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Meaning-Construction in warring states philosophical discourse : a discussion of the palaeographic materials from Tomb Guōdiàn One
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Introduction

MEANING-CONSTRUCTION IN LATE WARRING STATES PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

1. Introduction

This book analyzes a defined corpus of philosophic texts from the Warring States period. It treats texts as objects in their own right and, in a broad sense, discusses the relationship between material conditions of text and manuscript culture, writing, techniques of meaning-construction, and philosophy in Warring States period (ca. 481-222). By analyzing the formal structure of the philosophic texts from the Warring States, the present study distinguishes between two ideal types of texts, which I call “argument-based texts” and “authority-based texts”. Meaning-construction in the former type of texts is based in writing; in the latter ideal type of texts, meaning-construction requires reference to (oral) commentators. Hence, whereas argument-based texts facilitate philosophy that is exempt from needs of contextualization, authority-based texts, for their part, are mere modules of larger philosophic processes that remain outside the texts themselves.

1.1. Text and Thought

In engaging with early thought, we tend to think of texts as mere repositories of ideas. As a rule, the more philosophic our questions, the less we think about the texts that transmit these thoughts. In so doing, we not only forget that the philosophic text is both mediator and (only) remnant of early thought, but we also *a priori* neglect the correlation that may have existed between the ideas, which we aim to understand, and the material carrier that conveys these ideas to the present day.

Instead of taking texts to be mere vessels of thought, I approach early thought and the practice of philosophizing in early China from a different perspective. Whereas most studies focus solely on the *ideas* expressed in the texts, my analysis starts off by dealing with the philosophic texts themselves: I shall look at texts as meaningful objects in their own right. The underlying assumption for this approach is that ‘text’ as a material object can reveal vital information about the ‘text’ as a cultural phenomenon; that is, it can provide such information as for what purpose philosophic texts were used, by whom they were used, but also how the philosophic texts were used in early Chinese intellectual communication. In other words, by taking a closer look at the philosophic texts themselves to make explicit their various means of meaning-construction, we can further our understanding of the practices of philosophic reasoning in early China overall.

The written object always mediates early thought. This demands conscious engagement with the correlation of text and thought and also with text as the only remnant of early thought. The relatedness of text and thought on the one hand, and the text being the only remnant of thought on the other hand, has subtle implications for the study of the history of ideas. These can be summarized in three groups of questions. Firstly, it is essential to think about the degree to which philosophic concepts were shaped by being written down. To what extent does the written word influence the structure of reasoning? Is writing only the transcription of thought, and the philosophic text, by implication, merely the mimesis of the mimesis, as Jan and Aleida Assmann suggest in accordance with Aristotle?¹ Or do

¹ Aleida and Jan Assmann 1998.

written texts impart a degree of abstraction to thought, which would be absent in oral discourse, as David Olson assumes?² Then, were the texts composed in writing, which should at least have facilitated a more complex disquisition of a philosophic concern therein? Or were they copied on bamboo only after having been composed orally? Do these texts, which we aim to understand, represent ‘closed’ edifices of thought that can (and should) be studied individually? Or are they only fractions of a larger, ongoing and in itself coherent (or incoherent) unit or discourse, which, ill-fated as it was, did not survive to the present day? If this were the case, it should be given expression in our analysis of the written piece of thought to be only *a piece* of thought that in itself is insufficient to be used for (re)constructing a coherent philosophic edifice. And then, is it possible at all to demonstrate this sufficiently in our engagement with the written text? If so, to what degree?

In this respect, it is necessary at least to attempt to disentangle the complex correlation of the spoken and the written word in the texts which we aim to understand. It is essential to reflect on the question whether or not writing imparts independence to the ideas engaged with. Thus, does the written word only refer to an oral—and by the date of composition still ongoing—context behind the makeup of the texts? Or does writing help to relieve ideas from situational contexts? And if it does so, then, to what extent? To what extent are written thoughts necessarily mediated by other media than the text alone? Is it possible to understand the (isolated) idea that was given expression (or pointed to) in the written object under review? Or is a reconstruction of some kind of mediator necessary to understand the written ideas of a text? Do written thoughts gain independence simply because they are written down? Or do they nevertheless only refer to an otherwise spoken (and by then still active) discourse? And is it possible at all to reconstruct an imagined oral discourse behind the written text on the basis of the written text alone? Should we, finally, postulate such an oral background for all philosophic texts, or only for some specific types of text? Or not at all? And on what basis could we justify either an oral discourse behind the written text, or the absence of the same?

² David Olson 1994.

Secondly, looking at a written piece of thought also means looking at some sort of philosophic record-keeping. Be it the mere notes of a teacher's words, possibly bare of any formal rigorousness and just serving a student's memory, or an elaborate and self-sufficient composition, in and of itself a masterpiece of philosophic writing. In any case, once written down it reflects a conscious act of record-keeping. This is crucial to call to mind when evaluating early thought, and we should ask ourselves whether there is a relationship between writing and the philosophic concepts expressed. How do the formal aspects of a text and philosophy correlate—if they do so at all? Are there specific types of philosophic language? Do we see texts that point to other meaningful references, or are they to be understood as rather 'closed' compositions that do not allow different (structural) arrangements? Is there a conscious concern by authors of philosophic texts to put particular ideas in certain compositional patterns? And could this tell us anything about the philosophy itself? Or about its composers? Or about different philosophic traditions in which these texts were used?

Thirdly, it is vital for a proper presentation of the written ideas in the overall context of China's history of thought that we also consider how the various findings present those texts we set out to understand. That means: to what extent do texts that seem to have a consistent focus but stem from different sites diverge from each other? And what is the relationship between a certain text and its (differing) manuscript-counterpart? To what extent are changes in the texts or their stability relevant for our understanding of these? And what do these changes in the texts (or their stability) tell us about the philosophic concepts they convey? Can we speak of coherent philosophic ideas at all, if we see that a philosophic text and its manuscript-counterpart differ appreciably? And what do changes or the stability in these texts tell us about the texts themselves? Or about their authors? Is it possible to reconstruct the history of a text? And to what extent would this be meaningful? What do deficiencies in texts imply for our understanding of early philosophy as expressed in these texts? Can we reconstruct early philosophy at all in meaningful ways? And if so, can we go so far as to reconstruct coherent edifices of thought even for a period such as the Warring States?

Questions like these are addressed in the present study of the philosophic materials from a late Warring States tomb from the ancient kingdom of Chǔ 楚. They grew out of an attempt to study the written ideas from the Warring States in a more coherent way, aiming to do justice to both the texts studied and the ideas expressed in them, and not to impose our own concepts on the philosophic texts from the Warring States period.

1.2. Guōdiàn One

This study of meaning-construction in the written philosophy from the Warring States period is based on a closed corpus of Warring States remnants of thought, which was excavated only recently from a tomb near Guōdiàn 郭店, Húběi 湖北 Province, termed Tomb Guōdiàn Number One (henceforth Guōdiàn One).³

In various respects, tomb Guōdiàn One proves to be the ideal platform for a qualitative study of text and thought in Warring States China. To begin with, this tomb contains an entire ‘library’ of written ideas.⁴ Those other few tombs discovered so far that also contain textual materials generally contain a broad variety of different text genres. These include texts of a medical, judicial, or administrative orientation. Guōdiàn One, for its part, only contains texts that, in general terms, hold a politico-philosophical point of reference.⁵

³ Tomb Guōdiàn One is located only nine km north of the old capital of the kingdom of Chǔ 楚 at Jinán 紀南, Húběi province, close to the village Guōdiàn in the Shāyáng 沙洋 district, Sīfāng 區四, Jīngmén 荊門 City. See the excavation report by the Húběi shěng Jīngmén shì bówùguǎn in *Wénwù* 1997.

⁴ On the problematic issue of the correlation of tomb and contents and the consistency of tomb equipments, see Joachim Gentz 2006. See also Michael Friedrich 1996. “Tomb-library” (or simply “library”) in the context of the present study is only a phrase to work with. The term should be used with caution. For an interpretation of the early Chinese burial system as reflected by Mǎwángduī Three, see Poo Mu-chou 1998.

