and is deeply hidden, therefore it is named the ‘North

⁷³ *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ch. 32 (*Lie yu guan* 列禦冠), p. 1047. See also Ye Haiyan 葉海煙, “*Tai Yi sheng shui yu Zhuangzi de yuzhou lun*” 《太一生水》與莊子的宇宙論, *Zhongguo zhhexue*, no. 21.

⁷⁴ See Wei Qipeng 魏啓鵬, “*Tai Yi sheng shui zhaji*” 《太一生水》劄記, paper presented at the International Symposium on Chu State Slips of Guodian, Wuhan University, October, 1999 (published in *Zhongguo zhhexue shi*, 2000, no.1), pp. 183-91. For the text of the *Wenzi*, see Ding Yuanzhi 丁原植, *Wenzi ziliao tansuo* 《文子》資料探索 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 1999), p. 2. For that of the Mawangdui text, see Robin Yates, *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao and Yin-Yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), p. 148.

⁷⁵ See Wei Qipeng, art. cit., citation on p. 190. The term *couye* 腠液, which I translate as “perspiration,” refers to a liquid thought to lie between the skin and flesh and to be emitted through the pores.

Ultimate' (*bei ji* 北極)." Although the date of this text is not clear, it seems to be based on a tradition similar to that of the *Da Yi sheng shui*.⁷⁶

This tradition, including the feminine gender of the Great One, is neatly encapsulated by a line from the *Lingshujing* 靈樞經—an other apocryphal text of unknown date: "Great One is the honorific style (*zi* 字) given to water. It was first the mother of the sky and earth, and later the fount (*yuan* 源) of the myriad living things."⁷⁷ Here, then, we have a cosmogony in which the Great One—that is, the Way—is seen as a female and the source of all living things; a source which at the same time is like a never-ending stream, an inexhaustible abyss, in other words, the Way that is constant and can never be exhausted; that is, the imagery associated with the Way in the *Laozi*.

***Tai Ji*, the "Great Ultimate"**

Tai Ji 太極 is also one of the terms pointed out by Ge Zhaoguang as corresponding with Tai Yi and the Way in Daoist literature. The word *ji* has been mentioned above in various expressions, including "without ultimate" (*wu ji*), "North Ultimate" (*bei ji*), "Celestial Ultimate" (*tian ji*), and "Pole Star" (*ji xing*). Its meanings include "pole," "utmost point," "ultimate." Thus, Donald Harper translates Tai (Da) Ji as "Grand Acme."⁷⁸ Metaphorically, the Grand Acme, or "Great Ultimate" as I translate it, takes the Pole Star—the utmost point of the cosmos before the genesis of the world from water—as its root. One finds many names to refer to the Pole Star in the Warring States Period, and it is not clear when the term Tai (or Da) Ji began to be used as a special name.

The *Shuowen* gloss for *yi* — ("one") discussed above: "the beginning; Da Ji," is clear evidence for the use of the term in the first century A.D. It is found in the received editions of the *Xici* 繫辭 commentary to the *Zhou yi* 周易. The *Xici* is pre-Han, since a

⁷⁶ See also Li Xueqin, *Tai Yi sheng shui de shushu jieshi*, p. 299.

⁷⁷ As cited by Yao Zhihua, "Tai Yi, shui yu Zhongguo gudai yuzhou sheng cheng lun," p. 5. The text is of unknown date. Yao's source is a Song Dynasty citation in the *Taixuanbu* 太玄部 of the Daozang 道藏. The line is now found in current versions of the text.

⁷⁸ See Donald Harper, "The Nature of Taiyi in the Guodian Manuscript *Taiyi sheng shui*."

version of it has been found at Mawangdui, but the excavated text has *Da Heng* 大恆, “Great Constant,” where the received text has *Da Ji*. In the *Xici*, the Great Constant—or Great Ultimate—takes the place of the Great One as the originator: “Thus, the *Changes* have the Great Ultimate (or Great Constant). It produced the two principles; the two principles produced the four images (*xiang* 象), the four images, the eight trigrams.”⁷⁹ The *Qian zuo du* 乾鑿度 commentary to the *Zhou yi* further elaborates: “Confucius said, ‘The *Changes* begin with the Great Ultimate (Tai Ji). The Great Ultimate separated and became two, thus producing the sky and earth. The sky and earth have the divisions, spring, autumn, winter and summer, thus they produced the four seasons. Each of the four seasons have the division of *yin* and *yang* and soft and hard, thus they produced the eight trigrams...’”⁸⁰ This cosmogony is, once again, similar to, but not close enough textually to derive from, the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony in the form found at Guodian.

