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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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Citation

Meyer, D. (2008, May 29). *Meaning-Construction in warring states philosophical discourse : a discussion of the palaeographic materials from Tomb Guōdiàn One*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12872>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 7

APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY “TÀI YÌ SHĒNG SHUǏ” AND “Lǎozǐ”

7. Applying the Methodology: “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” and “Lǎozǐ”

This chapter applies the methodology outlined in the preceding discussion to disputed materials from tomb Guōdiàn One. Based on a form-analysis, I shall outline the relationship of the materials generally referred to as “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” and “Lǎozǐ”.

7.1. “Lǎozǐ” and “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”

As already said in chapter 6, the materials collected in bundles “A”, “B”, and “C” generate a broad range of questions. On the one hand, these materials closely resemble the received *Lǎozǐ* in spirit and tone. On the other hand, they differ appreciably from the transmitted version in style and content: taken as a whole, the three bundles only contain some two-fifths of the received *Lǎozǐ*. Having been placed in one and the same tomb, the materials are nonetheless fixed on different bundles of strips, and they seem to be inscribed by different hands.¹ The organization of these materials within the various bundles differs significantly from the received *Lǎozǐ*, and the individual units of thought often deviate substantially from the received text in terms of the use of characters, losses in the excavated texts (or maybe interpolations in later versions), as well as the internal structure and composition of individual units of thought. In addition to this, some fourteen strips of bundle “C” contain materials otherwise unseen, which, by implication, are also not part of the received *Lǎozǐ*. The finding of these materials once more calls for a reevaluation of the nature of what we today call “Lǎozǐ”.

Due to the fact that the materials of the so-called “Guōdiàn Lǎozǐ”, that is, the authority-based text(s)² collected in bundles “A”, “B”, and “C”, display such grave differences to the received “Daoist Classic”, *Lǎozǐ*, a number of scholars conceive the otherwise unknown materials collected on bundle “C” as part of a so-called “Warring States-Proto Lǎozǐ”. In the following I shall outline an alternative view. Briefly, I hold that the materials now labeled “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” are not an integral part of an imagined composition that would include the three different bundles “A”, “B”, and “C” of an envisioned “Guōdiàn Lǎozǐ”. Instead, the so-called “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” should be understood as an argument-based text in its own right. Even though it shares some notions that are given expression also in the received *Lǎozǐ*, a closer look at the “Tài yī

¹ See William G. Boltz 1999, p. 592.

² Note that the materials were not only collected on different bunches of bamboo strips; moreover, the materials assembled in bundle “A” were also distinguished internally by two different tadpole symbols, pointing to the possibility of *different texts* or sources. Thus, the fact that beginning with the finding of the materials from Mǎwángdū Three we seem to have a consistent *Lǎozǐ* should not lead us to assume the same also for the finding of materials from Guōdiàn One, only because *later* texts treat these as being part of *one* text.

shēng shuǐ” nevertheless suggests that both the formal composition of the text as well as the main ideas presented therein are not in congruence with the authority-based text “Lǎozǐ”. Thus, the fact that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is collected in one bunch of bamboo strips together with other authority-based text(s) does not per se also suggest a closer relationship of these. Quite to the contrary, it is in agreement with the customs of manuscript production during the Warring States period that a text may have shared the same material carrier with otherwise unrelated materials—for reasons that so far remain beyond our understanding.³ I assume that, as a general tendency, the reasons for this custom rather lie in the limited availability of certain materials rather than in an internal relationship of the texts collected.⁴

7.2. “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”: an Argument-based Text

As mentioned, the bundles “A”, “B”, “C” differ in length,⁵ modes of manufacture,⁶ but also in calligraphy. At least three different hands (that is, people) fixed the materials under review on the present bundles of strips. This suggests that these materials were collected at different places, maybe even at different times.

If these materials were indeed collected at different locations from the ancient kingdom of Chǔ (the calligraphy of all bundles shows several Chǔ-characteristics), then the question is why was this necessary to do: Was there no single coherent *Vorlage* to consult?

³ Remember that the “Qióng dá yǐ shí” and the “Lǚ Mùgōng wèn Zǐsī”, for instance, were also collected in the same bundle of bamboo strips even though the two do not share any close relationship with each other.

⁴ Of course, I also imagine that it is rather unlikely that competing or mutually contradicting materials were placed on one and the same material carrier. Yet, I assume that this rather results from the customs of *collecting* the materials that were available (or with which the collector wanted to be identified) and not from the goal of writing down ultimately related texts on one bundle of strips. In our objective of understanding Warring States intellectual history, we should, by implication, try to understand the texts out of themselves, that is, from the perspective of text and contents. Only then it is methodologically sound to ask further questions concerning the logic behind their groupings on a material carrier as seen from excavated materials. It is methodologically ill-founded to approach the texts in question from modern principles of organization, as this must ultimately results in preconditioned ideas on the texts which we eventually set out to understand.

⁵ Bundle “A” contains strips of 32.3 cm length, “B” of 30.6 cm, and “C” of 26.5 cm length respectively.

