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*LAOZI: RE-VISITING TWO EARLY
COMMENTARIES IN THE HANFEIZI*

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by

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ABSTRACT

Laozi: Re-visiting Two Early Commentaries in the Hanfeizi

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The *Laozi* or *Daodejing* is the foundational text of both philosophical and religious Daoism, and is one of the most important books in Chinese history. The earliest extant commentaries on this text form chapters 20 and 21 of the *Hanfeizi*, a prominent text of the Legalist tradition. These commentaries, *Jie Lao* ('Explaining *Laozi*') and *Yu Lao* ('Illustrating *Laozi*'), are surrounded by questions of authenticity, and have often been misunderstood by scholars who interpret them in the spirit of Han Fei's Legalist philosophy. Therefore, this thesis re-visits these commentaries and analyzes each in isolation, considering their dating, authorship, and philosophical affiliations in order to better situate them within the context of Warring States intellectual history. Stylistic and doctrinal coherence are taken into account, as well as the impact of recent archaeological finds, including those at Mawangdui (1973) and Guodian (1993). Finally, complete new annotated translations of the commentaries are provided.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
SECTION I – HAN FEI, <i>HANFEIZI</i> , AND HUANG-LAO	
The nature of texts from the Warring States period	3
Han Fei and the <i>Hanfeizi</i>	5
Han Fei – historical background and political philosophy	6
The <i>Shiji</i> biography and the question of authorship	11
What is Huang-Lao philosophy?	16
SECTION II – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN <i>JIE LAO</i> AND <i>YU LAO</i>	
Differences between the chapters	20
SECTION III – POINTS OF INTEREST	
The impact of the Guodian and Mawangdui findings	27
Where's the <i>Dao</i> ?	30
Where's Lao Dan?	32
SECTION IV – <i>YU LAO (ILLUSTRATING LAOZI)</i>	
Dating	34
Authorship	36
Political philosophy	38
<i>Illustrating Laozi</i> – annotated translation	41
SECTION V – <i>JIE LAO (EXPLAINING LAOZI)</i>	
Dating	59
Authorship	61
Textual considerations	64
Political philosophy	66
<i>Explaining Laozi</i> – annotated translation	70
APPENDIX I – <i>JIE LAO</i> AND <i>YU LAO</i> AUTHENTICITY CHART	104
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	105

INTRODUCTION

The *Laozi* 老子 or *Daodejing* 道德經 is the foundational text of both philosophical and religious Daoism, and is one of the most important books in Chinese history. Yet, the earliest extant commentaries on this text do not appear in a Daoist work; rather, they form chapters 20 and 21 of the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, a seminal text of the Legalist tradition. The first of these, entitled *Jie Lao* 解老 ('Explaining *Laozi*'), uses reasoning and exegetical analysis to uncover the meaning behind passages from 11 chapters of the *Laozi*. The second, *Yu Lao* 喻老 ('Illustrating *Laozi*'), cites over thirty historical episodes to illustrate passages from 12 chapters of the *Laozi*.

These commentaries have traditionally been attributed to Han Feizi, a Machiavellian theoretician who believed in building and governing a state by establishing a harsh and efficient rule of law, while concentrating the efforts of the people on agriculture in order to increase military strength and economic power. It seems puzzling, then, that Han Fei would value a book such as the *Laozi*, whose main message, politically speaking, is moderation, pliancy, and minimalism.

Indeed, these commentaries are surrounded by questions of authenticity and philosophical affiliation, and have often been misunderstood by scholars who attempt to interpret them in the spirit of Han Fei's Legalist philosophy. Nevertheless, as the earliest extant commentaries on the *Laozi*, they are extremely important in understanding the early history of Daoist philosophy, and provide an avenue towards discovering how the *Laozi* was received by its early audience, not saddled with the added baggage of centuries upon millennia of interpretation and commentary.

As there is currently no consensus among scholars,¹ this thesis will consider these commentaries in detail, examining their dating, authorship, and philosophical affiliations. In order to facilitate this, we will first review the nature of texts from the Warring States period in order to gain a better understanding of what constituted a ‘book’ during this era. Next, we will look at the *Hanfeizi* and examine the philosophy of Han Fei contained in it, as well as Han Fei’s relationship to the Huang-Lao school of philosophy. Turning to the commentaries themselves, we will establish that it is doubtful they were penned by the same person. We will also examine what impact the discoveries at Mawangdui in 1973 and Guodian in 1993 have on the way we approach these commentaries (the latter is an area largely unexplored). Finally, we will provide an analysis of each commentary, examining their probable dates and authorship, and providing an account of the philosophical content of each.

Immediately following the analysis of each commentary is a new translation of each. Currently, there is but one complete set of translations to these commentaries in the English language – that done by W.K. Liao in 1939. Given the amount of scholarship done on the *Hanfeizi* text since then, and the remarkable archaeological discoveries over the last thirty years, a new translation is long overdue.

¹ The conclusions of several major commentators on the authenticity of these chapters are provided in summary form in a chart at the back of this study.

SECTION ONE - HAN FEI, *HANFEIZI*, AND HUANG-LAO

The nature of texts from the Warring States period

Thus far no one has succeeded in providing a persuasive argument – let alone a compelling one – that these chapters were not written by Han Fei. In the absence of any other persuasive evidence to the contrary, therefore, we will assume that they all come from his hand. - Wang and Chang, p.95

[Regarding] the works of the latter part of the Warring States period... unless there are strong reasons, it is never safe to assume that any such work was actually written by a particular thinker or even that the whole work represents a single tradition in a closely knit school. - D.C. Lau, 1982, p.126

The *Hanfeizi* is similar to many texts from the Warring States period in drawing its title from its purported author, such as the *Mencius* 孟子, *Laozi* 老子, *Mozi* 墨子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Xunzi* 荀子, and *Guanzi* 管子. At one point, nearly all of these texts were considered authorial and integral – in other words, authentic. Generally, when we deem a text ‘authentic’, we are claiming that it is the direct product of the person it is attributed to, containing the words as they were written down by its purported author. However, this definition proves too restrictive when applied to texts from the Warring States period. It is widely accepted that most texts from this period were written or compiled by the immediate or later disciples of the persons they are ascribed to, and are better conceived as compilations as opposed to ‘books’. Therefore, an ‘authentic’ text from this period is one that preserves the words and core teachings of its purported author, as opposed to one that is the result of a systematic writing project. An excellent example of such an ‘authentic’ text is the *Mencius*, which most scholars agree is largely free of later interpolations.

However, a great majority of Warring States texts are the end result of an editing process spanning decades or even centuries that added related materials to a ‘core’.

These materials were usually added to serve as commentaries or further elaborations of the core text, and were often added anonymously. Depending on the skill of the compiler and the idiosyncrasies of the core writings, these later additions can be either easy or difficult to detect. This does not mean that we should doubt the veracity of all texts from this period; rather, that we be judicious and approach our work with keener sensibilities.

For instance, the *Zhuangzi* text was conventionally ascribed to one person, Zhuang Zhou. Yet the text, though quite homogenous in thought and subject matter, contains many inconsistencies and even contradictions that were once difficult to reconcile. The Yellow Emperor, for example, appears as a benevolent and wise sage in certain chapters, and as a villain in others, and while some parts of the text advocate preserving one's body and prolonging one's life, others preach the equanimity of life and death. Over the last half century, though, scholars such as Guan Feng and A.C. Graham, making use of advances in early Chinese syntax and literary criticism, have demonstrated that the *Zhuangzi* is not the product of one thinker but rather contains a number of identifiable strains of thought, such as the Yangist, Syncretic, and Primitivist. Because of their work, we can now isolate distinct voices in the text (such as Zhuang Zhou and the Primitivist author), and have discovered lost documents of the Yangist school. Such work is invaluable in uncovering the richness of philosophy that characterizes this period in Chinese history.

Given such advances in our understanding of Warring States texts, it should be apparent that D.C. Lau's approach mentioned at the outset is more prudent than Wang and Chang's. Indeed, when we consider the authenticity of these chapters later on, we will initially take a neutral position and not presume that Han Fei wrote them. Rather, we

will examine the chapters individually and consider them in isolation from the rest of the text. Once this has been done, we will be in a much better position to determine their authenticity.

Finally, it might seem unsavoury to some to contest Han Fei's authorship of these chapters, as it either bucks tradition, repudiates 'authoritative' commentaries, or seems to diminish his stature as an intellectual. However, if we assume by default, as is often still done, the integrity of a text, then this has the unfortunate consequence of destroying its various individual voices through a process of amalgamation. While many scholars and philosophers of the Warring States period composed their works in anonymity, there is no reason now to disguise their identities.

Han Fei and the *Hanfeizi*

Much of the information regarding Han Fei stems from the *Shiji* 史記, China's first comprehensive history, which covers the early history of China from greatest antiquity to around 100 B.C. The *Shiji* was co-authored by the father and son team of Sima Tan 司馬談 and Sima Qian 司馬遷.

According to his biography in the *Shiji*, Han Feizi was a prince of Han 韓, a state located in central China and recognized as autonomous by the Zhou ruler in 403 B.C.¹ Most scholars believe he lived between the years 280 and 233 B.C., situating him at the end of the Warring States 戰國 period (463-222 B.C.), which was, as its name implies, an

¹ Though a prince, his mother was not the queen. The biography states that he was a 諸工子 – meaning the son of a concubine. See Lundahl, p.44.

era of constant struggle and warfare amongst small states to conquer or gain the allegiance of all others and thus rule the world.

The received edition of the *Hanfeizi* contains fifty-five chapters and was compiled into something resembling its present form between the years 26 – 8 B.C., some 200 years after Han Fei's death.² In the *Shiji*, the following chapters are mentioned by name – *Gu Fen* 孤憤, *Wu Du* 五蠹, *Nei Wai Zhu* 內外儲, *Shuo Lin* 說林, and *Shui Nan* 說難 – which comprise a total of eleven of the fifty-five chapters of the received edition.³ Most scholars consider these chapters to be authentic, and to them we may confidently add *Xian Xue* 顯學, *Er Bing* 二柄, *Nan Mian* 南面, *Ba Jian* 八姦, *Bei Nei* 備內, *He Shi* 和氏, *Wen Bian* 問辯, *Gui Shi* 詭使, *Liu Fan* 六反, and the four *Nan* chapters (難一, 難二, 難三, 難四).⁴

The following summary of Han Fei's philosophy is based on a reading of these chapters only, as they are the most reliable source of his teachings.

Han Fei – historical background and political philosophy

Questions of authorship inevitably include doctrinal coherence, and so it is necessary to review Han Fei's philosophy as it appears in the most reliable parts of the

² Lundahl, p.73.

³ In the present work, 內外儲 is divided into two blanket sections: 內儲說 with two chapters, and 外儲說 with four, while 說林 is divided into two. The *Shiji* also mentions that the total work ran over one hundred thousand words, which conforms well to the received edition. See Lundahl, p.92.

⁴ This list represents the consensus opinions of the following scholars – Rong Zhaozu, Liang Qixiong, Chen Qitian, Zheng Liangshu, and Bertil Lundahl. For a chart summarizing the views of the first three scholars for all chapters, see Zheng, p.4-6. There is also a consensus that the following chapters are inauthentic or mostly inauthentic: *Chu Jian Qin* 初見秦, *Chi Ling* 飭令, *Cun Han* 存韓, *Wen Tian* 問田, and *Zhi Fen* 制分. Beyond these, it is difficult to find common ground.

text before considering the coherence between it and the thought of the two chapters of this study.

Historical Background

Han Fei lived during the final decades of the Warring States period, a time of great upheaval and volatility. China was divided into a number of independent states, which, more often than not, settled their differences through wars as opposed to diplomacy. In this hostile international environment, economic growth became ever important, and advances in agriculture and trade allowed for the rise of massive armies comprised of peasant conscripts armed with new technologies (such as the crossbow), which engaged in battle after battle, with a brutality never before witnessed.

Domestically, with the old aristocracy engaged in constant infighting, traditional ties broke down, and the Warring States period saw an increase in social mobility.⁵ Social status and power were no longer determined solely by heredity; indeed, the Warring States period was a time when both dispossessed nobility and upwardly mobile peasants vied to gain favour with the rulers of the various states. Loyalties and even family connections had deteriorated, and personal ambition became a determining factor in how fast one climbed the competitive social and political ladder.

Thus, with the constant threat of attack from the outside, and incessant power struggles within, it should come as no surprise that the bulk of Han Fei's writings contain Machiavellian advice to the ruler on how to build, secure, and maintain control over a powerful state. As a member of the ruling family of Han, he had powerful insights into

⁵ Most of the information on social mobility is taken from Cho-yun Hsu's important work *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722-222 B.C.*

the workings of government and administration, and, as his writings attest, he was also an incisive commentator about the human condition and the human psyche.

Political Philosophy

Han Fei⁰ was constantly preoccupied with the threats posed by various groups of people, be they family members, ministers, or the hated literati; potential enemies were everywhere, ready to profit from or even usurp the power of the ruler. Indeed, his advice to the ruler was to trust absolutely no one, “for he who trusts others will be controlled by others.” and the closer the relationship – ministers, attendants, concubines, wives, family members – the greater the risk.⁶ Along these lines, the ruler never reveals his feelings or motives; otherwise, they might be put to use against him. Han Fei’s political system was meant to make the ruler extremely powerful, which entailed that he be utterly paranoid and lonesome.

With no one to rely on and no one to trust, the ruler must ensure that the state is managed in such a way that all potential threats to his power are minimized. In order to facilitate this, Han Fei based his teachings – indeed, his entire political philosophy – on two undeniable facts: man’s fear of harm on the one hand, and his desires and his fondness for profit on the other, qualities permanently imbedded in man’s nature. Since these cannot be changed, Han Fei believed it was better to guide man’s behaviour through (plenty of) punishments and (not many) rewards; moral rules were considered useless. “The people will bow naturally to authority, but few of them can be moved by righteousness.”⁷ Consequently, “the enlightened ruler controls his ministers by means of

⁶ Watson, 1964, p.85.

⁷ Ibid., p.102.

two handles alone. The two handles are punishment and favor ... To inflict mutilation and death on men is called punishment; to bestow honor and reward is called favor.”⁸

Such a system would limit the ministers’ power and prestige. Moreover, by hiding his true inclinations, the ruler could ensure that his ministers remained on their best behaviour, in a perpetual state of competition to gain favour from him. The workings of the ministers were to be transparent and highly accountable. “The way of the ruler is to make certain that ministers are called to account for the words they speak and are also called to account for the words they fail to speak.”⁹ Their duties, responsibilities and authority were to be clearly delineated, and any transgression of rank, whether motivated by loyalty or self-service, was met with quick and decisive punishment; the ministers were never to shirk in their duties nor go beyond the call of duty. With clear standards and laws, the political order ultimately depended not on the power of the ruler, but on the well-ordered, transparent, and rigorous system of government that he erected. In Han Fei’s system, the ruler is not a moral figure worthy of emulation; he is simply in the key position of power in this large, impersonal, efficient system.

Han Fei derided and denounced the Confucians and Mohists (“fools and imposters” who preached the ways of the former kings)¹⁰ not only because he believed their methods useless, but because they did not work and hence did not earn their keep. “He who manages to get clothing and food without working for them is called an able man, and he who wins esteem without having achieved any merit in battle is called a worthy man. But the deeds of such able and worthy men actually weaken the army and

⁸ Ibid., p.30.

⁹ Ibid., p.92

¹⁰ Ibid., p.119

bring waste to the land... Those who practice benevolence and righteousness should not be praised, for to praise them is to cast aspersion on military achievements; men of literary accomplishment should not be employed in the government, for to employ them is to bring confusion to the law.”¹¹

As for the population, Han Fei believed people were best kept in a state of ignorance, awe, and contentment, and constantly aware that the source of their well-being is the ruler and not their local ministers; consequently, ministers should never be allowed to reward them or gain favour in their eyes at the expense of the ruler. “If the people are content, there will be no opportunity for men to exercise authority on the lower levels and power groups will disappear. Once power groups have been wiped out, then all the right to dispense favors will reside with the sovereign.”¹² Han Fei was well aware that the support of the people was crucial in maintaining power, and he was dogmatic in protecting it. He held the lowly farmer in greater esteem than the scholar, for the farmer grows food and contributes to the land without repayment. “The farmers are the ones who must pay taxes to the officials, and yet the ruler patronizes scholars – thus the farmer’s taxes grow heavier and heavier, while the scholars enjoy increasing reward. If the ruler hopes, in spite of this, that the people will work industriously and spend little time talking, he will be disappointed.”¹³

That Han Fei defends the lowly farmer is easily understood, for he believed that the efforts of the state should be concentrated on the two industries that would ensure a strong state capable of defeating its enemies: agriculture and war. He was acutely aware that as “the number of people increases, goods grow scarce, and men have to struggle and

¹¹ Ibid., p.104-105

¹² Ibid., p.87

¹³ Ibid., p.121

slave for a meagre living. Therefore they fall to quarrelling, and though rewards are doubled and punishments are piled on, they cannot be prevented from growing disorderly.”¹⁴ Han Fei explicitly links disorder with a scarcity of resources leading to competition and strife. He argued that an orderly state is maintained neither through benevolent government nor through fearful punishments, but by having a contented and sedated population. “When the sage rules, he takes into consideration the quantity of things and deliberates on scarcity and plenty. Though his punishments may be light, this is not due to compassion; though his penalties may be severe, this is not because he is cruel; he simply follows the custom appropriate to the time.”¹⁵

Finally, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, Han Fei believed it necessary to build up the strength and power of the state in order to force others to bend to its will, rather than work to establish relations through diplomatic channels and a cooperative spirit. Ever pragmatic, Han Fei was keenly aware that “he who has great power at his disposal may force others to pay him court, but he whose power is weak must pay court to others. For this reason the enlightened ruler works to build up power.”

When we examine the philosophy contained in the *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* chapters, it will become apparent that virtually none of these ideas are present in them.

The *Shiji* biography and the question of authorship

Han Fei’s biography in the *Shiji* is of great importance to the present study on *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao*, as it contains two statements that have been at the core of many discussions about the authenticity of these chapters. Specifically, these statements have

¹⁴ Ibid., p.97

¹⁵ Ibid., p.99

been used to account for the distinctive qualities of these two chapters that are hard to reconcile with the authentic chapters mentioned previously.

The first of these is the statement that Han Fei, together with Li Si, studied under the famous Confucian philosopher Xunzi (與李斯俱事荀卿). This statement, commonly accepted as truth, is often referred to when discussing the distinct strain of Confucian philosophy that runs through the *Jie Lao* chapter. The second is that Han Fei based his theories on Huang-Lao philosophy (其歸本於黃老).

Han Fei's relationship to Xunzi

Most scholars still accept that Han Fei studied under Xunzi while Xunzi was a magistrate in Lanling 蘭陵, which is not too far from Han Fei's and Li Si's birthplaces, between the years 255 and 247 B.C.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that apart from this reference in Han Fei's biography in the *Shiji*, there is no mention of Han Fei studying with Xunzi in either Xunzi's biography or Li Si's. Also, there are no references to Xunzi in any part of the *Hanfeizi*, nor any reference to Han Fei in the *Xunzi*.¹⁷ It seems odd that the close relationship of two such eminent figures would be lost to history if not for a single line of text in Han Fei's biography. By way of comparison, Li Si is mentioned as being a student of Xunzi in the *Xunzi* text and in three biographies, those of Xunzi, Han Fei, and Li Si's own. These and other peculiarities have led at least one

¹⁶ See Lundahl, p.47.

