

## FANWU LIUXING 凡物流形 (“ALL THINGS FLOW INTO FORM”) AND THE “ONE” IN THE LAOZI

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### Abstract

The archeological discoveries of the past several decades have radically expanded our knowledge of the *Laozi* and its context. Thus far, most research has focused on the various manuscript versions of the text itself, but there is another way in which archeological evidence has changed our knowledge of the *Laozi*: the discovery of several other cosmogonic texts, all dated to around the same time as the Guodian materials. While these texts share some concerns and assumptions, they also disagree and offer conflicting positions. Thus rather than assuming that anything sounding vaguely like the *Laozi* is saying the same thing in different words, we should be attuned to subtle differences on issues ranging from cosmogony to conceptions of action. We should also allow for the possibility that the *Laozi* itself incorporates diverse positions. This article analyzes one particular example, the role of “the one” (*yi* 一) in the *Laozi*. It argues that the five chapters discussing the one represent an attempt to incorporate what was originally a distinct position that took the one as the ultimate and had no concern with the interdependence of opposites. That position is expressed in the recently discovered *Fanwu liuxing*.

### The *Laozi* 老子 and the “Cosmogonic Turn” in Chinese Philosophy

The archeological discoveries of the past several decades have radically expanded our knowledge of the *Laozi* and its context. Most obviously, these discoveries have given us more evidence about the development

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and editing of the text itself.<sup>1</sup> We now know that a complete *Laozi* similar to the received text was in circulation early in the Western Han. This was established by the discovery of two *Laozi* silk manuscripts found at Mawangdui 馬王堆. These were entombed in 168 B.C.E., but the A manuscript uses the character *bang* 邦, indicating that it was written down before the death of the emperor Liu Bang 劉邦 in 195 B.C.E. More recently, a version of the *Laozi* written on bamboo strips was donated to Peking University. While the materials are unprovenanced, they are estimated to have been written down sometime in the latter half of the reign of Han Wudi 漢武帝 (141–87 B.C.E.).<sup>2</sup> A more significant discovery came in 1993 when bamboo strips containing parts of the *Laozi* were found in tomb 1 at Guodian 郭店. These are thought to have been buried around 300 B.C.E. The strips were divided into three bundles, written by different hands on different-sized strips. Altogether, they contain passages from thirty-one chapters of the received text. Some of these chapters are partial, though, and their wording frequently differs from later manuscript and received versions. The order of chapters bears no relationship to that of the Mawangdui manuscripts or the received text.

Aside from copies of the text itself, there is another way in which archeological evidence has changed our knowledge of the context of the *Laozi*: the discovery of several other cosmogonic texts dated to around the same time as the Guodian materials. So far, three such texts have been published. One was found along with some of the *Laozi* materials in the same tomb at Guodian and is known as the *Taiyi shengshui* 太一生水 (Great One Generates Water).<sup>3</sup> The other two texts were purchased by the Shanghai Museum in 1994. Since these texts were looted, their precise date and original location are unknown, but based on similarities with the Guodian bamboo strips and the fact that they appeared soon after the Guodian materials were excavated, the consensus is that they originate from roughly the same time and place. One of these texts, known as the *Heng xian* 恆先

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1. For an excellent and up-to-date account of the textual sources for the *Laozi*, see Alan Chan, “Laozi,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/Laozi/>.

2. *Beijing daxue cang xi Han zhushu* 北京大學藏西漢竹書, edited by Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2012), 2.

3. The Guodian texts were published in *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡, edited by Jingmenshi Bowuguan 荊門市博物館 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1998). I follow the reconstruction of the texts in Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asian Series, 2012). Throughout this article, excavated bamboo texts are cited by strip number.

(Constancy First), was published in volume III.<sup>4</sup> The other is titled *Fanwu liuxing* 凡物流形 (All Things Flow into Form) and was published in volume VII.<sup>5</sup> The Shanghai museum bamboo strips include two manuscript versions of *Fanwu liuxing*.

Scholars often approach these newly discovered texts through the philosophy and vocabulary of the *Laozi*, but each text clearly presents a distinct position. The most obvious difference is in the ways they label whatever they take to be ultimate. The "great one" (*taiyi* 太一) appears only in *Taiyi shengshui*, which is also the only text to give a significant cosmological role to water. If we consider only the materials that have been excavated (rather than the *Laozi* as a whole), the "one" (*yi* 一) appears only in *Fanwu liuxing*. Only *Heng xian* labels the origin as "constancy" (*heng* 恆), and the second term in that cosmogony is so unprecedented that no one is certain what it should be (strip 1). The character itself is *huo* 或, which would mean a vague "something." That usage is so unfamiliar, though, that many commentators take it instead as *yu* 域, which would mean something like spatiality. Unfortunately, there is little precedent for that concept in early Chinese cosmologies either. The Guodian *Laozi* materials call this origin *dao* 道, the way, but also say that all things ultimately arise from *wu* 無, no-being. Only the Guodian *Laozi* materials give any role to *de* 德 (potency/virtue).

The differences go beyond the label given to the ultimate, since each text includes a different number of intermediary stages between the ultimate and the myriad things. There is no way to reconcile them by simply changing the labels. That these cosmogonies represent more or less distinct discourses is further supported by differences in the traces of concepts that later came to dominate Chinese cosmological thinking. *Yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 appear in *Fanwu liuxing* (strip 2) and in *Taiyi shengshui* (strips 1–2), but in the latter they are not the primordial duality. They are produced after the pairs of heaven and earth and the numinous and perspicacious (*shenming* 神明). *Qi* 氣 appears in each text, but only *Heng xian* explicitly presents a thorough *qi* cosmology. *Qi* is said to exist before there are things (strips 1–2), and heaven and earth are explicitly analyzed as modalities of *qi* (strip 4). The cosmogony of the *Taiyi shengshui* gives no place to *qi*, but the passage following it (which is usually taken to be part of the same text) explains heaven as *qi* but earth as soil, *tu* 土, showing that it takes *qi* not as the fundamental stuff composing all things but as merely one of several elements (strip 10).

4. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhu shu III* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 (三) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2004).

5. Ma Chengyuan, ed., *Shanghai Bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhu shu VII* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 (七) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2008).

*Qi* appears in a passage in the Guodian *Laozi* A materials that became chapter 55 (strip 35), but there it seems to refer to breath. *Fanwu liuxing* mentions the interaction of the five *qi*, on a list between the five measures (*wudu* 五度) and the five notes (*wuyin* 五音) (or possibly, five doctrines, *wuyan* 五言) (strip 4). The number five plays no role in any of the other materials (although groupings of five are used in *Laozi* chapter 12, which was not found in Guodian).

The differences between these cosmogonies make it very unlikely that they would represent a single school or lineage, but their commonalities also are remarkable, particularly when contrasted with the philosophical background preceding them in China or with the forms taken by cosmogonies in other cultures. The basic commonality is their shared concern with the ultimate origin and ground of things, with cosmogony in a broad sense. This marks a radical shift from the concern only with the origins of human civilization or culture that one finds among the Mohists and Ru. The cosmogonies themselves share common points as well. All attempt to ground the multiplicity of the concrete world in a more fundamental unity (rather than an ultimate dualism or fundamental multiplicity). None appeal to anything like intentionality or design. The *Fanwu liuxing* and *Taiyi shengshui* use the term for growth, birth, or generation (*sheng* 生), while *Heng xian* and the Guodian *Laozi* materials go further in explicitly claiming that the differentiated world ultimately arises spontaneously or of itself (using phrases with *zi* 自). All of the texts more or less displace the role of *tian* 天, heaven, both by pairing it with earth (*di* 地) and by explicitly making it derivative of a more fundamental force. Each text claims that one can derive power and efficacy directly from the originary principle, which implies that it remains immanent in the world. This immanent source for effective action differs from either following divine commands or picking out and acting according to natural patterns, both of which dominated earlier philosophical discussions.

Taking into account the commonalities between the texts and their disagreements, they might be best characterized as representing a “cosmogonic turn.” The term “turn” encompasses a wide diversity of positions (as the “linguistic turn” can include both Heidegger and Russell) and conveys the fact that while these concerns first appear in a limited context, they ultimately had to be addressed by Chinese philosophers of any orientation.<sup>6</sup> Given the differences between the

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6. For a more detailed discussion of this “cosmogonic turn,” see Franklin Perkins, “Metaphysics in Chinese Philosophy,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/chinese-metaphysics/>.

cosmogonies, there is no justification—either textual or archeological—for assuming the dominance of the views and terms found in the *Laozi*. Thus we must be attuned to subtle differences on issues ranging from cosmogony to conceptions of action to forms of self-cultivation, avoiding the common practice of assuming anything that sounds vaguely like the *Laozi* must be saying the same thing in different words. One complication for maintaining the distinctness of the texts is the similarities mentioned above. We can say, for example, that *dao* and *taiyi* play analogous roles as labeling the ultimate, but that should not erode the differences between them. Instead, it should prompt us to ask why different concepts would be given that same role, and what was at stake in this difference. Doing otherwise is like saying that water and air are the same, because they both play the role of first principle (*arche*) in pre-Socratic philosophy. A further challenge is that the framework from the *Laozi* did eventually become dominant and Chinese cosmogonic thinking more or less consolidated around *dao* as its key term. Eventually, terms like *dao*, *yi*, and *taiyi* were sometimes used interchangeably, and one might even be defined in terms of the other, but we must be cautious in using such evidence. Such claims more likely reflect this process of consolidation rather than the original meanings of terms in discourses written by the late fourth century B.C.E.

This article will examine an early instance of this process of consolidation, focusing on the relationship between the *Fanwu liuxing* and passages in the *Laozi* that discuss the one. My argument relies on evidence of two kinds. On one side are the similarities in ideas or phrases that appear in both *Fanwu liuxing* and the *Laozi*. I take these not as evidence for a direct connection between the two texts but as evidence for some common source material. On the other side, there are tensions internal to the *Laozi* itself, particularly between the subordination of the one to the *dao* in chapter 42 and the apparent equation of the one and the *dao* in other chapters (particularly chapter 39). I will argue that these tensions are best explained by reading those passages as incorporating and responding to a discourse of the one that appears in *Fanwu liuxing*. Before turning to that argument, though, several methodological issues must be discussed.