The earliest form of the character for *ji*, found in oracle bone inscriptions, is a man between two horizontal lines (二). The *Shuowen* explains these as the sky and earth. Western Zhou bronze inscriptions add a mouth (口) on the left (easily confused with the moon in *heng*). A hand holding a cudgel is then added on the right, which is abbreviated in the *Shuowen* to a hand (又). However, there are also instances, e.g. from Houma, in which this element is abbreviated to the cudgel, which is similar in form to *bu* 卜 (to “divine”) (see fig. 3). Thus, *ji* and *heng* are easily confused in copying. The meanings are normally distinct, but in bronze inscriptions *ji* is used metaphorically to describe the role of the king or royal ancestor, who was the *ji* for the four quadrates, that is, the center or principle.⁸¹ Similarly, in cosmology *Da Ji* is the point of origin and takes the pole star as its metaphoric root. *Da Heng* as the point of greatest constancy is also this metaphoric center. Thus, in this context,

⁷⁹ *Zhou Yi zhushu* 周易注疏, in Zheng Wangeng 鄭萬耕, ed., *Yixue jingcui* 易學精粹 (Peking: Peking Press, 1996) p. 206. See also Wang Zhiping 王志平, “*Tai Yi sheng shui yu Yi xue*: Jianlun Zhongguo gudai yuzhou lun” 《太一生水》與《易》學一兼論中國古代宇宙論, *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 2001, pp. 93-118, for a discussion of the relationship between *Tai Yi sheng shui* and the *Changes*.

⁸⁰ Bent Nielsen, *A Concordance to the Qian zuo du* (Copenhagen: East Asian Institute, 1992), p. 3. See also Xing Wen 邢文, “*Tai Yi sheng shui yu Huainanzi: Qian zuo du zai renshi*,” pp. 212-26.

⁸¹ See Chen Chusheng 陳初生, *Jinwen changyong zidian* 金文常用字典 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin, 1987), pp. 1082-4.

Ji 嘏 (極)				
				
Shuowen 13 <i>xia</i> = <i>bu</i>	Qin slip Shuihudi (Qin 16)	Spring and Autumn covenant tablet (Houma 320)	W. Zhou bronze (Qiang pan)	Shang oracle bone

Figure 3.

the meanings of *ji* and *heng* coincide. Indeed, both readings make sense and it is not clear what the original character should be. However, I think it more likely that the Chu character for *heng* was misread as *ji* than vice versa.

Wang Bi's (A.D. 226-49) gloss to the *Xici* explains *da ji* as: "What that which has nothing to call it by is called." Several centuries later, Kong Yingda (A.D. 574-648) says it refers to the "original vapor (*yuan qi* 元氣) before the sky and earth had separated...", and this became the conventional gloss.⁸² In the *Kongzi jiaoyu* 孔子家語, on the other hand, the "Great One" rather than the "Great Ultimate" is defined as "original vapor."⁸³ This is evidence for the identity of the Great One and the Great Ultimate. Yet in the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony the term *qi* is not used in this theoretical sense, but matter-of-factly, as the vapor of the sky in opposition to the soil that is earth. As discussed extensively in *The Way of Water*, water in all its forms, from mist to ice, serves as the root metaphor for *qi* as an abstract concept—what everything is made of, both the material and immaterial.

We have already seen that the "one" was used in early Taoist meditation texts interchangeably with *dao* and the center (*zhong*). In the *Daodejing* (ch. 28, not in the Guodian *Laozi*) the term *ji* is found in connection with the image of a cosmograph: "If you act as a cosmograph (*shi*) for the world, your virtue will be constant virtue without deviation, and you will go back again to where there is no ultimate (*wu ji* 無極)." This usage suggests that a cosmographic metaphor may be at work in the body/cosmos correspondence.

⁸² Jin Jingfang 金景芳, *Zhou yi xici zhuan: xinbian xiangjie* 周易繫辭傳—新編詳解 (Shenyang: Liaoning, 1998), p. 83; Deng Qiubo 鄧球柏, *Boshu Zhou yi jiaoshi* 帛書周易校釋 (Changsha: Hunan Press, 1996) (rev. ed.), p. 419.