⁵ Since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, thousands of tombs have been excavated in China. According to Péng Hào 彭浩 (1999 a, p. 23), more than 5000 tombs of Chǔ provenance were unearthed only in modern Húběi and Húnán. Pián Yǔqiān 駢宇騫 and Duàn Shū’ān 段書安 (2003) provide basic information about important textual findings between the years 1900-1996. Enno Giele (2000) provides a convenient overview over the various tomb-finds in China; although his site would need another update. See his <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/earlychina/res/databases/decm/sites.html> (last accessed 03 July 2007). See also same author 1998-1999. For a detailed account of archaeological evidence for early China at large, see Lothar von Falkenhausen 2006.

Second, as will be discussed in further detail throughout this work, the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One contains philosophic texts submitting to all types of different philosophic reasoning, and the texts are even addressed to different audiences. Tomb Guōdiàn One contains texts that are concerned with proper rule and discuss appropriate measures both from the perspective of the advisor as well as from the perspective of the ruler himself. It holds texts that engage with self-cultivation, or those that ponder the dichotomy of heaven and man. Guōdiàn One contains texts that establish long and continuous disquisitions of a philosophic concern, and others that are only one or two statements in length. This list could be continued. What it shows is that the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One provides a wide range of texts that seem to reflect a fair selection of the broad and diverse philosophic activities during the Warring-State period. As a result, the diversity of the philosophic texts from Guōdiàn One minimizes the danger that a study like the present presents only a one-sided picture of text and thought in mid to late Warring States philosophic discourse. Hence, the variety of philosophic texts from the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One allows me to provide a more coherent overview in that I can draw on different types of philosophic activities as provided therein.

Third, tomb Guōdiàn One dates around mid to late Warring States period, and it was opened only fairly recently. Despite some disagreement, consensus holds that the tomb was sealed around 300 BC.⁶ As such, the ‘tomb-library’ of Guōdiàn One provides a rare

⁶ For a discussion of the date of burial, see Cuī Rényì 崔仁義 1997 and 1998; Luó Yùnhuán 羅運環 1999; Péng Hào 彭浩 1999 (a), (b), (c); Lǐ Bóqián 2000; Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 (2000) (a), (b), among many others. Wáng Bǎoxuán 王葆琰 (1999) holds a rather isolated voice in that he believes that Guōdiàn One could have been closed as late as 227 BC.

The structure of tomb Guōdiàn One bears similarities with other Warring States tombs, such as for instance Tomb Number Two from Bāoshān 包山, Jīngmén, Húběi Province (henceforth Bāoshān Two; see Húběi shěng Jīngshā tiělù kǎogǔ duì 湖北省荊沙鐵路考古隊 1991), Tomb Number 245 from Yǔtáishān 雨台山, Jiānglíng 江陵, Húběi Province (see Húběi shěng Jīngzhōu dìqū bówùguǎn 湖北省荊州地區博物館 1984), and Tomb Dàngyáng Zhàojiāhú 當陽趙家湖, Húběi Province (see Húběi shěng Yíchāng dìqū bówùguǎn 湖北省宜昌地區博物館 1992), among others, and should be dated accordingly to mid-to late Warring States period. The *terminus ante quem* for the date of burial is set with the conquest of Yǐng 郢, for former capital of the kingdom of Chǔ by invaders from Qín 秦 under general Bái Qǐ 白起 (?-257 BC) in 278 BC. It is generally assumed that subsequent to the invasion of Yǐng the structure of (aristocratic) tombs would drastically differ. See, for instance the discussion by Wáng Bǎoxuán 王葆琰 who also subsumes other scholars’ positions (idem, 1999, pp. 366 f.). Due to the fact that Guōdiàn One should be slightly later than Bāoshān Two, which in turn can be dated fairly precise around 323 (or 322) to 316 BC, for it contained a dated inventory strip, the burial of Guōdiàn One should be set roughly between 323 BC (or 322) to 278 BC.

opportunity in that it offers an immediate view into the structure of the philosophic text from the Warring States period. As a result, we gain unprecedented insights into the intellectual debate of a formative period of Chinese philosophical thinking, reading, and writing.⁷ Thus, contrary to received texts such as the *Lúnyǔ*, the *Mòzǐ*, or the *Mèngzǐ*, to name just a few, the advantage of the palaeographic materials from the Warring States tomb Guōdiàn One is that they present us with a glimpse of philosophic texts before they might have been altered (or even suppressed) by later hands, which in most of these cases can be reasonably assumed, but due to archaising styles used by later authors, different chronologic layers of a text can hardly be made out with certainty. The fact, then, that the textual materials from Guōdiàn One were brought to light in a scientific excavation provides the necessary referential framework to work with these materials in a way that could never be true for other findings, such as for instance the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ materials.⁸ It thereby is ‘irrelevant’ for our study—although truly said—that Guōdiàn One has been looted at least twice before Chinese archaeologists from the Jīngmén Museum decided to carry out a rescue excavation.⁹ Even though these unscrupulous looters have destroyed parts of the tomb assemblage and even might have taken an appreciable amount of inscribed bamboo strips from the tomb,¹⁰ we can nevertheless

For a discussion of the date of burial of Bāoshān Two, see Péng Hào 彭浩 1999 (a), p. 24; Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 1999 (e), p. 13. Liú Bīnhuī 劉彬徽 1991.

⁷ Dirk Meyer 2005/2006 [2007], p. 179.

⁸ For the importance of the contexts, such as tombs, to function as referential framework in our work with paleographic materials, see Martin Kern 2002. The Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts have been published under the auspices of Mǎ Chéngyuán 馬承源 (1927–2004), former president of the Shànghǎi Museum. So far volumes 1–6 have come out.

⁹ Tomb looters enforced access to Guōdiàn One in August 1993, and again in October of the same year. The second trespass was successful and destroyed parts of the tomb assemblage.

¹⁰ After the ‘finding’ of the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts was made public—they were acquired from dealers on an antique market in Hong Kong in 1994; their provenance is thus uncertain—it was repeatedly assumed that these strips might also stem from a site close to Guōdiàn One, or even from the same tomb. See, for instance, Mǎ Chéngyuán 2001, vol. 1, p. 2.

The assumption that the Shànghǎi bamboo strips should indeed stem from tomb Guōdiàn One is mainly based on two observations: first, the chronologic proximity of their appearance with those from Guōdiàn One; second, the similarity of the texts (that is, the Shànghǎi texts also share an exclusive philosophic orientation) and the style of calligraphy (that is, Chǔ type of late-to mid Warring States). Despite the fact that we *do* see close similarities between the strips from Guōdiàn One and those from the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts, I hold that on the basis of *structural* dissimilarities between them, we can be fairly sure to exclude that the Shànghǎi strips should also come from tomb Guōdiàn One. The structural dissimilarities, for instance, are the—by Guōdiàn One standards—exceptionable length of the Shànghǎi strips of up to 57 cm, or the fabricated notches in many Shànghǎi strips, which are not seen in the strips from Guōdiàn One. But also the fact that the two groups of strips display a considerable overlap of texts—the “Zī yī” 緇衣 (Black Robes) or the “Xìng zì mìng chū/Xìng qíng lùn” 性自命出/性情論 (Nature derives

eliminate that they might have added further (faked) strips to the assemblage of Warring States texts. People enter tombs for the purpose of their material benefit; not for deluding the student of early Chinese thought. Thus, the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One can be considered to be a ‘closed’ corpus of manuscripts; it is exceptional in that this collection of palaeographic materials allows us to advance a qualitative study of text and thought of the Warring States period with unprecedented methodological coherence. Michael Nylan once asked what could be considered an “ideal tomb”?¹¹ At least for a study such as the present one, Guōdiàn One, I presume, comes pretty close to that standard.

1.3. The Library of Guōdiàn One

The so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One contains 804 bamboo strips, of which 730 are inscribed. Taken as a whole, these carry some 13,000 characters, written in beautiful calligraphy with obvious Chǔ characteristics.¹² Using various criteria, scholars group the materials in fifteen to eighteen individual texts. For reasons detailed below, I divide the materials into twenty-one ‘texts’.¹³

The texts are written on strips of dissimilar length. On the basis of physical evidence, we can distinguish six different groups. The first group contains text written on strips of 32.3-32.5 cm length. The second group contains strips of 30.6 cm length. The third group contains strips that measure between 28.1-28.3 cm length. The fourth group contains

from Heaven/Treatise on Nature and Sentiment) appear in both collections of manuscripts—suggests that the two groups of bamboo strips stem from different (but maybe spatially adjacent) sites, but that they have been produced at around the same period.