¹⁷ There is one mention of the Sun Family 孫氏 in the Xian Xue 顯學 chapter, where Han Fei mentions that the Confucians of his day were generally divided into six schools, one of which was headed by the Sun family. Some have taken this as a reference to Xunzi, despite the fact that he has a completely different family name – 荀. The Sun family is probably a reference to 公孫尼子, a disciple of a disciple of Confucius. (Lundahl, p.48).

scholar, Kaizuka Shigeki 見塚茂樹, to argue that Han Fei was never a student of Xunzi at all.¹⁸

Even if we accept that Han Fei was indeed a student of Xunzi, this cannot account for the Confucianism that is found in the *Jie Lao* chapter. The chapter seems to have been influenced by Mencius' brand of Confucianism, with an emphasis on the original goodness of human nature and the importance of benevolent rule in securing allies and strengthening the state. The mix of Confucianism and Daoism in this chapter is easily accounted for by the fact that this chapter was probably produced during the first three quarters of the third century, prior to the rift between the two traditions.¹⁹

Han Fei and Huang-Lao

Sima Qian claimed Han Fei based his theories on Huang-Lao Daoism. This seems, on first examination, to be valid, as there are a number of chapters in the received edition that contain tenets of Huang-Lao Daoism, such as *Zhu Dao* 主道, *Yang Quan* 揚權, *Jie Lao* 解老, *Yu Lao* 喻老, and *Da Ti* 大體.

It is important to note, however, that the Huang-Lao strain in the *Hanfeizi* is limited almost entirely to these chapters, with very little influence throughout the rest of the text. Several scholars find this conspicuous. Indeed, even those who do not wish to engage in debates about authorship believe that the isolation of the Huang-Lao strain to

¹⁸ For a summary of Kaizuka's stimulating arguments, see Lundahl, pp.46-49. However, this opinion is currently in the minority, and a number of scholars have put forth theories to explain these oddities in the historical record. Chen Qianjun suggests that since Han Fei's ideas were in conflict with Xunzi's, he could not propagate them; on the other hand, since Xunzi was his master, he did not want to criticize his ideas either. Therefore, there is no mention of Xunzi anywhere in the *Hanfeizi*. Along similar lines, others have claimed that Xunzi's absence indicates his relationship with Han Fei was not harmonious, or that it represents an effort by Han Fei to distance his teacher or destroy his memory through exclusion.

¹⁹ For more on the Mencian strain in the *Jie Lao* chapter, refer to the introductory essay to the translation below. The rift between the two schools occurred after the figure of Lao Dan became associated with the *Laozi* text and put to polemical use in attacking the Confucians. See Roth, 1999, p.198-203.

these few chapters signifies that it was a peripheral element not central to Han Fei's political philosophy. As early as 1923, Liang Qichao 良啓超 declared that they were of secondary importance when it came to studying Han Fei.²⁰ Recently, A.C. Graham noted that "this strand in the thought is nearly confined to a few isolated chapters suggests, even on the debatable assumption that Han Fei is the author, that it is a not wholly assimilated element."²¹ R.P. Peerenboom, in his study of the *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts* (黃老帛書), again notes that these chapters have long since been questioned in terms of authenticity. However, "as it is always difficult to prove what is spurious and what is not",²² he, like Graham, dismisses the importance of these chapters in understanding Han Fei's philosophy: "While acknowledging that these chapters may represent Han Fei's sincere effort to adopt Daoism and Huang-Lao thought as the cosmological basis on which to erect his Legalist political edifice, I contend that Han Fei at best is only partially successful. Han never fills in the rough outline sketched in these few chapters."²³

Nevertheless, several scholars believe that these chapters are well accounted for by the statement in the *Shiji* that Han Fei based his theories on Huang-Lao, and take these chapters as the very core of Han Fei's teachings. Wang and Chang, for example, rely heavily on the *Shiji* account to support their claim that Han Fei penned these dubious chapters, and argue that they represent the philosophical foundation upon which Han Fei erected his political system.²⁴ Zhang Suzhen suggests that *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* should be

²⁰ See Lundahl, p.95-96.

²¹ Graham, p.285.

²² Peerenboom, p.146.

²³ Ibid., p.146.

²⁴ See Wang and Chang, p.87-109. Wang and Chang also cite a few parallel passages from parts of these chapters with others in the *Hanfeizi*. However, the parallels are far from conclusive. Lundahl discusses these parallels and others, and demonstrates their weakness as evidence. See Lundahl, p.223-232, and p.237-241.

viewed as the most concrete proofs of the veracity of the statement in the *Shiji* (“解老，喻老兩篇該是‘其歸本於黃老’最具體的證明。”)²⁵

There are a number of problems with these arguments. First of all, given that several texts from this period are known to contain additional materials and interpolations, we ought to approach all texts with a critical eye instead of assuming integrity by appealing to the received historiography. Secondly, such approaches seem to beg the question. For example, Wang and Chang note that Han Fei's political philosophy must be compatible with Huang-Lao thought because “Han Fei surely would not have based his political theory on a Weltanschauung and its corollary postulates and propositions adverse to his philosophy fa-chih.”²⁶ This argument is clearly circular. Finally, many scholars make the mistake of assuming that all chapters containing Daoist ideas can be accounted for by reference to this statement in the *Shiji*. It is obvious that even if we accept that Han Fei based his theories on Huang-Lao or, more generally, that he appropriated some Daoist insights into his own system, this does not entail that *all* or *any* of the chapters containing Huang-Lao or Daoist concepts are authentic. It is important that each chapter be considered on its own, and compared with those parts of the text that most scholars deem authentic. In subsequent sections, this will be done for *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao*.

²⁵ Zhang Suzhen, p.2.

²⁶ Wang and Chang, p.93.

What is Huang-Lao philosophy?

If this question had been asked thirty years ago, it would be difficult to find any consensus among scholars. This was due to the paucity of extant texts associated with the school; or, rather, due to the overabundance of thinkers associated with the school in the *Shiji*, for they are a diverse group that make awkward bedfellows. Among the thinkers associated with Huang-Lao philosophy in the *Shiji* are Song Xing, Tian Pian, Shen Dao, Shen Buhai, and Han Feizi. As Benjamin Schwartz has noted, the use of the term ‘Huang-Lao’ to denote such disparate thinkers may tell us far more about Sima Tan and Sima Qian than any of the personages under this category.²⁷ Both were believed to be adherents to Huang-Lao Daoism, and Sima Tan is said to have studied under a Huang-Lao master, and so “one cannot lightly dismiss his various applications of the term to figures of the Warring States period.”²⁸ Most of these figures have some relationship to the Jixia Academy 稷下 in the state of Qi 齊, which is now regarded as the likely origin of Huang-Lao thought. The Jixia Academy was a gathering place for scholars to debate their ideas and develop theories on governing. These scholars were given stipends, attendants, and other amenities, and were largely free of interference or demands from their benefactors, the rulers of Qi. The Jixia Academy seems to have sparked the development of syncretic thought that would later characterize the intellectual climate of the Han dynasty.

Yet the term ‘Huang-Lao’ was first used during the Han dynasty, and is a retrospective term when applied to texts and philosophers of the Warring States period;

²⁷ See Schwartz, p.237.

²⁸ Schwartz, p.238. See also Roth, *Original Tao*, p.177.

there was no self-conscious Huang-Lao school or lineage before the Han dynasty, though we may recognize the tenets of the Huang-Lao school in some pre-Han texts. During the Han, Huang-Lao referred to a syncretic philosophy that gained currency after the fall of the Qin and became the dominant ideology of the Han court until Confucianism supplanted it in 140 B.C. The *Shiji* characterizes Han Huang-Lao thought as culling the best ideas from all of the competing philosophical schools to create a superior system.²⁹

Prior to 1973, Huang-Lao was believed to refer to a fusion of Legalism and Daoism. Guo Moruo 郭沫若 once speculated that it was a fusion of these two and Mohism.³⁰ However, with the discovery of the *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts* at Mawangdui in 1973, we finally have some texts of this once influential school. The *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts (HLBS)* show influences from many other schools, and in its pages we can find elements of Daoism, Legalism, and Confucian, as well as influences from the School of Names 名家 and Yin-Yang theory.

The main overriding characteristic of Huang-Lao thought in the *HLBS*, however, is the normative priority of nature. Peerenboom describes this as “foundational naturalism.”

First as a *naturalism*, humans are conceived of as part of the cosmic natural order understood as an organic or holistic system or ecosystem. In the language of Huang-Lao, *dao* as the cosmic natural order embraces both the way of humans (*ren dao* 人道) as well as that of nonhuman nature (*tian dao* 天道). Second, Huang-Lao privileges the cosmic natural order: the natural order has normative priority. It is taken to be the highest value or realm of highest value. Third, and correlate to the second, the human social order must be consistent and compatible with the cosmic natural order rather than nature and the natural order being subservient to the whims and needs of humans.³¹

²⁹ Such characterizations are found in the *Shiji*. For a discussion and translation of key passages in the *Shiji*, see Roth, “Psychology” p.604-608.

³⁰ See Rickett, p.21.

³¹ Peerenboom, p.27.

Out of this foundational naturalism arises a theory of natural law, that laws are not the whimsical edicts of a despotic ruler but are objective and to be found in a predetermined natural order. It is the task of the ruler to discover and emulate this order in every aspect of his administration. Hence, the laws of the state were to be gleaned from, and in accordance with, the Way or *Dao*. While the author of the *Boshu* engaged in some metaphysical speculation, “when all is said and done his primary philosophical concerns remain social and political – one of the most important being the role, nature and normative basis of law as a means for effecting socio-political order.”³² The manuscripts also provide much detailed and practical advice on politics and warfare.³³

These documents provide a full and rich account of Huang-Lao philosophy. However, the term ‘Huang-Lao’ is still used in a rather reckless fashion by many scholars to refer to any early syncretic philosophy that incorporates Daoist and Legalist terminology, including the *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* commentaries. This is highly misleading. Peerenboom laments that the *HLBS* seems to have caused more confusion than clarification:

... the enormous potential of the discovery of the *Huang-Lao Boshu* to assist in clarification of the relationship between the various pre-Han and Han philosophical schools is being compromised by the willingness on the part of contemporary scholars to appeal to it without first clearly delineating its conceptual content. In the absence of a clear statement as to the unique philosophical import of the *Boshu* in particular and Huang-Lao thought in general, all late Warring States and early Han literature that has any Daoist-Legalist content is being relegated to the Huang-Lao school.³⁴

I wholly agree that the term ‘Huang-Lao’ should be reserved for the court ideology of the early Han as exemplified in the *HLBS* and the highly mystical religious movement that

³² Peerenboom, p.19.

³³ For a detailed analysis of the thought of the *HLBS*, see Peerenboom, especially p.27-73. Robin Yates has translated the *HLBS*. See Yates.

³⁴ Peerenboom, p.3.

developed some time later, and that it should be used with extreme caution when referring to thinkers and texts of the Warring States period. In order to help organize and structure scholarship in this area, new names have been advanced, such as “Daoist Legalism” or “Neo-Laoziism”, to designate the syncretic philosophy associated with the Jixia Academy.³⁵ Others, such as Kanaya Osamu and Hu Jiacong 胡家聰, have begun to classify the various thinkers associated with the Jixia Academy and the Huang-Lao tradition.³⁶ Such work is extremely important. In subsequent sections we will attempt to clarify what, if any, relationship the *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* chapters have to the philosophy of the *HLBS*.

³⁵ See Rickett, p.21.

³⁶ Peerenboom provides a description of their work on pages 235-236 and in corresponding footnotes.

SECTION II – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *JIE LAO* AND *YU LAO*

Jie Lao and *Yu Lao* are the 20th and 21st chapters, respectively, of the *Hanfeizi*. Traditionally, these two chapters have been treated as a unit. Both chapters contain the word ‘Lao’ in the title – *Jie Lao* simply means ‘Explaining *Laozi*’ and *Yu Lao* means ‘Illustrating *Laozi*’. Moreover, quotations from the *Laozi* are found in both chapters, and in both chapters these quotations are given glosses. For these reasons, the chapters have usually been treated as a unit, or grouped together with other ‘Daoist’ or ‘Huang-Lao’ chapters, such as *Yang Quan*, *Zhu Dao*, and *Da Ti*. However, there are several reasons why this may be inappropriate. The chapters differ considerably, both in content and style, which suggests that *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* are best treated as distinct units.

Differences between the chapters

The differences between the chapters are both apparent and significant. Reading the two chapters consecutively, as they appear in the text, only serves to highlight this fact. Other than the general similarities mentioned above, there seem to be no other obvious ways that the chapters can be linked together, either stylistically or philosophically; alternatively, there are several ways that they may be contrasted. We will spend some time reviewing these differences, as they are often neglected in discussions about these chapters.

1. Number of lines commented on from each chapter of the *Laozi*¹

In the *Yu Lao* commentary, passages from 12 chapters of the *Laozi* text are given some commentary. However, for most of the chapters, only a few lines are commented on and, in some cases, such as chapter 52, only a single line appears in the commentary. Indeed, of the 12 *Laozi* chapters considered, only three – chapters 36, 46, and 47 – are given substantial commentary.

Conversely, *Jie Lao* gives a thorough, line-by-line explanation to most chapters.² Moreover, the writer often explains parts of sentences, or even single terms, before giving an account for the sentence or passage as a whole. This sort of careful exegesis leads its writer to repeat certain phrases during his explanations. This sort of repetition or duplication occurs in the commentaries to 7 of the 11 chapters. Perhaps, the best example of this type of commentary is the one on chapter 59.³

<i>Laozi</i> text (in received edition)	Method of commentary (in order)
治人事天，莫如嗇。	治人。事天。治人事天莫若嗇。
夫唯嗇，是以早服，早服謂之重積德。	夫唯嗇，是以蚤服。重積德。蚤服是謂重積德。
重積德則無不剋，無不剋則莫知其極。	無不克。重積德則無不克。無不克則莫知其極。
莫知其極，可以有國：有國之母，可以長久。	莫知其極。莫知其極則可以有國。有國之母。有國之母，可以長久。
是謂深根，固蒂，長生，久視之道。	柢。深其根。固其根。深其根，固其柢，長生久視之道也。

The author is going to great lengths here to ensure that specific terms are understood, such as 治人, 重積德, and 有國之母, before he elucidates the meaning of the line or

¹ Zheng Liangshu provides a detailed account of this. See Zheng, p.215-220.

² The commentaries to chapters 1 and 14 being the exceptions to this general rule. However, it is interesting to note that these two are the only chapters from the *Dao* section of the *Laozi* that are commented on, and this may indicate they are an interpolation. For a discussion, see the *Jie Lao* section, below.

³ Zheng Liangshu provides such charts for all chapters in which this sort of duplication occurs. See Zheng, p.221.

passage as a whole. This careful exegesis suggests a different hermeneutic, and may provide clues to its writer's identity, as discussed in the *Jie Lao* section below.

2. *Introducing quotations from the Laozi*

Another important consideration is the different ways the chapters source the Laozi text. In *Yu Lao*, the quotations are, without exception, introduced with the stock “hence it is said” 故曰. In *Jie Lao*, the writer uses a number of different sayings to introduce quotations. Apart from the standard “hence it is said”, there are many other variations, such as 是以曰, 所謂...者, 故謂之..., etc. The different ways that *Yu Lao* and *Jie Lao* introduce the *Laozi* text is telling in itself. However, the most significant among these is the use in *Jie Lao* of 書之所謂 – “That which the text calls...” Obviously, the writer of the *Jie Lao* commentary saw before him an integral text and thus designates it as a ‘book’ 書.⁴ In *Yu Lao*, the text the writer is quoting is never called a 書 ‘book’, and the piecemeal fashion of the commentary suggests that the writer was working with what he believed to be a collection of aphorisms as opposed to an integral text.

3. *Exegetical mode*

The difference in exegetical mode is readily discerned from the titles of the chapters. *Jie Lao* – Explaining *Laozi* – uses reasoning and careful analysis to bring out the deep meanings of each passage, and there are usually several lines of exegesis per line of *Laozi* text. In addition, only once is a story used to illustrate a passage.⁵ *Yu Lao* – Illustrating *Laozi* – uses stories to show how the lines from the *Laozi* can be illustrated

⁴ The detailed and rigorous analysis he provides also support this idea.

⁵ The story about Mr. Chan's ‘perception’ of the ox's horns in the commentary on chapter 38 of the *Laozi*.

with historical episodes. In total, the writer cites approximately 30 different historical episodes (most of them quite old and well-known) to illustrate passages from 12 chapters of the *Laozi*. There are but a few instances where the writer uses some other form of exegesis, such as prose explanation. Moreover, in the case of *Jie Lao*, the writer was undoubtedly a scholar or academician engaged in the larger intellectual debates of the time, as the text is full of much of the philosophical terminology of this period, such as 德, 仁, 義, 禮, 精, 虛, and 無爲. The writer of *Yu Lao*, on the other hand, seems to have been a minister or prince of a small state wholly interested in political affairs and, as such, uses historical episodes to show how the lessons of the *Laozi* can be applied to the political realm.⁶

4. The term used to signify 'country' - 國 and 邦⁷

In general, *Yu Lao* uses the term 邦 to denote country, while *Jie Lao* uses 國.

Word Used to Denote 'Country' or 'State'

Chapter	Occurrence of 國	Occurrence of 邦
<i>Jie Lao</i>	21	5 (all used in quotes or direct glosses)
<i>Yu Lao</i>	1	13

Note: In the rest of the *Hanfeizi* (i.e. the remaining 53 chapters of the text), the term 邦 only occurs once. 國 is the standard method of denoting 'country'.

The disparity here suggests that the chapters were penned by different people, for why would the same person use two different terms to denote the same idea. Moreover, the use of 邦 to denote 'country' may point to an earlier date for *Yu Lao*, as is noted below in the analysis of that chapter. While it is possible that the use of 邦 in the *Yu Lao*

⁶ The authorship of these chapters are taken up individually in their respective sections below.

⁷ Zheng seems to have been the first to notice the significance of this, though he never explicitly uses this in support of separate authorship of the chapters. See Zheng, p.228-235.

chapter is the result of a later copyist substituting it for 國, this seems unlikely; if 國 is used throughout the rest of the text, why change it to 邦 in one chapter only?

5. *Commentaries on the Same Passages*

Both *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* provide commentaries on chapters 46 and 54 of the *Laozi*. Zheng, in his analysis, uses this as evidence that the chapters were written by different people, noting that if the same person had penned both chapters, it seems unlikely that he would duplicate his commentaries.⁸ However, if we inspect the commentaries in each chapter more closely, it is clear that the interpretations differ sharply as well.⁹

We shall start with chapter 54. In the *Yu Lao* commentary, the writer glosses the terms 不拔 and 不脫 found in that chapter by citing the story of Sun Shuao.¹⁰ Sun Shuao was able to keep his barren, useless piece of land from the King of Chu for the simple reason that it was so craggy and unattractive that the King did not ask for it back. It is clear from the passage that the writer understands 不拔 to mean ‘not uprooted from your territory’, while he takes the term 不脫 to mean ‘not having your territory slip away from you’.

In contrast, *Jie Lao*’s writer interprets the phrases 不拔 and 不脫 entirely differently. In this chapter, the author explicitly states that 不拔 refers to the sage who is ‘not lured by’ external objects. Along the same lines, he takes 不脫 to refer to the sage

⁸ Zheng, p.223.

⁹ It is puzzling that Zheng and Lundahl, who both wrote studies of authorship, and who both agree that *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* were penned by different people, both fail to mention these differences in interpretation.

¹⁰ Which dates back to the first years of the 6th century B.C.

whose ‘spirit does not waver when he sees desirable objects’, hence he does not ‘fall off’. The interpretations are entirely different. If the same person (namely, Han Fei) had written both chapters, we are left to wonder why he would read the same line so differently.

Furthermore, in the commentaries on chapter 46 of the *Laozi*, there is a difference in the meaning of the term 足. In *Jie Lao*, it is clear from the context that it is synonymous with ‘sufficiency’, as the sage seeks to acquire the minimum necessary for survival; by not wanting more, the sage is free of worry. However, the focus in *Yu Lao* is on knowing ‘contentment’ or ‘what is enough’, and it clearly does not translate to the bare minimum for survival. In the relevant passage, a high-ranking Earl is led to ruin because of his greed. The Earl could have avoided his ruin by being content with what he already had. In *Jie Lao*, it is clear that having rank or wealth is the very source of anxiety, and the sage therefore ought to strive for the bare minimum and thus have no worries at all. In addition, according to at least two modern interpreters, the statement 戎馬生於郊 in the *Jie Lao* commentary of this chapter should be interpreted as “war-horses must be brought forth from the stalls of the high ministers”, in accordance with the way the writer glosses various terms in this passage.¹¹ In the *Yu Lao* chapter, the same sentence is translated as “war horses are bred in the suburbs.”