⁸³ *Kongzi jiaoyu* (Taipei: Shijie yinshu, n.d.), p. 76 (*juan* 7, *Li yun* 禮運).

The term *ji* also occurs in chapter 16, in the line: “When emptiness reaches its ultimate (極), I preserve the stillness (靜) with caution.” Here, however, we once again find *heng* instead of *ji* in the *Guodian Laozi* version of the text (A 24:1-8): “When the extreme emptiness is constant (至虛恆), I preserve the center (中) with caution.” The imagery seems to be that of a cosmos with a still, empty center around which the sky revolves. Thus, the idea of the Great Ultimate, Tai ji, as an abstract point of origin, before there was anything else, seems to be a later theoretical development, based on a cosmogony like that found in the *Tai Yi sheng shui*, in which everything began with the Great One and water.

Isabelle Robinet argued that the cosmogony found in the *Da Yi sheng shui* is typically Daoist. She also observed that the formal structure of the cosmogony, which proceeds through stages of generation and then returns systematically to the beginning, resembles the later Daoist Tai Ji diagrams (*tai ji tu* 太極圖), and posited a connection between the *Da Yi sheng shui* and the three Daoist “offices” (*guan* 官), viz. sky, earth, and water.⁸⁴ Thus, although the term *tai ji* does not seem to be as early as Tai Yi, it does use the same cosmic metaphor. That it became a technical term in later Daoist “religion” suggests that this religious tradition had its foundations in the same environment in which the *Laozi* took form.

The Myth of the Flood

Shui means “river” as well as water, and the water that flowed from the pole in the *Da Yi sheng shui* can be understood as the Milky Way—the Celestial River that flowed across the sky, circled around (as the Yellow Springs), and returned to “assist” or “enhance” the sky. From this, the earth and all else proceeded. This interpretation is supported by the reference to the sky being deficient in the northwest and the earth low, mythologically associated with Gong Gong butting Bu Zhou mountain and causing heaven and earth to tilt at the time of the great flood. The note to *Guodian Chu mu*

⁸⁴ See Isabelle Robinet in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, p. 166; and “Lun *Tai Yi sheng shui*” 論太一生水, in *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 17 (1999), pp. 332-49. See also her earlier discussion of Daoist cosmology, “Original Contributions of *Neidan* to Taoism and Taoist Thought,” in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, pp. 297-330.

zhujian mentions the passage in the *Huainanzi* cited above, describing Gong Gong's contest with Zhuan Xu to become *Di* 帝.⁸⁵

In Chinese texts before the late Warring States Period, the history of the world generally begins at the time of the great flood. As I have discussed in my *The Shape of the Turtle: Myth, Art, and Cosmos in Early China*, the story of controlling the flood was one of ordering the world and making it fit for humans to live in. It is closer to that of Genesis than to Noah's flood, which was caused by forty days and forty nights of rain; in other words, it is not a "flood myth" in the sense that the world became flooded, but a myth of origin. The world, in its primeval state, was covered with water. The waters were fanned by the evil Gong Gong until they rose up to the sky. However, the flood hero Yu 禹 dug the river beds and made the mountains from the excess earth, so that the water flowed into the sea.⁸⁶ Yu's principle was that denoted in slip 9 of our text: "When one forms by paring away, one produces (*sheng* 生) by piling up." This myth may be a source of the idea that water preceded all else, expressed in a schematized manner in the cosmogony of *Da Yi sheng shui*.

In *Hamlet's Mill*, Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha von Dechend trace a wide range of Eurasian 'flood' myths to astronomical imagery associated with the precession of the equinoxes. The movement of the precession is very slow, as it takes approximately 23,000 years to return to the original position; however, a small change in star positions *vis-à-vis* fixed markers can be observed in as little as three generations. Thus, even in ancient times, when people used fixed stars to calculate the calendrical changes, they would at some point realize that the stars were no longer in the appropriate place. De Santillana and von Dechend suggest that even very primitive peoples, prone to devote great attention to the sky, would have noted the movement, and they theorize that the coincidence of similar myths concerning a flood is ascribable to the observation of the precession and the traumatic effect of its recognition. These myths, so common in the ancient world, would thus be a figurative rendering of a celestial event, making its appearance when the stars were found to have moved from their accustomed places in Neolithic times. In many of these myths, the Milky Way is believed to be the source

⁸⁵ See note 46 above.