¹¹ Personal communication (29 May 2006 in Leiden).

¹² Two texts might be said to deviate from this standard. Different scholars have observed that the calligraphy of the so-called “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” 忠信之道 and the “Táng Yú zhī dào” 唐禹之道 shows a particular style which differs from that of the other materials. Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 even goes so far as to assume that the calligraphy on the bamboo strips of these two texts probably is not written in Chǔ script at all. I come back to this below (chap. 2.2 “The Text on Bamboo”, p. 50, n. 1). For Lǐ’s assumption, see Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams 2000, p. 178.

¹³ Here, as throughout my work unless otherwise specified, I basically follow Konrad Ehlich (1998) in that I use ‘text’ in a sense that comprises the everyday-mundane category, yet in a way that ‘text’ does not need to be (entirely) written in nature; likewise, it can also appear in oral form—or as Martin Kern puts it, “co-exist in both”. (See Kern 2005 c, p. 293, n. 1). Also, ‘text’ does not only denote any utterance, but is an identifiable entity. See also Konrad Ehlich 1982.

strips of 26.4-26.5 cm; the fifth and sixth groups contain strips that are decidedly shorter, namely 17.2-17.5, or 15.1-15.2 cm respectively. I shall refer to these groups further below in more detail.

1.3.1. The Texts from Guōdiàn One

The palaeographic materials from Guōdiàn One can be grouped and analyzed according to all kinds of standards. In particular two considerations will be of importance for the present study: that is, first, the place of the particular manuscript in transmission history overall; second, the strategy of meaning-construction as applied in these texts.

As for the first criterion, not all the materials from Guōdiàn One are entirely new to us. Some of the materials from Guōdiàn One, be it entire texts, smaller or greater fractions, or mere quotations, survived to the present day. They might have taken on different shapes, but in one way or the other they still can be identified—at least in part—with a received counterpart. Other materials may be familiar to us from other excavations or findings. These texts did not survive the transmission process, but they must have had at least some importance before they got lost, as the different instances of writing down the largely identical text suggest. The remaining texts, then, are entirely new to us. Each of these three groups of texts contributes to our understanding of the Warring States intellectual history, but in different ways. The former two groups inform us about the nature of a text in early China in terms the stability (or fluidity) of concepts and text-compositions, but they also demonstrate that a high-level standardization of texts must have been a rather late, that is, surely a post-Warring States development. The latter group of texts, that is, texts without a (known) counterpart, for its part attests to the broad intellectual variety and the diversity of texts and argumentative structures during the Warring States that was otherwise unknown.

As for the second criterion applied in this study to categorize the palaeographic materials from Guōdiàn One, that is, according to the different types of meaning-construction

applied therein, I distinguish between two main strategies; although it is without a doubt possible to describe even more particularities and sub-types of meaning-construction in these materials. The two ideal types of meaning-construction as seen in these texts can be summarized as follows. On the one hand, we have those texts that generate meaning by advancing what I call ‘argumentative’ patterns. The texts of this ideal type aim to be persuasive in that they build their reasoning on the power of “good arguments”. I call them ‘argument-based texts’. On the other hand, we have those texts which I call non-argumentative, or ‘authority-based texts’. Different from the previous ideal type of texts, the authority-based texts do not seek to establish argumentative force by virtue of reason. As the name suggests, these texts rely on established and identified authorities for stating their concern.

Note in this context that ‘argument’ in the present study should not be mistaken for the concept known from the classical Greek tradition. Argument-based texts do not seek to ascertain ‘truth’ by virtue of applying the techniques commonly seen in (Western-sense) philosophic discourse, such as for instance, logic deduction or syllogism. Instead, the ‘argument’ as applying to the kind of texts discussed should rather be described as *a pattern that, in its use, generates argumentative force*. The addressee of the text should be persuaded to accept the philosophic position presented in the text as good, and accordingly as something that can be followed and put into practice. Thus, instead of advancing ‘arguments’ in the Western-sense of the word, these texts present philosophic positions, of argumentative force, nonetheless.¹⁴

A study like the present one requires a detailed analysis of the formal structure underlying the makeup of the philosophic texts. Revealing the formal structure of composition is indispensable for making explicit how meaning is constructed in early Chinese written philosophic discourse, which in turn enables us to provide a new focus to the analysis of the different ways and strategies of philosophizing in early China. Yet, despite the contribution that a fine-grained analysis of the written remnants of thought can make for our understanding of early thinking overall, it nevertheless seems that so far

¹⁴ See my discussion in chapter 6.

the study of text and writing as tools of meaning-construction do not always find equivalent commitment in our study of philosophy—and this holds true in particular in the context of the study of Chinese philosophy. It is only fairly recently that the scrutiny of meaning-construction on a textual level receives more attention.¹⁵ The present study aims to correct this picture. The disregard of scholars for the manifold strategies of meaning-construction as seen in early Chinese philosophic discourse is especially noteworthy since with Chinese philosophy we engage with thought that so often is postulated to be fundamentally different from our own.¹⁶ This in itself already calls for a detailed investigation of the various ways of meaning-construction in written discourse.

It cannot be the task of a study like the present one to provide a full description of all philosophic texts from *Guōdiàn* One and their contents; nor could it be the attempt to describe all features of meaning-construction in one individual text exhaustively. This would by far go beyond the scope of this study and call for a larger project of encyclopaedic dimensions. Instead, the present study describes two ideal types of meaning-construction as applying to the philosophic texts from *Guōdiàn* One. The overall aim is to show in how far the approach of a detailed analysis of the strategies to generate meaning in early Chinese written discourse can further our understanding of the philosophic activities in early China. By implication, my contribution to the field should rather be understood as generating a methodology for the engagement with early written philosophy, and not to describe all peculiarities of the written philosophic text. Larger questions underlying this study hence are the following: What were the techniques of meaning-construction in early Chinese written philosophic discourse? What were the dialectical processes between social communities on the one hand, and the philosophic text on the other hand? And finally: What do texts tell us about the very activity of philosophizing in early China?

¹⁵ See, for instance, Rudolf G. Wagner 1980, 2000, 2003 (a), 2003 (b); Wolfgang Behr (2005) [2006]; Joachim Gentz (2005) [2006]; Dirk Meyer (2005) [2006] and also (2005/2006) [2007]; Christian Schwermann (2005) [2006].

¹⁶ Most representative for this position probably is François Jullien, who sets out to demonstrate the Otherness of Chinese thought in many studies, perhaps most evident in François Jullien 1995. See also same author 1989, 1991, and 1992, among other works of his. For a critical assessment of his work, see Jean-François Billeter 2006.

In the following sections I provide a brief survey of the individual texts from Guōdiàn One. Texts that are not analyzed in detail in the main body of this study will be dealt with in more detail here.

1.3.1.1. Manuscripts with a Received Counterpart

The materials from Guōdiàn One that, in one way or the other, did survive transmission process to the present day, fall into the larger group of authority-based texts. The materials in question are the manuscripts called “Zī yī” 緇衣 (Black Robes) and three different bundles of bamboo strips that contain materials that bear close resemblance with the received *Lǎozǐ* 老子, or *Dào dé jīng* 道德經 (The Classic of Way and Virtue). As the materials identified as “Lǎozǐ” were indeed collected on three different bundles of strips, they are generally referred to as “Lǎozǐ A” 老子甲, “Lǎozǐ B” 老子乙, and “Lǎozǐ C” 老子丙. The received “Zī yī”, for its part, has been incorporated in the compilation *Lǐ jì* 禮記 (Record of Rites). The manuscripts from Guōdiàn One are substantially shorter than their received counterparts, and they differ appreciably in terms of internal organization and structure.