⁶ The strips of bundle “A” are tapered towards both ends whereas those of bundles “B” and “C” are cut evenly at both sides.

And if there was no such *Vorlage*, Did there exist one *Lǎozǐ* at all? And if there did, Why select only these units instead of copying the “*Lǎozǐ*” in its entirety? (Remember that the three bunches of bamboo strips, namely “A”, “B”, “C”, together only contain some two-fifth of the received *Lǎozǐ*.) And if the units chosen were taken from an already complete text during the Warring States period, then Why copying only parts of it? (Remember that some of the units seen in the three bundles are appreciably shorter than those in the received version.) Why inserting the tadpole symbol twice in bundle “A”? (Remember that this symbol otherwise always signals the end of either an individual text, or of self-contained parts thereof.)⁷ These questions all point to the dispute whether the received *Lǎozǐ* was indeed written by one historical figure—maybe around the late sixth or fifth century BC⁸—or whether we should rather understand it as an anthologized collection of different thoughts, brought about by different people all through different periods.⁹

As a result of losing confidence in *one* composition of the so-called “*Lǎozǐ*” in Warring-States period (or even the entire concept *Lǎozǐ* itself), a number of scholars also take the next step and consider the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” as integral part of the materials collected. This can be seen to be the final blow against the concept of a coherent *Lǎozǐ*, as none of these materials found their way into the later versions of the *Lǎozǐ*.¹⁰ I fully subscribe to these hesitations concerning the notion of one *Lǎozǐ* composed in its entirety by one person around whatever time. However, I do so for different reasons.

The problem with the approach of considering the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” an integral part of the materials collected on bundle “C”, that is, the so-called “*Guōdiàn Lǎozǐ C*”, which, at a first sight, might seem to be the logical step in a methodologically accurate text-critique, is the fact that the materials now referred to as “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” are organized in a completely different fashion as compared to the other materials collected in bundle “C”.

⁷ See my discussion of the tadpole symbol in chapter 5 “*Xing zì mìng chū*”.

⁸ As, for instance, Chén Gǔyīng provokingly argues. See Chén 1992 (b). Quoted from Shaughnessy 2005, p. 442. Shaughnessy notes that this view has by now received “some consensus status in China”. See *ibid.*, p. 443.

⁹ This was first argued by Gù Jiégāng 顧頌剛 (1893-1980) 1932. Representative for Western views on the *Lǎozǐ* is the highly influential study and translation by D. C. Lau 1963. In several monographs and articles, Michael LaFargue has deepened this understanding of the *Lǎozǐ*. See Michael LaFargue 1992, 1994, 1998.

¹⁰ See for instance William G. Boltz 1999, p. 595.

Taken as a whole, the so-called “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” contains materials that extend over some fourteen strips. In contrast to this, none of the other units of thought collected on the three bundles need more space than only three to four bamboo strips—for the very utmost. Thus, the sheer length of more than four times of the average unit of thought of the authority-based texts collected in bundles “A” through “C” makes it rather unlikely to assume that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is an inherent part of these collections of thoughts; if one accepts the supposed unity of the text. Yet, the unity of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” itself is not undisputed. Conversely, subsequent to what is generally perceived as a cosmogony (strips 1-8), the text changes its focus and shifts to a politico-philosophical level (strips 9-14). As a result, a great many scholars split the materials accordingly into two individual texts and interpret these as lost parts of a “Warring States-*proto Lǎozǐ*”.¹¹

Plausible as this assumption might seem at a first sight, it is ill-founded for being ultimately shaped by the mere observation that the materials called “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” were collected on one and the same bundle of strips together with the individual units of thought now called “Lǎozǐ C”. The “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is given no room to be understood out of itself. As we have seen, collecting different texts in one and the same bunch of bamboo strips was a common practice of manuscript-production during the Warring States.¹² The fact that different materials were collected in one bundle of strips, however, does not say that these were ever considered to belong together.

Without a doubt, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” consists of two greater parts, a cosmogony and a politico-philosophical discussion. Yet, as I shall argue in the present chapter, they are not individual texts. Instead, I hold that these materials were two parts of a consistent whole. By implication, when applying the methodology of analysis developed in this study, it becomes clear that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole establishes one coherent argument. Whereas the so-called “Lǎozǐ C” clearly is an authority-based text, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is an argument-based text. As we shall eventually see, the politico-philosophical discussion is an integral element of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” overall. The whole discussion

¹¹ Boltz 1999, p. 595.

¹² See my discussion in chapter 1 Introduction; chapter 3 “Qióng dá yǐ shí”.

of this passage is in the entirety based on the preceding cosmogony. The politico-philosophical discussion of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” should hence be seen as the concrete application (politico-philosophical wise) of the insights gained from the cosmogony of the text. The text as a whole is addressed to the political source of power in a state. It can only be fully understood when taken in its entirety. The concern of the text is to explain the conceptual meaning of the “Way” (*dào*) as pictured by the author(s) of the text, and from this to draw the relevant conclusions for proper rule.