⁸⁶ Sarah Allan, *The Shape of the Turtle*, ch. 3.

of all the water in the world. Moreover, the original source of the celestial river is often thought to be the Pole Star.⁸⁷

Deborah Porter, following De Santillana and von Dechend, relates the Chinese great flood myth to a presumed knowledge of the precession of the equinox. She has pointed out that in China the Celestial River (*tian han* 天漢) is located in the northwestern direction and that, along with the ecliptic (i.e., the projected course of the sun in the night sky), it “runs right through Scorpius and Sagittarius,” the region known as the “heavenly ford” (*tian jin* 天津). Again following De Santillana and Dechend, she suggests that Gamma Sagittarius, part of the “basket” (*ji* 箕) constellation and located right in the Milky Way, was used as the equinoctial marker and that the catastrophic mythic event—the creation of the Celestial River when Gong Gong breached the pillar, or the great flood of the historical texts—was in fact a reflection of the movement that resulted in the Corona Australis (the “heavenly turtle,” *tian bie* 天黿) replacing the Milky Way.⁸⁸

The relationship of the Chinese flood myth to astronomical phenomena—and indeed, of the flood myth to the use of water as a root metaphor—is beyond the scope of the present essay. As I see it, there is too little evidence to support the supposition that Paleolithic peoples observed the precession of the equinoxes. Moreover, the supposition that it caused a traumatic effect resulting in flood mythology across Eurasia is purely hypothetical. Nevertheless, if the Chinese flood myth is associated with the Pole Star, its possible relationship with other Eurasian flood myths is striking and deserves further research.

The Way as Water

The cosmogony of the *Da Yi sheng shui* is highly abstract. Since it is a theoretical text associated with divination, the “water” produced by the Great One should be read as an abstraction. Nevertheless,

⁸⁷ Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston: Nonpareil, 1977).

⁸⁸ Deborah Porter, *From Deluge to Discourse: Myth, History and the Generation of Chinese Fiction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 32-33. More specifically, she associates the myth with the trauma of the movement of the vernal equinox around 6,000 B.C. Although many of her observations are highly stimulating, the overall theory remains problematic.

since *shui* 水, “water” also means “river,” to say that the Great One produced water is also to say that the Pole Star produced or gave birth to a river, which was then the source of the sky and earth. If *dao* is identified with the Great One and the Great One is taken as female, as I have argued above, then much of the most important imagery in the *Daodejing* can be read in terms of the one found in the *Da Yi sheng shui*.

In *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue*, published in 1997, I formulated the theory that water and plant life were the root metaphors of many of the most fundamental concepts in early Chinese philosophical thought. This theory was based on an analysis of the relationship between the terms in the received tradition, rather than on any direct formulation found in the ancient texts, and I was as yet unaware of the *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony. My hypothesis was that the early Chinese philosophers assumed that common principles informed the natural and human worlds and believed that, by studying the principles governing nature, one could understand the nature of man. Although the term “root metaphor” is commonly used by historians of religion to refer to the myths that served as foundation for philosophical thinking, I took the term to refer not to foundational myths in the case of China, but to natural imagery: this was what served as a concrete model for formulating philosophical abstractions in ancient China.

The most important concept in Chinese philosophical discourse is *dao*, the “Way.” In my argument, the *focal* meaning of *dao* is not a roadway, as many scholars have supposed (though roads are a type of *dao*), but a waterway, and this is the root metaphor of the philosophical concept. Philosophically, *dao* is a natural course or way, grounded in the imagery of the stream of a river or of the water bubbling up unceasingly from a natural spring. One of the characteristics of water is that it flows in channels and always moves downward. From this idea of the *dao*, modeled on the image of a stream with a spring as its source, its channel acting as a conduit that guides people in their actions, the concept was extended to encompass a condition in which everything in the world follows its natural course.

This imagery was inherent in the very concept of *dao*, and thus, shared by all the early philosophical schools, with different permutations depending on the particular school. It remains, however, that water plays an exceptionally prominent role in the *Daodejing*, as many scholars have observed. Water itself is described as “the

highest good” (*shang shan*, *Daodejing*, ch. 8), and the text advises the ruler, or the person who wishes to survive in perilous times, quite simply to imitate its qualities: not contending, taking the lowest position, being soft and weak, yielding to any pressure and taking any shape, and thus being able to penetrate the slightest opening and wear down even the hardest stone.