The so-called “Guōdiàn Lǎozǐ” and “Zī yī” also find close correspondence in other palaeographical materials, thus substantiating the assumption that they must have been of high status: in addition to the excavated manuscript from the site under review, the “Zī yī” is also part of the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts, and a complete copy of “Lǎozǐ” has been excavated in the seventies from a tomb dating to the early Former Hàn-dynasty, namely Tomb Number Three from Mǎwángduī 馬王堆, Chángshā 長沙, Húnán

Province 湖南 (henceforth Mǎwángduī Three).¹⁷ I shall be dealing with these materials in more detail further below in this study.¹⁸

1.3.1.2. Manuscripts with a Counterpart from Other Findings

Materials that are familiar to us from other sites are the manuscripts called “Wǔ xíng” 五行 (Five Types of Conduct) and “Xìng zì mìng chū” 性自命出 (Nature Originates from Decree). The former has been part of the collection of manuscripts excavated from Mǎwángduī Three; the latter is part of the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts, where it is referred to as “Xìng qíng lùn” 性情論 (Treatise on Nature and Sentiments) by modern editors. None of these texts match their counterpart in the entirety; yet, the similarities between them are still astonishing. Especially for the “Wǔ xíng” it becomes clear that this text must have enjoyed considerable status; the finding of its manuscript-counterparts shows that this text circulated for at least some 150 years, before it finally fell into oblivion. Both texts, the “Wǔ xíng” and the “Xìng zì mìng chū”, together with their manuscript-counterpart, will be discussed in detail below.¹⁹

1.3.1.3. Other Manuscripts

The remaining texts from Guōdiàn One were previously unknown to us. These are: a cosmogony containing fourteen strips now referred to as “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” 太一生水 (Great One Gives Birth to Water). The “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” enjoys considerable devotion by modern scholars because the manuscript is physically identical with the so-called “Lǎozǐ C”, for which reason many present-day scholars interpret it to be a lost part of an

¹⁷ See the excavation report from Húnán shěng bówùguǎn 湖南省博物館, Zhōngguó kēxué yuàn kǎogǔ yánjiù suǒ 中國科學院考古研究所 1974. For an (interpretative) transcription, see Mǎwángduī Hàn mù bóshū zhěnglǐ xiǎo zǔ 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組 1974. The tomb contained a letter to the netherworld, which can be dated to 168 BC. This should also be the date of burial.

¹⁸ Chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁹ Chapters 4 and 5.

imagined “Proto Lǎozǐ”. I disagree with this assumption. As I shall show in chapter 7 below, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” establishes one coherent argument over the length of fourteen bamboo strips. Its argumentative patterns and the strategies of meaning-construction applied in this text are not in congruence with what can be seen from the so-called “Lǎozǐ C”. As the analysis shows, they should be understood as distinctive texts.

A brief text now referred to as “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” 忠信之道 (The Way of Trueheartedness and Trustworthiness): This particular piece of political philosophy addresses the ruler of a state with the request for moral government. The nine strips that constitute this succinct treatise on proper rule will be the first to discuss in the present study of meaning-construction in early Chinese philosophic discourse.²⁰

A text now called “Qióng dá yǐ shí” 窮達以時 (Failure and Success Appear at their [Respective] Time) follows my discussion of the techniques of meaning-construction in the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”. The “Qióng dá yǐ shí” is concerned with the dichotomy of heaven and man, pinpointing a seeming inequity caused by the power of the former over the latter. The aim of the text is to provide man a sort of *Leitfaden* that allows him to deal with life’s imponderables, caused by heaven. The peculiar way to construct meaning as applied in the “Qióng dá yǐ shí” will be discussed in chapter 3.

Very close to the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” mentioned above both in terms of the formal structure of its compositional pattern but also in thought is the brief text now referred to as “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī” 魯穆公問子思 (Duke Mù of Lǚ Inquires of Zǐsī). Although some parts of the text are phrased in the form of a dialogue, the main argument as advanced in the “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī” is constructed in accordance with the same formal patterns that also apply to the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”; as such, the “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī” needs no detailed investigation of argument-construction and will not be considered in detail in the present study.

²⁰ Chapter 2.

The shape of the bamboo strips and the style of calligraphy of the eight bamboo strips that constitute the “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī”, for their part, are identical to those of the “Qióng dá yǐ shí”. Despite these similarities, the two texts differ markedly in terms of content, structure, and tone. They clearly were distinct textual units, which, however, must have been copied in chronological and geographical proximity, possibly even at the same workshop.²¹

The “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī” records a dialogue first between Zǐsī and Duke Mù of Lǚ, and then between Duke Mù of Lǚ and the minister Chéngsūn Yì 成孫弋, whose name does not appear in transmitted records. Upon a direct question by Duke Mù of Lǚ, Zǐsī defines the meaning of ‘loyal minister’. The answer displeases Duke Mù, who thereupon dismisses Zǐsī.

The latter dialogue between the duke and the minister Chéngsūn Yì perfectly matches what one might want to call an ‘imagined teaching scene’.²² Having listened to his duke’s lament, Chéngsūn Yì holds an apologia in support of Zǐsī and his view of what should be termed a loyal minister. In the course of this it becomes apparent that Chéngsūn Yì not only shares Zǐsī’s view; in his praise of Zǐsī’s ideal he even brings it into practice.

Next to “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī”, the previously unknown text now referred to as “Táng Yú zhī dào” 唐虞之道 (The Way of Táng [Yáo] and Yú [Shùn]) also bears close similarities to the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” in terms of its strategy of constructing meaning. Moreover, the twenty-nine strips that constitute this text also bear a strong physical resemblance to the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” in that they have the same length (28.1 to 28.3 cm respectively), share the same style of manufacture (cut evenly at both sides) and the strips are also inscribed in the same style of the calligraphy. Yet, just as it holds true for the relationship between the “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī” and the “Qióng dá yǐ shí” briefly referred to above, the physical similarity of the “Táng Yú zhī dào” with that of the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” does not say anything about a relatedness of these texts in thought; it

²¹ I shall discuss the relationship of the physical material carrier and the collection of texts throughout this study in further detail.

²² Cf. Mark Edward Lewis 1999, pp. 53-63.

only shows that they should have been produced in chronologic and spatial proximity with each other, and were probably even manufactured at the same workshop. The “Táng Yú zhī dào” basically shares the strategy of meaning-construction as used in its most strict form by the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”; but like the “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī”, it does so in a less strict manner. Since the present study already discusses in great detail the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” as an example of this particular type of meaning-construction, the example of the “Táng Yú zhī dào” can therefore be left without a meticulous analysis.

The “Táng Yú zhī dào” promotes the idea of abdication.²³ Three central positions of the text’s programmatic argument must be highlighted: first, the “Táng Yú zhī dào” notes an inherent tension, or conflict, that seems genuine to the very act of abdication, namely between what the text perceives to be a vital element of proper rule and filial piety. This polarity is carried to its extreme in the formula of “loving the related” versus “venerating the capable”, that is, filial piety versus resigning voluntarily for the sake of the accomplished. As the “Táng Yú zhī dào” puts it, abdication is a sagely issue and a matter of righteousness. Filial piety, on the other hand, is the utmost expression of benevolence. By referring to the ‘historical’ example of Yáo 堯 and Shùn 舜 that were both highly filial and righteous, the text annuls the ostensible conflict between the two positions. For the author(s) of this treatise, filial piety in itself is a fundamental aspect of a ruler’s unsolicited ascendancy, and only when being filial, a ruler can “love the entire people”, which for the “Táng Yú zhī dào” is the highest expression of a ruler being righteous. Thus, when taking the text’s position to the extreme, how could the very act of loving the entire people be more enhanced than by having them ruled by the accomplished? Seen from this perspective, filial duties and abdication are not in the slightest contradicting positions. Quite to the contrary, in the ideal case, both positions belong on one and the same plane. In the same vein the text holds that only by abdicating can a ruler truly accord with the virtue of filial duty.

²³ On the basis of three newly excavated texts, among which the “Táng Yú zhī dào”, Yuri Pines (2005) elegantly reconstructs the evolution and the views of abdication during Warring States (481-221 BC) period. For a detailed discussion of the tension between family values and abdication, see Oūyáng Zhēnrén 歐陽禎人 (2002). On a discussion of the text’s philosophic affiliation, see Jiāng Guānghuī 姜光輝 1999, pp. 81-92 and the same author, slightly emended (2001, pp. 6-38), Lǐ Líng (1999, p. 497), Dīng Sixīn 丁四新 (2000, p. 382), Wáng Bó 王博 (2001, p. 86), Péng Bāngběn 彭邦本 (2004), Carine Defoort (2006).