6. *Discrepancies in the Laozi quotations*

Finally, in the commentaries to both these chapters, lines from the *Laozi* text appear in different forms. In the case of chapter 54, *Yu Lao* ends one line from the *Laozi*

¹¹ This reading has been suggested by Tsuda Hokei and Zhuang Jue. For an examination of their interpretation, as well as another, refer to the translation of Commentary on *Laozi* 46 in the *Jie Lao* section below.

with 不絕, while *Jie Lao* ends the same line with 不輟. While there is no real difference in meaning, we are left to wonder why two different characters are used. There is a similar discrepancy in a line from chapter 46: in *Yu Lao*, the line reads 咎莫憯於欲得, while *Jie Lao* reads: 咎莫憯於欲利. Again, given the context, the difference between 欲 ‘desire’ and 利 ‘benefit’ is minimal, but the textual discrepancy is telling. The simplest and best explanation for these textual discrepancies is that the chapters are commenting on two different versions of the *Laozi*.

Given the other differences between the chapters discussed above, we are left to conclude that *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* were written by two writers, and that these writers were quoting different versions of the *Laozi* text. When we analyze each of the chapters in turn, it will become apparent that the commentaries also diverge considerably in their philosophical content, further strengthening this conclusion.

SECTION III — POINTS OF INTEREST

The impact of the Guodian and Mawangdui findings

The remarkable archaeological finds over the last thirty years have revolutionized the way we look at Warring States intellectual history in general, and the development and breadth of Daoist philosophy in particular. Here we will view the impact of the Guodian and Mawangdui findings on the way we read and understand these chapters of the *Hanfeizi*.

1. Selections from Han Fei?

These chapters have always been understood as Han Fei's commentaries on passages that he selected from a complete 81-chapter *Laozi* text, passages which he found either the most important, most interesting, or most necessary for explication. This has always seemed the most plausible explanation. Nevertheless, some scholars have wondered why the passages that are commented on were chosen over others, as they seem unrelated to one another or to Han Fei's philosophy.¹

However, the discovery of an incomplete version of the *Laozi*, unearthed at Guodian in Hubei province in 1993, raises new possibilities. Found among a cache of early texts, this copy of the *Laozi* is by far the oldest ever found, dated to at least 300 B.C., if not earlier. It likely belonged to a Confucian scholar. This version of the *Laozi* contains only 31 chapters of the received edition, and, of these, only 16 are complete.

¹ See, for example, Lundahl, p.240.

Moreover, the entire text is organized into three bundles, which also differs from all other versions.

The Guodian findings raise the possibility that the *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* chapters of the *Hanfeizi* are complete commentaries on partial texts as opposed to selective commentaries on complete texts. We must now examine the possibility that these chapters were commentaries on different ‘proto-*Laozi*’s’, and that the writers were, in fact, commenting and citing the entire text in its ‘original’ order.

2. *Is there an order to the Laozi quotations in these chapters?*

In recent years, some scholars have also advanced theories regarding the ordering of the *Laozi* passages in these commentaries. While the *Yu Lao* chapter has been largely free of speculation, the *Jie Lao* chapter has received much attention, especially after the 1973 discovery of the *Dedaojing* 德道經 at Mawangdui. In both of the silk *Laozi* texts discovered at Mawangdui, the two sections of the text are in this order – i.e. the *De Jing* appearing before the *Dao Jing*. Some scholars believe that the *Jie Lao* comments on the *Laozi* in this order – namely, on the *De* section first and the *Dao* section last. Wang and Chang, for instance, believe this to be true, and suggest that “under *te*, Han Fei immediately deals with concrete human affairs and then proceeds to the more theoretical and abstract treatise on Tao. The sequence clearly establishes the priority in Han Fei’s appreciation of ‘purposive’ Taoism.”² Cui Renyi 崔仁義 also suggests that Han Fei cites from the *Laozi* according to the *De* and *Dao* ordering.³

² Wang and Chang, p.91-92.

³ Henricks, 2000, p.19.

However, this is simply not the case. It is true that the *Jie Lao* commentary begins with chapter 38 of the *Laozi*, the first chapter of the *De* section. However, the commentary then proceeds in the following order: 58, 59, 60, 46, 14, 1, 50, 67, 53, and 54. While most of the commentary is on chapters from the *De* section, there is no clear order of *De* before *Dao*. The commentary moves back and forth – *De*, *Dao*, and then *De* again – apparently at random.⁴

3. *The positive treatment of Confucianism in the Guodian Laozi and Jie Lao*

Both *Jie Lao* and the Guodian *Laozi* are remarkable for their attitude towards Confucianism. For example, the *Jie Lao* chapter contains a commentary on chapter 38 of the *Laozi*, which many have understood as a criticism of Confucianism;⁵ the writer of the *Jie Lao* chapter does not interpret chapter 38 in the same way. In the *Jie Lao* commentary, the writer positively treats the Confucian moral terms 仁, 義, and 禮. Indeed, the *Jie Lao* chapter as a whole seems to have been deeply influenced by the philosophy of the *Mencius*.⁶ As for the Guodian *Laozi*, it is notable for its *lack* of criticism of Confucian moral terms, the most prominent example being the new reading of chapter 19. The opening lines of Chapter 19 of the received edition read:

⁴ Henricks agrees with this conclusion. See Henricks, 2000, p.203 n.76. However, he also believes that “the order [Han Fei] follows should not be taken as indicating the order of chapters in the version of the *Laozi* he was using.” I take issue with this conclusion, and suggest that the order may, in fact, be indicative of the *Laozi* the writer was using, since we simply cannot be sure which edition of the text was used; if we imagine something like the Guodian *Laozi*, it remains a distinct possibility.

⁵ Richard Lynn, in his translation and study of Wang Bi’s commentary, characterizes Wang’s reading of this passage as a knock on “Confucians, whose cardinal virtue is benevolence, in such a way that he seems to damn them with faint praise – as if the greats of Confucians, the person of superior benevolence, could only be the least of Daoists.” See Lynn, p.126. Allyn Rickett also takes this chapter of the *Laozi* as a criticism of Confucianism (Rickett, p.21, n.19). It should be noted, however, that the text as quoted in the *Jie Lao* chapter is different here. See the commentary on chapter 38 in the ‘*Jie Lao*’ section below.

⁶ See the ‘*Jie Lao*’ section below for more on the philosophy of the *Jie Lao* chapter.

絕聲棄智，民利百倍
Repudiate sagehood and discard wisdom, and the people would benefit a hundredfold.
絕仁棄義，民復孝慈
Repudiate co-humanity and discard righteousness, and the people would again be obedient and kind.

However, the Guodian text reads differently:

絕智棄辨，民利百倍
Repudiate wisdom, discard distinctions, and the people would benefit a hundredfold.
絕巧棄利，盜賊無有
Repudiate skill, discard profit, and there will be no more robbers and thieves.

Here, the moral terms ‘sagehood’, ‘co-humanity’, and ‘righteousness’ are missing.

These moral qualities of ‘sagehood’, ‘co-humanity’, and ‘righteousness’ were highly valued by the Confucian school, and so chapter 19 of the received edition has traditionally been read as a slight against Confucians. However, the Guodian version, with the terms ‘wisdom’, ‘distinctions’ and ‘profit’ in place of these Confucian moral virtues, seems far less anti-Confucian. Some scholars, such as Robert Henricks, tend to believe that the Guodian wording is probably the original wording, and I would agree.⁷ Hence, both of these texts – the Guodian *Laozi* and the *Jie Lao* chapter – may stem from a period before there was a rift between Daoism and Confucianism, which probably occurred after the figure of Lao Dan, purported teacher of Confucius, became associated with the *Laozi* text.⁸

Where’s the *Dao*?

There is one feature of both *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao* that warrants mention – the severe lack of discussion about the cosmological and metaphysical aspects of the *Dao* 道.

⁷ Henricks, 2000, p.14.

⁸ This probably occurred in the middle of the third century. For a fascinating discussion of the early history of Daoism and the legend of Lao Dan, see Roth, *Original Dao*, p.173-203.

This is especially true of *Yu Lao*, which contains no references of this type. Of the nine instances of the character 道 in this chapter, four refer to a road, path, or highway.

Another three appear in *Laozi* quotations, with the first two being the somewhat ambiguous 天下有 / 無道 lines from *Laozi* 46, and the last being a reference to 天道 – ‘the Way of Heaven’ or ‘the path that Heaven takes’. There is one instance of 道 meaning ‘virtue’ or ‘moral sense of purpose’ at the end of the *Yu Lao* chapter, and one instance of the compound 道理, which appears in a line that reads 道理之數, which may refer to the ‘principles (or laws) of nature’. None of these uses of 道 refer to the metaphysical or cosmological aspects of Dao that are found in many chapters of the *Laozi*.

The *Jie Lao* chapter, over twice as long as *Yu Lao*, contains far more instances of 道 (about 55). Out of these, a dozen appear in quotations from the *Laozi*, and another half dozen appear in one section in the middle of the chapter that is most probably an interpolation.⁹ This leaves us with 37 instances of 道 that can be attributed to the writer himself. There are four admonitions to embody the Way 體道, and one to embody the Way of Heaven and Earth 體天地之道. The most prominent use of 道 in this chapter, though, is in the compound form 道理, which occurs nine times. This compound refers to the ‘principles of the Way,’ the reoccurring, predictable patterns of the natural and human world which the ruler examines and mimics in order to protect his person, achieve success, and establish benevolent rule. As such, it is best understood as ‘law of nature’, and, in this regard, it closely resembles the role of 道 in the HLBS.

⁹ See ‘Commentary on Dao – an interpolation?’ in the *Jie Lao* section. Indeed, this is the only section which elaborates on the metaphysical and cosmological aspects of the Dao. But since it is most probably an interpolation, it is not included in the discussion here.

Where's Lao Dan?

The figure of Lao Dan is first connected with the *Laozi* text in the syncretic Daoist essay *Bu Er* 不二 in the *Spring and Autumn of Mr. Lu* 吕氏春秋, dated to about 239 B.C.¹⁰ Soon thereafter, he becomes the chief spokesman for the *Laozi* text, ubiquitous in the narratives of the *Zhuangzi* and in Han dynasty texts such as the *Huainanzi*. Prior to 239 B.C., Lao Dan is not associated with the text, and his absence from these commentaries may point to an earlier date for them. This conclusion is, however, tentative.

¹⁰ See Roth, 1999, p.198-199

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SECTION IV — *YU LAO (ILLUSTRATING LAOZI)*

The *Yu Lao* chapter comes after the *Jie Lao* chapter in the *Hanfeizi* text; however, there are a number of reasons why it ought to be considered first. First of all, it is much shorter than *Jie Lao*, containing far less commentary and far fewer quotations from the *Laozi* text. Secondly, as it uses historical episodes to gloss these quotations, this chapter is, on the whole, less susceptible to divergent readings. Moreover, unlike *Jie Lao*, this chapter is quite homogenous in style, and seems to be free of any interpolations. Finally, its political philosophy is less sophisticated and elaborate, containing but a few overarching themes, which will be considered below.

Dating

There are numerous historical episodes and references in this chapter, which, when mapped out over the history of early China, span a few centuries. Some of these are very old (such as the story of the ivory chopsticks of the King of Zhou), while others are comparatively late. The latest of these is the story of the Ruling Father (King Wuling of Zhao) ‘making light of himself in front of the whole world’, which dates to within a few years of 300 B.C. Thus, we can be sure that the text was written no earlier than the 3rd century.

This chapter is also replete with accounts of states warring with one another, and there is no indication that the empire had been unified. Indeed, the chapter is aimed at instructing a small state on how to survive and avoid being conquered by another. Hence,

we can also be sure that it was composed no later than the Qin unification in 221 B.C., and probably some time earlier than that.

It is clear, then, that the chapter is a product of the first three quarters of the third century. A close examination of the text yields further clues that allow for a more accurate dating. As discussed earlier, the *Yu Lao* chapter is distinguished by its use of the term 邦 to denote ‘country’. Apart from pointing to separate authorship of *Jie Lao* and *Yu Lao*, the use of the term 邦 can also help us situate this chapter relative to other works of the Warring States period. Zheng Liangshu, through tracing the use of 國 and 邦 in pre-Qin texts, believes that the usage of 邦 indicates a mid to late Warring States dating. His findings are summarized in the chart below.

Text (earliest to latest)	Occurrence of 邦	Occurrence of 國
周易	7	-
(尚書) 虞夏書	5	-
(尚書) 商書	8	-
(尚書) 周書	46	18
毛詩	45	73
論語	47	10
孟子	2 (when citing an old text)	122
荀子	1 (when citing an old text)	246

The term 邦 is also rare in the *Guanzi* and *Lushi Chunqiu*, texts that were written or compiled (at least in part) during Han Fei’s lifetime.¹

It is clear, then, by the time of the *Mencius* and the *Xunzi*, the term 邦 had become exceedingly rare. Hence, Zheng concludes that the *Yu Lao* chapter must have been composed no later than these texts.

Zheng’s conclusions regarding the use of the term 邦 to denote ‘country’ as a tool for dating texts are not without problems. After all, we cannot be certain that the lack of

¹ Lundahl, p.236

the term in texts after Mencius and Xunzi is not the result of a later copyist's substitution of 國 for 邦. Nor does the use of 邦 necessarily preclude a later dating; it may be an intentional stylistic element to give the text a certain flavour, or it may reflect the linguistic characteristics of a certain region in China at the time. Nevertheless, Zheng's findings conform well with all the other evidence that point to an early 3rd century dating.

Authorship

This chapter is neither attributed to Han Fei nor anyone else in the early histories and bibliographies. It is part of the *Hanfeizi* text and, as noted at the outset, it is no longer acceptable to attribute the contents of a work to the person it is named after without strong corroborating evidence for doing so. Hence, it is necessary to investigate this chapter and see if it yields any clues as to whose hand it is the product.

It seems as though the writer was not a travelling scholar 士 going from state to state advancing theories on the methods of proper ruling, as there is little of the common pool of terminology used in philosophical texts of this time.² Moreover, the writer is not concerned with ideals or paradigms but with the immediate reality of his time.

The attention to historical episodes and lessons and the emphasis on contentment and survival indicate that this chapter was probably written by a minister of some small state. Indeed, the sheer number of stories cited in the text – about thirty distinct stories or citations to illustrate only select passages from twelve chapters of the *Laozi* – seems to indicate an effort to demonstrate that the lessons of these short aphoristic sayings are

² Most of the texts from this period were composed by members of the scholar 士 class.

particularly germane to the political realm. Moreover, whereas the kings and dukes of the various stories are at times praised and at times criticized, the ministers are always singled out for praise as the wise and prudent figures whose advice is ignored by their kings and dukes to their own detriment. This also supports the claim that the author was a minister.

Given the dating of this chapter, Han Fei could be its writer. Yet this is highly improbable. There are none of the core ideas from the authentic chapters. While there is a sense of 'paranoia' in this chapter, the target of the paranoia is other states and not those who have access to the ruler, as we find in the authentic chapters. Moreover, some passages in this chapter are extremely difficult to reconcile with the philosophy of the authentic chapters of the *Hanfeizi*. For example, in a story about Zi Xia 子夏 and Zengzi 曾子, two of Confucius' pupils, Zi Xia exclaims that the reason why he had grown plump was because he was filled with the righteousness of the former kings (先王之義). One of the reasons why Han Fei detested and denounced the Confucians was because he believed the methods of governing a state should change to suit the times; hence, he thought that looking to the former kings for a model to emulate was fundamentally flawed. Finally, the evidence points to an early third century dating as opposed to a later one, making it even less likely that Han Fei (280-233 B.C.) could have composed it.

Political Philosophy

... what is the book about? Mystical philosophy? Derridan deconstructionism? The art of government? Even the art of war, as was widely held in China at the time of the Cultural Revolution? Or the little man's strategy of survival...³

The subject of the above quotation, as is probably obvious, is the *Laozi*, for the *Laozi* is many things to many people. Yet it is apparent that, to the writer of this chapter, the *Laozi* is foremost the latter. Survival is the overriding theme of this chapter, and it supports the belief of many that the immediate audience to which the *Laozi* is addressed is “the ruler of a state – a small state, one might guess, which has to bend with the wind to survive among stronger states.”⁴ Nearly all of the historical episodes cited have to do with a small state falling victim to a larger one, either through the larger state’s aggression or through the smaller state’s error of judgment. The very method of exegesis – through illustrative historical examples – emphasizes that this commentary was intended to be wholly pragmatic. The lessons of the text are to be valued not because they are the utterances or observations of some wise reclusive sage,⁵ but because they arose out of (and hence can be evidenced in) history.

It is interesting to note that the dominant emotion of this text, as with the received *Laozi* text, is fear.⁶ This fear is a tool that enables the observant ruler to detect and quell possible disasters if acted upon in its early stages. In the bloody instability of the Warring States, there were those who had no interest in conquering the world (霸天下); for some of the smaller states, survival was the only goal worth pursuing. The emphasis

³ Graham, p.234.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The traditional image of Lao Dan or Laozi, purported author of the text.

⁶ Among those who believe that ‘fear’ is the dominant emotion of the text are A.C. Graham and D.C. Lau. See Graham, 1989, p.218.

on survival is unmistakable in the way the writer interprets the messages in the “plan for the difficult while it is yet easy; act on the great while it is yet minute” lines from *Laozi* 63 and “while tranquil it is easy to manage; while yet to manifest it is easy to devise for” lines from *Laozi* 64, which he treats as a unit. In glossing these passages, the writer cites, without exception, stories of disasters that could have been avoided – as opposed to missed opportunities that could have been seized. He warns of large dikes crumbling from the bored holes of tiny termites, large buildings burned to the ground by wayward sparks, and lives lost to diseases caused by slight infections left untreated.

Concurrent with the emphasis on survival is the admonition to neither be ambitious nor become an object of desire to others. The story of Sun Shuao, discussed earlier, is an excellent example of this. Sun Shuao’s fief was not confiscated by the king of Chu because it was “a sandy and craggy region.” Why would the writer consider this worth mentioning? Because appearing unattractive to others is a method for survival. The writer tells us that panthers and foxes are skinned because their pelts are beautiful, whereas Sun Shuao kept his land because it was ugly.

In one of the few instances where a passage is glossed by reasoning, the writer puts the whole issue in a very matter-of-fact way: “A state by surviving lasts long; whether by hegemon or king this can be done. An individual by living lasts long; whether by wealth or nobility this can be done.” This entire focus on survival is in stark contrast to the authentic chapters, in which Han Fei stresses that a state must build up its agricultural and military strength in order to compete with and conquer the others. The writer of *Yu Lao*, it seems, would prefer to remain in the shadows in the hopes of being overlooked.

Finally, the writer calls for mutual aide among the smaller states, which is exemplified in the advice of the minister Gong Zhiji to the ruler of Yu, who was pondering granting passage to the state of Jin to attack Yu's neighbour, the state of Guo. Gong, the wise minister, admonishes his ruler, saying, "Don't allow it! When the lips are gone the teeth grow cold. Yu and Guo ought to come to each other's aid, and not just to favour each other. For if Jin destroys Guo today, tomorrow we will be certain to follow it into ruin." Naturally, as is the case with all stories of this type, the ruler does not listen to the advice and meets his untimely end. Again, if Han Fei advised the ruler not to trust his own flesh and blood, his closest friends and advisors, why would he call for camaraderie between bordering states?

Before concluding, we should also mention one instance where the writer extols us to follow the natural patterns of things, and rely on the resources of Heaven and Earth instead of man, and we encounter the compound term 道理 – the principles of the Way. This normative priority to the natural order is also found in the *Jie Lao* chapter, and the *HLBS*, among other texts. However, it should be noted that this is found in only one passage of *Yu Lao*, suggesting it wasn't an important or significant part of the writer's message.

Illustrating Laozi 46¹

天下有道無急患則曰靜，遽傳不用，故曰：『卻走馬以糞。』天下無道，攻擊不休，相守數年不已，甲冑生蟣蝨，鷲雀處帷幄，而兵不歸，故曰：『戎馬生於郊。』

‘When the Way prevails in the world’,² there is neither haste nor trouble, so it can be said to be ‘tranquil’, and fleet-footed couriers will no longer be used. Hence it is said: “Coursers are used for fertilization.”