7.2.1. Part One: Cosmogony

^{Ty1} 太一生水，水反薄太一，是以成天；^[A]
 天反薄太一，是以成地。
 天地 □□□ [復相薄]^{Ty2} 也，是以成神明；†^[B]
 神明 復相薄也，是以成陰陽；
 陰陽 復相薄也，是以成四時；
 四時^{Ty3} 復 [相] 薄也，是以成滄熱；
 滄熱 復相薄也，是以成溼燥；
 溼燥 復相薄也，成歲^{Ty4} 而止。

The Great One gives birth to water, water returns and joins with the Great One—that is how Heaven is accomplished;

Heaven returns and joins with the Great One—that is how the Earth is accomplished.

Heaven and Earth {repeatedly join with each other}^{Ty2}—that is how the spirits and the illuminated are accomplished;

The spirits and the illuminated¹³ repeatedly join with each other—that is how *yín* and *yáng* are accomplished;

Yín and *yáng* repeatedly join with each other—that is how the four seasons are accomplished;

The four seasons^{Ty3} repeatedly join {with each other}—that is how coldness and heat are accomplished;

Coldness and heat repeatedly join with each other—that is how moisture and dryness are accomplished;

Moisture and dryness repeatedly join with each other, [then] the year is accomplished^{Ty4} and [the circle] stops.

¹³ On the concept of *míng* 明, see Henri Maspero 1933.

故歲者，溼燥之所生也；
 溼燥者，滄熱之所生也；
 滄熱者，四時 [之所生也]；† [C]
 [四時]^{T5} 者，陰陽之所生；
 陰陽者，神明之所生也；
 神明者，天地之所生也；
 天地^{Ty6} 者，太一之所生也。

From this follows that, as for the year, it was given birth to by moisture and dryness;
 As for moisture and dryness, they were given birth to by coldness and heat;
 As for coldness and heat, {they were given birth to} by the four seasons;
 As for^{T5} {the four seasons}, they were given birth to by *yín* and *yáng*;
 As for *yín* and *yáng*, they were given birth to by the spirits and the illuminated;
 As for the spirits and the illuminated, they were given birth to by Heaven and Earth;
 As for^{Ty6} Heaven and Earth, they were given birth to by the Great One.

是故太一藏於水、行於時、周而又□ [始。] †
 □□□ [故][太一][為]^{Ty7} 萬物母，一缺一盈，以己為萬物經。† [D]
 此天之所不能殺，地之所^{Ty8} 不能理，陰陽之所不能成。[E]
 君子知此之謂 [聖人]□□□□□ [□] † [F]

From this follows that the Great One is stored in the water, moves with the [four] seasons, [finishes] a circle, and then {starts over again}: †
 ... {Thus, the Great One is}^{Ty7} the mother of the myriad things, once diminishing, once full, it takes itself to be the alignment of the myriad things. †
 This is what Heaven is unable to kill, Earth^{Ty8} is unable to smother, *yín* and *yáng* are unable to accomplish.
 The gentleman (*jūnzi*) who grasps this is whom [we] call a {sagely person}... †

7.2.2. Part Two: Application

...^{Ty10} 下，土也，而謂之地；^[G]
 上，氣也，而謂之天。
 道亦其字也。請問其名？^[H]

...^{Ty10} Below is soil, yet we call it “earth”;
 Above is vapor, yet we call it “heaven”.
 “Dào” likewise is [just] its style-name—May I [thus] ask for its [real] name?

以^{Ty11} 道從事者必托其名，故事成而身長。^[I]
 聖人之從事也，亦托其^{Ty12} 名，
 故功成而身不傷。

[For] he who^{Ty11} carries out his service according to the “dào” must [also] consign himself to its name; as a result, [his] task can be completed and his person can endure.

In carrying out his service, the sagely person must also consign himself to its^{Ty12} name; as a result, [his] achievements can be completed and his person will not suffer harm.

天地名字並立，故過其方，不思相 當 □□□ †^[J]
 [天不足]^{Ty13} 於西北，其下高以強。
 地不足於東南，其上□□□□□□□ [高以強][...] †^[K]

As for Heaven and earth, their name and style-name were established simultaneously; as a result, once moving beyond these boundaries, [one] cannot think [of them] appropriately... †

...{*If Heaven does not suffice*}^{Ty13} in the northwest, that on its below [then] rises in strength.

If Earth does not suffice in the southeast, that on its high {[*then*] rises in strength}... †

^{Ty9} 天道貴弱，削成者以益生者；^[L]
 伐於強，責於□ [X] †^[M]
 □□□□□□ [是故 不足於上]^{Ty14} 者，有餘於下；†
 不足於下者，有餘於上。

The way of Heaven values weakness—it reduces what is accomplished so as to add to [new] life;

It cuts back on strength [and] requests from {...}.
 {This is why, that what does not suffice on high},...^{Ty14} has a surplus on below;
 [And] that what does not suffice on below has a surplus on high.