### Methodological Considerations

The most obvious problem for any attempt to reconstruct dialogue in the Warring States Period is how to deal with the limits of available evidence. It is almost certain that we have only a small portion of the texts that circulated during the Warring States Period, that we have at most a few of what were probably many versions of any given text, and that

what was written down is dwarfed by what was transmitted and discussed orally. We cannot tell the story of Warring States intellectual history as if we had all of the relevant parts. Regarding excavated texts, this first of all means that we cannot simply identify texts with the positions that happen to be known, whether that is determining that the author was Zisi 子思 or Shi Shuo 世碩, that a discovered text is really from the Zisizi 子思子 or *Huangdi sijing* 黃帝四經, or even that a text is “Daoist,” “Confucian,” or “Huang-Lao.” Second, we have no way to know that an idea or position originated with the first text in which we encounter it. In other words, the chronological order of texts containing certain ideas cannot be equated with the order in which those ideas appeared. To give just one example, the view of the heart as commanding the other organs was thought to have originated with Xunzi but is now known to have been written down before 300 B.C. E., as it is expressed in the *Wu xing* 五行 text found at Guodian.<sup>7</sup> To assume that this idea was original with the *Wu xing*, though, would simply repeat the same mistake. These two points together make it practically impossible to trace dialogues between specific texts, passages, or people. We have no way to know if a text is addressing the text we happen to have or a similar text that has since been lost or even a conversation with someone expressing that view. The situation is only slightly better when people are identified by name—Xunzi tells us that he is arguing against Mengzi, but we do not know to what degree the materials through which he encountered the philosophy of Mengzi resembled the *Mengzi* we now read.

While these comments may sound discouraging, it is important not to overstate their significance or to ignore the complexity they introduce. If two texts put forward similar positions or arguments, or use specific phrases in common, that constitutes evidence for a connection between them. What we cannot conclude is that this connection is *direct*, since the ideas may have been transmitted in a multitude of ways (orally, through an earlier mother text, through texts written by disciples, and so on). Texts expressing similar views might still shed light on each other, but in a more complex way. We cannot take them as two versions of the same view but rather as variations on a theme, with their degree of similarity and difference determined by the textual evidence itself. The same results hold for cases in which one text criticizes or responds to ideas appearing in another. That does not mean the author of the first knew about the second (or vice versa),

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7. The *Xunzi* passage appears in the “Jiebi” 解蔽 chapter (Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988], 398–400). The *Wu xing* passage is in strips 45–46 of the Guodian version.

but it still constitutes evidence for a link between the texts, whether direct or indirect, and it still allows the use of one text to help clarify the ideas in the other.

To say that these "count as evidence" is not, of course, to say that they constitute decisive proof. Here it is necessary to consider an even broader methodological issue—the locus for the burden of proof. In situations lacking decisive evidence, assumptions about the burden of proof frequently determine one's conclusions. For example, one cannot decisively prove either that the *Laozi* was composed as a coherent text by one author or that it brings together several different viewpoints. Thus if one assumes that the traditional view of single authorship is true unless proven otherwise, putting the burden of proof on those who would oppose it, then the traditional view will stand. The reverse is true as well: if the burden of proof is put on those claiming single authorship, they will fail. In fact, neither view should be taken as the default, which means that we should go with whichever view has the preponderance of evidence. That might seem obvious, but it means that showing weaknesses or gaps in a position is not enough. The issue is not to show that a view might be wrong but to show that it is less plausible than other alternatives.

These methodological points must be applied to the degree to which we should read texts in (indirect) dialogue. We do know some general points that support the assumption of dialogue and debate in general. We know that the tombs included texts that circulated and ended up in multiple tombs or in transmitted texts. That is, they were not exclusively private texts. We know that the tombs with philosophical texts included a wide range of perspectives, as is the case at Guodian, Mawangdui, and wherever the Shanghai museum texts came from. The fact that none of these tomb occupants could be identified with a particular "school" or "lineage," let alone a specific philosophical position, suggests that readers at the time engaged with a diverse range of texts. One would assume that writers did the same. Regarding these cosmogonic texts, our evidence is more specific. The *Taiyi shengshui* was not only buried in the same tomb as the *Laozi* materials but was copied along with some of them (in what is known as bundle C). Thus at least someone read them both. Similarly, the *Heng xian* comes from the same collection as the two copies of *Fanwu liuxing*, once again showing that at least someone was reading these different cosmogonic texts together. Of course, we know from received texts that there were widespread debates in which people articulated and defended competing views, while also incorporating each other's ideas. Thus while some people may have been simply interested in surveying different opinions, many were concerned with advocating particular

positions against others. None of these conclusions is beyond doubt, but they follow as the most likely conclusions from the limited evidence we have. The problem is moving from these general points to any specific instance of influence. We cannot assume that any given text was widely known, that an author would have been aware of any given contrary viewpoint, or that a specific author advocated positions meant to compete with others. At the same time, we should not beg the question by assuming the opposite either. We must simply follow the preponderance of the evidence in specific cases.

I will here argue that the preponderance of evidence supports reading certain parts of the *Laozi* as critically incorporating ideas that appear in *Fanwu liuxing*. My claim is not that that author of those parts of the *Laozi* had access to the text itself. That is possible, and the fact that *Fanwu liuxing* was found in two copies suggests it was a significant text. Even so, there is no way to know what texts the author(s) of the *Laozi* passages had access to, and no way to know how widely the ideas appearing in *Fanwu liuxing* were available in other texts (or even in conversations). In fact, *Fanwu liuxing* prefaces each section by saying, "It has been heard that ..." (*wen zhi yue* 聞之曰), suggesting that the ideas are not original with it.<sup>8</sup> Whether the authors of the relevant *Laozi* passages had access to *Fanwu liuxing* or to an earlier text (or oral tradition) from which *Fanwu liuxing* draws its ideas makes no difference for my argument.

The final methodological point that must be made regards the text of the *Laozi*. For convenience, I use "the *Laozi*" as a generic term for the text found in various versions, whether transmitted or excavated. The materials found at Guodian are too limited to be considered a version of the *Laozi* and I refer to them instead as "the Guodian *Laozi* materials." With one exception, the chapters that I will discuss in relation to *Fanwu liuxing* are absent in the Guodian materials, so those materials are of little direct relevance here. Nonetheless, since my argument has implications for the composition of the *Laozi*, it is worth briefly mentioning how the Guodian materials relate to that issue. The Guodian *Laozi* materials were found on three distinct bundles of bamboo strips, known in English as A, B, and C. Bundles A and B contain no repetitions, and all of the materials in them appear in the received text. Bundle C is distinctive, both because it shares one passage (which became the final part of *Laozi* chapter 64) with bundle A, and because it includes materials not found in the *Laozi*. There is some debate whether those materials form one text—

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8. For a discussion of the significance of this, see Cao Feng 曹峰, "Shangbo chujian *Fanwu liuxing* de wenben jigou yu sixiang tezheng" 上博楚簡《凡物流形》的文本結構與思想特徵, *Xuedeng* 學燈 10.4 (2010).



the *Taiyi shengshui* discussed above—or if the cosmogony section should be taken as distinct from the passage on naming that follows it. Most scholars take it as one text, but the evidence is not decisive and my argument in no way presupposes one view or the other.<sup>9</sup> On the face of it, the finding of only a portion of the *Laozi* buried around 300 B.C.E. would suggest that the *Laozi* itself did not yet exist at that time. The Guodian materials would either represent a collection of materials that were later grouped with others to form the *Laozi*, or a completed text to which other passages were later added. Even so, we must avoid the error of assuming we have all of the texts. It is quite possible that the *Laozi* did exist and the Guodian materials represent selections from it. My argument is compatible with any of these views and I make no presuppositions about the ultimate origins of the text.

I have so far used "the *Laozi*" as a generic term for the text found in various versions, but of course it is necessary to argue based on some specific version. One of the ways in which the *Laozi* evolved over time was toward consistency, so later versions will tend to obscure tensions that may have originally been present. The best windows we have into early forms of the *Laozi* are the two manuscripts found at Mawangdui. While the A manuscript is older, it is too heavily damaged to use as a base text. I thus rely on the Mawangdui B manuscript. Even so, the manuscript is damaged in many places, so we do not have what was originally written down in certain parts. For those places in which the text is unclear, our best option is to supplement Mawangdui B with the earliest evidence we have, whether that is the A manuscript, the recently discovered Peking university manuscript (*Beida Laozi*), or one of the received texts. There are problems with this approach. It is unlikely that we would fill in the gaps in just the way they were in the original manuscript, and if one goal is to show how the text might have changed over time, there are obvious dangers with using later versions. Even so, this method gets us closer to the original Mawangdui B manuscript than simply leaving the damaged places unfilled. We do not know for sure what the missing characters should be, but we do know that they said something. In reconstructing the text, I have followed Gao Ming unless otherwise noted, marking those places where gaps

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9. The most thorough argument for taking the passages as one coherent text is in Dirk Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 209–26. Scott Cook also takes them as one text (*The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, Vol. II, 323–54). The most persuasive argument in favor of separating the cosmogony passage from the other fragments is Sarah Allan, "The Great One, Water, and the *Laozi*: New Light from Guodian," *T'oung Pao* 89.4/5 (2003), 237–85.

have been filled in from other sources.<sup>10</sup> Variations between versions are discussed explicitly only when they are relevant to my argument.

### “All Things Flow into Form”

Before turning to the *Laozi*, it is necessary to briefly introduce *Fanwu liuxing*.<sup>11</sup> The first part of the text consists of a long series of questions covering a range of issues. The second part answers the questions, not item by item but rather through an integrated account of *yi* 一, “the one,” “oneness,” or “unity.” The text begins by asking how the basic constituents of the world take form and become stable:

凡物流形，奚得而成？  
 流形成體，奚得而不死？  
 既成既生，奚顧而鳴？  
 既拔既根，奚後【簡1】之奚先？

10. Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校註 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996).

11. Although the A manuscript of *Fanwu liuxing* has little damage, it remains extremely difficult to reconstruct. I have raised these difficulties only when relevant to my argument. The reconstruction of the text is an excellent example of the high level of collaborative work in China now, with dozens of scholars contributing insights. Unless otherwise noted, I follow the reconstruction of the text by Gu Shikao 顧史考 [Scott Cook] in “Shangbo jian *Fanwu liuxing chutan*” 上博簡〈凡物流形〉初探, *Guoli Taiwan daxue zhexue lunping* 國立臺灣大學哲學論評, 38 (2009), 1–32 (cited as Cook A), and, “Shangbo qi *Fanwu liuxing xiaban pian shijie*” 上博七《凡物流形》下半篇試解, in *Chutu wenxian yu chuanshi dianji quanshi* 出土文獻與傳世典籍詮釋, edited by Fudan daxue chutu wenxian yu guwenzi yanjiu zhongxin 復旦大學出土文獻與古文字研究中心 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2009), 333–59 (cited as Cook B). Cook includes a thorough discussion of alternate readings and their sources. He draws on the text as reconstructed by Li Rui 李銳 in “*Fanwu liuxing shiwen xinbian* (gao)” 〈凡物流形〉釋文新編 (稿) (Qinghua daxue jianbo yanjiu wangzhan 清華大學簡帛研究網站, December 31, 2008), and “*Fanwu liuxing shidu zhaji* (zaixu) (chongdingban)” 〈凡物流形〉釋讀札記 (再續) (重訂版) (Qinghua daxue jianbo yanjiu wangzhan 清華大學簡帛研究網站, January 3, 2009), and by the Fudan Daxue chutu wenxian yu guwenzi yanjiu zhongxin yanjiusheng dushuhui 復旦大學出土文獻與古文字研究中心研究生讀書會 (“*Shangbo* (qi) *Fanwu liuxing chongbian shiwen*” 〈上博(七)·凡物流形〉重編釋文 [Fudan Daxue chutu wenxian yu guwenzi yanjiu zhongxin wangzhan 復旦大學出土文獻與古文字研究中心網站, December 31, 2008]) (referred to as Fudan reading group). All versions are refinements of the text as originally edited by Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎 in Ma, *Shanghai Bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhu shu* VII. I have also used the reconstruction of the text in Cao Feng 曹峰, “Shangbo chujian *Fanwu liuxing*.” All references to the readings of the above scholars refer to these sources. For an alternate translation of the full text, see Shirley Chan, “Oneness: Reading ‘All Things Are Flowing into Form’ (*Fan Wu Liu Xing* 凡物流形),” *Journal of International Communication of Chinese Culture* (forthcoming).