This basic notion leads up to a further claim of the “Táng Yú zhī dào”, namely that abdication is a required feature for a positive transformation of the people. Here the message comes close to that of the “Zhōng xīn zhī dào” in that it promotes the idea that the ruler over a state has all means of transforming the environment by virtue of his model of proper conduct and virtuous behavior, which, in some sense, comes close to the Weberian concept of “charisma”. The idea presented in the text thus bears strong resemblance to the position declared by Mèngzǐ as follows: “A great man is one who rectifies himself, and the world is rectified.”²⁴

Lastly, the “Táng Yú zhī dào” argues that abdication is a necessary precondition for a ruler’s well-being. Physical deterioration is a natural phenomenon, which every human being—including the ruler over a state—faces at a certain point in his life. Before reaching the point of excessive weakness the ruler should resign. Making this a standard, this piece of politico-ethical philosophy generates a “general pattern of abdication”²⁵ that is novel among those texts that subscribe to this politically delicate notion.²⁶

History had shown to the political world of those days what disastrous outcome abdication in praxis might bear. In 314 BC, King Kuài of Yān 燕王噲 (r. 320-314) had indeed resigned in favour of his minister Zǐ Zhī 子之. The leaders of the various states generally condemned his move as an acute violation of political propriety. The ruler of Zhōngshān 中山 used this incident to invade Yān and conquer part of its territory, as recorded in a bronze vessel inscription.²⁷ This might make the appearance of a text such as the “Táng Yú zhī dào”, which uncompromisingly declares abdication as the only possibility to govern the people, seem peculiar. Yet, as early as 1989, Angus C. Graham

²⁴ 有大人者正己而物正者也 (*Mèngzǐ zhèng yì*, “Jīn xīn shàng” 盡心上 13.19, p. 532). See also Yuri Pines 2005, p. 258.

²⁵ Yuri Pines 2005, p. 261.

²⁶ Different from the “Táng Yú zhī dào”, other Warring States texts such as the *Mèngzǐ* 孟子 or the “Yáo diǎn” 堯典 chapter of the *Shàng shū* 尚書, for instance, stress the uniqueness of abdication from Yáo to Shùn, thus ruling out a systematic yielding as envisioned by the authors of the “Táng Yú zhī dào” (Pines 2005, pp. 171, 174-5).

²⁷ Wénwù 1995, vol. 1, p. 341-369; quoted from Yuri Pines 2005, p. 269.

already argued that the recurring *topos* of abdication myth in transmitted Warring States texts only reflects “the tip of the iceberg”,²⁸ a view to which Pines in contribution to this topic subscribes to.²⁹ Findings of similar texts from the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts corroborate Graham’s and Pines’ observation.³⁰

Three long but highly corrupted texts fall out of the present study on meaning-construction in mid to late Warring States philosophic discourse: the so-called “Chéng zhī wén zhī” 成之聞之 (also referred to as “Dà cháng” 大常 ‘The Great Constancy’),³¹ “Zūn dé yì” 尊德義 (also referred to as “Shǎng xíng” 賞刑 ‘Reward and Punishment’),³² “Liù dé” 六德 (also referred to as “Dé yì” 德義 ‘Virtue and Righteousness’).³³ As for these texts, the internal organization of the strips is far from being resolved; even the proper association of the different bamboo strips within these three (?) units is anything but clear.³⁴ Under these circumstances, we can only reconstruct bits and pieces of these units with confidence. On these units as meaningful *texts*, however, nothing can be said with certainty. A study of the argumentative strategies of these materials hence would remain highly speculative. As a result, I shall not discuss these units in the present study.

Two more groups of bamboo strips fall out of the scope of the present study, namely the materials that are generally referred to as “Yǔ cóng” 語叢 (Collected Sayings), which modern editors have divided into four different texts.³⁵ The “Yǔ cóng” texts differ in all respects from the other materials of Guōdiàn One. To begin with, the four “Yǔ cóng”

²⁸ Angus C. Graham 1989, p. 293

²⁹ See Yuri Pines 2005.

³⁰ See the newly-discovered texts “Zǐ Gāo” 子羔 and “Róng Chéng shì” 容成氏 “. In Mǎ Chéngyuán 馬承源 (2001-), vol. 2 [2002], pp. 33-47; 181-199 (for the scans of the strips and transcription of the “Zǐ Gāo”); pp. 139-146; 247-293 (for the scans of the strips and transcription of the “Róng Chéng shì”).

³¹ See Chén Wěi 2003.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Just after the bamboo-strip texts were made public in Húběi shěng Jīngmén shì bówùguǎn 1998, as far as I can see, Guō Yí 郭沂 was the first to propose a largely new arrangement of the strips for the “Chéng zhī wén zhī”, and thus started the ball rolling for a discussion of the three units under review. See Guō Yí 郭沂 1998; see also Zhōu Fèngwǔ 周鳳五 and Lín Sùqīng 林素清 1999; Lǐ Líng 李零 1999; Wáng Bó 王博 2000; Chén Wěi 陳偉 2000; Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 2000; Chén Wěi 2001; Chén Wěi 2003; Gù Shíkǎo 顧史考 [Scott Cook] 2006, among many others.

³⁵ See Húběi shěng Jīngmén shì bówùguǎn 1998.

texts are written on bamboo strips that are decidedly shorter than those of the other texts from the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One. As mentioned, the longest strips from Guōdiàn One are around 32.3-32.5 cm in length. The so-called “Lǎozǐ A”, “Zī yī”, “Wǔ xíng”, “Xìng zì míng chū”, and the three ‘units’ here referred to as “Chéng zhī wén zhī”, “Zūn dé yì”, and “Liù dé”, which I have briefly introduced above, all fall into this (largest) category. Taken as a whole, these are 331 bamboo strips, or some 45 per cent of the entire inscribed materials from Guōdiàn One. Then, as indicated, we have those strips that are about 30.6 cm in length, namely the so-called “Lǎozǐ B” with its 18 bamboo strips. What follows are the strips of 28.1-28.3 cm length, namely the thirty-eight bamboo strips of the two units “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” and “Táng Yú zhī dào”. Finally, we have those bamboo strips that are between 26.4-26.5 cm in length. The so-called “Lǎozǐ C”, “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”, “Lǚ Mù gōng wèn Zǐsī”, “Qióng dá yǐ shí” with their together fifty bamboo strips fall into this category of bamboo strips.

The four “Yǔ cóng” texts, for their part, are written on bamboo strips that are either 17.2-17.5 cm, or 15.1-15.2 cm in length. Thus, the physical appearance of these units already obviously breaks away from the rest of the so-called ‘tomb-library’ of Guōdiàn One. As I shall discuss in the present study, for the written materials of Warring States period it holds true that the size of strips does not by necessity also reflect the status of the text recorded. Only with the Latter Hàn 漢 (AD 25-220), we do indeed have clear statements that texts which differ in status had been written down on strips of dissimilar length.³⁶ However, the situation of Hàn times, when books and texts began to take on a fairly fixed form,³⁷ from which also resulted a new notion of a direct correlation between the status of a text and its material carrier, should not be applied immediately to the situation of Warring States period. Instead, as can be deduced from the manuscripts of tomb Guōdiàn One, large amounts of written texts of early to mid-Warring States period more likely

³⁶ See Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (AD 127-200) in his preface to the *Chūnqiū Zuǒ zhuàn zhèngyì* 春秋左傳正義 (7a): He notes the length of two feet four inches for the ‘Classics’; one foot two inches for the *Xiào jīng* 孝經; eight inches for the *Lúnyǔ* 論語. All lengths refer to Hàn Dynasty measures. (Two feet four inches correspond to 55.44 cm; one foot corresponds 23.1 cm. See Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (eds.) 1986, p. xxxviii.) Trusting Wáng Chōng’s words, instead, the “sayings of the ancients were written on tablets of two feet four inches”. See Tsien 2004, p. 116.