As it is the case with nearly every new text that comes to light, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” generates more questions than it answers. To begin with, the philosophic affiliation of the text is still debated with great passion, and some of the concepts used so far remain obscure.¹⁴ Even the proper order of the strips is still debated. Especially the position of strip *ty9* remains the focus of dispute, as this particular strip does not connect to continuous sentences above or below.¹⁵ For the moment, I tentatively place it right before strip *ty14*. In this I follow Qiú Xīguī 裘錫圭, who sees a coherence of the three clusters *ty1-8*; *ty10-13*; and finally *ty9*, 14.¹⁶ Notwithstanding these difficulties, most studies focus on the relation of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” to the so-called “Guōdiàn Lǎozǐ” as it has been fixed on the same bunch of bamboo strips together with units of thought that persisted into the later received *Lǎozǐ*.¹⁷

The foremost goal of my brief discussion of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” below is to show that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is an argument-based text in its own right. It did not belong to any

¹⁴ Li Xuéqín 李學勤 1998 (b) and 1999 (d) sees a close affiliation of this very text to ideas of so-called “Guān Yīn” 關尹 Daoists, which received much affirmation from mostly Chinese colleagues. Huáng Zhāo 黃釗 (2000.1), for his part, sees a close affiliation of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” with Jixià scholarship. Most scholars follow Dīng Sìxīn 丁四新 (2002) in that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” should date around late Warring States period. On Warring States concepts of the Great One, see Sarah Allan 2003.

¹⁵ As Qiú Xīguī 裘錫圭 notes, the editors of *Húběi shěng Jīngmén shì bówùguǎn* (1998) originally placed strip *ty9* before strip *ty13* and after *ty12*. It was only due to Qiú’s demur that the editors finally located it subsequent to strip *ty8*. See Qiú (2000.7, pp. 219 f.). Later Qiú withdrew his earlier proposal to insert strip *ty9* subsequent to *ty8* and before *ty10*. According to his current view, strip *ty9* should be placed right before the final strip *ty14* and after *ty13*, thus arriving at the following order of the strips: 1-13, 9, 14. See Qiú (2000, p. 220) As it is so often the case, once made public, his view enjoyed much agreement among contemporary scholars: whereas Chén Wěi 陳偉 (1999 and 2000 c) still suggested to place strip *ty9* subsequent to *ty12* and before *ty13*—a view also shared by Cuī Rényì 崔仁義 (1998, p. 37) and Liú Xīnfāng 劉信芳 (1999, pp. 76, 78)—he follows Qiú’s view after having seen his article. See Chén Wěi (2003, p. 24).

¹⁶ See Qiú Xīguī 裘錫圭 2000 (b), p. 221. According to this order, strips *ty1-8* outline the cosmology of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”. The cluster *ty10-13* discusses the importance of proper naming, the cluster *ty9*, 14 discusses the fact that the “Great One” in itself values weakness.

¹⁷ See Boltz, William G. (1999), Cuī Rényì (1998), Li Xuéqín 李學勤 (1998 b), Chén Wěi (1999 and 2000 c), Dīng Sìxīn 丁四新, (2002), Chén Lìguī 陳麗桂 (2005), among others.

of the authority-based text(s) assembled in bundles “A” through “C”, let alone to an imagined text spanning over these three bunches of bamboo strips as a whole.

7.3. The Structure of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”

Many scholars argue that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” displays a considerable overlap of ideas with some units of thought of the received *Lǎozǐ* (and also with some units collected in bundles “A” through “C”).¹⁸ As a result, scholars hold that it should be understood as a hermeneutical device that explores some of the concerns expressed in the units of thought of the *Lǎozǐ*—so to speak an early commentary to this anthology of ideas.¹⁹ In this approach to the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”, scholars go so far as to split up the text into separate units, of which each one is considered to be exclusively related to one individual *zhāng* of the received *Lǎozǐ* respectively.²⁰ It is even suggested that the units of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” were set apart from each other by black markings on the strips—just as it is the case in the authority-based text of bundle “C”, and to a lesser extent also in the authority-based texts from bundles “A” and “B”.²¹ By implication, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is also made into a compilation of otherwise unrelated units of thought—be they part of the so-called “Guōdiàn *Lǎozǐ*” or elaboration of the same. The problem with this approach is

¹⁸ William G. Boltz, for instance, holds that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” contains passages corresponding with the received *Lǎozǐ*, namely with *zhāng* 17, 18, 35, 31, 64. See Boltz 1999, p. 595. See also Qiú Xīguī 裘錫圭 (2000).

¹⁹ Lǐ Xuéqín 李學勤 (1998 b, p. 3), for instance, reads the first eight strips of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”—the part that lays out a cosmogony—as a complementary elaboration of *zhāng* 42 of the received (Wáng Bì) *Lǎozǐ*. See also Qiú Xīguī 裘錫圭 (2000).

²⁰ According to Chén Wěi (1999 and 2000 c), the three units into which he divides the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” are concerned with *zhāng* 42, 25, and 77 of the received *Lǎozǐ* and must, by implication, be understood as a further elaboration of these. If this were indeed the case, it would show that the authority-based texts collected in bundles “A” through “C” must accordingly be a selection from a, by that time, already complete *Lǎozǐ*, which I doubt was the case.