‘When the Way is absent from the world’,³ attacks and assaults will be incessant, and the people will shield themselves from one another for years at a time, with no end in sight. And so, though their armour and helmets be full of lice, and their tents be nested by swallows and sparrows, the troops cannot return home. Hence it is said: “War horses are bred in the suburbs.”

翟人有獻豐狐、玄豹之皮於晉文公，文公受客皮而歎曰：『此以皮之美自爲罪。』夫治國者以名號爲罪，徐偃王是也。以城與地爲罪，虞、虢是也。故曰：『罪莫大於可欲。』

A man of Di presented Duke Wen of Jin some rich⁴ fox and panther skins. After accepting the visitor’s gifts Duke Wen said with a sigh, “This crime occurred because of the beauty of the pelts.” As for administrators of states who fell victim to crimes due to fame and repute, King Yan of Xu was just so.⁵ And as for those who fell victim to

¹ This chapter is also commented on in Jie Lao, but the interpretations differ.

² The four characters 天下有道 appear before 卻走馬以糞 as the opening line of the chapter, but they are not introduced by 故曰, so I use single quotes to indicate this.

³ Again, the four characters 天下無道 are at the beginning of line two, before 戎馬生於郊, but they too are not introduced by 故曰.

⁴ Here, 豐 could also mean 大.

⁵ The story has it that King Yan was benevolent and righteous, and so several feudal states obeyed him. King Mu of Zhou (1001-946 B.C.) was not pleased by this, and so ordered Chu to punish him, and he was subsequently defeated.

crimes due to their cities and territory, Yu and Guo were just so. Hence it is said: “Of crimes there is none greater than desirability.”⁶

智伯兼范、中行而攻趙不已，韓、魏反之，軍敗晉陽，身死高梁之東，遂卒被分，漆其首以爲溲器，故曰：『禍莫大於不知足。』

Earl Zhi, having already annexed the states of Fan and Zhonghang, assaulted Zhao relentlessly, causing the states of Han and Wei to oppose him. As a result, his army was defeated at Jinyang, he himself died at Gaoliang, his fief⁷ was partitioned, and his skull was lacquered and made into a wine goblet. Hence it is said: “Of disasters none is greater than not knowing contentment.”⁸

虞君欲屈產之乘，與垂棘之璧，不聽宮之奇，故邦亡身死，故曰：『咎莫憯於欲得。』

The ruler of Yu wanted Quchan's fine set of horses and Chuiji's fine jade, and did not listen to Gong Zhiji's exception to it. Therefore his state was lost and he met with death. Hence it is said: “There is no more excruciating error than lusting after gain.”⁹

邦以存爲常，霸王其可也。身以生爲常，富貴其可也。不欲自害則邦不亡身不死，故曰：『知足之爲足矣。』

A state by surviving lasts long; whether by hegemon or king this can be done. An individual by living lasts long; whether by wealth or nobility this can be done.¹⁰ If one

⁶ This line has been translated as ‘Of crimes there is none greater than having too many desires.’ However, the fox and panther were skinned because they themselves were desirable; King Yan was killed for similar reasons.

⁷ 遂 is a loan for墜, which means 地. See Zhang, p.380.

⁸ This same passage is commented on in Jie Lao. However, there is a significant difference in the use of 足. Here, it is synonymous with ‘contentment’, since it was the Earl's greed that led him to ruin. The stress in Jie Lao is on ‘sufficiency’, in the sense of securing the bare minimum in order to stave off the anxiety caused by desires.

⁹ The text as quoted in Jie Lao reads: 咎莫憯於欲利.

¹⁰ A good example of how a passage can be coloured by attributing it to Han Fei. These lines can also be translated as “A state must have standards to survive, and so can achieve hegemony. An individual must have standards to live, and so can achieve wealth and nobility.” However, this section, and the chapter as a whole, never advocates aggression or ambition; its focus is on moderation and survival.

doesn't harm oneself through desires,¹¹ a state will not be lost and an individual will not meet with death. Hence it is said: "To know contentment is the way to be content."

Illustrating *Laozi* 54¹²

楚莊王既勝狩於河雍，歸而賞孫叔敖，孫叔敖請漢間之地，沙石之處。楚邦之法，祿臣再世而收地，唯孫叔敖獨在。此不以其邦爲收者，瘠也，故九世而祀不絕。故曰：『善建不拔，善抱不脫，子孫以其祭祀世世不輟』，孫叔敖之謂也。

Once King Zhuang of Chu was victorious,¹³ he went out hunting at Heyong. When he returned home, he rewarded Sun Shuao. Sun Shuao thereupon asked for the territory along the Han River, a sandy and craggy region. Now, according to the laws of Chu, all those ministers employed by the state were obliged to return their fiefs to the king after two generations. Only Sun Shuao's fief¹⁴ was left alone. That his fief was not confiscated was because it was barren. And so for nine generations they remained there, making sacrifices at his ancestral shrines uninterrupted. Hence it is said: "The well-founded cannot be uprooted, the well-embraced cannot slip away, and so the descendants will continue making sacrifices for generations without end." And so can be said of Sun Shuao.¹⁵

Illustrating *Laozi* 26

制在己曰重，不離位曰靜。重則能使輕，靜則能使躁。故曰：『重爲輕根，靜爲躁君。』故曰：『君子終日行不離輜重也。』邦者，人君之輜重也。主父生傳其邦，此離其輜重者也。故雖有代、雲中之樂，超然已無趙矣。主父，『萬乘之主，而以身輕於天下。』無勢之謂輕，離位之謂躁，是以生幽而死。故曰：『輕則失臣，躁則失君』，主父之謂也。』

¹¹ 陶鴻慶 suggests that there ought to be an 以 between 不 and 自, as this better conforms to the meaning of 知足之爲足. Zhang, p.382

¹² This passage is also commented on in Jie Lao, however the interpretations differ.

¹³ Over the Jin in 596 BCE?

¹⁴ Reading 封 instead of 邦.

¹⁵ An altogether puzzling account, especially if we take Han Fei to be the author. Why would Han Fei find Sun Shuao's actions praiseworthy? It seems as though he was able to hold onto the land for the single reason that it was barren and useless.

Having control at your side is called ‘being heavy’; not being away from your position is called ‘being tranquil’. If heavy you are able to utilize the light; if tranquil you are able to utilize the active. Hence it is said: “The heavy is the root of the light, the tranquil is the lord of the active.”

It is also said¹⁶: “The ruler marches all day and never lets the baggage carts out of his sight.” The state is the baggage cart of the ruler of men. The Ruling Father,¹⁷ while still alive, handed over his state [to his son], and thus left behind his baggage cart, so that even though he enjoyed the pleasures to be found at Dai and Yunzhong [counties], he had already lost his state of Zhao in his euphoria. The Ruling Father, though he was ‘the lord of ten thousand chariots, yet made light of himself in front of the world.’¹⁸

To have no positional power¹⁹ is called ‘being light’, and to leave your position is called ‘being active’, and thus the Ruling Father was imprisoned alive and met with his death. Hence it is said: “The light will lose his vassals, the active will lose his rule.” And so can be said of the Ruling Father.

Illustrating *Laozi* 36

勢重者，人君之淵也。君人者勢重於人臣之間，失則不可復得也。簡公失之於田成，晉公失之於六卿，而邦亡身死。故曰：『魚不可脫於深淵。』賞罰者，邦之利器也，在君則制臣，在臣則勝君。君見賞，臣則損之以爲德；君見罰，臣則益之以爲威。人君見賞而人臣用其勢，人君見罰而人臣乘其威。故曰：『邦之利器不可以示人。』

Strong positional power is the ‘deep’ of the ruler of men. The ruler of men must have stronger positional power than that among his ministers, for if he loses it, there is no

¹⁶ I omit translating the 故 (hence, therefore, and so, etc.), because it does not follow from the passage before it.

¹⁷ Ruling father, or ‘father of the ruler’, was a title assumed by King Wu-ling of Zhao when he abdicated in 291 B.C. in favour of his son, King Huiwen. In 294 B.C. his palace was surrounded by the soldiers of his high minister Li Dui, and after some three months of confinement he died of starvation. Watson, p.84

¹⁸ Given the context, I take 以 to mean something like 使. Again, the line is not introduced by 故曰.

¹⁹ The concept of positional power 勢 was a key concept in Shen Dao 慎到 and was later appropriated by Han Fei. Its inclusion here may cause some to believe he composed it, but others had discussed it before, notably Shang Yang 商鞅. See Zheng, p.227-228.

getting it back.²⁰ Duke Jian [of Qin] lost it to Tien Cheng, the ruler of Jin lost it to six noblemen, and both of their states went to ruin, and they both lost their lives. Hence it is said: “The fish must not be allowed to escape from his depths.”

Reward and punishment are the sharp weapons of the state. If they are on the side of the ruler then he can control his ministers; if on the side of the ministers they can defeat the ruler. If the ruler displays rewards, the ministers will offer them to others to seem virtuous; if the ruler displays punishments, the ministers will add to their severity in order to seem imposing. The ruler of men displays his rewards, and the ministers will make use of his positional power [by offering it to others as favours]. The ruler of men displays punishments, and the ministers will avail themselves of his awe. Hence it is said: “The sharp weapons of the state must not be revealed to anyone.”²¹

越王入宦於吳，而觀之伐齊以弊吳。吳兵既勝齊人於艾陵，張之於江、濟，強之於黃池，故可制於五湖。故曰：『將欲翕之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之。』晉獻公將欲襲虞，遺之以璧馬；知伯將襲仇由，遺之以廣車。故曰：『將欲取之，必固與之。』起事於無形，而要大功於天下，『是謂微明。』處小弱而重自卑，謂『損弱勝強』也。

The King of Yue entered into the service of the King of Wu and gave his views on how he should attack the state of Qi, hoping that the attack would exhaust the King of Wu's strength. Then, when Wu's troops had just defeated Qi's soldiers at Ai Ling, and were allowed to extend between the waters of the Jiang and the Ji [rivers] and gather their strength at Huang Chi, they were subdued by the King of Yue at Five Lake. Hence it is said: “If you wish to contract it, you must allow it to expand; if you wish to weaken it, you must allow it to strengthen.”

Duke Xian of Jin, about to launch a surprise attack on the state of Yu, presented it gifts of jade and horses. Earl Zhi, too, before launching a surprise attack on Jiu Yu,

²⁰ To gloss this passage and the following passage by referring to similar passages in 內儲說下 (Inner Congeries of Sayings 2) is a mistake. There are significant differences between the passages, and I discuss these in the introduction to the thesis.

²¹ There is a passage very similar to this one in *Nei Chushuo Xia*. However, there are significant differences in the vocabulary. For example, this passage has the term 勝君 – ‘defeat the ruler’ – which never appears in the authentic chapters. There, it is rendered as 擁主 – ‘block the ruler’. Moreover, this saying is ubiquitous in early texts, and seems to be a very old one. If it were unique and limited to the *Hanfeizi*, it would be telling. See Lundahl, p.238.

presented it gifts of grand chariots. Hence it is said: “If you want to get something, give something first.”

To embark on affairs before they have taken shape and seize²² a great accomplishment for the world, “this could be called both subtle and perspicacious.” To be in a small and weak position and yet remain humble is called “disadvantage and weakness overcome strength.”²³

Illustrating *Laozi 63* and *Laozi 64*²⁴

有形之類，大必起於小；行久之物，族必起於少。故曰：天下之難事必作於易，天下之大事必作於細。是以欲制物者於其細也，故曰：『圖難於其易也，爲大於其細也。』千丈之隄以蟻蟻之穴潰，百尺之室以突隙之煙焚。故曰：白圭之行隄也塞其穴，丈人之慎火也塗其隙。是以白圭無水難，丈人無火患。此皆慎易以避難，敬細以遠大者也。扁鵲見蔡桓公，立有間，扁鵲曰：『君有疾在腠理，不治將恐深。』桓侯曰：『寡人無。』扁鵲出，桓侯曰：『醫之好治不病以爲功。』居十日，扁鵲復見曰：『君之病在肌膚，不治將益深。』桓侯不應。扁鵲出，桓侯又不悅。居十日，扁鵲復見曰：『君之病在腸胃，不治將益深。』桓侯又不應。扁鵲出，桓侯又不悅。居十日，扁鵲望桓侯而還走。桓侯故使人問之，扁鵲曰：『疾在腠理，湯熨之所及也；在肌膚，鍼石之所及也；在腸胃，火齊之所及也；在骨髓，司命之所屬，無奈何也。今在骨髓，臣是以無請也。』居五日，桓公體痛，使人索扁鵲，已逃秦矣，桓侯遂死。故良醫之治病也，攻之於腠理，此皆爭之於小者也。夫事之禍福亦有腠理之地，故曰：『聖人蚤從事焉。』

In the category of things that have shape, the great must begin at the small. Of objects that endure, the many must begin with the few.²⁵ Hence it is said: “Difficult affairs must be acted on when they are yet easy; great affairs must be acted on when they are yet minute.” So, those that wish to control objects should get at them in their

²² Taking 要 to mean 取. See Zhang, p.387

²³ The four characters 損弱勝強 conform well to the silk manuscripts Mawangdui A and B, which read 柔弱勝強.

²⁴ This section is comprised of passages from two chapters, but the author clearly treats them as a unit, stringing together the theme of ‘nipping things in the bud’ or ‘stop it before it starts’, and he uses the same word ‘pore’ 腠 to connect the two illustrations together. This sort of combining is never done in Jie Lao.

²⁵ With Wang Xianshen, 族 here means 眾. See Zhang, p.389

minuteness. Hence it is said: “Plan for the difficult while it is yet easy; act on the great while it is yet minute.”

A dike of ten thousand feet²⁶ will break apart from the bored holes created by tiny termites. A room one hundred feet square will burn down by a wayward spark from a crack in the chimney. Hence it is said that Bo Gui, while traversing the dike, plugged up its holes, and the Old Man exercised caution towards fire by plastering any cracks [in the chimney]. Thus Bo Gui suffered no hardships from the water, and the Old Man suffered no disasters from the fire. These are all cases of exercising caution while the situation was easy in order to avoid hardship, and by heeding the minute in order to go far and be great.

Bian Que met with Duke Huan of Jin²⁷. After standing around for some time, Bian Que said, “Your Highness has a slight infection in the pores of the skin. However, if left untreated, I’m afraid it might spread deeper.” Duke Huan²⁸ replied, “I have no infection,” and so Bian Que left. Duke Huan then remarked, “Doctors like treating people that are not sick so as to appear efficacious.”

Ten days later, Bian Que again met with the Marquis and said, “Your highness’ disease²⁹ has gotten into the flesh and skin. If left untreated, it will spread yet deeper.” Yet Duke Huan again gave no reaction. Bian Que left, leaving the Duke unhappy.

After ten more days, Bian Que again met with the Marquis and said, “Your Highness’ disease has now spread to the intestines and bowel. If left untreated it will spread yet deeper.” Again, Duke Huan gave no response. Bian Que left, leaving the Duke unhappy.

Ten days later, Bian Que, catching sight of Duke Huan, turned and ran off. So Duke Huan sent someone after him to ask why. Bian Que said to this person, “If the infection is in the pores, you can get at it with hot water and irons; if in the flesh and skin, it can be got at with needles of metal and stone; if in the intestines and bowels, it can be got at with a fiery dose of medicine. However, if in the bones and marrow, then he’s in

²⁶ One *zhang* 丈 equals approx. ten feet.

²⁷ This story probably refers to Duke Huan of Jin, and not Duke Huan of Cai. The difference, however, is unimportant to the interpretation of the passage.

²⁸ Again, the text reads 侯 Marquis, but we shall stick to Duke for continuity’s sake.

²⁹ The words 疾 and 病 are here differentiated by severity.

the hands of fate³⁰ – there is no alternative. And now, the disease is in the bones and marrow, and so I would not call on him again.”

Five days later, Duke Huan’s body began to ache, and so he sent someone to seek out Bian Que, but the doctor had already fled to Qin. Duke Huan proceeded to die. For this reason, good doctors, when treating diseases, attack them while still in the pores.

These are all instances of contending with things while they are yet small. And the potential disasters and fortunes in affairs too have their own ‘pores’, hence it is said: “The sage attends to things from the get-go.”³¹

昔晉公子重耳出亡過鄭，鄭君不禮，叔瞻諫曰：『此賢公子也，君厚待之，可以積德。』鄭君不聽。叔瞻又諫曰：『不厚待之，不若殺之，無令有後患。』鄭君又不聽。及公子返晉邦，舉兵伐鄭，大破之，取八城焉。晉獻公以垂棘之璧假道於虞而伐虢，大夫宮之奇諫曰：『不可。唇亡而齒寒，虞、虢相救，非相德也。今日晉滅虢，明日虞必隨之亡。』虞君不聽，受其璧而假之道。晉已取虢，還，反滅虞。此二臣者皆爭於腠理者也，而二君不用也。然則叔瞻、宮之奇亦虞、鄭之扁鵲也，而二君不聽，故鄭以破，虞以亡。故曰：『其安易持也，其未兆易謀也。』

In ancient times, the Prince of Jin, Chong Er, while in exile abroad and passing through the state of Zheng, was treated without any propriety by Zheng’s ruler. Shu Zhan admonished the ruler, saying, “This is a worthy prince. If Your Highness would treat him with some generosity, you could then collect benefits/favours from him [in the future].”³² But the ruler of Zheng did not listen to him. Shu Zhan again admonished him, saying, “Well, if you won’t treat him with some generosity, then it’s best to kill him, and avoid bringing about future calamities.” Again, the ruler of Zheng did not listen. When the Prince had returned to his state of Jin, he raised an army and attacked Zheng, greatly crushing it [大破之] and capturing eight of its cities.

³⁰ A more literal translation would be “belongs to the delegator of fate.”

³¹ Here, 蚤 is a variant of 早. This sentence does not appear in the modern *Laozi* edition. Some have done away with the 曰 and interpreted it as not being a quote from the text. Others believe it is a passage in an earlier version of the *Laozi* that didn’t make the ‘final cut’. I would agree with the latter.

³² Both 積德 in this sentence and 後患 in the following one refer to future events, so I take 積德 to mean ‘collecting benefits/favours from Chong Er in the future’, as opposed to ‘accumulate virtue in the eyes of others.’

Duke Xian of Jin, by means of the jade of Gui Ji, wished to be granted a passage through Yu to attack Guo. Gong Zhiji, a high official of Yu, admonished its ruler, saying, “Don’t allow it. When the lips are gone the teeth grow cold. Yu and Guo ought to come to each other’s aid, and not just to favour each other. For if Jin destroys Guo today, tomorrow we will be certain to follow it into ruin.” The ruler of Yu did not listen and, accepting Jin’s jade, granted him a passage. Jin, having captured Guo, on its way back returned to destroy Yu.

Now, these two ministers both contended with matters at their ‘pore’ stage – it’s just that the rulers refused to put their advice to use. And so Shu Zhan and Gong Zhiji were the ‘Bian Que’s of Yu and Zheng, but both rulers did not listen to them,³³ therefore Zheng was crushed and Yu was ruined. Hence it is said; “While tranquil it is easy to manage; while yet to manifest it is easy to devise for.”

Illustrating *Laozi* 52

昔者紂爲象箸而箕子怖。以爲象箸必不加於土鍤，必將犀玉之杯。象箸玉杯必不羹菽藿，則必旄象豹胎。旄象豹胎必不衣短褐而食於茅屋之下，則錦衣九重，廣室高臺。吾畏其卒，故怖其始。居五年，紂爲肉圃，設炮烙，登糟邱，臨酒池，紂遂以亡。故箕子見象箸以知天下之禍，故曰：『見小曰明。』

In ancient times, when the King of Zhou made ivory chopsticks, Viscount Ji³⁴ grew alarmed and thought, “Ivory chopsticks cannot be added to plain old pottery/earthenware, they must be used with cups made of rhino’s horns or ivory. And ivory chopsticks and jade cups cannot be used for broths made of common legumes and vegetables, but should be filled with meats from yaks, rhinos, and foetal dogs. When there are meats from yaks, rhinos, and foetal dogs, you cannot wear coarse-haired clothing and eat under thatched-roof huts, but must dress in layers of embroidered clothing and live in spacious mansions with lofty terraces. I dread such consequences, and so am alarmed at the outset.”