陰陽之處，奚得而固？  
水火之和，奚得而不詭？

Regarding things flowing into form, what do they attain to become complete?

In flowing into form and completing their bodies, what do they attain to not die?

Once they are completed, once they are born, how do they look around and call out?

Once they are plucked, once they are rooted, what should be put last, what first?

In the dwelling of *yin* and *yang*, what do they attain to be steady?

In the harmony of fire and water, what do they attain to not deviate? (1–2)

It then applies a similar line of questioning more specifically to human beings:

聞之曰：

民人流形，奚得而生？【簡2】

流形成體，奚失而死？

有得而成，未知左右。

之請天地，立終立始。

天降五度，吾奚【簡3】橫奚縱？

五氣竝至，吾奚異奚同？

It has been heard:

Regarding people flowing into form, what do they attain to live?

In flowing into form and completing their bodies, what do they lose to die?

Having attained and become complete, they do not yet know left and right.

One must seek guidance from heaven and earth, setting up the end and setting up the beginning.

Heaven sends down the five measures—what do I make horizontal and what vertical?

The five vital energies combine and arrive—how do I recognize difference and similarity? (2–4)

While asking questions rather than making claims, the seamless progression from human beings taking form to the configuring of vital energy suggests that the emergence of norms from heaven is seen as similarly natural. In fact, the question assumes the existence of norms derived from heaven, asking only how they should be applied in practice.

The text next raises a series of questions relating to the relationship between human beings and ghosts as it pertains to sacrifices. While these may be questions about how sacrifices are possible, they seem to

express some skepticism. For example, they ask why, if ghosts are made from human beings, they are more numinous and perspicacious (*shenming* 神明), or how, since ghosts lack material bodies, their insight can operate in the world (strip 5). These questions lead into concerns about how to rule:

順天之道，吾奚以爲首？  
 吾欲得【簡7】百姓之和，<sup>12</sup>吾奚事之重？  
 天之明奚得？  
 鬼之神奚食？  
 先王之智奚備（/服）？<sup>13</sup>

In following along with the way of heaven, what do I take as primary?  
 I want to attain the harmony of those of the hundred surnames—what affairs do I make most important?  
 Regarding the perspicacity of heaven, how is it attained?  
 Regarding the numinous power of ghosts, how is it sacrificed to?  
 Regarding the wisdom of the early kings, how is it perfected in oneself [*bei* 備]? (7–8)

After these questions, the list turns to specific aspects of the natural world, like the sun and moon, and to questions of the divine. That latter part is worth quoting:

討問：  
 天孰高歟？  
 地孰遠歟？  
 孰爲天？  
 孰爲地？  
 孰爲靈【簡11】神？  
 孰爲帝？  
 土奚得而平？  
 水奚得而清？  
 草木奚得而生【簡12A】？  
 禽獸奚得而鳴【簡13B】？

12. Cook (A) argues that the characters *zhi he* 之和 (the harmony of) should be cut from this line, as they are missing in the B version of the text and violate the rhyme scheme. Nonetheless, they fit the context too well to be simple copying errors and thus seem rather to be a textual variant. I follow the A version as is.

13. Cook (A) suggests that *bei* 備 (to ready, perfect, or complete) could just as well be read as *fu* 服 (to enact or comply with).

Suppose we ask:  
 Who is higher than heaven?  
 Who is vaster than the earth?<sup>14</sup>  
 Who made heaven?  
 Who made earth?  
 Who made the thunder god?  
 Who made the Di?<sup>15</sup>  
 What does soil attain to become level?  
 What does water attain to become clear?  
 What do grasses and trees attain to live and grow?  
 What do birds and beasts attain to call out? (11, 12A, 13B)

Although some of the above questions give priority to heaven, they also seek something more fundamental, something that would explain heaven itself. Moreover, none of the answers in the second part of the text appeals to heaven, gods, or ghosts. This turn from theistic explanations aligns *Fanwu liuxing* with the other cosmogonic texts discussed above. It should be noted, though, that the bases for action in strips

14. An anonymous reviewer suggests that *shu* 孰 in these two lines must be read as a distributive, in which case *tian* and *di* must be read in the plural. The first line would then be either “of the many heavens, which is the highest,” or, “of all the multitude of things that together are called heaven, which is the highest.” Building on a suggestion from Philip J. Ivanhoe (“Heaven as a Source of Ethical Warrant,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6 (2007), 212), Brook Ziporyn has argued for a conception of heaven as a collective body resembling a jury or committee (*Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought* [Albany: SUNY, 2012], 95–96). To fragment heaven by asking about its internal hierarchies would be a very radical move, comparable to claims in *Heng xian* and *Taiyi shengshui* that heaven is just vital energy, *qi*. While that is possible, it is more likely that *shu* selects from an indefinite group, as it does in the subsequent sentences.

15. The last two questions can be read in a different way. The character taken as *shen* 神 (god/spirit) is obscured on the bamboo strip. The Fudan reading group takes the character as *shen* 神 but reads it as *dian* 電 (lightning). They then read *chi* 畜 in the next line as *ting* 霆, which refers to a violent thunderclap. On this reading, which is followed by Cook (A), the lines would be: “Who makes the thunder and lightning? Who makes the violent thunderclap?” That makes the questions redundant, though, as *ting* is often defined in terms of *lei* 雷, thunder. Chen Wei 陳偉 argues that *shen* 神 should be read as is, and *chi* 畜 should be read as Di 帝 (“Du *Fanwu liuxing* xiaozha” 讀《凡物流形》小札 [Wuhan jianbo wang 武漢簡帛網, January 2, 2009]). I follow this reading, which is also followed by Cao Feng. There is precedence for reference to a thunder god or spirit (*leishen* 雷神). For example, the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 says that the thunder god [*leishen*] “has the body of a dragon and the head of a man, and it drums its belly” (龍身而人頭, 鼓其腹) (Zhang Butian 張步天, *Shanhaijing jie* 山海經解 [Hong Kong: Tianma tushu, 2004], “Hainei dongjing” 海內東經, 443). The *Hanshi Waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 also refers to a thunder god (*Hanshi Waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980]) 10.7, 342–43).

7–8 (attaining the perspicacity of heaven, sacrificing to the numinous power of ghosts, and perfecting the wisdom of the early kings) do not seem “Daoist” and differ considerably from the *Laozi*, or at least the parts of the *Laozi* found at Guodian.

These questions are not directly answered but are addressed through a discussion of the one, *yi* 一. We can consider a few passages here; others will be discussed in relation to the *Laozi* in the next section. The most direct answer to the list of questions follows a claim that all things are ultimately generated from the one:

是故：  
 有一，天下無不有；<sup>16</sup>  
 無一，天下亦無一有。  
 無【簡21】【目】而知名，  
 無耳而聞聲。  
 草木得之以生，  
 禽獸得之以鳴。  
 遠之事【簡13A】天，  
 近之施人。  
 是故【簡12B】執道，所以修身而治邦家。

For this reason:

With the one, there is nothing the world lacks;  
 Without the one, the world also will not have the one.<sup>17</sup>  
 Without eyes, but names are known;  
 Without ears, but sounds are heard.  
 Grass and trees attain it to live;

16. The character taken as *yi* 一 (one) was originally transcribed as 彡 and read by Cao Jinyan as *mao* 貌 (Ma, *Shanghai Bowuguan cang zhanguo Chu zhu shu* VII, 256). Shen Pei 沈培 first argued that the character should be read as *yi* 一, based both on context and evidence from bronze inscriptions and other bamboo manuscripts (“Lüeshuo *Shangbo qi xinjian de ‘yi’ zi*” 《略說《上博（七）》新見的「一」字》，Fudan jianbo wang 復旦簡帛網, December 31, 2008). That reading has been accepted in all later reconstructions of the text. The Fudan reading group transcribes the original character as 彡, which has also become the consensus view.

17. I have translated these lines literally, but the meaning is difficult to determine. Scott Cook takes both as referring to the ruler: if he has the one, then everyone does; if he lacks the one, then the world lacks it too (Cook [B], 349). Both the cosmogonic passage preceding these lines and the subsequent lines about plants and animals attaining the one to live, though, read more naturally as illustrating the dependence of all things on the one rather than dependence on the ruler. Chan translates the lines as, “Therefore when there is oneness/the one, there is nothing that cannot come to existence under heaven; (if) there is no oneness, there is nothing that can exist under Heaven” (Chan, “Oneness”). Note that the transcription in Cook (B) accidentally omits *xia* 下 after *tian* 天 in this first line.