²¹ See Qiú Xīguī (2000, pp. 220 ff.). According to Qiú, each of the units *ty*1-8; 10-13; 9 and 14 were followed by a black marking on the strips. Just like Chén Wěi (1999 and 2000 c, and also 2003 a), Qiú also believes that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is a further elaboration of the *Lǎozǐ*. Yet, different from Chén, he does not see a one-to-one relation of units from the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” with the three *zhāng* 42, 25, and 77 of the received *Lǎozǐ*. We do indeed see that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole was closed by a black marking on the final strip. As several strips are fragmentary, we cannot say with certainty whether or not such markings also divided the different units within the text.

that it is ultimately determined by the received *Lǎozǐ*. I propose instead to test a reading which considers the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” a coherent text in and of itself.

Instead of being guided by the physical appearance of the authority-based text of bundle “C” and thus preconceive the same also for the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” only because the two share the same material basis, I want to take the effort and test whether or not it is conceivable to understand the fourteen strips of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a coherent (and continuous) whole, instead of fragmentizing the text into a collection of thoughts that share no apparent relation with one another. In order to do so, we should investigate whether or not we can detect something like a coherent ‘system’ behind the composition of the text as a whole. If it is indeed possible to make out such a more or less reasoned macro structure behind the makeup of the text, it is then favorable also to read and understand it as such.²²

The key for testing the overall coherence of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”, among others, is a close reading of the third building block of this text (strips *ty6/8* to *ty8/end*): this particular unit closes the cosmogony part of the text by focusing on the characteristics of the Great One; yet, it also brings into play the gentleman, or *jūnzǐ* 君子. It is a pity that strip *ty8* breaks off exactly at this junction. Nevertheless, it is clear that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is just about to provide a positive definition for the particular gentleman (*jūnzǐ*) who grasps the essence of what has been described in the cosmogony of the text.²³ Subsequent to this passage, that is, after having provided a definition for the *jūnzǐ* grasping the essence of the cosmogony, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” no longer speaks of a “*jūnzǐ*”. Instead, the subsequent passages only speak of the sagely person, the *shèng rén* 聖人, who carries out his service according to the *dào* (I come back to this further below).

Of course, due to the fact that a crucial part of the text is absent, nothing of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” can be said with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, by paying close attention to

²² Note that a negative outcome of this test would not per se also prove that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” was part of a so-called “Proto *Lǎozǐ*”.

²³ 君子晷(知)此之胃(謂)□□□□□□□□□□ “The *jūnzǐ* who grasps this is whom [we] call a □□□□□□□□□□”

all kinds of different formal features, we can still arrive at a satisfactory picture of this defective text. I am confident to argue that these features help us to explain the flawed parts of the text. The formal device of contrasting different concepts with each other so as to define their conceptual meaning does not only apply to the—supposed—correlation of the gentleman (*jūnzǐ*) with the sagely person (*shèng rén*) in the two parts of the text. As may be seen later on, it is indeed *the* decisive characteristic of the text as a whole and can be traced on all different levels of the same.

If we now assume for the moment a unity of the text under review—which in turn I can only demonstrate with more certainty after having described all kinds of different features of the text—we then see that the sagely person (*shèng rén*) of the second part of the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” must refer to the gentleman (*jūnzǐ*) named above, who grasps the essence of cosmogony, and for whom the text provided a qualitative definition (sagely person; *shèng rén*), which, due to the loss of parts of the bamboo strip, is now lost. If this is the case, that is, if “*shèng rén*” indeed is the qualitative definition for the particular *jūnzǐ* named above, who grasps the essence of the cosmogony described, and it is reasonable to assume that it *is*, then it becomes clear that the unit under review fulfils two functions. It concludes the first part of the text and, simultaneously, leads the argument over to the next part of the text. This can be described as follows. First, this passage *concludes* the first part of the text by summing up the concrete characteristics of the Great One, the *tài yī* 太一. As it is stated therein, the *tài yī* not only commences the process that generates cosmos, but it also inheres all of its characteristics. Second, the unit under review also provides the additional information that for a *jūnzǐ* it must be considered a necessity to comprehend the cosmogonic process described and—this appears to be even more important—to appreciate the essence of the Great One and what results from it. This then implies that the gentleman (*jūnzǐ*) becomes a sagely person, a *shèng rén*. In other words, the unit under review articulates a request at the address of the gentleman and defines him as “sagely person” if meeting the implied request. The gentleman (*jūnzǐ*) thus turns into the very concept with which the text deals further on (*shèng rén*). Thus, the unit under review (building block 3) leads the argument of the text over from the cosmogony to a politico-philosophical level. Seen from a (postulated) macro-perspective, the present

unit is just another instance of a ‘double-directed segment’ in that it combines two parts of a text by concluding the first part and, simultaneously, continuing the argument of the text as a whole. As this unit connects two greater parts of a text (cantos), we can thus speak of a distanced type thereof.²⁴