³³ Like Duke Huan of Jin above.

³⁴ Said to be the uncle of the King of Zhou. See Zhang, p.394

Five years later, the King of Zhou had made a meat garden³⁵ and established pits for roasting, had climbed a hill of grain and looked down on a lake of wine, and he proceeded to die by them. So Viscount Ji, upon seeing the ivory chopsticks was able to foreknow a disaster in the world. Hence it is said: “Seeing the small is called perspicacious.”

Illustrating *Laozi* 52 and *Laozi* 71³⁶

句踐入宦於吳，身執干戈爲吳王洗馬，故能殺夫差於姑蘇。文王見詈於王門，顏色不變，而武王擒紂於牧野。故曰：『守柔曰強。』越王之霸也不病宦，武王之王也不病詈。故曰：『聖人之不病也，以其不病，是以無病也。』

Gou Jian entered [into slavery] as a government official at the state of Wu and held shield and spear as the King of Wu's leader of the cavalry.³⁷ Thus, he was able to kill Fu Chai at Gu Su.³⁸ King Wen met with a scolding³⁹ at the Jade gates,⁴⁰ yet his facial expression did not change, and so King Wu (his son) was later able to capture King Zhou at Mu Ye. Hence it is said: “Holding to the submissive is strength.”

The King of Yue's hegemony was possible because he did not consider servitude to be shameful.⁴¹ King Wu's kingship was possible because he did not consider a scolding [of his father?] to be shameful. Hence it is said: “That the Sage does not feel shame – this is because he does not see it as shame, and thus has nothing of which to feel shameful.”

³⁵ Probably a place to hang meat for curing, etc.

³⁶ Another instance where the author combines bits from different chapters under a blanket theme. Although chapter 52 was commented on in the passage above, here the author takes another line from chapter 52 and combines it with a line from chapter 72, and so I treat the passages separately.

³⁷ Reading 先 instead of 洗, following Wang Xianshen. Zhang, p.396

³⁸ In the state of Wu.

³⁹ 詈 means something like 罵.

⁴⁰ In ancient times, 王 was often used for 玉, especially in the *Zhuan* 篆 style of calligraphy. See Zhang, p.396

⁴¹ Taking 病 to mean something like 辱.

Illustrating Laozi 64⁴²

宋之鄙人得璞玉而獻之子罕，子罕不受，鄙人曰：『此寶也，宜爲君子器，不宜爲細人用。』子罕曰：『爾以玉爲寶，我以不受子玉爲寶。』是鄙人欲玉，而子罕不欲玉。故曰：『欲不欲，而不貴難得之貨。』

A hillbilly from Song got hold of a piece of uncut jade and presented it to Zi Han, but Zi Han refused to accept it. The hillbilly said, ‘This treasure, it is fit to be made into an implement for a prince, and ought not be put to use by someone insignificant.’ Zi Han replied, “You deem this piece of jade to be a treasure, while I deem not accepting it to be a treasure.”

Thus the hillbilly desired the jade, while Zi Han did not desire it. Hence it is said: “Desire to not desire, and do not value goods hard to come by.”

王壽負書而行，見徐馮於周塗，馮曰：『事者，爲也。爲生於時，知者無常事。書者，言也。言生於知，知者不藏書。今子何獨負之而行？』於是王壽因焚其書而舞之。故知者不以言談教，而慧者不以藏書篋。此世之所過也，而王壽復之，是學不學也。故曰：『學不學，復歸衆人之所過也。』

Wang Shu was travelling carrying some books when he bumped into Xu Feng on a road⁴³ in the state of Zhou. Xu Feng said, “Affairs – they are based on acts. Acts arise at a certain point in time, and so the knowledgeable see nothing constant in affairs. Books – they are but words. Words arise out of knowledge, and so the knowledgeable do not collect books. Now why do you burden yourself with them as you travel?” On these words, Wang Shu burned his books and danced about it.

Therefore the knowledgeable do not teach with words and speech, and the wise do not fill themselves with trunks of books. This is what common people overdo, while Wang Shu returned from it – and this is learning to not learn. Hence it is said: “Learn to not learn and return from what the masses overdo.”

夫物有常容，因乘以導之，因隨物之容。故靜則建乎德，動則順乎道。宋人有爲其君以象爲楮葉者，三年而成。豐殺莖柯，毫

⁴² This section of the *Laozi* was already commented on above.

⁴³ The character 塗 here means a 道 or highway. See Zhang, p.398

芒繁澤，亂之楮葉之中而不可別也。此人遂以功食祿於宋邦。列子聞之曰：『使天地三年而成一葉，則物之有葉者寡矣。』故不乘天地之資，而載一人之身；不隨道理之數，而學一人之智；此皆一葉之行也。故冬耕之稼，后稷不能羨也；豐年大禾，臧獲不能惡也。以一人力，則后稷不足；隨自然，則臧獲有餘。故曰：『恃萬物之自然而不敢爲也。』

Now, all things have their constant capacity, and so one avails himself of this and leads the thing accordingly. For if you follow its capacity, when still you build on their virtue, and when moving you can follow the path they take.

Once, a man of Song made a mulberry leaf of ivory for his ruler, and it took him three years to complete it. With its stem so thick and its shoots so fine, and its hairs so intricate and covered with a sheen, if you mixed it in with real mulberry leaves you could not tell them apart. This man of Song, through this accomplishment, was put on the state of Song's payroll.

Liezi⁴⁴ heard of this and said, "Supposing Heaven and Earth took three years to complete a single leaf, then things with leaves would be few." So, to not rely on the resources of Heaven and Earth and instead burden one single person, and not follow the multitude ways and patterns and instead learn from the wisdom of a single person, all of this is to behave in the manner of 'one leaf every three years.'

Hence when it comes to farming by plough in the winter, even Hou Ji⁴⁵ couldn't produce a surplus. Yet in a bountiful year with a large harvest, even slave kids could not lead it to ruin. When using the strength of one man, even Hou Ji's, couldn't fulfill the demand. Yet when following nature, even slave kids would have plenty to spare. Hence it is said: "Rely on the naturalness of the myriad things and don't dare interfere."

Illustrating Laozi 47

空竅者，神明之戶牖也。耳目竭於聲色，精神竭於外貌，故中無主。中無主則禍福雖如丘山無從識之，故曰：『不出於戶，可以知天下；不闚於牖，可以知天道。』此言神明之不離其實也。

⁴⁴ A Daoist figure who appears in several early texts.

⁴⁵ A famous farmer from the state of Zhou. Said to have served as minister of agriculture during the reigns of the legendary sages Yao and Shun.

Holes and cavities – they are the doors and windows of the spirit. If the ears and eyes are exhausted by notes and colours, and the spirit exhausted by external appearance, then you can have no master inside. With no master inside, even if calamity and fortune are as noticeable as hills or mountains, there is no way for you to recognize them. Hence it is said: “Without leaving your door, you can know the world; without peeping through your window, you can know Heaven’s Way.” This is to say that the spirit doesn’t leave its abode.

趙襄主學御於王子期，俄而與於期逐，三易馬而三後。襄主曰：『子之教我御術未盡也。』對曰：『術已盡，用之則過也。凡御之所貴，馬體安於車，人心調於馬，而後可以進速致遠。今君後則欲逮臣，先則恐逮於臣。夫誘道爭遠，非先則後也。而先後心皆在於臣，上何以調於馬，此君之所以後也。』白公勝慮亂，罷朝，倒杖而策銳貫頤，血流至於地而不知。鄭人聞之曰：『頤之忘，將何爲忘哉！』故曰：『其出彌遠者，其智彌少。』此言智周乎遠，則所遺在近也，是以聖人無常行也。能並智，故曰：『不行而知。』能並視，故曰：『不見而明。』隨時以舉事，因資而立功，用萬物之能而獲利其上，故曰：『不爲而成。』

Viscount Xiang of Zhao⁴⁶ was studying charioteering with Prince Yu Qi.⁴⁷ Before long, he began to race with Yu Qi, thrice switching horses and thrice finishing behind him. Viscount Xiang said, “Your teaching me the techniques of charioteering is not yet complete.” Yu Qi answered, “I have already taught you the whole of the technique, it is you who overdo in applying it. That which all charioteers esteem is a horse firmly latched to the chariot and a mind in harmony with the horse, after which you can increase speed and cover the distance. Your Highness when behind wishes to catch up to me, and when ahead is in fear of being caught by me. When you head your chariot down the course in a long race, if you’re not in the lead then you’re behind, and whether you’re in front or behind your mind is always on me – how can you be in harmony with the horse? That’s why your Highness is always falling behind.”

⁴⁶ In Zhang’s text, his name is rendered as 趙襄子. I take 子 to mean a title like ‘viscount’.

⁴⁷ The 於 is missing in the name here, but appears below.

Once, when Duke Sheng of Bo⁴⁸ had left court and was plotting a rebellion, he gripped his cane upside down and pierced his chin with its sharp end.⁴⁹ And though his blood flowed to the ground he did not realize it. The people of Zheng heard this and said, “Since he forgot his own chin, what would he not forget.”⁵⁰ Hence it is said: “The further one goes, the less one knows.”

This is to say that if one’s wisdom encircles the faraway, it will miss what remains close at hand. This is why the sage has no constancy in his actions, yet is able to spontaneously know both near and far. Hence it is said: “He does not move about and yet he knows.” He is able to spontaneously see near and far, hence it is said, and “He does not look about and yet perceives.” Go along with the time to start something, comply with resources to establish achievements, and make use of the myriad things’ abilities to capture benefits on top of all this. Hence it is said: “He does not act and yet accomplishes.”

Illustrating *Laozi* 41

楚莊王蒞政三年，無令發，無政爲也。右司馬御座而與王隱曰：『有鳥止南方之阜，三年不翅不飛不鳴，嘿然無聲，此爲何名？』王曰：『三年不翅，將以長羽翼。不飛不鳴，將以觀民則。雖無飛，飛必沖天；雖無鳴，鳴必驚人。子釋之，不穀知之矣。』處半年，乃自聽政，所廢者十，所起者九，誅大臣五，舉處士六，而邦大治。舉兵誅齊，敗之徐州，勝晉於河雍，合諸侯於宋，遂霸天下。莊王不爲小害善，故有大名；不蚤見示，故有大功。故曰：『大器晚成，大音希聲。』

⁴⁸ The son of Prince Jian of Chu, grandson of King Ping of Chu. Prince Jian, while in refuge in the state of Zheng, was killed by its ruler. Sheng was then recalled to Wu. Later, during the reign of King Hui, Sheng returned to Chu and was given a fief, and plotted to avenge the death of his father Prince Jian by the hands of the ruler of Zheng. However, Zi Xi, his grandfather King Ping’s half brother, thwarted his efforts twice, causing Sheng to kill him and start a rebellion against King Hui. He managed to seize a portion of Chu until he was defeated by Duke Ye and hung himself, ca. 488-479 B.C.

⁴⁹ 顛 could also be a loan for 顛.

⁵⁰ Some texts, such as the *Liezi* 列子, have 不 instead of 爲. It is clear that the more Sheng sought to avenge his father’s death, the more he lost sight of everything else, as he eventually turned on Zi Xi and King Hui to get at Zheng. In the spirit of the rest of the chapter, which is mostly prudent political advice, the message is that to be so consumed with revenge that you lose sight of your personal welfare is wrong – you may not even be aware of the damage you cause yourself. Hence ‘the further he goes along in his plan, the less he knows about his immediate surroundings’, like the charioteering above.

King Zhuang of Chu had been overseeing the administration for three years, yet had no orders to announce and no policies to implement. The commander of the cavalry was accompanying the King and riddled him, asking, “There is a bird perched on a hill to the south. For three years it has neither fluttered nor flown nor squawked; it sits silent, without a sound.⁵¹ How can it be designated by such a name [bird]?”

The King replied, “Not fluttering for three years allows it to grow wings and feathers, not flying or squawking allows it to observe the standards of the common folk. Though it has not flown, when it does take flight it will soar to the heavens; though it has not squawked, when it does squawk it will startle everyone. Leave it be, I know what you’re getting at.”

In the course of half a year, the King himself began administrating, discarding ten policies⁵² and initiating nine new ones, punishing five high ministers and appointing six new scholars, and the country was in perfect order. Then he triumphed over Jin at Heyong and, gathering the remaining feudal lords in the state of Song, and became the ruler of the world.

King Zhuang did not act for insignificant goods, and thus won a great reputation.⁵³ He didn’t reveal himself too early, and thus won great achievements. Hence it is said, “Greatest men are late to complete things [reach completion], and loudest notes are seldom audible.”

Illustrating *Laozi* 33

楚莊王欲伐越，杜子諫曰：『王之伐越何也？』曰：『政亂兵弱。』杜子曰：『臣愚患之。智如目也，能見百步之外而不能自見其睫。王之兵自敗於秦、晉，喪地數百里，此兵之弱也。莊躋爲盜於境內而吏不能禁，此政之亂也。王之弱亂非越之下也，而欲伐越，此智之如目也。』王乃止。故知之難，不在見人，在自見。故曰：『自見之謂明。』

When King Zhuang of Chu desired to attack Yue, Duzi admonished him, saying, “Your Majesty’s attacking Yue, what would that be for?” The King replied, “Its

⁵¹ According to 尹桐陽. 嘿 is a loan for 默. See Zhang, p.404

⁵² The most probable translation for 者. ‘Things’ seem to vague.

⁵³ Omitting the 害.

government is in disorder, its army weak.” Duzi said, “In my stupidity I regard this [plan] as a disaster. However, wisdom is like the eyes – though they may be able to see a hundred paces away and beyond, they never notice the eyelashes just in front of them. Your Majesty’s troops have been beaten by Qin and Jin, and lost a hundred miles of territory – this shows the weakness of your troops. Zhuang Xijiao is plundering all within your borders and the magistrates are unable to stop him – this shows the disorder of your government. Your majesty’s weakness and disorder are no less than Yue’s, yet you desire to attack it. This sort of wisdom is just as [shortsighted as] the eyes.” And so the king put an end to his desire to attack Yue. Thus the difficulty in knowing lies not in seeing the other but in seeing yourself. Hence it is said: “Seeing yourself is called perspicacious.”

子夏見曾子，曾子曰：『何肥也？』對曰：『戰勝故肥也。』曾子曰：『何謂也？』子夏曰：『吾入見先王之義則榮之，出見富貴之樂又榮之，兩者戰於胸中，未知勝負，故臞。今先王之義勝，故肥。』是以志之難也，不在勝人，在自勝也。故曰：『自勝之謂強。』

Zi Xia bumped into Zengzi.⁵⁴ Zengzi said, “How’d you get so plump?” “Victory in battle made me plump,” came the reply. “What do you mean?” asked Zengzi. Zi Xia said, ‘At home I immersed myself in the righteousness of the Former Kings and delighted in it. Out in the world I met with the joys of riches and nobility and delighted in it, too.’⁵⁵ So these two delights struggled inside of me. When the outcome wasn’t yet apparent, I was thin. And now the righteousness of the Former Kings has won out, so I’ve grown fat.” Thus the difficulty in fulfilling aspiration lies not in conquering others but in conquering yourself. Hence it is said, “Conquering yourself is deemed power.”

Illustrating Laozi 27

⁵⁴ Two of Confucius’ pupils - Zi Xia his junior by 44 years, Zengzi by 46, according to the *Liezhuan* 列傳.

⁵⁵ Reading 樂 instead of 榮. See Zhang, p.404

周有玉版，紂令膠鬲索之，文王不予，費仲來求，因予之。是膠鬲賢而費仲無道也。周惡賢者之得志也，故予費仲。文王舉太公於渭濱者，貴之也；而資費仲玉版者，是愛之也。故曰：『不貴其師，不愛其資，雖知大迷，是謂要妙。』

The state of Zhou had some plates of jade, and King Zhou of Shang sent Jiao Ge to fetch them, but King Wen would not grant them. Yet when Fei Zhong came requesting them, King Wen granted them. This was because Jiao Ge was worthy while Fei Zhong lacked the Way. The state of Zhou hated to see a worthy fulfill his aspirations, and so its king granted the jade plates to Fei Zhong.⁵⁶

That King Wen [of Zhou] pulled Tai Gong out of the waters of Wei was because he esteemed him. That he gave credence⁵⁷ to Fei Zhong with the jade plates was because he cherished him [in his scheme to weaken Shang]. Hence it is said: “If you do not esteem your teacher, and do not cherish your material, though wise you will be lost. This is called ‘profoundly subtle.’”

⁵⁶ Zhou wanted a bad man to run Shang, so Shang would fall all the quicker.

⁵⁷ Here, the meaning of 資 is tricky, but it does not mean ‘enrich with resources’. He wished to make Fei Zhong look credible or reliable, and thus raise his rank.



EXPLAINING LAOZI



SECTION V - *JIE LAO (ILLUSTRATING LAOZI)*

When compared to the *Yu Lao* commentary, the *Jie Lao* commentary is more sophisticated, more elaborate, and, at least philosophically, far more interesting. The interpretation here is rigorous and oftentimes pregnant with meaning. Moreover, we encounter much more of the terminology we associate with Warring States philosophical texts – *de*, *ren*, *li*, *dao*, etc. Indeed, out of the two chapters, *Jie Lao* has generally received far more attention than *Yu Lao*.

Dating

Usually, philosophical writings from this period in Chinese history contain invaluable references to historical events that help us date them. Han Fei himself often used such historical episodes as a rhetorical device to show how past rulers could have achieved success and yet met with failure due to their stupidity. However, there are no historical references in this chapter. Hence, the debates surrounding its dating and authenticity revolve around stylistic and doctrinal issues.

The syncretic outlook of this chapter has lead several scholars (e.g. Kimura Eiichi, Jiang Boqian) to mark it as a Han dynasty text (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), as it appears to be a Huang-Lao text. Indeed, it was during the first decades of the Han dynasty that Huang-Lao dominated the court, until Confucianism overtook it in 140 B.C. However, there are numerous difficulties with a Han dating. For instance, the chapter makes references to neighbouring states and advises rulers to keep harmonious relations with them.

The ruler who practices the way abroad bears no enmity towards his bordering rival states and domestically treats the people in his own state with benevolent rule. Now, the ruler who bears no enmity towards his bordering rival states receives feudal lords and foreign dignitaries with the proper protocols... If the ruler of men doesn't practice the Way, then inside his borders he will be cruel to and mistreat his people, and outside his borders he will encroach upon and harass his neighbouring states. If the ruler is cruel and mistreating inside his borders then the people's productivity will stop, and if encroaching and harassing his neighbouring states then troops will often be raised.

These references to neighbouring states seem unlikely to stem from the Han dynasty, and are indicative of a pre-Qin dating, when the empire had not yet been united.

Another indication is the way the *Laozi* text is treated. In commentaries from the Han dynasty, such as the “Dao Ying” 道應 chapter of the *Huainanzi*, the *Laozi* is clearly treated as a canonical text, and the figure of Lao Dan 老聃 is ubiquitous. Indeed, “the entire self-understanding of early Han Huang-Lao teachers is based strongly on the teachings of Lao Tan found in the *Lao Tzu*. This can be seen by the frequent quotations of this text throughout the *Huai-nan Tzu* introduced by the phrase ‘Lao Tzu said.’”¹ There is no sense of this in the *Jie Lao* chapter. The passages cited, though given careful exegesis and apparently held in high esteem by the writer, are not referred to as the teachings of Lao Dan; instead, they are introduced with the stock 故曰 ‘hence it is said’ or ‘hence the text says’. While the text is referred to as a ‘book’ 書 on a number of occasions, the only reference to the *Laozi* is in the title of the chapter, which may have been added by a later editor. In any case, this chapter seems to have been composed at a time before the *Laozi* had reached canonical status and before the figure of Lao Dan had become associated with the text, which points to a pre-Qin dating, not a Han dating.