Birds and beasts attain it to call out.  
 Extending it into the distance, it serves heaven;  
 Bringing it close, it benefits human beings.  
 For this reason, grasping the way is that by which one cultivates the self  
 and manages the state. (21, 13A, 12B, 22)

Aside from a single use of the phrase "the way of heaven" (*tianzhidao* 天之道), the term *dao* appears only twice in *Fanwu liuxing* (in strip 22 here and in strip 14). In both cases it is used as in this passage, referring to what one must grasp (*zhi* 執) in order to succeed.<sup>18</sup> *Dao* is never used to explain the functioning or arising of things in the world; in those contexts, only *yi* is used. Thus the two terms are kept distinct and cosmological priority is given to *yi*. It is quite possible that *dao* is used only in its ordinary sense, to refer to the proper way of acting rather than to an aspect of the world.<sup>19</sup>

Grasping the one is the way to succeed in the world, bringing an almost magical power:

聞之曰：  
 能執一，則百物不失；  
 如不能執一，則【簡22】百物具失。  
 如欲執一，  
 仰而視之，俯而揆之，

18. Unfortunately, there is wide disagreement on the character for the verb *Fanwu liuxing* most commonly uses to describe how we should relate to the one, here translated as "grasp." Cao Jinyan reads it as *shi* 識 (know or recognize). The Fudan reading group suggests both *zhi* 執 (grasp) and *shou* 守 (protect) as possibilities. Cao Feng reads it as *zhi*; for a detailed argument in favor of *zhi*, see Yang Zesheng 楊澤生, "Shuo *Fanwu liuxing* cong 'shao' de liangge zi" 說《凡物流形》從"少"的兩個字 (Wuhan jianbo wang 武漢簡帛網, March 7, 2009). He Youzu 何有祖 argues that *cha* 察 (observe or examine) most closely fits the original graph ("*Fanwu liuxing zhaji*" 《凡物流形》札記 [Wuhan jianbo wang 武漢簡帛網, January 1, 2009]). Cook (B) says the evidence is inconclusive, but follows He in taking it as *cha*. While the difference between *zhi* and *shou* is rather subtle, *cha* differs in being more intellectual and in implying more separation from its object. The sense of *cha* seems less likely in context, and both *zhi* and *shou* are used in similar phrases in the *Laozi* and "Nei ye" (both of which have links to *Fanwu liuxing*). For these reasons, I follow Cao Feng in reading it as *zhi*, grasp.

19. On this point, I disagree with Cao Feng, who writes, "This *dao*, without doubt, is the highest philosophical concept, which can be used to explain what sustains the existence of the myriad things and the primary cause driving their movement, i.e., the prime mover. It is worth noting that *Fanwu liuxing* prefers to use the 'one' to represent 'dao,' and in the text there are expressions such as 'grasping the one,' 'attaining the one,' 'having the one,' 'able to become one,' and 'honoring the one.' The expressions in the *Fanwu liuxing* in relation to 'dao' and 'one' are all quite close to those in the *Laozi*" ("*Shangbo chujian Fanwu liuxing*"). This is an excellent illustration of the tendency to ignore terminological differences in order to reconcile texts with the *Laozi*.

毋遠求度，於身稽之。

得一【而】【簡23】圖之，如并天下而担(/取)之；

得一而思之，若并天下而治之。

It has been heard:

If you can grasp the one then the hundred things are not lost;

If you cannot grasp the one, then the hundred things are all lost.

If you wish to grasp the one:

Look up and see it, look down and examine it,

Do not seek the measure in the distance, but examine it in yourself.

If you attain the one and consider it, it is like uniting the world and holding it.

If you attain the one and contemplate it, it is like uniting the world and bringing order to it. (22, 23, 17)

Grasping the one is the key to political success. Gaining this power by grasping the one, though, depends on internal cultivation, in particular, cultivating the heart. One passage says that if the heart does not overcome or conquer the heart (*xin busheng xin* 心不勝心) then there will be great chaos; if the heart can overcome the heart, then one will have penetrating insight (strips 26, 18). This process is ultimately grounded in the one:

曰：

百姓之所貴唯君，

君之所貴唯心，

心之所貴唯一。【簡28】

It is said that:

What those of the hundred surnames value is none other than the sovereign,

What the sovereign values is none other than the heart,

What the heart values is none other than the one. (18)

This linkage between political power, the heart, and the one, has several similarities with the “*Nei ye*” 內業 chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子, which also presents self-cultivation in terms of a heart within the heart.<sup>20</sup>

While many terms and phrases in *Fanwu liuxing* remain too obscure to interpret reliably, its basic position is fairly clear. All things arise from the one. The one remains immanent in the world, functioning as the support for all the processes of nature. As immanent, the one is

20. Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Guanzi sipian quanshi* 管子四篇詮釋 (Beijing: Shangwu, 2006), 110. Cao Feng argues that *Fanwu liuxing* has closer links to the “*Nei ye*” than to any other text. See “Shangbo chujian *Fanwu liuxing*,” and “*Fanwu liuxing de ‘shaoche’ he ‘shaocheng’—‘xin busheng xin’ zhang shuzheng*” 《凡物流形》的“少徹”和“少成”——“心不勝心”章疏證 (Jianbo yanjiu wang 簡帛研究網, January 7, 2009).



accessible to cultivated rulers, allowing them to easily unite and bring order to the realm. To gain this power, the ruler must engage in self-cultivation, by aligning or uniting the heart with the one, and thereby allowing the heart to overcome the heart.

### The One in the *Laozi*

The one appears with some philosophical significance in five passages of the *Laozi*: chapters 10, 14, 22, 39, and 42.<sup>21</sup> These passages suggest that the one plays a key role in the philosophy of the *Laozi*, and the one is usually taken as an alternate name for the ultimate source tentatively but more consistently referred to as *dao*. These passages have not traditionally been singled out as particularly problematic, but they do raise several challenges for reading the *Laozi* as expressing a single coherent viewpoint. Chapters 39 and 42 each seems particularly incoherent, divided into two parts that have no apparent connection. The deeper problem is that while chapters 10, 14, 22, and 39 all seem to take the one as the ultimate (and thus as equivalent to *dao*), chapter 42 clearly distinguishes the two, claiming that *dao* generates the one. The contradiction between the role of the one in chapters 42 and 39 is only heightened by a striking connection: the same lines claiming that those in high positions take names conveying lowliness appear in both chapters, and nowhere else in the *Laozi*. The fact that none of these chapters appears in the Guodian materials also is suspicious—given that the Guodian materials include parts of thirty-one out of eighty-one chapters (38 percent of the chapters), one would expect the inclusion of at least one or two of the five chapters on the one.<sup>22</sup> These difficulties and anomalies can be explained if we take these passages as borrowing and incorporating ideas that originated in another cosmogonic system, in particular, a system centering on the one as the ultimate. I will discuss each of the five passages below.

21. "One" also appears as a number in chapters 11, 25, and 67.

22. Robert G. Henricks mentions the absence of "the one" as one of the significant differences between the Guodian bamboo strips and the full text of the *Laozi* (*Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2000], 14). If we were to exclude the last fifteen chapters of the *Laozi*, which seem to have some exceptional status in that all of them are missing in Guodian, the odds would be even worse, as 47 percent of the first sixty-six chapters appear in Guodian. For arguments that the last fifteen chapters should be considered distinct from the rest of the text, see E. Bruce Brooks, "Probability and the Gwodyen Dau/Dv Jing," *Warring States Papers* 1 (2010), 59–61, and Franklin Perkins, "Divergences within the *Lǎozǐ*: A Study of Chapters 67–81," *T'oung Pao* 100 (2014), 1–33.

Chapter 10 consists primarily of a list of questions that seem to concern a specific program of internal cultivation. It begins:

戴營魄抱一，能毋離乎？  
搏氣致柔，能嬰兒乎？

In bearing the *po*-soul and embracing the one, can you not leave it?  
In concentrating the vital energies and maximizing softness, can you be like an infant?

While it is likely that embracing the one refers either to unifying something internal or to uniting with the one as an ultimate force, the context is insufficient to determine its precise meaning.<sup>23</sup> These questions have some resemblance to *Fanwu liuxing*, which asks:

能寡言乎？  
能一【簡18】乎？(18, 28)

Can you have few words?  
Can you be one?

This phrasing, though, is shared by several texts and *Fanwu liuxing* is even closer to questions appearing in the “*Nei ye*”:

搏氣如神，萬物備存。  
能搏乎？  
能一乎？

Concentrate vital energy as if a spirit and the myriad things will exist complete.  
Can you concentrate?  
Can you be one?<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the “*Ming xing*” 名刑 section of the *Shi da jing* 十大經 text found at Mawangdui says:

能一乎？  
能止乎？

23. Wang Bi reads it in the first way, explaining, “one is what is genuine in human beings” (一，人之真也), linking that to purifying the numinous (*qingshen* 清神) (Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1999], 22). Heshanggong reads it in the second way: “the one is what *dao* first generates, the refined vital energy of the great harmony” (一者，道始所生，太和之精氣) (Wang Ka 王卡, *Laozi Daodejing Heshanggong zhangju* 老子道德經河上公章句 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997], 34). He then connects the one in this passage to the power of attaining the one in chapter 39.

24. Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Guanzi sipian quanshi*, 119.

能毋有己？  
能自擇而尊理乎？

Can you be one?  
Can you stop?  
Can you have no self?  
Can you abandon yourself and respect natural patterns [*li* 理]?<sup>25</sup>

It is likely that all of these quotations reflect some common source or saying but there are no grounds for determining where that may have appeared first.

Of all the chapters in the *Laozi*, chapter 39 gives the most central role to the one. The first part of the chapter says:

昔得一者：  
天得一以清，  
地得一以寧，  
神得一以靈，  
谷得一盈，  
侯王得一以為天下正。

Those that attained the one in the past:  
Heaven attained the one and thereby became clear.  
Earth attained the one and thereby became stable.  
Spirits attained the one and thereby became animate.  
Valleys attained the one and thereby became full.  
Dukes and kings attained the one and thereby made the world right.

The position described here is practically identical to that in *Fanwu liuxing*, both in saying that the natural world functions by attaining the one and in claiming that the one allows kings to be successful. While not close enough to prove direct textual borrowing, the form of expression, in each case saying that what must be attained (*de* 得) is the one, is too similar to be dismissed as coincidence. Since what this passage says about the one fits what the *Laozi* generally says about *dao*, it is common to assume the terms are here used interchangeably.<sup>26</sup> This equation is supported by the fact that *dao* is left out of the chapter—

25. Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Huangdi sijing jinzhu jinyi* 黃帝四經今注今譯 (Beijing: Shangwu, 2007), 336.

26. For example, Gao Heng says "one" is an alternate name for *dao* (Gao Heng 高亨, *Laozi zhuyi* 老子注譯 [Zhengzhou: Henan renmin, 1980], 92), and Chen Guying says one is *dao* (Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Laozi zhuyi ji pingjia* 老子註譯及評價 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 2003], 218). Hans-Georg Moeller writes: "As a numerical symbol, 'one' or 'oneness' stands for the Dao" (Hans-Georg Moeller, *Dao De Jing* [Chicago: Open Court, 2007], 94).

if the one is not *dao*, then how does *dao* fit in? Because of this tendency to simply read the one as *dao*, the chapter does not appear odd in the broader context of the *Laozi*. I will return to this passage, but first we should consider the passage that disrupts this equation of *dao* with the one.

Perhaps the most famous statement of cosmogony in the *Laozi* appears at the start of chapter 42:

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。  
萬物負陰而抱陽，中氣以為和。<sup>27</sup>

*Dao* generates one, one generates two, two generates three, three generates the myriad things.

The myriad things shoulder *yin* and embrace *yang*, centering vital energies to make harmony.