³⁷ See my discussion in chapter 8.

reflect instances of occasionally writing down a predominantly oral text. Accordingly, it is no wonder that none of the texts which we reconstruct from the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One complies with the length of strips as described by Hàn-authors, such as Wáng Chōng 王充 (AD 27-97) or Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (AD 127-200). Instead, the physical variations among the strips, such as their dissimilar length, the dissimilar cutting, but also different styles of calligraphy with which the strips are inscribed, most likely only reflect different *modi*, and different *loci* of manufacture, that is, spatial and chronological differences in manuscript production. For Warring States manuscripts, such differences do not correspond to the different status of the texts that have been fixed on these.³⁸

Not only the length of strips of the different “Yǔ cóng” differs from the rest of the so-called ‘tomb-library’ of Guōdiàn One. The four different units, which modern editors have arranged from the two different groups of bamboo strips,³⁹ also differ notably from the other materials in style and content: of the four units as organized by the editors of *Guōdiàn Chǔ mù zhújiǎn* 郭店楚墓竹簡,⁴⁰ only the particular unit now labeled “Yǔ cóng Four” can in fact be considered to be something like a meaningful text in the real sense of the word. Despite this, it nevertheless still differs from the other intellectual materials as collected in the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One in that it can neither be regarded as an ‘authority-based text’, nor does it fall into the category described as ‘argument-based text’. Argument-based texts develop what I will later on in the present study call semiotic webs in their attempt to construct meaning. The so-called “Yǔ cóng Four”, for its part, rather generates narrative patterns of the kind seen in later texts such as for instance the *Xúnzǐ* 荀子, or *Hán Fēizǐ* 韓非子 in its attempt to state its concern. This makes the “Yǔ cóng Four” truly exceptional in comparison to the other materials from the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One. The text inscribed on twenty-seven bamboo strips of ca. 15.1-15.2 cm length that carry 402 (remaining) characters, to which we might add another three graphs in our reconstruction of the text, describes a strategy, most likely directed to

³⁸ For a study analyzing purpose, formal, genre and possessor of a manuscript, see Hú Píngshēng 胡平生 2000. For further ideas on this issue, see Matthias Richter 2005, pp. 92 f.

³⁹ See Húběi shěng Jīngmén shì bówùguǎn 1998, pp. 75-86 (for scans of the “Yǔ cóng One”), 87-93 (for scans of “Yǔ cóng Two”), pp. 95-102 (for scans of “Yǔ cóng Three”), pp. 103-107 (for scans of “Yǔ cóng Four”).

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

the advisor at court, for both survival at court and for gaining influence and bringing this influence to bear at court. By implication, just as the other written materials from Guōdiàn One, the manuscript “Yǔ cóng Four” also deserves a title correlated to content.⁴¹ Tú 涂 and Liú 劉, for instance, call it accordingly “Shèn yán yàng xíng” 慎言詠行 (Cautious Words and Wise Actions).⁴² The remaining manuscripts grouped under “Yǔ cóng”, for their part, do not generate any kind of meaningful narrative (as does “Yǔ cóng Four”), nor do they try to establish persuasive argumentative patterns (as do the argument-based texts) or rely on further authoritative references (as do the authority-based texts). Instead, these units collect various sayings without aiming to synthesize them into one coherent account. Many of these sayings, or possibly brief notes, also appear in other texts from Guōdiàn One. Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 assumes that the different “Yǔ cóng” must have had a particular teaching purpose.⁴³ Robin Yates, for his part, suggests that these manuscripts address specific philosophic themes, in which he sees grounds for comparing them to the “Shū yán” 樞言 chapter from the *Guǎnzǐ* 管子.⁴⁴ Yet, whereas in the “Shū yán” chapter of the *Guǎnzǐ* the author(s) try to establish what we might want to call (notwithstanding the formulaic appearance of these) consistent pericopes, that is, meaningful units, we cannot compellingly postulate the same for the “Yǔ cóng” manuscripts “One”, “Two”, and “Three”.

The philosophic or educational function of these manuscripts that collate various core statements from the Guōdiàn One materials (and also other sources) remains far from evident. As these manuscripts simply gather different notions instead of synthesizing them into coherent accounts and thus seem to have followed a pure mnemonic function, I shall not consider them in the present study on meaning-construction in early Chinese written philosophic discourse.

⁴¹ Note that all titles of the Guōdiàn One manuscripts were chosen by modern editors.

⁴² See Tú Zōngliú 涂宗流 and Liú Zǔxìn 劉祖信 2001, p. 315.

⁴³ See Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams 2000, p. 179.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

1.4. Author(s) versus Editors

Not much is known about the authorship of early Chinese philosophic texts. We shall see in the course of the present study that the complex interaction between the oral and the written as embodied in early Chinese philosophic texts indeed forces us to rethink our conventional idea that we actually have standardized early philosophic texts already from the pre-Hàn period (be it on the level of a text's composition or its lexicon). In a similar relationship, the interplay of the spoken and the written, but also the fusion of various traditions within one text, furthermore exclude the existence of a single identifiable author for the different texts.

The fact, then, that the so-called received texts should in effect be regarded to be the rather late standardizations of previously much more fluid texts that were characterized by the complex relationship between the spoken and the written, in itself reduces any meaningful attempt to (re)construct an imagined *Urtext* to absurdity.⁴⁵ From this it follows, and this holds true especially for the newly discovered early (Chinese) texts, that attributing an individual author to these rather fluid entities is likewise a highly speculative undertaking. These observations have led—not only—Sinologists to talk about “editors” in their study of text and authorship of presumably ‘ancient’ philosophic works.⁴⁶ Indeed, Sinologists did not generate the concept of an editor of ancient works by themselves; in fact, they borrowed it from related fields, namely the study of the classics in the Western milieu, and also from biblical studies (which in turn derived this concept from the Greek philology).

As for the different roles of ‘editors’, ‘redactors’, and ‘authors’, John van Seters describes in a detailed study that throughout the last few decades a notion has been cultivated that abolishes the neat distinction between author and redactor. This confusion has led to a change of understanding of what would be the role of a redactor as compared to that of an

⁴⁵ Martin Kern deals with this issue in some detail. See Martin Kern 2002, esp. pp. 148 ff.

⁴⁶ The question remains to be asked in how far *can* we talk about “received *ancient* texts” when holding ‘modern’ editions of these in our hands.

author with the result that, “at times, authors are dispensed with altogether.”⁴⁷ John van Seters argues convincingly that even if there is “abundant evidence” for the occurrence of what he calls “interpretative additions” in ancient texts, this is not in itself sufficient “justification for attributing them to ancient ‘editors’.”⁴⁸ Instead, the role of editors is that of identifying “interpolations as corruptions and to remove them.”⁴⁹ Thus, in the same vein as we should call the Alexandrian scholars of the Hellenistic period “editors”, we are fully justified also to call those scholars “editors”, who were working under the guidance of Liú Xiàng 劉向 (79-8 BC), after he received the order in 26 BC from Emperor Chéng of Hàn 漢成帝 (r. 32-7 BC) to collate the texts from the imperial library: until his death, the group of scholars under his direction (and then under the guidance of his son Liú Xīn 劉歆; 46 BC-AD 23) compared various versions of texts, ‘identified’ interpolations therein, and removed these—in their eyes—corrupt passages from texts of canonical status.⁵⁰ Thus, the work of these scholars *par excellence* matches the definition of “to redact” and “redaction”, that is, to restore, which can also have the sense of ‘to restore something to its former condition’.⁵¹ Redaction, and likewise the verb to redact, in turn, are neologisms from the Latin verb *redigere* and “used as synonyms for ‘editor’, ‘edit’, and ‘edition’.”⁵² But the word ‘editor’ in antiquity was never used for “the writing or production of a book”.⁵³

As discussed at length by B. A. van Groningen, the modern word ‘edition’ derives from the Greek *ekdosis* ἑκδοσις (editio in Latin) and is related to *ekdidonai* ἐκδίδωναι, which is used in situations in which any kind of belongings are handed over to someone else’s

⁴⁷ John van Seters 2006, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Of each text that was edited, notes were made and recorded in the *Bié lù* 別錄 (*Separate Records*), which for its most part is now lost. Liú Xīn 劉歆 (46 BC – AD 23), under whose guidance the editorial project was continued, then produced the *Qī lüè* 七略 (*Seven Summaries*), the basis of the later “Yìwén zhì” 藝文志 (Records of Arts and Letters) in the *Hàn shū* 漢書 (*History of the Hàn*). For the remaining parts of the *Bié lù*, see Yáo Zhènzōng 姚振宗 (1843-1906) 1899. Zhāng Shùnhuī 張舜徽 (1911-1992) and Gù Shí 顧實 provide excellent studies on the “Yìwén zhì”. See Zhāng Shùnhuī 張舜徽 1990; Gù Shí 顧實 1987. See also Mark Edward Lewis 1999, pp. 325-332.