¹ Roth, p.200

Finally, as D.C. Lau has noticed,² this chapter observes the Qin taboo on the character 正, which is replaced by 端 in the following statement: 書之所謂大道也者，端道也。所謂貌施也者，邪道也 - “That which the text calls the ‘Great Way’ is the orthodox Way. That which it calls the ‘apparent course of things’ is the heterodox Way.” The common antonym for ‘crooked’ or ‘heretical’ 邪 is 正. The substitution of 端 here indicates that that this chapter was already in existence during the Qin dynasty.

Authorship

We found that, given the tone and overall message of the *Yu Lao* chapter, it was probably written by an official or royal family member of a small state during the first quarter of the 3rd century B.C. This chapter proves more antagonistic to such a clear statement. Nevertheless, if we examine the text closely, there are several clues regarding the identity of its author.

The detailed exegesis in this chapter reveals a different writer with a different purpose. For instance, there is a certain sense of ‘formality’ in the style of the exegesis: the glossing of certain terms, the careful and detailed explanations, the use of the chain-syllogism that allows for clarity. It seems as though this may be an essay composed by a scholar 士 engaged in philosophical and ideological debates. Given the syncretic outlook of this chapter, we may speculate that its writer was part of what may have been the closest thing “in Chinese history to an institution devoted to the free exchange of ideas” –

² As noted by Lundahl, p.134-135

the Jixia Academy in the state of Qi.³ This academician seems to have been influenced most by the philosophy of the *Laozi* and that of Mencius. Mencius visited the state of Qi towards the end of the 4th century, during the reign of king Xuan (319-301 B.C.). It was king Xuan who revived the Jixia Academy, and, during this time, Mencius himself was made a titular minister in Qi.⁴ Hence, there is a substantial link between Mencius and the Jixia Academy. As for the *Laozi*, Xunzi is the first to mention the *Laozi* in his writings and is likely to have encountered the text during the decade he spent at Jixia (ca. 275-265 B.C.).⁵ Therefore, it seems likely that the text was present at Jixia by 275 B.C.

The nature of the exegesis and the syncretic outlook of this chapter, as well as the corollary evidence just mentioned, strongly suggest that this text is the product of a Jixia academician from the early part of the 3rd century B.C.

Style and Authorship

The *Jie Lao* chapter is noteworthy for its repeated use of the ‘chain-syllogism’. The chain syllogism lays out an argument in the following form: if A then B, if B then C, if C then D, and so on. This style of argumentation can be found in a number of texts from this period, and is the standard form of argumentation in this chapter, whether they be short chains of A to C, or much longer ones from A to J or more.

However, apart from this chapter, there are only three isolated instances of the chain-syllogism in the other fifty-four chapters of the *Hanfeizi*.⁶ Han Fei seems to have preferred a more colourful and forceful style of argumentation; in comparison, the chain-

³ Schwartz, p.239

⁴ Graham, p.112

⁵ Roth, p.198

⁶ Lundahl, p.234. There are no instances of the chain-syllogism in *Yu Lao*.

syllōgism, while lucid and efficient, is utterly boring and monotonous. Indeed, attributing this chapter to Han Fei seems more of an insult to his literary prowess than a tribute to his intellectual acumen. This chapter contains no stylistic element that suggests Han Fei wrote it. Hence, its distinct form of argumentation can be seen as evidence that he did not write it.

The use of this style of argumentation is very appropriate to the exegesis. One of the main themes of this chapter is that the enlightened ruler will base his movements on the observable and predictable principles of the Way. These principles can empower the ruler to observe the cyclical nature of flourish and decline, prosperity and poverty, triumph and failure, etc. The best example of this type of cyclical / causative thinking occurs in the commentary to chapter 58 of the *Laozi*:

When a person has fortune, wealth and nobility arrive. With wealth and nobility come the best of clothes and food. With the best of clothes and food, the arrogant mind arises. When the arrogant mind arises conduct becomes wicked and behaviour unprincipled. When conduct is wicked it will lead to premature death. When behaviour is unprincipled you cannot fulfill efficacy. When inside you have the misfortune of premature death, and outside you have the reputation of not fulfilling efficacy - now that's a great disaster! And the disaster had its source in have had good fortune. Hence the text says: "Fortune – that is what disaster lurks in!"

This mode of exegesis itself seems to be deeply influenced by the philosophy of the *Laozi* text. The idea of cyclical rise and decline, fortune and disaster, reversal and reversion, are all central to the *Laozi*, and are lucidly interpreted and elaborated through the use of the chain-syllogism.

Textual Considerations

‘Commentary on Dao’ – *an interpolation?*

There is one conspicuous passage in the middle of the *Jie Lao* chapter – which I have called ‘Commentary on Dao’ – that leaps out from the rest, and is almost certain to be a later interpolation. This section is distinguished by the absence of a *Laozi* quotation, the frequent use of end-rhymes, and the discussion of *Dao* in fantastic terms. Zhang Jue 張覺, in his recent translation of the work, notices the distinct qualities of this section and suggests that it may have been part of the *Zhu Dao* 主道 chapter and have gotten mixed into *Jie Lao* by a later editor because its subject matter is the Way 道.⁷ In spite of some very superficial similarities, though, there is nothing to suggest that this section was once part of the *Zhu Dao* chapter. However, since Zhang believes Han Fei composed *Jie Lao*, he evidently limited his search to the *Hanfeizi* text.

If we look beyond the *Hanfeizi*, there are more striking parallels between this passage and parts of two other texts: the *Nei Ye* 內業 chapter of the *Guanzi* and the *Dao Yuan* 道原 book of the *HLBS*. Rickett, in the second volume of his monumental study of the *Guanzi*, notices the parallels with *Nei Ye*.⁸ The similarities to the *Dao Yuan* text lie in the use of rhymes, overall tone and content, and the repeated use of the “... 得之以...” pattern (i.e. ‘something’ attains it [the Dao] and ‘thereby accomplishes’ something). All three texts seem to be part of a particular genre of literature that Roth has dubbed ‘the lore of the Way’ or ‘Daoist wisdom poetry’.⁹ Given the probable dates of the *Nei Ye*

⁷ Zhang Jue, p.353.

⁸ See Rickett, p.41.

⁹ See Roth, *Original Dao*, p.190-193.

(early-mid Warring States) and the *HLBS* (most consider it late Warring States – Early Han), this passage may lie somewhere between the two chronologically. Further research may clarify the affinities amongst these texts.

Other interpolations?

D.C. Lau has suggested the possibility that the *Jie Lao* commentary was originally a commentary on the *De* section of the *Laozi* alone, and that there may have been another commentary on the *Dao* section that is no longer extant.¹⁰ Noting that the majority of the *Laozi* quotations in *Jie Lao* stem from the *De* section, he suggests that the commentary on chapter 1 of the *Laozi*, which belongs to the *Dao* section, may have got in by mistake. Lau neglects to mention the commentary on chapter 14, also from the *Dao* section, which appears just before the commentary on chapter 1. Moreover, he does not offer any other reason why this commentary may not belong in the text. Nevertheless, his hypothesis warrants some brief comment.

The commentaries on chapters 1 and 14 of the *Laozi* are the only ones from the *Dao* section of the text. In addition, both commentaries are exceedingly short, and only one line from each chapter is glossed. All of the commentaries on chapters from the *De* section of the *Laozi* are extensive and gloss all or a significant number of lines from the chapter which it is commenting on. Finally, it is interesting to note that all of these suspected interpolations occur side by side in the middle of the chapter (the order of commentary is: 38, 58, 59, 60, 46, *Dao*, 14, 1, 50, 67, 53, 54). If we remove the three suspected interpolations in the middle, there does seem to be a greater coherence to the chapter as a whole, and, given the peculiarities just mentioned, Lau's hypothesis seems to

¹⁰ For Lau's argument, see *Chinese Classics*, p.160-161.

warrant consideration. However, apart from ‘Commentary on Dao’, the evidence cannot be considered conclusive, and it seems best to reserve judgment on the commentaries to chapters 1 and 14 at this time.¹¹

Political Philosophy

To speak of the philosophy of this chapter, is, to a degree, problematic. It is, after all, a commentary on or elucidation of the *Laozi*. As such, much of its philosophy will coincide with that of the *Laozi*. Moreover, there is no apparent system or overall structure to the chapter. Nevertheless, we will explore some of the main concerns of this chapter and attempt to relate its philosophy with others from the same period.

There is no influence from Legalism in this chapter, and this needs to be mentioned first. It seems as though this chapter has fallen victim to the problem Peerenboom mentioned, already cited above,¹² which is the automatic assumption that this chapter must be Huang-Lao since it is found in the Legalist *Hanfeizi* and contains Daoist philosophy from the *Laozi*. While there are certain features of this chapter that correspond to certain features of the *HLBS*, this chapter is markedly different from the *HLBS* in its lack of discussion on law. The importance of the concept of law within the Huang-Lao school is widely acknowledged.¹³ In addition, none of the main themes of the *Hanfeizi* are discussed in this chapter, such as the relationship between the ruler and his

¹¹ As a final remark, it is also interesting to note that if we remove the suspected interpolations, we are left with commentaries on 9 chapters of the *Laozi*. The number ‘9’ has long been associated with the composition and ordering of the *Laozi* text – for example, its 81 chapters is a product of 9 times 9. For a fascinating discussion of the chapter divisions in the *Laozi*, see Henricks, “On the Chapter Divisions of the *Laozi*”.

¹² See pages 18-19 above.

¹³ Peerenboom, p.19

ministers, the emphasis on building power and military strength, the necessity of harsh laws and fierce punishments, the aversion to morality and moral rules, the hatred for the literati and academicians,¹⁴ or the various threats posed to the ruler and the state from within.

This chapter, rather, seems to be a treatise on how to govern benevolently and morally and ensure peace both within and among nations. The dominant philosophical orientations of this chapter are unmistakably the Daoism of the *Laozi* and the Confucianism of the *Mencius*. The Confucianism in this chapter has not gone unnoticed; however, it has been misconstrued, especially by those scholars who maintain Han Fei's authorship of this chapter. As mentioned earlier, some scholars have pointed to Xunzi, Han Fei's purported teacher, as the source of the Confucianism in this chapter. They have done this by appealing to a theory of Han Fei's intellectual development, whereby he was influenced by Daoism and Xunzi in his premature youth, and developed his own philosophy later in life. Not only is there no evidence to support *any* theory of Han Fei's intellectual development, there is also no apparent resemblance in this chapter to Xunzi's Confucianism. However, there are striking ways in which it is similar to Mencius'.

For example, there is a deep concern for the welfare of the people 民. There is an admonition to not become their enemy, to help them along their paths and prevent them from becoming lost, to not interfere with their work, to not carry out punishments on them or seize the fruits of their labours,¹⁵ to treat them with benevolent rule and work at ensuring food supply, and to not engage in war and therefore not enlist people into the ranks of the military. In fact, the prosperity of the state is equated with the prosperity of

¹⁴ Indeed, as was argued, this chapter was most probably penned by an academician.

¹⁵ As long as they are good, law-abiding citizens, of course.

the people – “When the people prosper and multiply, then the reserves of the state will increase.” The approval of wealth and fine clothes for worthy ministers who practice propriety is explicit here and is also implicit in the *Mencius*. Finally, the positive view of human nature found in this chapter is also in line with Mencius, who believed people were born morally good by nature, and most definitely opposed to Xunzi, who believed people were born with a morally bad nature.

Indeed, the advice to the ruler is to practice the Way in a program of self-cultivation that will develop the moral qualities of virtues of *de* (virtue), *ren* (co-humanity), *yi* (righteousness), and *li* (propriety) within him. These moral qualities are upheld and celebrated in this chapter. This supports our belief that this chapter was written prior to the rift between Confucianism and Daoism. Some of these self-cultivation practices have to do with the development of vital energy 氣, vital essence 精 神, and spirit 神, and are also reminiscent of similar techniques mentioned in other early texts, such as the *Nei Ye*.¹⁶

Influences from the *Laozi* can be found in the chapter’s warning of the perils of having too many desires and of wasting one’s energy, spirit, and vital essence in the pursuit of inessentials, in its admonitions to not value or promote luxurious goods so that the masses will not be seduced by them, and the need to recognize the cyclical patterns of rise and fall.

The overriding concern of this chapter, also influenced by the *Laozi*, is to follow or comply with the principles of the Way (道理). Following these principles, which refer

¹⁶ Which, coincidentally, is also associated with the Jixia Academy. See Roth, *Original Tao*, p.20-30, and Rickett, p.35.

to the regular patterns of nature or the law of nature, will lead one to success, success being equated with nobility, riches, rank, long life, and the ability to unify the empire.

Is this chapter Huang-Lao?

Rickett, while discussing Huang-Lao in terms of the *Guanzi*, sums up the difference between Huang-Lao and the Daoism of texts such as the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* as follows:

The way becomes much more naturalistic and less mystical. It remains a first principle but it is no longer entirely nameless. It tends to be treated as a natural law of the universe... The ideal ruler becomes a Daoist sage, ruling through nonassertiveness (*wu wei*) and practicing various quietist techniques, while the work of administration is performed by ministers and bureaucracy. Confucian virtues, especially *ren* 仁, "human goodness" or "benevolence," *yi* 義, "a sense of duty" or "righteous conduct," and *li* 禮, "ritualistic principles" or "propriety," are valued.¹⁷

All of these notions are present in the *Jie Lao* chapter. Hence, we may be tempted to label it as Huang-Lao. However, the absence of a discussion of law and its grounding in the Dao, and the absence of Yin-Yang cosmology, demand that we reserve from labelling it. If we want to call it something, better to call it Meng-Lao Daoism (孟老) versus Huang-Lao Daoism.

¹⁷ Rickett, p.21. Incidentally, in a footnote, Rickett contrasts this positive attitude towards Confucianism in the Huang-Lao tradition to the negative one found in *Laozi* 38. However, the writer of this chapter did not read *Laozi* 38 as a critique of these virtues but as an expression of their relationship to the Way and potency. His interpretation was aided by the fact that a key line in chapter 38 appears here in different form, demanding a more positive reading. See page 3 in the translation below.

Commentary 01 on *Laozi* 38

德者，內也。得者，外也。上德不德，言其神不淫於外也。神不淫於外則身全，身全之謂德。德者，得身也。凡德者，以無爲集，以無欲成，以不思安，以不用固。爲之欲之，則德無舍，德無舍則不全。用之思之則不固，不固則無功，無功則生於德。德則無德，不德則在有德。故曰：『上德不德，是以有德。』

Virtue is internal. Attainment is external. “A person of superior virtue does not seek a reputation for virtue” – this means that his spirit is not obsessed with external things. If the spirit is not obsessed with external things then the self is preserved. He who preserves his self is called ‘virtuous,’ [as] virtue is the attainment of the true self.

In general, virtue is gathered in by taking no deliberate action, is perfected by having no desires, remains safe if you avoid deliberation, and rests secure if you avoid application. If you act for it and desire it, then virtue will not have a lodging place. If virtue does not have a lodging place then it cannot be preserved. If you use it and deliberate on it then virtue will not be secure. If it is not secure, then it can have no efficacy. If virtue has no efficacy, then one lives for virtue. [If you live for] virtue you have no virtue, and if you do not [live for] virtue you have virtue. Hence the text says: “The person of superior virtue does not seek a reputation for virtue, and therefore has virtue.”

所以貴無爲無思爲虛者，謂其意無所制也。夫無術者，故以無爲無思爲虛也。夫故以無爲無思爲虛者，其意常不忘虛，是制於爲虛也。虛者，謂其意無所制也。今制於爲虛，是不虛也。虛者之無爲也，不以無爲爲有常，不以無爲爲有常則虛，虛則德盛，德盛之謂上德，故曰：『上德無爲而無不爲也。』

The reason why the text esteems those who act out of emptiness by non-purposive action and not deliberating is that their thoughts avoid being restricted. As for those who lack artfulness, they are so because they deliberately act out of emptiness by means of no purposive action and not deliberating. Those who deliberately act out of emptiness by means of no purposive action and not deliberating never forget their intent to act out of

emptiness, and are thus restricted by their intent to act out of emptiness. To act out of emptiness means that your thoughts avoid being restricted; now, if you are restricted by this intent to act out of emptiness, this is not really acting out of emptiness.

The non-purposive action of one who truly acts out of nothingness is not taken as a constant rule.¹ It is by not taking it as a constant rule that one acts out of emptiness. Acting out of emptiness, one's virtue is replete. Virtue that is replete is superior virtue, hence the text says: "The person of superior virtue takes no purposive action and nothing is not done."²

仁者，謂其中心欣然愛人也。其喜人之有福，而惡人之有禍也。生心之所不能已也，非求其報也。故曰：『上仁爲之而無以爲也。』

To feel co-humanity³ is to gladly love others from one's innermost heart. A person who feels co-humanity rejoices in others' good fortune and laments others' misfortune, and these expressions from his innermost heart⁴ can't be restrained and never seek reciprocation. Hence the text says: "When a person of superior co-humanity acts he acts out of nothing."

義者，君臣上下之事，父子貴賤之差也，知交朋友之接也，親疏內外之分也。臣事君宜，下懷上宜，子事父宜，賤敬貴宜，知交朋友之相助也宜，親者內而疏者外宜。義者，謂其宜也，宜而爲之，故曰：『上義爲之而有以爲也。』

Righteousness is the workings between ruler and minister, superior and inferior; it's the distinction between father and son, esteemed and lowly; it's the affinity between intimates, acquaintances, friends and peers,⁵ and is the difference between close and

¹ A difficult passage to translate. I rely on the flow of the argument for my interpretation. The point the author is trying to drive home is that someone who is 虛 is never restricted nor is he occupied by any thoughts, as his actions are in no way premeditated or deliberate.

² This line does not appear in any other version of the *Laozi* text. The line normally reads:

上德無爲而無以爲 – "A person of superior virtue takes no purposive action and so he acts out of nothing."

³ A more literal translation (i.e. in nominalized form) would be 'the state of feeling co-humanity', but doesn't read well. The stock translation of 仁 is 'benevolence'. However, using 'benevolence' here would mask the reciprocal, relational aspects of this virtue, of which the author is well aware. Moreover, to be 仁 is to have achieved a state of being and not simply to behave in a certain way.

⁴ Here 生心 is a compound meaning 發自內心.

⁵ Here the words 知交朋友 are all nouns referring to social relations.

distant, internal and external. It's how ministers ought to serve rulers, how inferiors ought to cherish superiors, how sons ought to serve fathers, how the lowly ought to revere the esteemed, how intimates, acquaintances, friends and peers ought to assist each other, and how those who are close consider it something internal and those who are strangers consider it something external.

Righteousness – it refers to the appropriateness of this, and as it is appropriate it must be acted on, hence the text says: “When a person of superior righteousness acts he acts out of something.”