The passage makes it clear that the “way” and the “one” are not two names for the same thing and that the one cannot be taken as the ultimate. Thus if we read the one as the ultimate in chapter 39, we cannot avoid concluding that the text uses the term inconsistently.<sup>28</sup> That is possible, but it would require either multiple authors or a profound level of carelessness in dealing with terms of central importance in both the *Laozi* and in cosmogonic discussions more broadly. The apparently contradictory use of the one is the biggest problem with reading this passage with the rest of the *Laozi*, but it is not the only problem. The passage presents a familiar type of cosmogony as a form of progressive differentiation in which a unitary source proceeds by steps to divide into two and then into further multiplicities. The cosmogony in the *Taiyi shengshui* has different steps but takes a similar approach. The

27. This chapter is heavily damaged in both Mawangdui manuscripts, so I here use the *Beida Laozi* (strip 16), which matches what remains of both Mawangdui manuscripts. The *Beida Laozi* and the Mawangdui A manuscript both use *zhong* 中, but in each case the editors read *zhong* as *chong* 沖, following the Wang Bi text. I read it as is.

28. Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 reaches this conclusion in his discussion of chapter 39: “‘One’ in this chapter is so important that it obviously does not correspond to the ‘the one’ in ‘*dao* generates the one’ in chapter 42. Here, ‘the one’ is in the first position and most fundamental, while ‘the one’ in ‘*dao* generates the one’ is produced and in the second position. Based on its importance, this ‘one’ obviously corresponds to ‘*dao*’” (*Laozi gujin* 老子古今 [Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2006], 414). Moss Roberts is one of few translators to keep them distinct. He appeals to chapter 14 (discussed below), saying: “In that stanza, the number one, standing between the Way and the ten thousand things, is a metaphor for the actualization of the Way in all things—a common denominator that undergoes development and completion. [...] Laozi’s one is always subordinate to the Way” (Moss Roberts, *Dao De Jing: The Book of the Way* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001], 110).

problem is that other chapters of the *Laozi* work on a different model. For example, chapter 40 says:

天下之物生於有，有[生]於无。

The things of the world are generated from being; being is generated from no-being.

The emphasis in this passage is not on progressive differentiation but on the movement from undifferentiated non-being (*wu* 無/无) to something (*you* 有) and then directly to the myriad things. Another account appears in chapter 51, which begins:

道生之，德畜之，物形之而器成之。

*Dao* generates them, potency [*de* 德] raises them, things form them, instruments complete them.

While this passage describes the way individual things gradually take on a specific form, the seeds of multiplicity are in the *dao* itself. There is no evidence for a cosmogony that moves from one to two to the multitude. Given that the *Laozi* has been read as a coherent whole for two millennia, there are many ways to reconcile the cosmogony of chapter 42 with those in 40 and 51. Nonetheless, it is implausible that a single author would make such different statements without also making some attempt to reconcile them.

Evidence from *Fanwu liuxing* now makes it very unlikely that the cosmogony that begins chapter 42 was original with the *Laozi*. Consider the most prominent statement of cosmogony in *Fanwu liuxing*:

聞之曰：

一生兩，兩生三，三生女，女成結。(21)

It has been heard:

One generates two, two generates three, three generates the feminine, the feminine completes bonds.

It is clear in the passage that the one generates a duality and then further multiplicities. The details of the last two steps are less certain.<sup>29</sup> The term *cheng* 成 is frequently associated with things taking their final forms, and it is often juxtaposed with *sheng* 生, to generate or give birth. *Jie* 結

29. For helpful discussions of this line, see Qin Hualin 秦樺林, “*Fanwu liuxing di ershiyi jian shijie*” 《凡物流形》第二十一簡試解 (Fudan jianbo wang 復旦簡帛網, January 9, 2009), Wang Zhongjiang 王中江, “*Fanwu liuxing de yuzhouguan, ziranguan he zhengzhi zhexue—weirao ‘yi’ er zhankai tanjiu bing jian ji xuepai guishu*” 《凡物流形》的宇宙觀、自然觀和政治哲學——圍繞“一”而展開的探究並兼及學派歸屬 (Jianbo yanjiu wang 簡帛研究網, October 23, 2009), and Cook (B).

literally means to bind or tie. Here it probably means coalescing into a concrete form, corresponding to the stage at which the bodies of things are completed (*chengti* 成體) (strips 1, 3). There is a general consensus that the character between “three” and “bonds” is *nü* 女, which means woman or daughter, translated here as “the feminine.”<sup>30</sup> While Cao Feng reads it as is, the Fudan reading group suggests *nü* should be read as *mu* 母, mother, a reading supported by Qin Hualin 秦樺林 and followed tentatively by Wang Zhongjiang.<sup>31</sup> In either case, the meaning would be similar. While a role for the feminine in the process of generation is not unusual, it is striking that the mother is derivative of the ultimate origin. This would contrast descriptions in the *Laozi* of the ultimate itself as the mother (for example *Laozi* 25), but it might fit chapter one, which distinguishes the nameless (*wuming* 無名) as the beginning (*shi* 始) of the myriad things from the named (*youming* 有名) as their mother (*mu* 母).<sup>32</sup>

Given uncertainties within the line from *Fanwu liuxing*, it is impossible to determine the relationship between the later steps and those in the version appearing in chapter 42 of the *Laozi*, but the crucial contrast is in the first steps. In the *Laozi*, the one is clearly distinguished from and subordinated to *dao*. In fact, if the progression from the one is borrowed from another source, then the placement of *dao* before it would be the focus of the line, revealing a key point of dispute between the views. The *Laozi* does not simply reject the one, though. It admits the discourse of the one while explicitly making it derivative of *dao*.<sup>33</sup> The phrasing of the first line is too close to *Fanwu liuxing* to

30. Cao Jinyan reads 女 = together as *diao* 帛. Shen Pei 沈培 has suggested the character should be *si* 四 (four) rather than *nü* 女 (“*Lüeshuo Shangbo qi xinjian de ‘yi’ zi*” 略說《上博(七)》新見的「一」字 [Fudan jianbo wang 復旦簡帛網, December 31, 2008]). While the latter is followed by Li Rui, neither suggestion has received wide support.

31. Qin Hualin, “*Fanwu liuxing di ershiyi jian shijie*”; Wang Zhongjiang, “*Fanwu liuxing de yuzhouguan*.” Cook (B) also takes the character as *nü* 女 but suggests it might be an error for *shu* 庶, meaning multitudes. While possible, I suspect that the multitude of individual things emerge only with the final stage of the process, through *jie* 結.

32. The received versions of the text obscure the contrast between beginning (*shi* 始) and mother (*mu* 母) by adding a contrast between heaven and earth (*tiandi* 天地) and the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物). The Wang Bi text has: “The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth; the named is the mother of the myriad things” (無名天地之始, 有名萬物之母) (Lou Yulie, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 1).

33. The *Laozi* uses the same strategy with regard to heaven (*tian* 天), admitting it but making it a product of *dao*. This happens most clearly in chapter 25, which concludes: “People follow earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows *dao*, *dao* follows what is so of itself” (人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然). For a discussion of this point, see Perkins, “Divergences within the *Lǎozǐ*.”

be coincidence, although it is quite possible that both use a common saying or text. Nonetheless, the fact that the *Laozi* critiques the claim rather than simply reproducing it suggests that the *Laozi* is incorporating lines from another source rather than vice versa. In other words, it is more plausible that *dao* was added to the line in the *Laozi* passage rather than that *dao* was cut out in *Fanwu liuxing*. If this passage was written primarily as a comment on an alternate cosmogony, then it makes sense that it would sit uneasily with cosmogonic statements elsewhere in the text. With that context, chapter 42 can be read as an attempt to situate a cosmogony based on the progressive differentiation of the one within a more fundamental account in which things emerge from *dao* or no-being (*wu*). In other words, the priority of *dao* over the one is a version of the priority of no-being (*wu*) over being (*you*).

From the perspective of the *Laozi*, a cosmogony that begins with the one does not go back far enough. There is something even more primordial. It is not obvious why this matters or what is really at stake, but one possibility is suggested in a passage on the one in the "Qi wu lun" 齊物論 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*—

天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。既已為一矣，且得有言乎？既已謂之一矣，且得無言乎？一與言為二，二與一為三。自此以往，巧歷不能得，而況其凡乎！故自無適有以至於三，而況自有適有乎！

Heaven and earth were born with me, and the myriad things and I make one. Since we already form one, can it be spoken of? Since I have already said they are one, can it not be spoken of? One and the speaking makes two, two and one makes three. Going from this, even a skilled counter cannot attain it, how much less an ordinary person! Thus from nothing going to something and reaching to three, how much worse if going from something to something!<sup>34</sup>

Once we label the ultimate origin as the "one," we have already brought it into the realm of human concepts and discourse. We have already moved from *wu*, a state of non-differentiated existence, to the state of *you*, beings. The ultimate origin, the common support that unites the world, cannot be spoken of in itself. Aside from the progression from one to two to three, there is no evidence connecting this *Zhuangzi* passage to the *Laozi*, but some *Laozi* chapters present a similar view.<sup>35</sup> As chapter one says, once any way is grasped as a way, it is no longer a constant way. Chapter 2 says that when one side of an opposition is

34. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1978), 79.

35. Wang Bi uses this same *Zhuangzi* passage in his explanation of this chapter (Lou Yulie, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 117).

recognized, its opposite necessarily appears as well. Chapter 32 directly links the claim that the *dao* itself cannot be named or characterized to the need for limits in the use of names: one will have names but must also know when to stop. In positing a *dao* that is more primordial than the one, the *Laozi* places greater emphasis on the limits of language, the interdependence of opposites, and the importance of paradox. None of those concerns appears in *Fanwu liuxing*.

If we place the priority of *dao* over the one in this broader philosophical context, we can make sense of the last half of chapter 42, which otherwise contains several puzzling lines with no connection to the initial cosmogonic progression.<sup>36</sup> The remainder of chapter 42 reads:

天下之所惡，唯孤寡不穀，而王公以自名也。  
 物或損之[而益，益]之而損。  
 故人[之所]教，亦議而教人。<sup>37</sup>  
 故強梁者不得死，我[將]以為學父。

That which people hate is just being orphaned, lonely, and starved, but kings use these to name themselves.

Things are sometimes increased by being diminished, and sometimes diminished by being increased.

Thus what other people teach, indeed evaluate and teach to other people.

Thus the forceful and rigid do not attain their proper deaths: I will take this as my preceptor.