⁵¹ John van Seters 2006, p. 14.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibidem.

control.⁵⁴ When applied to a text, “the author no longer has control over the text, and it is left to the whims of those who wish to abuse it.”⁵⁵ Thus, once a text was written down, one could speak of it as *ekdosis*, as there was no such thing as ‘copyright’ or a fixed text. Local *ekdoseis*, or ‘editions’, hence should not be understood as “special recensions or edited versions”⁵⁶ of a text—let alone the authoritative version thereof. Instead, they should be understood as local instantiations of writing down some kind of (predominantly oral?) text. In the same vein, the ‘edition’ of the “Wǔ xíng” as excavated from Guōdiàn One is not an edited version of the manuscript counterpart that was found in tomb Mǎwángduī Three, which differs considerably from the Guōdiàn One text; or vice versa.⁵⁷ Instead, as I shall argue in detail further below, the Guōdiàn One “Wǔ xíng” should rather be viewed as one particular manifestation of this text; as such, it reflects a spatially and chronologically fixed instance of writing down a text that, although not yet fixed in ancient days, could still be conceived as fully coherent entity.⁵⁸ Thus, separate instances of writing down a (verbally coherent) text, such as for instance the “Wǔ xíng”, can indeed result in different ‘editions’ of the same. However, ascribing the changes in these texts (such as for instance is additions, omissions, a different organization, and so forth) to editors would be a pure anachronism. By implication, as van Seters concludes, the fact that written objects in antiquity were subject to change is by no means confirmation of editorial activity.⁵⁹ In accordance with these observations, I shall refrain from talking about editors when dealing with (the changes in) ancient texts, even when discussing different ‘editions’ of the same, that is, in the sense of *ekdoseis*. This in particular implies those texts that date prior to institutionalized attempts of canonizing history (and indeed philosophy) around 212 and 213 BC under the Qín 秦 (221-210 BC), and again in 136 BC under the Hàn 漢, in what were apparently similar measures that were, nonetheless, either condemned or celebrated by history.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ See B. A. van Groningen (1894-1987) 1963.

⁵⁵ B. A. van Groningen 1963, pp. 1-17, quoted from van Seters 2006, pp. 15 ff.

⁵⁶ John van Seters 2006, p. 17.

⁵⁷ See my discussion in chapter 4.

⁵⁸ See also chapter 4.

⁵⁹ See John van Seters 2006, p. 22.

⁶⁰ On the execution of scholars and the burning of books in 212 and 213 BC, see Derk Bodde 1986, p. 95; on the burning of books, see Ulrich Neiningen 1983; Jens Østergård Petersen 1995; Martin Kern 2000, pp.

1.5. Odes *shī* and Documents *shū*

In the present study, I shall not treat pre-Qín 秦 sources such as ‘odes’ *shī* or ‘documents’ *shū* as if they were consistent bodies. Concepts such as the *Book of Odes*, or the *Book of Documents* were absent during the Warring States and must be seen as a mere anachronism. Instead, it seems more reasonable to assume that the concepts of *shī* and *shū* as consistent books was established only beginning with the Qín 秦 and Hàn 漢 dynasties, that is, roughly around the last decade of the third century BC, when people started to perceive history from the perspective of defined books, and not of traditions. A closer look at excavated sources, but also at transmitted records such as the “Yiwén zhì” 藝文志 in the received *Hàn shū* 漢書, which is based on the *Qī lùe* 七略 by Liú Xīn 劉歆, seems to confirm this suspicion.⁶¹ Even though we can now see that the wording of *shī* 詩 as quoted in pre-imperial manuscripts seems to have been somewhat stable already during the Warring States period, as Martin Kern has shown in various studies,⁶² the confines of what belonged to this anthology and what did not appears to have been still flexible. Many odes quoted in pre-Qín sources (some of which are introduced explicitly as *shī* in the paleographic materials) are no longer extant today.⁶³ Despite this, the collections of odes seemed to have been recognized and remembered by larger élite groups of the Warring States and thus, without a doubt, have had an important impact on the identity formation of these groups or circles. By implication, I refer to these sources as “Odes” (instead of *Odes*) because I do not want to assert that these were already well-defined, or ‘closed’ entities (not to mention books) in the Warring States period, let alone at any earlier moment in history; but I capitalize “Odes” to show that they were already a distinct (but not necessarily well-defined) body in those days.

183 ff; Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan 2003; for a comparison between the measures taken in 212 and 136 BC, see Martin Kern 2000, pp. 191 ff.

⁶¹ On the “Yiwén zhì” from the *Hàn shū*, see above n. 50.

⁶² See Martin Kern 2003, 2005 (b), and also 2005 (c).

⁶³ There are also quotations of the *shī* in paleographic materials that are not explicitly marked as such, as we shall encounter, for instance, in the “Wǔ xíng” discussed in chapter 4. Quotations of authoritative sources such as Odes will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

As for the *shū* 書 we come to even more drastic results. Excavated materials from the Warring States never introduce quotations from this ‘work’ with “*shū*” (‘documents’, or ‘writings’), but always refer to them by what we now consider to be chapter titles (or even the name of a certain speaker, it seems). Furthermore, the materials quoted and now identified as what we today consider to be the *shū* lack overall coherence. This suggests a later standardization of these instances. Given these facts, I see no justification to treat the *shū* as a named tradition that was more or less circumscribed in the way that the Odes were in Zhōu times. Instead, the different passages quoted may have been part of a generally shared cultural lore (at least in some well-defined and self-aware circles), and only later (maybe under the influence of erudites instituted under the Qín?) this material was ‘hardened’ into a generally respected anthology, what we today call the *Documents*.⁶⁴

1.6. Organization of the present work

The present work consists of three parts. Part One provides a detailed form-analysis of the makeup of the argument-based texts from Guōdiàn One, by which I hope to show how approaching early texts from the perspective of their formal structure can be a strong tool for dealing with early thinking. Heading this analysis of meaning-construction in Warring States written philosophic discourse I refer to the previously unknown “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”. Part Two discusses the intellectual environment of the written materials from the ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One at large. The focus of my discussion in Part Two is the relationship between material conditions of text, manuscript culture, and writing, as well as of strategies of meaning-construction and philosophical endeavors in Warring States period. Part Three, finally, provides the philological discussion for the reconstruction of the texts considered in this study.

⁶⁴ For further discussions on the *shū*, see Matsumoto Masaaki 松本雅明 1968, p. 520; Chén Mèngjiā 陳夢家 1985, pp. 11-35; Liú Qǐyú 劉起釪 1997, pp. 4-24; Mark Edward Lewis 1999, pp. 105-109; David Schaberg 2001, pp. 72-80, Kai Vogelsang 2004, Martin Kern 2005 (c), p. 297, n. 9, among others.

Note that a form-analysis of written philosophy as carried out in this study is different from a study of grammar, and it has to describe gray zones in a way that would not be necessary for a study of grammar. Generally speaking, the study of formal patterns in early Chinese texts can be approached in three different ways. First, the study of grammar, as represented by scholars such as Hans Georg von der Gabelentz (1840-1893) with his still unsurpassed analysis of classical Chinese grammar,⁶⁵ Angus C. Graham (1919-1991), with his many articles on grammar and logic, once more a trailblazer, as he is in so many areas of early Chinese studies,⁶⁶ and Christoph Harbsmeier, who might be viewed as succeeding this line of research.⁶⁷ Second, the study of what has been termed *xiū cí* 修辭, that is, ‘the use of proper words’, which probably comes closest to the *ars bene dicendi* ‘the art of good speaking’ as expressed by Quintilianus;⁶⁸ but also, third, the study of parallel features in Chinese prose as headed by studies carried out by John Francis Davis (1795-1890),⁶⁹ Gustave Schlegel (1840-1903),⁷⁰ Yoshikawa Kôjirô (1904-1980),⁷¹ and Rudolf G. Wagner, who in turn seems to be the first scholar discussing the philosophic relevance of parallel features in Chinese texts; to name just a few.⁷²

Whereas the study of formal features in (early) Chinese texts, as a rule, is largely focused on the semantic precision of the terms such as used in the context of these patterns—even if noticing the philosophic relevance thereof as Wagner did—the present study of meaning-construction in Warring States written philosophic discourse follows different aims in that it goes much further than that. Not the lexicon of a text is of special interest,

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Hans Georg C. von der Gabelentz 1887; 1881; 1883, among other works.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Angus C. Graham 1972; 1973; 1977; 1978 (a); 1978 (b); 1989 (b), among other works.