Accepting these preconditions for the moment, it becomes clear that “sagely person” mentioned in the second part of the text refers to the *jūnzǐ* introduced above, except that “sagely person” should now be read as a *jūnzǐ* who has grasped the very nature of the Great One (and, by implication, cosmos at large) as described above. In the same way, in which the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” no longer uses the appellation “*jūnzǐ*” after having provided a more substantive definition for the person who has grasped the essence of the Great One and cosmos at large (and that what results from it), but thereafter only refers to the positive definition provided (*shèng rén*), the text also defines the other important terms of the text. The text as a whole, as we shall eventually see, is all about providing the conceptual definitions for things around us. In particular, the text is concerned about the actuality of the “Way”, the *dào* 道.²⁵

The second part of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” (canto two), then, describes the sagely person, who is defined in canto one as someone having grasped the very nature of the Great One, in his relation to the *dào*—an otherwise unspecified and highly abstract concept, it seems. Both the concepts ‘Great One’ (or *tài yī* 太一), which pertains cosmos in its entirety, and that of the *jūnzǐ*, are entirely absent in this part of the text. If we now take the next step in testing the argumentative nature of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole, it will become apparent that the correlation of ‘Great One’ (*tài yī* 太一) to the ‘Way’ (*dào* 道) is the same as that of “*shèng rén*” to “*jūnzǐ*”. Thus, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” implicitly defines the various concepts used by means of its formal structure. Ideas are correlated with each

²⁴ On the feature double-directed segments of various units of an argument-based text, see in particular chapter 3 “Qióng dá yǐ shí”.

²⁵ The “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is not concerned with proper naming, but defining the actuality of things. In this it differs greatly from the Rǔ-ist discourse of names and appellations, but comes closer to the Aristotelian idea of defining ‘the what it is’, or *to ti esti* το τι ἔστί of a thing. I come back to this below. For a good discussion of the dispute of Warring States philosophers on names and concepts, see John Makeham 1994

other on different levels of the text overall. Their conceptual meaning is made accessible accordingly.

In the second part (canto two), the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” articulates the philosophic concern of this text. The fourth building block of the text makes clear that only by knowing the ‘real names’ (*míng* 名), that is, the actuality of a thing, one can grasp the essence of the same—in contrast to relying on its ‘style-names’ (*zì* 字) only²⁶—a mere denotation that cannot define the meaning of a thing.

Building block 4 of the text describes that ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ are only the style-names of what ‘vapor’ and ‘soil’ (the real names) describe in their entirety.²⁷ The “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” contrasts this with the *dào*. As the text puts it, “*dào*” likewise only is a style-name.²⁸ As such, it remains an abstract appellation that cannot grasp the essence, that is, the actual meaning of a thing. As we see from this passage, this issue must have caused many philosophers of that period considerably headache: notwithstanding the fact that *dào* only is a style-name that cannot grasp the essence of the thing itself, it nevertheless remains the *dào* according to which one should carry out service, as the text puts it.²⁹ Only when knowing the real name of it, and thus grasping this concept in the entirety, one can endure. Hence the blunt question posed by the author(s) of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”, asking for the real name of this very concept and hoping to fill it with more substantial contents.³⁰ See the following figure:

²⁶ Strip *ty*10.

²⁷ Strip *ty*10.

²⁸ We should render this in our translation of this passage as follows:

^{Ty}10 下，土也，而謂之地；

上，氣也，而謂之天。

道亦其字也。請問其名？

^{Ty}10 On below is soil, yet we call it [by its style-name] “earth”;

On above is vapor, yet we call it [by its style-name] “heaven”.

“*Dào*” likewise is [just] its style-name—May I [thus] ask for its [real] name?

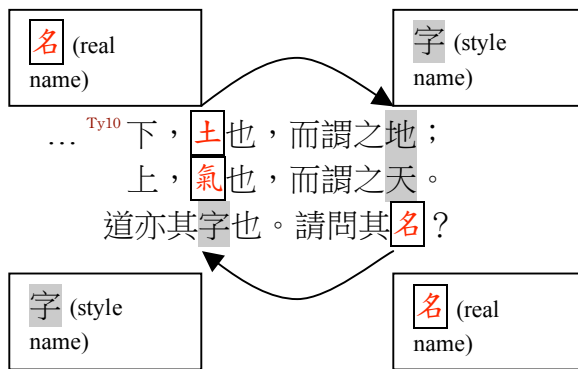
²⁹ Strips *ty*10/24-12/14.

³⁰ For the reading of 青(青)昏丌(其)名 with 請問其名 “may I ask its name”, see the seminal article by Qiú 2000 (b).

Figure 23: Building block Four of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”

...^{Ty10} 下，**土**也，而謂之地；
 上，**氣**也，而謂之天。
 道亦其**字**也。請問其**名**？³¹

...^{Ty10} On below is soil, yet we call it [with the style-name] “earth”;
 On above is vapor, yet we call it [with the style-name] “heaven”.
 “Dào” likewise is [just] its style-name—May I [thus] ask for its [real] name?