The Mawangdui B manuscript is too damaged to use for this part of the chapter, so I here use the A manuscript, which is taken to be slightly older.<sup>38</sup> The received text differs on several points, but the most significant is that, instead of *yi* 議, to comment on or evaluate, later versions of the text have *wo* 我 (I). In that case, the line reads simply: “Thus what other people teach, I also teach to other people.” While that makes sense grammatically, it is difficult to see what it could possibly mean—the *Laozi* is clearly not just teaching what everyone else teaches. Wang Bi and Heshanggong both read the line as *contrasting* what the speaker teaches with what other people teach, but the received text

36. The apparent disconnection is strong enough that Chen Guying and others have argued that the last half was mistakenly inserted into this chapter, perhaps from chapter 39. See Chen Guying, *Laozi jinzhū jīnyī* 老子今注今譯 (Beijing: Shangwu, 2011), 238.

37. In this line, Gao Ming reads *gu* 故 as *gu* 古 and *yi* 議 as *wo* 我. I read both as is. Both are discussed in the following paragraph.

38. The last two lines in the Mawangdui B manuscript are entirely lost, aside from three of the final five characters (將以□□父). Where the A manuscript is damaged, I have filled in the characters based on context and the *Beida Laozi*.



clearly says the opposite.<sup>39</sup> Hans-Georg Moeller takes this part of the chapter as consisting of “largely unrelated sayings,” and says that this particular line “sounds quite Confucian.”<sup>40</sup> Given these difficulties, following the Mawangdui A text seems more promising, and if we take the first part of the passage as a critical incorporation of ideas from another source, then the remainder of the passage follows. The author states explicitly that he uses what other people have taught, but evaluates it or selects what is appropriate (*yi* 議).<sup>41</sup> The term *yi* can mean simply to discuss or consider, but it also means “to evaluate” or “judge,” as in a passage from the “Qi wu lun” chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which places *yi* in a progression between *lun* 論 (to discuss or categorize) and *bian* 辯 (to argue or debate).<sup>42</sup> Without knowing that the first lines of the chapter incorporate and modify another position, the statement about evaluating and using the teachings of others would lose its meaning. This would explain why later editors of the text might seek alternate readings of the line, leading to the various versions of the received text.<sup>43</sup> The final line refers to the *xuefu* 學父, where *xue* means “study” or “studies” and *fu* is an honorific for a male person one generation older than oneself (or possibly, father).<sup>44</sup> Its meaning is

39. Lou Yulie, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 118; Wang Ka, *Laozi Daodejing Heshanggong zhangju*, 169–70.

40. Moeller, *Dao De Jing*, 101. In order to make sense of the line, Gao Ming reads “thus” (*gu* 故) as “ancient” (*gu* 古), so the line would be: “What ancient people taught, I also teach to other people.” While the two characters were frequently interchanged, Mawangdui A, the *Beida Laozi*, and all versions of the received text have *gu* 故.

41. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall follow the Mawangdui text and translate the lines, “Thus, as for what other people are teaching, I will think about what they have to say, and then teach it to others” (*Laozi—Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation* [New York: Ballantine Books, 2003]). Henricks translates it, “Therefore, what other men teach, [I] will also consider and then teach to others” (*Lao Tzu: Te-Tao Ching—A New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1992]).

42. In the *Zhuangzi* passage, Brook Ziporyn translates *lun* as “discuss,” *yi* as “express an opinion on,” and *bian* as “debate” (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009], 16). Victor Mair has them, respectively, as “discuss,” “deliberate over,” and “dispute about” (Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parable of Chuang Tzu* [Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1994], 19).

43. As Gao Ming shows, the received versions of the text vary widely on these lines, suggesting there was a general disagreement on what they really meant. See Gao Ming, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu*, 33–34. Even so, this particular change would have happened fairly early, since the *Beida Laozi* also has *wo* rather than *yi*.

44. I follow D. C. Lau in translating the phrase as “preceptor” (*Tao Te Ching: Translation of the Ma Wang Tui Manuscripts* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994]).

footnote continued on next page

perplexing on any reading, but if we take it as referring to one's immediate teacher, then the author claims to privilege a principle of avoiding excessive strength over any particular master or text. If this line is a coherent part of the overall passage, I might mean that by grounding one's philosophy in a principle, one can then evaluate other texts and positions.

The link to the interdependence of opposites in this chapter can be further understood by returning to chapter 39, which—if we follow the version in the Mawangdui manuscripts—can be seen not just as incorporating a common view of the one but again as correcting or contextualizing it. The remainder of the chapter says:

其至也，<sup>45</sup>謂：  
 天毋已清將恐裂，  
 地毋已寧將恐發，  
 神毋[已靈將]恐歇，  
 谷毋已[盈]將恐竭，  
 侯王毋已貴以高將恐蹶。  
 故必貴以賤為本，必高矣而以下為基。  
 夫是以侯王自謂孤寡不穀。此其賤之本與，非也？  
 故致數譽无譽。  
 是故不欲祿祿若玉，硤硤若石。

At its utmost, we say:

If heaven were incessantly clear, it might fracture.

If earth were incessantly steady, it might quake.

If spirits were incessantly animated, they might wither.

If valleys were incessantly full, they might dry up.

If kings were incessantly honored and elevated, then they might stumble and fall.

Thus it is necessary for the noble to take the ignoble as root; it is necessary for the high to take the low as foundation.

For this reason, dukes and kings call themselves “the Orphan,” “the Lonely,” and “the Starved.” This is taking the lowly as root, isn't it?

Thus the greatest renown is to be without renown.

For this reason, do not desire to dazzle and shine like jade but to be firm and steady like a rock.

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Ames and Hall translated it as “precept” (*Laozi—Making This Life Significant*). Henricks translates it as “the father of my studies” (*Lao Tzu: Te-Tao Ching*). I am grateful to an anonymous reader for drawing my attention to this point.

45. Gao Ming reads *zhi* 至 as *jie* 誠, following a gloss from Heshanggong. I read it as is. Mawangdui A has *zhi zhi* 致之, which is also in the *Beida Laozi* (strip 7) and all versions of the received text. Mawangdui B has only one character: 至.

While the chapter begins like *Fanwu liuxing* in stating that things attain their strengths by attaining the one, the remainder of the chapter radically qualifies these claims. The virtue of heaven is its clarity, but if it were to be always only clear, it would collapse. The same applies to earth, spirits, and so on. As a consequence, kings must avoid being always elevated and honored if they wish to sustain their positions: the noble takes the ignoble as root, the high takes the low as foundation. This explains why those in high positions would take names conveying lowliness, a claim that appears in chapter 42 as well.

The passage reads most naturally as a critique not just of one-sidedly valuing the positive but of the one itself. If grasping the one leads to the positive side (clarity, fullness, etc.), how do we also embrace the negative? The obvious answer would be through *dao*, which avoids this one-sidedness precisely because it exceeds any specific labels. That answer, though, is unavailable if we identify *dao* and the one, as is commonly done. This difficulty may explain why the passage was eventually modified so as to obscure the critical element. Rather than "without cease" (*wuyi* 毋已), all versions of the received text have "without that by which" (*wuyi* 無以).<sup>46</sup> With that alteration, the second half of the passage reinforces the first half, explaining the negative consequences of not attaining the one. By eliminating the critical element, the passage can be read as equating the one with the way, even though that leaves no way to explain the transition to the claim that the high must take the low as root and throws it into contradiction with chapter 42. The evolution of chapter 39 provides an excellent example of how diversity in the origins of the *Laozi* became more and more obscure through the editing of the text into a coherent whole.

The nature of the disagreement between the *Laozi* and the position centering on the one can be further clarified through two other places where the *Laozi* seems to incorporate and subordinate claims that

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46. It is possible that 毋已 in the Mawangdui manuscripts should be read as 無以. This is how, for example, Robert Henricks translates the line: "If Heaven were not by means of it clear, it would, I'm afraid, shatter" (*Lao Tzu: Te-Tao Ching*). There is no justification for that reading, though, aside from it being found in received text. The *Beida Laozi* also uses 毋已 (strips 7–8), and although the transmitted Heshanggong text has 無以, the Heshanggong commentary seems instead to use 毋已. For example, the commentary explains the line on heaven: "It says heaven should have *yin* and *yang*, slackening and stretching, with day and night alternating functions. It cannot only desire to be clear and luminous without a moment of rest [*wuyi* 無已], or else it would fracture and not be heaven" (言天當有陰陽弛張晝夜更用不可但欲清明無已時將恐分裂不為天) (Wang Ka, *Laozi Daodejing Heshanggong zhangju*, 155). For arguments in favor of following the Mawangdui text, see Gao Ming, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu*, 13, and Liu Xiaogan, *Laozi gujin*, 409–10. D. C. Lau translates the line on heaven as: "It will mean that not knowing when to stop in being limpid heaven will split" (*Tao Te Ching*).

appear in *Fanwu liuxing*. We can again begin with the key passage from *Fanwu liuxing*, on cultivating the heart:

聞之曰：  
 心不勝心，大亂乃作；  
 心如能勝心，【簡26】是謂少微。  
 奚謂少微？  
 人白爲執。  
 奚以知其白？  
 終身自若。  
 能寡言乎？  
 能一【簡18】乎？  
 夫此之謂諄成。

It has been heard:

If the heart does not overcome the heart, then great disorder will arise.

If the heart can overcome the heart, this is called penetrating the essentials.

What is it that is called penetrating the essentials?

The white of human beings must be grasped.

How does one know the white?

To the end of one's life, being spontaneously at ease.

Can you have few words?

Can you be one?

Now this is called subtle accomplishment. (26, 18, 28)

The passage seems to include several technical terms whose meaning is now obscure. This is the case with the phrases translated as “penetrating the essentials” (*shaoche* 少微) and “subtle accomplishment” (*chaocheng* 諄成). *Che* 徹 means to penetrate or extend through and may have had some technical meaning, as a dialogue in the “Dazongshi” 大宗師 chapter of the *Zhuangzi* presents *zhaoche* 朝徹 (“penetrating like the light of dawn”) as a stage of cultivation between setting aside life (*waisheng* 外生) and seeing singularity (*jiandu* 見獨).<sup>47</sup> I follow Wang Zhongjiang’s 王中江 suggestion that *shao* 少 should be read as is, with the meaning of what is essential.<sup>48</sup> The character modifying *cheng* 成, accomplishment, is previously unknown, written as *shao* 少 over *kou*

47. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 253.

48. Wang Zhongjiang, “*Fanwu liuxing de yuzhouguan*.” It is common to read *shao* 少 here as *xiao* 小 (small), but in context it is difficult to see why the result of the heart overcoming the heart would be labeled as small or minor. For an argument on this point, see Cao Feng, “*Fanwu liuxing de ‘shaoche’ he ‘shaocheng’*” and, “*Zailun Fanwu liuxing de ‘shaoche’ he ‘chaocheng’*” 再論《凡物流形》的“少微”與“諄成” (Jianbo yanjiu wang 簡帛研究網, January 11, 2010). Chan takes it as *xiao* but translates it as “basic” (Chan, “Oneness”).