禮者，所以貌情也，群義之文章也，君臣父子之交也，貴賤賢不肖之所以別也。中心懷而不諭，故疾趨卑拜而明之。實心愛而不知，故好言繁辭以信之。禮者，外節之所以諭內也。故曰：『禮以貌情也。』凡人之爲外物動也，不知其爲身之禮也。衆人之爲禮也，以尊他人也，故時勸時衰。君子之爲禮，以爲其身，以爲其身，故神之爲上禮，上禮神而衆人貳，故不能相應，不能相應，故曰：『上禮爲之而莫之應。』衆人雖貳，聖人之復恭敬盡手足之禮也不衰，故曰：『攘臂而仍之。』

Propriety is that through which one gives a proper appearance to one's natural inclinations, the emblem or outer manifestation of all righteous acts. It characterizes the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, and is that by which esteemed and lowly, worthy and unworthy are distinguished. [For instance,] when you cherish someone in your innermost heart but you cannot convey this, you scurry after him and bow low so as to clarify this. Or when you love another in your true heart but cannot make it known, it is by means of good speech and elaborate words that you make your feelings believable.⁶ Propriety, then, is the external etiquette through which natural inclinations are conveyed. Hence the text says; “Use propriety to make your natural inclinations apparent.”⁷

That most people are moved by external objects is because they do not understand propriety applies to oneself. The masses act with propriety in order to be respectful to others, and so at times they are motivated and at times they decline. The ruler acts with propriety for his own sake. Since he performs it for his own sake, he makes of it a spirit

⁶ Scurrying after someone, bowing low, using good speech and elaborate words are all instances of propriety, then.

of superior propriety. So superior propriety is a spirit while the masses are ambivalent, hence they cannot respond to each other. It is because they cannot respond to each other that it is said: “The person of superior propriety acts and no one responds to him.” While the masses are ambivalent, the sage still is courteous and reverent, exhausting hand and foot in propriety, and never does he waver in this. Hence the text says: “[The sage] roles up his sleeves and keeps at it.”⁸

道有積而德有功，德者道之功。功有實而實有光，仁者德之光。光有澤而澤有事，義者仁之事也。事有禮而禮有文，禮者義之文也。故曰：『失道而後失德，失德而後失仁，失仁而後失義，失義而後失禮。』

As one has increase in respect to the Way, virtue becomes more effective, for virtue is the efficacy of the Way. Efficacy bears fruit and this fruit is glorious; feeling co-humanity is the glory of virtue. This glory has its sheen and this sheen results in undertakings; righteousness is the undertaking resulting from feeling co-humanity. These undertakings accord with propriety and in propriety there is refinement; propriety is the emblem of righteousness. Hence the text says: “One loses the Way and so loses his virtue, loses his virtue and so loses his feeling of co-humanity, loses his feeling of co-humanity and so loses his righteousness, loses his righteousness and so loses his propriety.”⁹

禮爲情貌者也，文爲質飾者也。夫君子取情而去貌，好質而惡飾。夫恃貌而論情者，其情惡也；須飾而論質者，其質衰也。何以論之？和氏之璧，不飾以五采，隋侯之珠，不飾以銀黃，其質至美，物不足以飾之。夫物之待飾而後行者，其質不美也。是以父子之間，其禮樸而不明，故曰：『禮薄也。』凡物不並盛，陰陽是也。理相奪予，威德是也。實厚者貌薄，父子之禮是也。由是觀之，禮繁者實心衰也。然則爲禮者，事通人之樸心者也。眾人之爲禮也，人應則輕歡，不應則責怨。今爲禮者事通人之樸心，而資之

⁷ This quotation does not appear in the received *Laozi* text.

⁸ Rolling up one's sleeves may not have been considered an act of propriety, and so another possible translation is “[The sage] roles up his sleeves and leads them [the masses] to it.” The reading also hinges on what the 之 in the sentence refers back to – either the sage's unwavering devotion to propriety, or the ambivalent masses.

⁹ Some translators, such as Liao, ignore all of the second 失 in the sentence and take it to be a criticism of Confucian doctrine. Here, the writer clearly views all of these virtues as further refinements and expressions stemming from one source – practicing the Way. Hence, lose the Way and you lose it all.

以相責之分，能毋爭乎？有爭則亂，故曰：『禮者，忠信之薄也，而亂之首乎。』

Propriety is the right appearance of natural inclinations; refinement is deemed the embellishment of substance. Now, the ruler holds fast to natural inclinations and eschews mere appearance, is fond of substance and loathes embellishment. Those who rely on appearance to discuss natural inclinations, their own natural inclinations must be despicable; those who need embellishments to determine substance, their own substance must be degenerative.¹⁰

How shall we discuss this? The jade of Bian-He was not embellished with the five colours, the pearls of Marquis Sui were not embellished with silver and gold;¹¹ their essence was good to the point that nothing *could* embellish them. Now, if a thing works only after being embellished, its substance cannot be good. This is why when it comes to father and son, the propriety between them is simple and not obvious, hence the text says: “Propriety – it’s superficial.”¹²

Just as not all things can flourish at once, because of how Yin and Yang operate, so the principle of taking away and giving to exists, and this is severity and kindness.¹³ As for things that are substantial and deep but appear to be superficial - the propriety of father and son is so. From this standpoint it is clear that when one observes elaborate propriety, it means his mind is in decline.

Be that as it may, the practice of propriety is an activity that is commensurate with the pristine mind of human beings. The practice of propriety by the masses is such that when others respond one is easygoing and happy, but when others do not respond, one places blame and resentment. Now, if the practice of propriety is an activity that is commensurate with the pristine mind of human beings, but yet is based on distinctions

¹⁰ It’s hard to tell what the 其 is referring back to in these sentences.

¹¹ Can also be translated as “silver yellow”. It is unclear what this refers to, but it seems to be a kind of precious object. See Lundahl, p.222

¹² The argument takes an unexpected turn here, as ‘propriety’ is criticized. However, it is important to keep in mind that chapter 38 of the *Laozi* contains this line, for which the author must give some account. Moreover, I think the tension is apparent but unsubstantial. The author is pointing out that 禮 is not just ritual, but something with substance that is ultimately derived from practicing the way. Hence, the point is not the outer appearance of ritual, but that which it is rooted in. 禮薄也 is a contraction of 夫禮者，忠信之薄 line in the received edition.

¹³ Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, believe that 威德 are probably the two “handles” (柄), i.e. reward and punishment, of government, normally rendered as 刑德. See Chen, p.336.

involving mutual recrimination, how can people not wrangle? When people wrangle there is disorder, hence the text says: “Propriety is superficial loyalty and trust, and therefore the beginning of disorder.”

先物行先理動之謂前識，前識者，無緣而妄意度也。何以論之？詹何坐，弟子侍，有牛鳴於門外，弟子曰：『是黑牛也而白題。』詹何曰：『然，是黑牛也，而白在其角。』使人視之，果黑牛而以布裹其角。以詹子之術，嬰眾人之心，華焉殆矣，故曰『道之華也』。嘗試釋詹子之察，而使五尺之愚童子視之，亦知其黑牛而以布裹其角也。故以詹子之察，苦心傷神，而後與五尺之愚童子同功，是以曰『愚之首也』。故曰：『前識者道之華也，而愚之首也。』

To be ahead of the action of things and to be ahead of the operation of principle is called ‘foreknowledge.’ Foreknowledge is calculation undertaken without reason and with reckless guessing. How shall we discuss this? Once, Chan He was seated and his disciples were waiting upon him, when an ox bellowed out from beyond the gate. A disciple said, “It’s a black ox with a white forehead.” Chan He replied, “Yes, it is a black ox, but it’s the horns that are white.” Someone was sent to take a look and, as expected, the ox was black and its horns were wrapped in white cloth. To use the tactics of Master Chan to keep infantile the minds of the masses comes close to being ‘flowery’, hence the text says, “[Foreknowledge is] the flower of the way.” Now, if once, by way of a test, we examine what Master Chan’s ‘perception,’¹⁴ consists in, all we have to do is send out a three-foot tall¹⁵ ignorant kid to take a look, and he too would discover that the black ox’s horns were wrapped in white cloth.

Therefore, to distress one’s mind and exhaust one’s spirit by means of Master Chan’s ‘perception,’ only to find out that a three-foot tall ignorant kid could get the same results, this is why it is said, “[Foreknowledge is] the beginning of folly.” Hence the text says; “Foreknowledge is the flower of the Way and the beginning of folly.”¹⁶

¹⁴ I use ‘perception’ here to translate 察, as it seems to give the right flavour of ‘foreknowledge.’

¹⁵ The 尺 here is that of the Zhou (周) dynasty, when one 尺 was equivalent to about 20 cm today. See Zhang, p.323.

¹⁶ The writer warns us that foreknowledge is a vain show which can exhaust one’s energies, and that there are always other methods available to find things out if need be (which are a lot simpler to boot). This passage is unique in 解老 insofar as it uses a story to illustrate the *Laozi* text, a technique which is used throughout 喻老 – *Illustrating Laozi*.

所謂大丈夫者，謂其智之大也。所謂『處其厚不處其薄』者，行情實而去禮貌也。所謂『處其實不處其華』者，必緣理不徑絕也。所謂『去彼取此』者，去貌徑絕而取緣理好情實也。故曰：『去彼取此。』

That which is called the “Great Man” refers to the greatness of his wisdom. “To dwell in the substantial and not in the superficial,”¹⁷ means that acts of the fruits of natural inclinations and discards propriety and appearance. “To dwell in the fruit and not in the flower,” means that one must certainly follow principles and not take short cuts. “To discard the one and take the other,” means that one eschews the shortcuts of superficial appearance and instead holds to following principles and being fond of the fruits of natural inclinations. Hence the text says, “He discards the one and takes the other.”

Commentary 02 on *Laozi* 58 [middle section only]

人有禍則心畏恐，心畏恐則行端直，行端直則思慮熟，思慮熟則得事理，行端直則無禍害，無禍害則盡天年，得事理則必成功，盡天年則全而壽，必成功則富與貴，全壽富貴之謂福。而福本於有禍，故曰：『禍兮福之所倚。』以成其功也。

When a person encounters disaster his mind becomes fearful. When his mind is fearful his conduct will straighten. When his conduct is straight his thought will become ripe. When his thought has ripened he'll recognize the principles of affairs.¹⁸ With his conduct straight he will encounter neither disaster nor harm. With neither disaster nor harm he will live out his natural allotment of years. Recognizing the principles of affairs he is certain to fulfill efficacy. Living out his natural allotment of years means his life will be preserved and long. And if he is certain to fulfill efficacy, then he will be wealthy and noble. To live a life preserved, long, wealthy, and noble - this is called ‘fortune’, and this fortune had its source in the having had a disaster, hence the text says: “Disaster – that is what ‘fortune’ relies upon!” This is how one fulfills his efficacy.

¹⁷ In this section, the writer is summing up all of his previous arguments, hence the pairs mentioned here match up with pairs that have appeared in previous sections.

¹⁸ This same line appears below in Commentary on *Laozi* 67.

人有福則富貴至，富貴至則衣食美，衣食美則驕心生，驕心生則行邪僻而動棄理，行邪僻則身死夭，動棄理則無成功。夫內有死夭之難，而外無成功之名者，大禍也。而禍本生於有福，故曰：『福兮禍之所伏』。

When a person has fortune, wealth and nobility arrive. With wealth and nobility come the best of clothes and food. With the best of clothes and food, the arrogant mind arises. When the arrogant mind arises conduct becomes wicked and behaviour unprincipled. When conduct is wicked it will lead to premature death. When behaviour is unprincipled you cannot fulfill efficacy. When inside you have the misfortune of premature death, and outside you have the reputation of not fulfilling efficacy - now that's a great disaster! And the disaster had its source in having had good fortune. Hence the text says: "Fortune – that is what disaster lurks in!"

夫緣道理以從事者無不能成。無不能成者，大能成天子之勢尊，而小易得卿相將軍之賞祿。夫棄道理而妄舉動者，雖上有天子諸侯之勢尊，而下有猗頓、陶朱、卜祝之富，猶失其民人而亡其財資也。眾人之輕棄道理而易妄舉動者，不知其禍福之深大而道闊遠若是也，故論人曰：『熟知其極。』

Indeed, those who handle affairs by following the principles of the Way, there is nothing at which they cannot succeed. Those for whom there is nothing at which they cannot succeed, the greater among them are able to gain the power and dignity of the Son of Heaven, while the lesser can easily garner ranks and rewards belonging to high ministers and generals.

As for those who abandon the principles of the Way and are rash in their behaviour, though above they may have the power and dignity of the Son of Heaven or of a feudal lord, or below have the wealth that one would divine and pray for, the riches of Yi Dun and Tao zhu, they still would lose their subjects and fritter away resources.

As for the masses inconsiderately abandoning the Way and principles and easily behaving in a rash way, that's due to not knowing the profundity and scope of [this mutually transformative cycle of] disaster and good fortune, and not knowing that the breadth of the way is far-reaching like that. Therefore the text declares: "Whoever knows the ultimate extent of it?"

人莫不欲富貴全壽，而未有能免於貧賤死夭之禍也，心欲富貴全壽，而今貧賤死夭，是不能至於其所欲至也。凡失其所欲之路而妄行者之謂迷，迷則不能至於其所欲至矣。今眾人之不能至於其所欲至，故曰『迷』。眾人之所不能至於其所欲至也，自天地之剖判以至于今，故曰：『人之迷也，其日故以久矣。』

No one ever does not desire wealth, nobility, health, and longevity, and yet there has never been any capable of avoiding the disasters of poverty, lowliness, death and untimely end. When the mind desires wealth, nobility, health, and longevity, and instead has poverty, lowliness, death and untimely end, this is the inability to reach where it wants to reach.

Generally those who abandon their desired paths and instead carry on in a rash way are called 'lost'. If lost, they are unable to reach where they want to reach. Nowadays the masses have an inability to reach where they want to reach, hence it is said they are "lost." That the masses are unable to reach where they want to reach has been so since the cleaving apart of Heaven and Earth until now. Hence it is said: "As for the people's being lost, its days for this reason have been long lasting."¹⁹

所謂方者，內外相應也，言行相稱也。所謂廉者，必生死之命也，輕恬資財也。所謂直者，義必公正，公心不偏黨也。所謂光者，官爵尊貴，衣裘壯麗也。今有道之士，雖中外信順，不以誹謗窮墮；雖死節輕財，不以侮罷羞貪；雖義端不黨，不以去邪罪私；雖勢尊衣美，不以夸賤欺貧。其故何也？使失路者而肯聽習問知，即不成迷也。今眾人之所以欲成功而反為敗者，生於不知道理而不肯問知而聽能。眾人不肯問知聽能，而聖人強以其禍敗適之，則怨。眾人多而聖人寡，寡之不勝眾，數也。今舉動而與天下之為讎，非全身長生之道也，是以行軌節而舉之也。故曰：『方而不割，廉而不剝，直而不肆，光而不耀。』

The 'square' mentioned here refers to the correspondence between the inner and the outer, the matching of words and actions. 'Pointed' refers to being certain of fate in life and death, how one takes money and property lightly. 'Straight' refers to the certainty to be fair and upright in moral relations, as a fair mind does not act counter to

¹⁹ Again, the received *Laozi* text is different here, and reads: 人之迷，其日固久 – "The people's confusion, its days have certainly lasted a long time."

the group. 'Radiant' refers to the honour and esteem of officials and lords and the magnificence of fine clothing.

Nowadays, the gentleman who practices the Way, though himself faithful at core and externally compliant, neither slanders the destitute nor debases the fallen; though himself willing to die for integrity and taking money and property lightly, will not humiliate the weak nor shame the greedy; though himself righteous and upright and not partial, he will not discard the wicked nor find fault with the selfish; though himself wielding power and respect and dressed in the finest clothing, will not flaunt it in front of the lowly nor use it to embarrass the poor.

What is the reason for this? It is to make those who have lost the path but are still willing to listen to the practiced and inquire of the knowledgeable not become completely lost. Nowadays, the reason why the masses who wish to achieve success but on the contrary suffer failure is because they do not understand the principles of the Way and yet are unwilling to inquire of the knowledgeable and listen to the able. And when the masses are unwilling to inquire of the knowledgeable and listen to the able, and the sage yet forcibly uses their misfortunes and failures to make them behave properly, the masses become resentful. The masses are numerous while the sages are few; and as for the few not overcoming the numerous - well, that is a matter of numbers. Nowadays, if you incite them to act in such a way that you become an enemy of all under Heaven, this is not the way to preserve one's person and prolong one's life, and for this reason the sage incites them to act by keeping to established ways and restraints. Hence the text says: "[The sage is] square but does not cut. He is pointed but does not stab. He is straight but does not align. He is bright but does not shine."

Commentary 03 on *Laozi* 59

聰明睿智天也，動靜思慮人也。人也者，乘於天明以視，寄於天聰以聽，託於天智以思慮。故視強則目不明，聽甚則耳不聰，思慮過度則智識亂。目不明則不能決黑白之分，耳不聰則不能別清濁之聲，智識亂則不能審得失之地。目不能決黑白之色則謂之盲，耳不能別清濁之聲則謂之聾，心不能審得失之地則謂之狂。盲則不能避晝日之險，聾則不能知雷霆之害，狂則不能免人間法令之禍。書之所謂治人者，適動靜之節，省思慮之費也。所謂事天者，不極聰明之力，不盡智識之任。苟極盡則費神多，費神多則盲聾悖狂之禍

至，是以嗇之。嗇之者，愛其精神，嗇其智識也。故曰：『治人事天莫如嗇。』

Acuity, clarity, intelligence and wisdom – these are endowed by Heaven. Action, rest, pondering and calculating – these are developed by human effort. People ride on Heaven's clarity for vision, depend on Heaven's acuity for hearing, and rely on Heaven's wisdom for contemplation. Therefore if people exert too much in sight their eyes will lose clarity; when they focus too much in hearing their ears will lose acuity; when they go too far in contemplation their wisdom and knowledge will become disordered.

If the eyes lack clarity they are unable to determine the black from the white; if the ears lack acuity they are unable to differentiate clear and muddled notes; if wisdom and knowledge are in disorder they are unable to examine the grounding of gain and loss.

If the eyes are unable to determine the black from the white they are called blind; if the ears cannot differentiate between clear and muddled notes they are called deaf; if the mind is unable to examine the grounding of gain and loss then it is called mad.

If blind, one cannot evade dangers in broad daylight; if deaf, one cannot tell the harm that accompanies the sounding of thunder; if mad, one cannot avoid the disaster of [violating] the laws and regulations between men.

That which the text²⁰ calls 'governing the people' refers to making appropriate the regulations of their activities and repose and curtailing the waste of [time and effort] in thinking [for themselves]. That which is called 'serving Heaven' means not straining clarity and acuity and not exhausting one's wisdom and knowledge to its capacity. To carelessly strain and exhaust oneself is to expend too much of one's spirit. And if one expends too much of one's spirit, then the disasters of blindness, deafness, and madness arrive. This, then, is the need to spare it. One who spares it will cherish his vital spirit, and spare his wisdom and knowledge. Hence the text says: "To regulate people and serve Heaven there is nothing like being sparing."

眾人之用神也躁，躁則多費，多費之謂侈。聖人之用神也靜，靜則少費，少費之謂嗇。嗇之謂術也生於道理。夫能嗇也，是

²⁰ The fact that a 'text' or 'document' 書 is mentioned indicates the author was commenting on what he believed to be a coherent piece of work, as does the fact that he deals mostly with entire chapters rather than passages alone. In *Yu Lao*, the text is never referred to by 書, and passages are handled in piecemeal fashion.

從於道而服於理者也。眾人離於患，陷於禍，猶未知退，而不服從道理。聖人雖未見禍患之形，虛無服從於道理，以稱蚤服。故曰：『夫謂蚤，是以蚤服。』

The masses are hasty in using their energy, and being hasty they are prone to expend more of it. To expend much energy is said to be extravagant. The sage is serene when using his energy, and being serene he expends little of it. To expend little energy is said to be sparing. Sparing is said to be a method that arises out of the principles of the Way.

Now, to be capable of being sparing means to be one who accords with the Way and submits to the patterns of things. The masses, when encountering a calamity or sinking into disaster, never know about beating a retreat, and as such do not follow the Way or submit to principles of things. The sage, though yet to see the shaping of disaster and calamity, being completely empty, willingly submits to the principles of the Way, and is thus designated as ‘submitting from the start.’ Hence the text says: “Because he is sparing, he is able to submit from the start.”

知治人者其思慮靜，知事天者其孔竅虛。思慮靜，故德不去。孔竅虛，則和氣日入。故曰：『重積德。』夫能令故德不去，新和氣日至者，蚤服者也。故曰：『蚤服是謂重積德。』積德而后神靜，神靜而后和多，和多而后計得，計得而后能御萬物，能御萬物則戰易勝敵，戰易勝敵而論必蓋世，論必蓋世，故曰『無不克』。無不克本於重積德，故曰『重積德則無不克』。戰易勝敵則兼有天下，論必蓋世則民人從。進兼天下而退從民人，其術遠，則眾人莫見其端末。莫見其端末，是以莫知其極，故曰：『無不克則莫知其極。』

The thought of one who knows how to govern people is serene; the apertures of one who knows how to serve Heaven are empty.²¹ When thought is serene then virtue will not dissipate. When apertures are empty, harmonizing vital energy will enter the person every day. Hence the text says: “repetitive accumulation of virtue.”