As the figure shows, building block 4 contrasts real names, that is, the essence of the things with denotations that are—presumably—commonly used, yet void of actual meaning (or at least unable to grasp the substantial meaning of the same), by which it establishes a correlation between these. ‘Heaven’, by implication, is nothing else but the style-name for what ‘vapor’ describes in the entirety. Real name, it turns out, is the phenomenological actuality behind the concept used. As we shall see later on, the same technique of disclosing the phenomenological actuality behind the concepts used by means of contrasting style-name and real name with each other and thus establishing the given correlation between them, not only applies to the building block under review. Instead, it is *the* decisive device of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole and thus also applies to the macro structure of the text. The two parts of the text contrast style-name

³¹ I fully subscribe to Qiú’s reading of the text in that the particle *qí* 其 must have *dào* as its object. See Qiú 2000 (b), p. 222.

and real name in the same fashion with each other as demonstrated in building block 4. By implication, we shall see that by means of its structure, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole defines the phenomenological actuality behind the concepts used; in particular for defining the phenomenological actuality behind the concept of the *dào*. By implication, it seems that building block 4 functions as a hermeneutical key (*Leseanleitung*) for the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole. Just as seen from the first unit of thought of the “Zī yī”, building block 4 reveals how to approach the text at large.³²

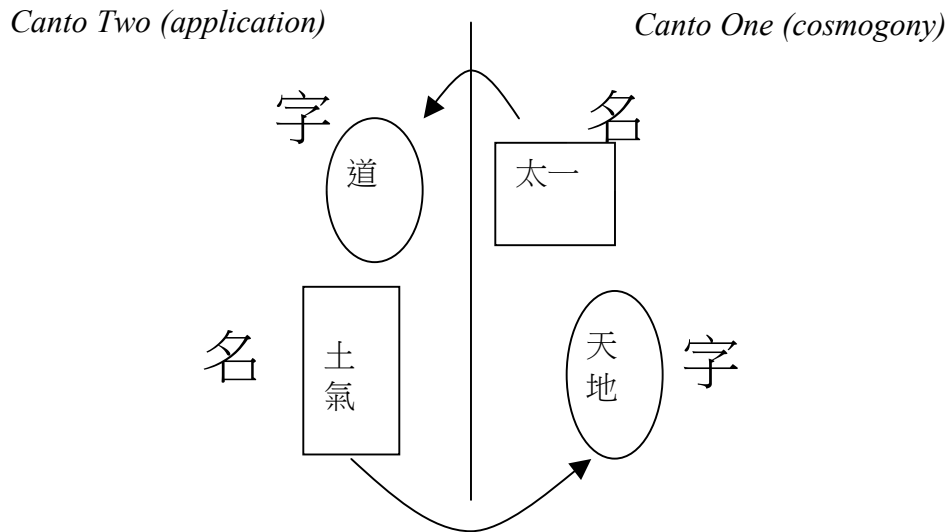
If only looking at this passage, that is, when reading the text either in a mere linear fashion, or isolated from the context of the text at large, the question posed remains an open one; the phenomenological actuality behind the otherwise abstract denotation ‘*dào*’ is left unspecified. Interpreting this particular passage as an isolated unit of thought would thus be to postulate a text void of meaning. However, when applying the same strategy underlying building block 4 to the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” at large, that is, reading the (postulated) macro structure of the text to be the conscious attempt to contrast style-name and real name with each other so as to establish a correlation between name and actuality, and thus to disclose the phenomenological actuality behind the concepts used, we see that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” indeed provides a positive definition for the otherwise abstract concept *dào*.

The two parts of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” are related on formal grounds in that they mirror each other structurally. The second part of the text continues on the insight of the cosmogony outlined above. Just as postulated for the hierarchical argumentative line of the macro composition of the “Qióng dá yǐ shí”, the two parts of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” show a similar relationship in that they feature in complementary fashion towards each other.³³ See the following unit:

³² For the “Zī yī”, see chapter 6.

³³ For the “Qióng dá yǐ shí”, see figure 12, p. 98 (chap. 3).

Figure 23: The Correlation of the Two Parts of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”



Just as seen from building block 4, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole also contrasts real names, that is, the essence of the things with their style-names. The structure establishes a correlation between the essence of a thing and the commonly used denotations thereof, which, if isolated from the actual thing, are unable to describe any substantial meaning of the thing itself. In the same fashion, in which we have seen that ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ prove to be nothing else but style-names for what ‘vapor’ and ‘soil’ describe in their entirety (thus, the “real names” of a thing), we see that the ‘Great one’ (*tài yī*) is considered the phenomenological actuality behind the style-name ‘*dào*’.³⁴ From this it may hence be seen that the approach to establish the given correlation between real name and style-name is not only processed in building block 4, but also applies to the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a whole.

³⁴ Note that the correlation of ‘vapor’ and ‘soil’ to ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ is also expressed on the macro level of the text’s composition and thus proves to be a strong corroboration for understanding building block 4 to be the hermeneutical key underlying the text at large.