⁶⁷ Christoph Harbsmeier 1981 and 1998.

⁶⁸ Quintilianus; quoted from Rahn 2006, vol. 2, p. 14, n. 5.

⁶⁹ As early as 1830, Davis had already pointed out the importance of parallelism in Chinese composition. See John F. Davis 1830.

⁷⁰ In 1896 Gustave Schlegel (1840-1903) has published his translation of the preface of the *Dà Táng xīyù jì* 大唐西域記, in which he set out to demonstrate the importance of parallelism in Chinese prose. See Gustave Schlegel 1896. For a critical evaluation of Schlegel’s translation, see Erwin Ritter von Zach (1872-1942) 1902.

⁷¹ Yoshikawa Kôjirô’s study on parallelism in the *Lǎozǐ* deepened the study of parallel structures in early Chinese texts.

⁷² See Rudolf G. Wagner 2000, p. 56. Before his trilogy (2000; 2003 a; 2003 b), Wagner already articulated his ideas on parallelisms in Chinese philosophic texts in several seminal articles: see for instance, Rudolf G. Wagner 1980, pp. 18-58; 1999, pp. 32-56; 1969, pp. 164-167. See also Joachim Gentz (2006), who provides a long overdue summary of western reception of parallelism in Chinese writing.

but the larger structures underlying the makeup of a philosophic text as a whole. Thus, contrary to the studies that barely provide an analysis exceeding that of what classical literature calls a *zhāng* 章, or ‘section’, the present study is concerned with the makeup of a philosophic text *as a whole* and hence keeps focusing on the cultural phenomenon of (the philosophic) text and (philosophic) writing in the larger framework of Warring States intellectual history.

1.6.1. Part One

Chapter 2 presents a form-analysis of the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”. It introduces Part One of my study in that it describes the means by which an argument-based text like the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” constructs meaning. By implication, the analysis of the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” also prepares for a more general definition of ‘argument-based text’ itself. I shall argue in this chapter that the composition of this written piece of Warring States politico-philosophical thinking should be described as a web-like structure that in itself can be considered to be an important constituent for conveying meaning. The formal structure is not only a technical device to present the argument of the text in a coherent manner, but, as I shall put forward, it also reflects the contents of this argument and thus highlights the philosophic concern of the text that the ruler’s sovereignty should exceed to everywhere, including the cosmic elements Heaven and Earth. The “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” can hence be considered an example *par excellence* for the correlation of form and content as advanced in early philosophic argument-based texts.

Chapter 3 deepens the discussion of argument-based texts in early China. It provides a detailed analysis of form and content of the previously unknown “Qióng dá yǐ shí”. As the subsequent discussion will eventually show, even though the “Qióng dá yǐ shí” is organized in a radically different fashion as compared with the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”, its structure, nevertheless, fulfils the same integrating function as seen in the former argument-based text. As I hold, the compositional structure of the “Qióng dá yǐ shí” is a conscious device designed to mimic the so-called “logical” structure of the argument,

which the texts aims to transmit. It hence is a philosophically relevant element of meaning-construction. From this follows that when neglecting the formal structure of composition in texts like the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” or the “Qióng dá yǐ shí”, we run the risk of ignoring the philosophical subtleties as intended by the author(s) of this ideal type of texts.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed study of the compositional structure of the long argument-based text “Wǔ xíng” from Guōdiàn One as compared to the ‘edition’ (*ekdosis*) of its manuscript-counterpart from Mǎwángduī Three. A brief comparison of the two not only shows the astonishing similarities of the two texts, but it also brings to light that apart from minor dissimilarities, the two excavated texts differ appreciably in terms of internal organization. It seems to be the general consensus to attribute these differences to conscious changes made by later “editors” [sic!]. Yet, as I shall argue in this chapter, I believe that this neglects the nature of a text during Warring States period (and not only the role of an editor in the engagement with a text). The differences of these ‘editions’ simply reflect different instances of writing down a predominantly oral text. As I shall accordingly suggest, instead of overemphasizing the differences between the two instantiations of the “Wǔ xíng”, it is more instructive to look at the analogousness of the two. I contend that in what matters, the two manifestations of the “Wǔ xíng” are not so different at all, but altogether advance one coherent ‘system of thought’, which I call the ‘*wǔ xíng*’-theory.

Chapter 5 closes the analysis of argument-based texts in that it provides the final example for this ideal type of texts by referring to the “Xìng zì mìng chū”. The interesting aspect of this text (among many others) is that it also has a manuscript-counterpart in another text anthologized in the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts. Whereas the two ‘editions’ share an extraordinary overlap over approximately the first half of the texts, the remarkable analogy of the two dissolves further below. I believe that the order of building blocks throughout the first half of the texts can be considered as a rather fixed one, as it is possible to describe a coherent system behind their arrangement, and I consider the first part of the text its core—also philosophically. The second part(s) of the

texts present a further, more detailed elaboration of the core part, providing some sort of application for the individual of what has been outlined theoretically in the core text of the “Xìng zì mìng chū”. As such, the latter part(s), which might originally have been grafted on the core text—probably at a later date—by implication leave more room for textual variation of precisely the kind seen in the two text versions.

Furthermore, even though the Shànghǎi counterpart of the “Xìng zì mìng chū” was bought from tomb looters on an antique market in Hong Kong, with the result that we have lost the referential framework for the analysis of that particular manuscript, I argue that we can nevertheless reconstruct parts of the textual history of the Shànghǎi “Xìng qíng lùn” in its relationship to the Guōdiàn One “Xìng zì mìng chū”.

1.6.2. Parts Two and Three

Chapter 6 opens up the second part of the present study on meaning-construction in Warring States philosophic discourse. It was the aim of the Part One of the present work to present a fine-grained analysis of the various techniques of meaning-construction in argument-based texts. Part Two of this study provides a larger framework for this analysis and positions the argument-based texts from Guōdiàn One in the broader context of the intellectual activities of Warring States’ élite-circles.

In particular, chapter 6 contrasts the techniques of meaning-construction as advanced in the argument-based texts from Guōdiàn One with those of the non-argument based texts from the same environment, but it also generates a descriptive definition for the latter ideal type of texts, which will be that of ‘authority-based texts’. Based on the discussion of the two ideal types of texts from the so-called ‘library’ of Guōdiàn One, chapter 6 engages in a broader discussion of authorship and writing in the intellectual world of Warring States-China overall.

Based on the insights from the preceding chapters, in which we have gained a methodological tool to deal with early Chinese written remnants of thought, chapter 7 discusses the disputed relationship of the materials generally referred to as “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” and “*Lǎozǐ C*”. By now it seems to be established consent to view the previously unknown materials now referred to as “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” to be part of an imagined “Warring States-Proto *Lǎozǐ*”. This assumption is misguided by the fact that the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” shares one and the same material carrier with the written materials of the so-called “*Lǎozǐ C*”. As I hold, despite their physical relationship, the two were unrelated texts nonetheless.

Finally, the conclusion of chapter 8 sums up the preceding discussion. It discusses the implications of the findings for Warring States thought overall in that it contrasts the philosophic background of the two traditions of thought that are manifested in the ideal types of meaning-construction (that is, argument-based texts versus authority-based texts). Based on this, chapter 8 considers the relationship of writing and thought and discusses the material conditions for meaning-construction in late Warring States philosophic discourse. Finally, chapter 8 also looks at the development, which these traditions took with the end of Warring States period.

Chapters 9-13, which form Part Three of the present work, discuss the reconstruction of the texts considered Part One and Two.