The *Da Yi sheng shui* cosmogony provides the key to understanding both why water has this particular role in the *Laozi*, and the priority given to the Way in that same text. As D.C. Lau noted presciently in the introduction to his 1963 translation of the *Daodejing*, contrary to the *Analects* of Confucius or the *Mencius*, the *Daodejing* is a text where *dao* is given conceptual priority over *tian* 天, “sky/heaven.” In Lau’s words, “The conception of the *dao* as the creator of the universe is interesting because, as far as we know, it was an innovation of the Warring States period, and the *Laozi* is one of the works where it is to be found. Traditionally, the role of creator belonged to *tian*.”⁸⁹ This precedence, and the particular role of the *dao* in the *Laozi*, may now be explained by the identification of the *dao* with the Great One, the origin of the water from which the sky and earth were created. Indeed, we can now see that the *dao* was not simply modeled on a river that flows continuously from a natural spring, but that it was taken as *the* celestial river that flows unceasingly from the womb of the Great One.

Conclusion

The discussion above has proposed a number of integrally related arguments about the text and conceptual implications of the *Guodian Laozi* and of the Great One cosmogony. Some of the conclusions that can be drawn from this discussion are summarized below.

The rise of the use of the cosmograph for divination influenced the manner in which the cosmos was visualized, and the cult of the Great One arose in association with it. The Great One was the Pole Star—the source of the celestial river from which the sky, earth, and all else was produced—and its spirit. This spirit, at least in some traditions, was female, and she was the source of the celestial river from which everything formed. In the technique of divination

⁸⁹ D.C. Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1963), p. 22.

using a cosmograph, the Great One was the still center—the unmoving pivot—which had no point of opposition and governed the sky revolving about it. This imagery also provided a metaphor for the body as a microcosm of the greater cosmos in meditation practices.

If we now look at the *Laozi* in this light, it becomes clear that the Great One cosmogony was a source for all three *Guodian Laozi* bundles and for the *Daodejing*, including the chapters not found at Guodian. Most importantly, the Great One was identified with the *dao*. This recognition allows us better to understand the particular imagery associated with the *dao* in the *Daodejing* and later Daoist texts. More specifically, it reveals the metaphoric source of the *dao* as unnamable, the only thing that is constant, female, an inexhaustible spring, a never-ending stream and the ultimate source of life, existing before the sky and earth and all the myriad things.

Chapters not found at Guodian often draw more explicitly on this imagery than the slip-texts. This self-conscious use of divination and Great One cosmogonic imagery and ideas suggests that in many passages the cult had become more distant, essentially a source of imagery and inspiration—something to “think with” rather than something actually practiced. Thus, for example, the identification of the Way with the One may have an origin in taboo, but it was clearly, at another level, a literary and philosophical conceit used to discuss ineffability.

Because we only know when the tomb was closed (ca. 300 B.C.), and not when the texts buried in it were compiled, the date of the *Daodejing* also remains unresolved. All three bundles of the *Guodian Laozi* drew upon a source of material also used in the compilation of the *Daodejing*. One of the bundles, *Laozi C*, includes one (or two) passages omitted in the compilation of the *Daodejing*. As the source used for the *Guodian Laozi* was only one of the sources of the *Daodejing*, it would seem to be of a later origin.

This material was associated with the cult of the Great One, and because of this association the Great One cosmogony was further appended to *Laozi C*. It reflects ideas associated with cosmographic divination, but it is a highly abstract theoretical work, not a practical divination manual. Just as the *Daodejing* functions at various levels, in the same way the cosmogony can be read differently in light of the different discourses—such as mythology, divination, ritual, and philosophy—associated with the different identities of the Great One. This text does not appear to have been widely circulated, but

we can now see that many references in other texts, especially in the later Daoist tradition, reflect similar cosmological ideas.

Finally, whereas modern scholarship makes a strict distinction between “religious” and “philosophical” Daoism, it is clear that such a distinction was not made in traditional China. The hypothesis that the Great One cult was the intellectual milieu from which the philosophical tradition took form suggests that the distinction has no validity for the ancient period.

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