口. I follow Cao Feng in taking it as *chao* 詔, read as either *miao* 眇 or *miao* 妙.<sup>49</sup>

The meaning of *bai* 白, which I have translated very literally as "white," should refer to some kind of purity. A term that would literally be "white heart" (*bai xin* 白心) is given as the title of one chapter of the *Guanzi*, where "white" seems to be a verb meaning "to clean or purify."<sup>50</sup> The same phrase is given in a summary of the philosophies of Song Xing 宋鉞 and Yin Wen 尹文 in the "Tianxia" 天下 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>51</sup> Another excavated text known as *Peng Zu* 彭祖 recommends cultivating the self by: "staying far from deliberation and using simplicity, making the heart white and the body relaxed" (遠慮用素, 心白身釋).<sup>52</sup> The "Renjianshi" 人間世 chapter of the *Zhuangzi* elaborates the fasting of the mind with the phrase, "empty the room and generate white" (*xushi shengbai* 虛室生白).<sup>53</sup> These citations suggest that a focus on some kind of whiteness as purity was common and thus not necessarily unique to *Fanwu liuxing*. What is striking, though, is how the specific phrase, "know the white," is used in chapter 28 of the *Laozi*:

知其雄，守其雌，為天下溪。  
 為天下溪，恆德不離。  
 恆德不離，復[歸於嬰兒]。  
 [知]其白，<sup>54</sup>守其辱，為天下谷。  
 為天下谷，恆德乃足。  
 恆德乃足，復歸於樸。

49. The reading of the character as a variant of *chao* 詔 comes from Yang Zesheng 楊澤生, who then reads 詔 as *chong* 崇, meaning revered or great ("Shuo *Fanwu liuxing* cong 'shao' de liangge zi"). Cook (B) suggests instead that the original character be read as *cao* 操, meaning to master. For Cao Feng's argument, see "Zailun *Fanwu liuxing* de 'shaoche' he 'chaocheng'."

50. In his commentary on the *Guanzi*, Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳 links "white" to the phrase in *Laozi* chapter 41 "Great whiteness is like shame" (大白若辱) and then explains it as "making the heart pure and still" (*xin qingjing* 心清靜) (*Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校注 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004], 788). Chen Guying explains it by appeal to the phrases "purify their sense organs" (*jie qi guan* 潔其官) and "empty their desires" (*xu qi yu* 虛其欲) in the "Xinshu shang" 心術上 chapter (Chen Guying, *Guanzi sipian quanshi*, 187). W. Allyn Rickett translates the chapter title as "Purifying the Mind" (*Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China, Volume II* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998], 82).

51. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1082.

52. Ma Chengyuan, *Shanghai Bowuguan cang zhangguo Chu zhu shu* III, strip 6.

53. Ziporyn translates the phrase, "The empty chamber within you will generate its own brightness" (*Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 27). For a discussion of these examples of the use of *bai*, see Cao Feng, "Shangbo chujian *Fanwu liuxing*."

54. As discussed in the following note, Gao Ming reads *bai* 百 here as *ri* 日; I read it as is.

知其白，守其黑，為天下式。  
 為天下式，恆德不忒。  
 恆德不忒，復歸於無極。  
 樸散則為器，聖人用則為官長，夫大制無割。

Know the masculine but preserve the feminine to be the ravine of the world.

As the ravine of the world, constant potency [*de*] will not leave.

Constant potency not leaving, one returns home to infancy.

Know the white but preserve the shameful to be the valley of the world.<sup>55</sup>

As the valley of the world, constant potency will then suffice.

Constant potency sufficient, one returns home to the simplicity of uncarved wood.

Know the white but preserve the dark to be the model of the world.

As the model of the world, constant potency will not err.

Constant potency not erring, one returns home to the limitless.

When uncarved simplicity is fragmented then it becomes tools. Sagely people use them to become leader of the officials. The greatest tailoring is without cutting.

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55. The use of *bai* 白, white, in two of the three lines seems odd on a formal level, and it contrasts the received versions of the text, which use *bai* in contrast to dark (*hei* 黑) but *rong* 榮 (glorious, honorable) as the contrast with shameful (*ru* 辱). The “*Dao ying*” (道應) chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 quotes the line with *rong*, showing that such a reading was around by 139 B.C.E. (Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989], 402). The Mawangdui B manuscript, though, clearly uses *bai* in both lines, as does the *Beida Laozi* (strips 195–96). The “*Tianxia*” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* quotes a shorter version that opposes *bai* and *ru*, attributing the saying to Lao Dan: “Know the masculine but preserve the feminine to be the ravine of the world. Know the white but preserve the shameful to be the valley of the world” (知其雄，守其雌，為天下谿；知其白，守其辱，為天下谷) (Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1095). Yi Shunding 易順鼎 argues that this was the original form of the line and that because the contrast between *bai* and *ru* was lost over time, the lines were expanded, so that dark was added as a contrast to *bai*, and glorious was added as a contrast to *ru* (see Gao Ming, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu*, 371–76). The contrasting of *bai* with *ru* also appears in *Laozi* chapter 41, which says “great whiteness is like shame” (大白若辱). In chapter 28, the Mawangdui A manuscript uses *ri* 日 (sun) in the second line, while the character is left out in the third line. Based on the A version and the received text, Gao Ming takes the first *bai* in B as a mistake for *ri* and then takes *ri* as a loan for *rong*, thus matching it to the received text. Another possibility is that *ru* 辱 should be read as *ru* 黷, meaning stained or dirty. This is how it is read by the editors of the *Beida Laozi*, and by Ames and Hall, who translate the line: “Know the clean yet safeguard the soiled” (*Laozi—Making This Life Significant*). For discussions of these lines, see Gao Ming, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu*, 371–76, and Liu Xiaogan, *Laozi gujin*, 313–14.

Once again, the *Laozi* allows for the position appearing in *Fanwu liuxing* but shows it to be limited: you should indeed know the white, but you must also preserve its opposite, the shameful (*ru* 辱) or dark (*hei* 黑). On one level, the *Laozi* rejects the one-sided focus on purity. Seeking purity is ultimately destructive if not balanced by embracing its opposite. This point is quite similar to that made in chapter 39, that heaven cannot be incessantly clear. On another level, the whiteness of the *Fanwu liuxing* comes from embodying the one, which is done by controlling the heart. The one-sidedness of the values follows from the conception of the one. In contrast, placing the ultimate in a *dao* that cannot be named or characterized renders all imperatives ambiguous and one-sided. The use of the phrase "know their white" in both texts cannot be coincidence. The fact that the phrase appears alone in *Fanwu liuxing* and is critiqued and qualified in the *Laozi* once again suggests that the *Laozi* passage critically incorporates an earlier position.

While its reference to the one is brief, chapter 22 of the *Laozi* can also be read in this context. It says:

曲則全，枉則正，洼則盈，敝則新，少則得，多則惑。  
 是以聖人執一，以爲天下牧。  
 不自是故彰，  
 不自見也故明，  
 不自伐故有功，  
 弗矜故能長。  
 夫唯不爭，故莫能與之爭。  
 古之所謂曲全者，豈語哉！  
 誠全歸之。

Bent then whole, warped then straight, hollow then full, worn then renewed, few then gained, many then perplexed.

By this, sagely people grasp the one and use it to become a model to the world.

By not affirming themselves they are prominent,

By not showing themselves they are luminous,

By not bragging about themselves they have accomplishments,

By not being arrogant they can last long.

It is only by not contending that there is no one who can contend with them.

What the ancients called the bent becoming whole—how close it is to this saying!

Truly, becoming whole returns to this.

As in *Fanwu liuxing*, the key to success is grasping the one (執一),<sup>56</sup> but the only way to grasp the one is to realize the interdependence of opposites. That requires recognition that the ultimate transcends labels and one-sided values.

The next link supports this same general contrast, but places it on the level of the ultimate. According to *Fanwu liuxing*, the one is accessible to the senses:

是故一，  
 咀之有味，  
 嗅〔之有臭〕，<sup>57</sup>  
 鼓之有聲，  
 近之可見。  
 操之可操，  
 握之則失，  
 敗之則【簡19】槁，  
 賊之則滅。  
 執此言，起於一端。

For this reason, regarding the one:

If tasted it has flavor,  
 If smelled it has scent,  
 If tapped it has sound,  
 If approached it can be seen.  
 If grasped it can be grasped,  
 If gripped then it is lost,  
 If defeated then it withers,  
 If stolen then it is annihilated.  
 Grasping these words arises from one beginning. (19, 20)

The *Laozi* directly denies this point, most clearly in chapter 14, another of the passages that discuss the one:

視之而弗見，[名]之曰微。  
 聽之而弗聞，名之曰希。  
 播之而弗得，名之曰夷。

56. As discussed in note 18 above, there is disagreement on how the character preceding the one should be read in *Fanwu liuxing*. There may have been some uncertainty in the *Laozi* as well. The Mawangdui and *Beida Laozi* manuscripts have *zhi yi* 執一, but the Wang Bi and Heshanggong texts have *bao yi* 抱一, to embrace the one (the same phrase used in chapter 10).

57. These three characters are damaged in the A manuscript and are filled in based on the B manuscript.



三者不可到計，<sup>58</sup> 故混而為一。  
 一者，其上不皦，其下不昧。  
 尋尋呵不可名也，復歸於无物。  
 是謂无狀之狀，无物之象，是謂忽恍。  
 隨而不見其後，迎而不見其首。  
 執今之道，以御今之有，以知古始，是謂道紀。

Looked for but not seen—it is named minute.  
 Listened for but not heard—it is named slight.  
 Reached for but not attained—it is named smooth.  
 These three cannot be fully calculated, so they are confused and become one.  
 The one—there is nothing more encompassing above it, nothing more subtle below it.  
 Formless! It cannot be named and returns back to the thingless.  
 It is called formless form, thingless image, it is called subtle and indistinct.  
 Follow it and you cannot see its back, look up and you cannot see its head.  
 Grasp the way of the present to manage what is had in the present and to know the beginning in the past. This is called the guiding thread of the way.

The precise point of dispute between the two texts is not obvious, as it is difficult to determine what *Fanwu liuxing* means in saying that we can taste and see the one. Since the one is not a concrete object of sensory perception, it most likely means that the one is grasped in the things we experience. The underlying point is that there is nothing mysterious about the one. It is simply the unity we experience in the world itself, and thus it is graspable.<sup>59</sup> That is precisely what the *Laozi* denies, most often in terms of the *dao*, which is mysterious and ungraspable. While the last half describes the one in terms that could apply just as well to *dao*, the chapter also gives an explanation of how the idea of the one arises. The ultimate is taken as one because of the confusion that follows from our inability to see, hear, and touch it. What the senses cannot discriminate is thus taken as one. This explanation contrasts the description of *dao* as a label, in chapter 25. In that chapter, *dao* is explicitly recognized as an inadequate label for something that in itself is ungraspable. In chapter 14, the one is mistakenly taken for that ultimate reality.