It may be noticed that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” does not define words. It describes things. The definition of *dào* 道 (style-name; *zì* 字) to be the “cosmos-generating principle and that what pertains cosmos in the entirety” (real name; *míng* 名) does not tell us the meaning of the word “*dào*”. Instead, it tells us what *dào* is said to be in respect of itself. In other words, “real name”, *míng* 名, is the equivalent to the Aristotelian *ti esti* το τι ἔστι, ‘the what it is’.

The “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” only works as a unit. Only when reading the text as a whole, we recognize that ‘*dào*’, the style-name of another concept, of which the text aims to take hold of in a more substantial way, is in its entirety explained by the means of the formal structure of the text: just as ‘*jūnzǐ*’ and ‘*shèng rén*’ were correlated with each other in cantos one and two so as to explain their conceptual meaning, building block 4 (strip *ty*10/1-10/23) also contrasts the essence of ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ (‘vapor’ and ‘soil’) with their abstract style-names and hence shows that the concept ‘*dào*’ is also nothing else but the style-name of something more substantial. Then, in the same way in which the various concepts are contrasted (and correlated) with each other on the formal grounds so as to elucidate their substantial meaning and fill these concepts with more concrete contents, it becomes clear that the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” also defines the essence of *dào* by relating it to the cosmogonic process pertaining world in the entirety.

In sum, when looking at the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” from a macro-perspective, we see that the text as a whole works in the very same way as the individual building block. In this, the text is very similar to what I have described for the “*Zhōng xìn zhī dào*” or the “*Qióng dá yǐ shí*”. Yet, the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” goes one step further. The text as a whole does not only mimic the structure of the individual building block, but it is designed in a fashion in which the individual building block functions like the hermeneutical key for the structure of composition at large.

By relating the two parts of the text, that is, the cosmogony and the politico-philosophic discussion with each other according to the same principles that also apply to the individual building block, the text explains that the ‘cosmogony’ of the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” not only describes the ontological process of how cosmos is generated; moreover, the way by which the text defines and interchanges different concepts makes clear that the cosmogonic process described in the text explains nothing else but the phenomenological account behind the otherwise abstract concept of the *dào*. By implication, we learn that such as it holds true for ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’, ‘*dào*’ is nothing else but the technical term for what underlies cosmos in the entirety.

Meaning in the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is constructed by relating different building blocks with each other. The “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” thus works fundamentally different from the “Lǎozǐ” (of which many scholars believe it was an inherent part). By definition, it cannot be a lost part of an imagined “proto-Lǎozǐ”.

7.4. Conclusion

The analysis has shown that the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is an argument-based text in its own right. Splitting it up into smaller, otherwise unrelated units causes us to misunderstand the way in which the text as a whole constructs meaning. By implication, regarding the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a compilation of different units of thought would prevent us from accessing the politico-philosophical message of the text—any meaningful communication with the text would thus be interrupted. Instead, the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” works as a unit spanning over the entire length of fourteen bamboo strips. Any attempt to interpret the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” as a collection of otherwise unrelated units of thought is a misconception misguided by the fact that it shares its material carrier with the authority-based text now tentatively called “C”. By implication, the cosmogony outlined throughout the first eight strips of the text cannot be understood in isolation. It likewise is not a mere commentary or elaborate explanation to another unit of thought of the authority-based text *Lǎozǐ*. Instead, the cosmogony of the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ” is the necessary element for understanding the conceptual meaning of the politico-philosophical concept *dào* as it is used in the text. It fills the concept with concrete contents.

According to the “Tài yī shēng shuǐ”, good rule should follow the principle of the *dào*. ‘*Dào*’, for its part, only is the style-name of the ‘Great One’, and the ‘Great One’ is that what pertains cosmos in the entirety. By implication, it becomes clear that the idea underlying the text as a whole is that ruling a state by means of the *dào* implies nothing else but to follow the inherent patterns of cosmos overall. Good rule thus results from a proper understanding of cosmos. The application of the cosmogonic principles described

in the first part of the text (canto one) to good rule as provided in the second part of the text (canto two) hence turns the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” as a whole into a cosmology.

In this chapter I have shown that the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” is an independent text rather than the lost part of an imagined “Proto *Lǎozǐ*”. I have demonstrated that it contains a structure that is fundamentally different from that of the individual units of thought of the authority-based text from bundle “C”. The “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” generates a consistent macro structure by integrating different building blocks into a consistent whole. It thus defines the actual meaning of the concepts used, which characterizes it as an individual text. We see that the text as a whole advances what I have called a ‘semiotic web’, which allows the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” to become a meaningful cosmology in its own right. Once and for all, we can dismiss all different kinds of attempts that interpret the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” as a lost part of the authority-based text of bundle “C”. These attempts are ill-founded for they construe an entirely new manuscript only through the channels of received tradition. Thus, instead of interpreting the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” as an authority-based text that (by chance?) has been collected in the same bunch of bamboo strips, the “*Tài yī shēng shuǐ*” should be given the necessary room to be understood out of itself, that is, from its specific argumentative structure.