58. Both Mawangdui manuscripts use *ji* 計, as does the *Beida Laozi*. Gao Ming reads it as *jie* 詰, which is the character in the received versions of the text. I read it as is.

59. For a good discussion of this point, see Wang Zhongjiang, "Fanwu liuxing de yuzhouguan," and Chan, "Oneness."

For the sake of a complete comparison, two other links should be mentioned, although they do not involve clear points of opposition. Several passages in *Fanwu liuxing* discuss knowing at a distance. For example, one says:

聞之曰：  
 執道坐不下席；  
 端冕【簡14】圖不與事。  
 先知四海，  
 至聽千里，  
 達見百里。  
 是故聖人處於其所，邦家之【簡16】危安存亡，賊盜之作，可先知。

It has been heard:

One who grasps the way sits and does not descend from his mat,  
 Wears his court robes and hat and does not scheme to get involved in  
 affairs.

First know to the four seas,  
 Extend to listen for a thousand miles,  
 Reach to see for a hundred miles.

Thus sagely people reside in their proper place and the safety and danger  
 or preservation and destruction of the state, the arising of thieves and  
 robbers, all can be known ahead. (14, 16, 26)

This line has some resemblance to chapter 47 of the *Laozi*:

不出於戶，以知天下；  
 不窺於[牖]，以]知天道。  
 其出彌遠者，其知彌[少]。  
 是以聖人  
 弗行而知，  
 弗見] 而名，<sup>60</sup>  
 弗為而成。

Do not leave the door to know the world.  
 Do not look out the window to know the way of heaven.  
 The further one goes, the less one knows.  
 By this, sagely people:  
 Know without acting,

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60. The bracketed characters are damaged in both Mawangdui manuscripts. I have filled them based on the *Beida Laozi* (strips 27–28). Mawangdui B clearly has *ming* 名 (name), as does the *Beida Laozi* and all versions of the received text. Gao Ming reads it as *ming* 明 (clear seeing or perspicacious), but I read it as is. *Fanwu liuxing* makes a similar connection between naming and not seeing in strips 21 and 13A quoted above.

Name without seeing,  
Complete without acting.

While I have been emphasizing points of conflict between the *Laozi* and *Fanwu liuxing*, in the broader context of early Chinese thought, they are quite close in their basic orientation and concerns. These two passages could simply express one of the many points the texts share. Certainly the chapter does not appear strange in the broader context of the *Laozi*. The passage, though, does not mention *dao* itself, and it is one of the only passages in the *Laozi* (outside the last fifteen chapters) that centers on the way of heaven (*tiandao*) rather than *dao* itself. That might suggest some borrowing from a different source.

The final connection is also the most specific. *Fanwu liuxing* contains the line:

聞之曰：  
升【簡8】高從埤，  
至遠從邇。  
十圍之木，其始生如櫛。  
足將至千里，必從寸始。

It has been heard:

Ascending to a height starts from what is low,  
Reaching a distant place starts from what is near.  
A tree that is ten arm spans around starts living as a shoot.  
Steps to reach a thousand miles must start from an inch. (8, 9)

This is quite close to the famous lines in chapter 64 of the *Laozi*:

其安也，易持也。  
其未兆也，易謀也。  
其臍也，易判也。  
其幾也，易踐也。  
為之於其亡有也，  
治之於其未亂。  
合[抱之木，生於毫]末；  
九成之臺，作[於累土]；  
百仞之高，始於[足下]。<sup>61</sup>

When it is calm it is easy to manage,  
When signs have not yet appeared it is easy to plan,

61. These lines are heavily damaged in both Mawangdui manuscripts, but they appear on strips 25–27 in bundle A of the Guodian bamboo strips. I have followed that version, based on the reconstruction of the text in Cook, *Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, 265–66. The missing characters have also been filled in following Cook.

When it is fragile it is easily broken up,  
 When it is small it is easily trampled.  
 Do it when it has not yet appeared,  
 Manage it when it is not yet disorderly.  
 A tree that one can embrace grows from a small sprout,  
 A nine story pavilion rises from basketfuls of dirt,  
 An ascent of a hundred *ren* starts under one's feet.

It is difficult to know the significance of this connection, since the shared lines could easily be a common saying with little philosophical significance (as they have become in English).<sup>62</sup> In *Fanwu liuxing*, the saying appears without context, the only claim inserted in the midst of the list of questions in the first part of the text. The first half of the *Laozi* chapter contains only common sense practical advice, with nothing distinctive of its philosophy. While the remainder of chapter 64 could be taken as integrating this practical advice with a view of *wuwei* 無為, non-action, the two halves of the chapter are not connected in the Guodian materials, and they are marked as separate chapters in the *Beida Laozi*.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusions

In this article, I hope to have shown that the various *Laozi* passages discussing the one—along with chapter 28—make the most sense, both as chapters and within the *Laozi* as a whole, if we take them not as straightforward statements of doctrine but rather as moments within a broader cosmogonic debate. While we cannot know what sources the author(s) of those passages used, *Fanwu liuxing* gives us a glimpse of what was originally the other side of that debate. The *Laozi* opposes that position on two related levels. On the level of ontology, it argues that there is something prior to the one, tentatively called the *dao* and sometimes described as no-being, *wu*. From this perspective, the one is already too concrete, too much like a thing that can be perceived and grasped.

62. The “*Zhong yong*” 中庸 chapter of the *Li ji* 禮記 contains a similar claim but applied to self-cultivation: “The archer resembles the noble [*junzi* 君子]: if they miss the center of the target, they turn to seek the cause in themselves. The way of the noble is like the way a distant journey must start from what is near or ascending high must start from what is low” (射有似乎君子，失諸正鵠，反求諸其身。君子之道，辟如行遠必自邇，辟如登高必自卑。) (Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 2003], 24). This suggests it may have been a common saying that could be applied in different ways.

63. In Guodian, the first half of chapter 64 appears on strips 25–27 in bundle A. The second half of the chapter appears in two versions, once on strips 10–13 in A and then again on strips 1–14 in C. For the *Beida Laozi*, the first half is on strips 74–75; the second half is on strips 76–78.

The ultimate origin must exceed the reach of fixed labels or concepts. The authors of the *Laozi* did not reject the one. They kept it, but subordinated it to a more primordial *dao*. On a practical level, the values appearing in *Fanwu liuxing* are criticized as one-sided, as embracing only the positive and obvious. It is not that the *Laozi* rejects these values in favor of others; rather, it claims that these values cannot be isolated from their opposites. The interdependence of opposites is a consistent theme in the *Laozi* chapters with links to the positions of *Fanwu liuxing*. In contrast, *Fanwu liuxing* seems to take human judgment as fundamentally unproblematic and values as arising naturally. Borrowing terms from Brook Ziporyn, we can say that the *Laozi* has an ironic stance toward values; *Fanwu liuxing* shows no trace of such irony.<sup>64</sup> These two levels are related—by placing the ultimate beyond labels and judgments, values are problematized rather than grounded.

This argument tells us nothing decisive about the origins of the *Laozi*, but two points are worth considering. First, there is an asymmetry between the way similar ideas appear in the *Laozi* and in *Fanwu liuxing*. In each case, the *Laozi* recontextualizes and supplements ideas that stand alone in *Fanwu liuxing*. Put simply, the *Laozi* responds to the position appearing in *Fanwu liuxing* while *Fanwu liuxing* shows no awareness of a view like that of the *Laozi*. This proves nothing decisively, but the most plausible way to relate the positions is to take the position of the *Laozi* as arising in response to an earlier view based on the one, rather than vice versa. In keeping with the earlier discussion of methodology, though, this claim is strictly about the progression of ideas rather than the chronological appearance of texts. It is quite possible that *Fanwu liuxing* was written down long after the ideas it expresses arose.

Regarding the composition of the *Laozi*, we can now see the text as doing two distinct things. Many chapters attempt to articulate and support a particular view of the world and how to live in it. Other chapters, though, incorporate formerly distinct positions, like that based on the primacy of the one. In doing so, those ideas are absorbed and subordinated to the primacy of the *dao*. In the case of the one, this assimilation was so successful that through both commentaries and the evolution of the text itself, the distinctness of the original positions was eventually lost. In itself, there is no reason to assume these two approaches—stating one's own position and assimilating other positions—belong to different strata of the text, but it is worth noting that, of all the passages discussed in relation to *Fanwu liuxing*, the only one that appears in the Guodian materials is chapter 64, which contains

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64. Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought, a Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 139–62.

practical advice and has no connection to philosophical discussions about values or the one. The exclusion of the passages related to the one is a statistical anomaly, as noted earlier. This exclusion could be a coincidence or a result of selection bias, but it suggests that part of the shift from the Guodian *Laozi* materials to the *Laozi* as a whole may have included this incorporation of other positions. A similar process may have been at work in the incorporation of the final fifteen chapters, which focus more on the way of heaven than on the way itself. All of those chapters also were missing from the Guodian materials. I began by mentioning the way that the eventual prominence of the *Laozi* made it the dominant lens through which other cosmogonic texts are interpreted, leading to the tendency to see anything vaguely like the *Laozi* as saying the same thing in different terms. It is quite possible that this same tendency to incorporate and absorb other positions began in the composition of the *Laozi* itself.

## 《凡物流形》和《老子》中的“一”

方嵐生

摘要

過去數十年的考古學發現極大的擴大了我們對於《老子》及其寫作背景的了解。但迄今為止，大多數研究仍集中在文本自身不同版本的研究。其實，考古證據從另一個途徑同樣改變了我們對於《老子》的認識：其它幾個大約與郭店文本同時期的有關宇宙生成文本的發現。這些文本在持有一些相同關注點和構想的同時，也存在著一些爭議和矛盾。因此，與其假設任何聽起來像《老子》一樣語意模糊的文本都是在用不同的語言敘述同樣的東西，我們更應該習慣那些從宇宙論到行為的不同概念之間的細微差別。不但如此，我們還應該接納這樣的一種可能性，那就是，《老子》文本自身即包含多元的立場。本文將對《老子》中“一”的概念進行特例分析，並指出，對於“一”這一概念作出討論的五個章節，實際是一種對原本已有觀點的吸納嘗試。這一觀點把“一”看作終極依據而並不考慮矛盾雙方的相互依存性。此點在新近發現的《凡物流形》中亦有闡發。

**Keywords:** *Laozi*, *Fanwu liuxing*, the one, dao, Guodian

老子, 凡物流形, 一, 道, 郭店