Now, to be able to bring it about that old virtue does not dissipate and fresh harmonizing vital energy arrives every day is what the text calls ‘the quick way to submission.’ Hence the text says: “The quick way to submission means repetitive

²¹ Probably referring to the seven apertures of the head, i.e. the eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth.

accumulation of virtue.” One accumulates virtue and the spirit becomes still; once the spirit is still then harmony increases; once harmony increases then one can realize his plans; realizing his plans he is able to command the myriad things, and if able to command the myriad things he will easily triumph over the enemy in war, and when he can easily triumph over the enemy in war then his strategy will sweep the world. Once his strategy sweeps the world, the text says: “there is nothing that he cannot conquer.” This stage of ‘there is nothing that he cannot conquer’ had its source in the repetitive accumulation of virtue, hence the text says: “If one repetitively accumulates virtue, there is nothing the he cannot conquer.”

If one can easily triumph over the enemy in war then one can unite the whole world, and if one’s strategy is sure to sweep the world then one’s subjects will be compliant. Thus, going forth he will annex the world, and when withdrawing his subjects will follow him. If his methods are far-reaching, then the masses in no case can see its beginning and end. If no one can see its beginning and end, thereby the people in no case can know his limits. Hence the text says: “As there is nothing that he cannot conquer, no one knows the limits he can reach.”

凡有國而后亡之，有身而后殃之，不可謂能有其國能保其身。夫能有其國、必能安其社稷，能保其身、必能終其天年，而后可謂能有其國、能保其身矣。夫能有其國、保其身者必且體道，體道則其智深，其智深則其會遠，其會遠眾人莫能見其所極。唯夫能令人不見其事極，不見事極者為保其身、有其國，故曰：『莫知其極。』莫知其極『則可以有國』。所謂『有國之母，』母者，道也，道也者生于所以有國之術，所以有國之術，故謂之有國之母。夫道以與世周旋者，其建生也長，持祿也久，故曰：『有國之母可以長久。』樹木有蔓根，有直根。根者，書之所謂柢也。柢也者，木之所以建生也；蔓根者，木之所以持生也。德也者，人之所以建生也；祿也者，人之所以持生也。今建於理者其持祿也久，故曰：『深其根。』體其道者，其生日長，故曰：『固其柢。』柢固則生長，根深則視久，故曰：『深其根，固其柢，長生久視之道也。』

In general, if you possess a state and then lose it, or possess your healthy person then let disaster befall it, then you cannot be called capable of possessing a state or protecting your person. Now, to be capable of possessing a state you must certainly be capable or protecting its sacrificial altars, and to capable of protecting your person you

must certainly be capable of fulfilling your natural allotment of years – only after meeting these requirements can you be called capable of possessing a state or protecting your person!

Now, to be capable of possessing a state or protecting your person means you must also embody the way. If you embody the way then your wisdom will be deep, if your wisdom is deep then your abilities will be far-reaching, and if your abilities are far-reaching then the masses in no case will be able to see its limits. Only such a person can make others not see the limits of one's affairs, and the people's not being able to see the limits of one's affairs is deemed protecting your person and possessing your state, hence the text says: "None know his limits." "None know his limits, thereby he is capable of possessing a state."

As for that which the text calls "maintaining the mother of the state," this 'mother' is the Way.²² The Way as such springs from the art of maintaining a state. Since it is the art of maintaining a state, it is referred to as "maintaining the mother of the state." One who uses the Way to be perfectly in step with the world, his time in life will last long and his term in office will last long, hence the text says: "If one maintains the mother of the state, he can, accordingly, long endure."

Trees have roots that spread out and roots that grow straight down. Roots (根) are what the text calls base roots (柢). The base roots are those through which the tree is able to establish itself, while the roots that spread out are those through which the tree is able to support itself.

[As for people], virtue is that by which people are able to establish themselves; rank is that by which people are able to support themselves. Now, he who establishes himself with principles will be able to support himself through rank for a long time, and hence the text says: "Deepen your roots." He who embodies the Way will live through many days, hence the text says: "Make firm your base." With a firm base his life is long, and with deep roots he will see many years, hence the text says: "Deepen your roots,

²² The way for this author is the way of the ruler, or the art of ruling, and there is hardly a trace of the metaphysical, transcendent Dao in this chapter. The one passage where the Dao is explicitly spoken of in these terms appears below, 'Commentary on *Dao*'.

make firm your base - this is the way of living long and enduring in overseeing the empire."²³

Commentary 04 on *Laozi* 60

工人數變業則失其功，作者數搖徙則亡其功。一人之作，日亡半日，十日則亡五人之功矣。萬人之作，日亡半日，十日則亡五萬人之功矣。然則數變業者，其人彌眾，其虧彌大矣。凡法令更則利害易，利害易則民務變，務變之謂變業。故以理觀之，事大眾而數搖之則少成功，藏大器而數徙之則多敗傷，烹小鮮而數撓之則賊其澤，治大國而數變法則民苦之，是以有道之君貴靜，不重變法，故曰：『治大國者若烹小鮮。』

If an artisan repeatedly switches occupations then he will lose his achievements. If a worker repeatedly moves about then he will lose any chance for achievement. If a person working a whole day loses half a day's work, after ten days he will have lost the work of five persons. If ten thousand people working a whole day lose half a day's work, then after ten days they will have lost the work of fifty thousand men. So, then, the more there are of those who repeatedly change their occupations, the greater the losses!

In general, if laws and decrees change then benefit and harm will be different; if benefit and harm are different then the people's duties will change. When duties change, this means 'changing occupations.' Therefore, if we look at things in terms of principles, then when employing a great multitude you keep shifting them about then their accomplishments will be few, when you harbour great talent and you continually move it about, it will be worn out and harmed, when cooking small fish you repeatedly stir them about then they will lose their moisture, and when governing a great state if you repeatedly alter laws then the people will suffer from it. Therefore the ruler who has mastered the way of ruling values tranquility and does not value changing laws. Hence it is said: "Governing a great state is like cooking small fish."

人處疾則貴醫，有禍則畏鬼。聖人在上則民少欲，民少欲則血氣治，而舉動理則少禍害。夫內無痠疽瘰癧之害，而外無刑罰法誅之禍者，其輕恬鬼也甚，故曰：『以道蒞天下其鬼不神。』治世

²³ The text quoted here is different than the received *Laozi* text, which reads: 深根固柢，長生久視之道 – "Having deep roots firmly established is the Way of long life and enduring oversight."

之民不與鬼神相害也，故曰：『非其鬼不神也，其神不傷人也。』
鬼祟也疾人之謂鬼傷人，人逐除之之謂人傷鬼也；民犯法令之謂民傷上，上刑戮民之謂上傷民；民不犯法則上亦不行刑，上不行刑之謂上不傷人；故曰：『聖人亦不傷民。』上不與民相害，而人不與鬼相傷，故曰：『兩不相傷。』民不敢犯法，則上內不用刑罰，而外不事利其產業，上內不用刑罰、而外不事利其產業則民蕃息，民蕃息而畜積盛，民蕃息而畜積盛之謂有德。凡所謂崇者，魂魄去而精神亂，精神亂則無德。鬼不崇人則魂魄不去，魂魄不去而精神不亂，精神不亂之謂有德。上盛畜積，而鬼不亂其精神，則德盡在於民矣。故曰：『兩不相傷，則德交歸焉。』言其德上下交盛而俱歸於民也。

When a person meets illness he holds the physician in esteem, when he has a calamity he holds the malign spirits in awe. When a sage is ruling above the people will have few desires. When people have few desires the humours of their blood will be amiable and their actions principled; thus, they will have few misfortunes. Those who are free of the ravages of sickness and disease on the inside and are free of the calamity of legal punishments and censure on the outside are extremely indifferent towards malign spirits, hence it is said: "If the world is managed according to the way, then the malign spirits will not have numinous power." People and malign spirits of an orderly age do not harm each other, hence it is said: "It is not that these malign spirits cease to have numinous power, just that they will not harm people."

When malign spirits are mischievous and cause people to be ill, this is called 'malign spirits harming people.' When people drive away malign spirits, this is called 'people harming malign spirits.' When people disobey laws and decrees, this is called 'people harming rulers.' When rulers punish and slaughter people, this is called 'rulers harming people.' If people don't break laws, then rulers won't enact punishments. When rulers don't enact punishments, this is called 'rulers not harming people', and so it is said: "The sage, in fact, does not harm people." When rulers and people do not harm each other, and people and malign spirits do not harm each other, it is said: "Neither of the two cause harm."

If people do not dare to break laws, then rulers will not carry out punishments on their persons, nor will they seek to profit by seizing the fruits of their labours. If rulers will not carry out punishments on their persons and will not seek to profit by taking the

fruits of their labours, then the people will prosper and multiply. When people prosper and multiply, then the reserves of the state will increase. When people prosper and multiply, and the reserves of the state increase, this is ‘having potency.’

Generally, when someone is said to be ‘cursed’, it refers to those for whom the ethereal spirit and earth-bound soul have departed and whose vital essence is in a wild state. Being in such a wild state means an absence of potency. If malign spirits are not mischievous with people, then people’s ethereal spirit and earth-bound soul will not depart. If people’s ethereal spirit and earth-bound soul will not depart their vital essence will not be in a wild state. If their vital essence is not in a wild state, this is ‘having potency.’

Therefore, when the reserves of the state increase and malign spirits do not cause people’s vital essence to be in a wild state, then potency will be replete among the people. Hence it is said: “When neither of the two cause harm, then potency unites and reverts [back to the people].” In other words, their potency will unite and flourish and will all revert back to the people.

Commentary 05 on *Laozi* 46

有道之君，外無怨讎於鄰敵，而內有德澤於人民。夫外無怨讎於鄰敵者，其遇諸侯也外有禮義。內有德澤於人民者，其治人事也務本。遇諸侯有禮義則役希起，治民事務本則淫奢止。凡馬之所以大用者，外供甲兵，而內給淫奢也。今有道之君，外希用甲兵，而內禁淫奢。上不事馬於戰鬥逐北，而民不以馬遠淫通物，所積力唯田疇，積力於田疇必且糞灌，故曰：『天下有道，卻走馬以糞也。』

The ruler who practices the Way abroad bears no enmity towards his bordering rival states and domestically treats the people in his own state with benevolent rule. Now, the ruler who bears no enmity towards his bordering rival states receives feudal lords and foreign dignitaries with the proper protocols. The ruler who treats the people of his own state with benevolent rule in governing his people works at what is fundamental. If he receives feudal lords with the proper protocols, then troops will rarely be raised; if in governing his people he works at what is fundamental then extravagant behaviour will cease.

Generally speaking, the greatest use of horses is to equip the troops abroad, while domestically they contribute to extravagance. Now, a ruler who practices the Way seldom deploys his troops abroad and forbids redundant extravagance domestically. If the ruler does not use horses to wage war and pursue the defeated, and the people do not use horses to transport goods in order to satisfy the craving for distant things, then what they will concentrate their efforts on will only be their own fields. Concentrating efforts on their own fields necessarily means [using horses for] fertilization, and so the text says: “When the Way prevails among all under Heaven, one relegates coursers to producing manure.”

人君者無道，則內暴虐其民，而外侵欺其鄰國。內暴虐則民產絕，外侵欺則兵數起。民產絕則畜生少，兵數起則士卒盡。畜生少則戎馬乏，士卒盡則軍危殆。戎馬乏則將馬出，軍危殆則近臣役。馬者，軍之大用；郊者，言其近也。今所以給軍之具於將馬近臣，故曰：『天下無道，戎馬生於郊矣。』

If the ruler of men does not practice the Way, then inside his borders he will be cruel to and mistreat his people, and outside his borders he will encroach upon and harass his neighbouring states. If the ruler is cruel and mistreating inside his borders then the people's productivity will stop, and if encroaching and harassing his neighbouring states then troops will often be raised. If the people's productivity stops, then the production of domestic animals will lessen. If troops will often be raised, then the ranks of troops will be used up. If the production of domestic animals lessens, then there will be a lack of war-horses; if troops are used up, the army will be in a precarious state. If war-horses are lacking, then even the generals' horses²⁴ will have to go on the battlefield. If the army is

²⁴ Most commentators read 將馬 ('mares') instead of 將馬. Gu Guangqi 顧廣圻 suggested that the character '將' was mistakenly used for '將' given the similarities in the appearance of the characters (將, 當作將, 形近之誤。) This seems plausible given the context – 'if war-horses are few, then even mares will have to go on the battlefield.' Also, the 'Debates on salt and iron' 鹽鐵論 of the first century B.C. includes a line that reads 戎馬不足，將牝入陳，故駒生於戰地 "war horses became insufficient, so even mares in foal were enlisted in the ranks, which resulted in colts being born out on the battlefields." However, both Tsuda Hokei 津田鳳卿 and Zhang Jue 張覺 believe that 將馬 should be read as 將之馬 – the generals' horses. Zhang believes that the term 郊 in the statement 郊者，言其近也 refers to the officials next to the ruler at court (perhaps 'surrounding' the rulers at court). The term 近, in one of its standard meanings, can denote the ministers close to the ruler, and later in this passage we indeed find the compound 近臣, which is suggestive. Also, the pairing of 'generals' horses and high ministers' seems better than 'mares and high ministers'. What further bolsters Hokei's and Zhang's position is that they do

in a precarious state, then even officials close to the ruler will be pressed into service. The horse is something of great use for the military; ‘surroundings’ are the officials close to the ruler. Since these days the troops’ equipage must have recourse to the generals’ horses and intimate officials, the text says: “When the way is not practiced in the world, then war-horses must be brought forth from the stalls of the high ministers.”²⁵

人有欲則計會亂，計會亂而有欲甚，有欲甚則邪心勝，邪心勝則事經絕，事經絕則禍難生。由是觀之，禍難生於邪心，邪心誘於可欲。可欲之類，進則教良民爲姦，退則令善人有禍。姦起則上侵弱君，禍至則民人多傷。然則可欲之類，上侵弱君而下傷人民。夫上侵弱君而下傷人民者，大罪也。故曰：『禍莫大於可欲。』是以聖人不引五色，不淫於聲樂，明君賤玩好而去淫麗。

If people have desires their calculations will soon be in disorder, if their calculations are in disorder their desires will only intensify. When desires intensify then the wicked mind will triumph, and if the wicked mind triumphs then one’s handling of affairs will come to an end. When one’s handling of affairs come to an end then disasters and difficulties will arise.

Looking at it from this viewpoint, disasters and difficulties arise out of the wicked mind, and the wicked mind is drawn out by desirable objects. This category of desirable objects, if the ruler promotes it he will cause innocent common folk to be villainous, while if he restricts it he will cause good men to meet with disaster.²⁶ When treachery comes about then at court it will encroach upon and weaken the ruler, and when disasters arrive then the people will incur more injuries. So then, this category of desirable objects will encroach upon and weaken the ruler above and will injure the people below. To

not emend the text to understand 將. Finally, there is also a question of military tactics: Zhang notes that generals, under normal circumstances, did not go out to do battle, while Chen believes that the generals’ horses would be dispatched into battle with all the rest (i.e. why wait until the number of horses had depleted until joining the fray?), and thus opposes this reading. The keys to reading this passage are the terms 將, 近 and 郊. If these are taken to mean “mares 牝”, “the closeness [of the battle]” and “outskirts”, then the Gu’s reading seems more justifiable. If these are taken to mean “generals”, “those surrounding the ruler” and “the ministers close to the ruler - 近臣” then Hokei’s and Zhang’s seems more justifiable. I go with the latter. For Hokei, Gu, and Chen, see Chen, p.361. For Zhang, see Zhang, p.347. For a complete translation of the 鹽鐵論 passage, see Lynn, p.141.

²⁵ This same passage in *Yu Lao* is best translated as “[When the way is absent from the world], war horses are bred in the suburbs.”

encroach upon and weaken the ruler above and to injure the people below is a great crime! Hence the text says: “There is no greater disaster than [being seduced by] desirable objects.”²⁷ Therefore the sage is not enticed by the five colours and does not indulge in music, and the enlightened ruler holds lightly amusement and attractions and discards indulgence and beauty.

人無毛羽，不衣則不犯寒。上不屬天，而下不著地，以腸胃爲根本，不食則不能活。是以不免於欲利之心，欲利之心不除，其身之憂也。故聖人衣足以犯寒，食足以充虛，則不憂矣。眾人則不然，大爲諸侯，小餘千金之資，其欲得之憂不除也，胥靡有免，死罪時活，今不知足者之憂，終身不解，故曰：『禍莫大於不知足。』

Man has neither fur nor feathers, so if he doesn't wear clothes he cannot combat the cold. Above he is not connected to Heaven, below he is not attached to the Earth; he takes his intestines and stomach as the fundamental source – if he doesn't eat then he cannot live. This is the reason why he cannot avoid having a covetous mind, and if he cannot eliminate this benefit-seeking mind, then he will be full of worry. Therefore as long as the sage has sufficient clothing to combat the cold and sufficient food to fill his empty belly he has no worries at all. The masses are not so, and though the greater among them can become feudal lords, and though the lesser might have a surplus wealth of a thousand pieces of gold,²⁸ the worry caused by coveting will not be eliminated. Prisoners have a chance to be set free, those sentenced to death are sometimes able to live, and yet nowadays the worries of those who don't know sufficiency will last till the end of their lives. Hence it is said: “There is no greater disaster than not knowing sufficiency.”²⁹

²⁶ I believe this is the most plausible reading of the passage, and I follow Zhang. The ‘good people’ who own or possess or otherwise can't avoid these pleasurable objects will meet the ‘disaster’ of punishment if the ruler restricts them. See Zhang, p.349.

²⁷ Compare to the received editions of the *Laozi*, which either read 咎莫大於欲得.

²⁸ A similar passage dividing the rank of officialdom and the riches of private life appears above in Commentary on Laozi 58.

²⁹ This line is also commented on in *Yu Lao*, however, there is a significant difference in the use of 足. Here, it is best rendered as ‘sufficiency’, as the sage seeks to acquire the bare minimum necessary for survival; by not wanting more, the sage is free of worry. However, the stress in *Yu Lao* is on knowing ‘contentment’, for in that passage, an Earl is led to ruin because of his greed. In *Yu Lao*, the Earl could have avoided his ruin by being content with what he already had; here, it is clear that having rank or wealth is the very source of anxiety.

故欲利甚于憂，憂則疾生，疾生而智慧衰，智慧衰則失度量，失度量則妄舉動，妄舉動則禍害至，禍害至而疾嬰內，疾嬰內則痛禍薄外，痛禍薄外則苦痛雜於腸胃之間，苦痛雜於腸胃之間則傷人也僇，僇則退而自咎，退而自咎也生於欲利，故曰：『咎莫僇於欲利。』

Therefore, if you covet intensely then³⁰ you will worry; if you worry then you'll be ill; if ill your wisdom will wane; if wisdom wanes you'll lose the ability to grade and measure; having lost the ability to grade and measure, actions become rash; with rash actions arrive disaster and harm; with the arrival of disaster and harm the illness will bind your innermost regions; if the illness binds your innermost regions then this painful disaster will reach the external appearance; if this painful disaster reaches the external appearance then the misery and pain will become mixed together in the area of the intestines and stomach; if the misery and pain mix together in the area of the intestines and stomach then the injury to the person will be agonizing;³¹ if it is agonizing then the person will retreat and find fault with himself. This retreating and finding fault with the self arose out of being covetous, hence the saying: "There is no more agonizing fault than being covetous."³²

Commentary 06 on Dao³³

道者，萬物之所然也，萬理之所稽也。理者，成物之文也；道者，萬物之所以成也。故曰：『道，理之者也。』物有理不可以相薄，物有理不可以相薄故理之爲物之制。萬物各異理，萬物各異理而道盡稽萬物之理，故不得不化；不得不化，故無常操；無常

³⁰ Taking 于 to mean 則.

³¹ See the passage above, where the author describes the intestines and stomach as the 'fundamental source' of life.

³² Again, compare this quote with the received edition, which reads 咎莫大於欲得 ("There is no greater calamity than being covetous.")

³³ The only section in *Jie Lao* where the author comments on the Dao as the ultimate source and progenitor of things, hence bringing out the metaphysical aspects of the Dao from the *Laozi*. Throughout the rest of the commentary, the *Dao* is translated as the *way* since it is clearly the way to achieve success and protect your person while in public office, hence it can be called the *way* of the ruler or official. Moreover, this is the only passage with no quotations from the *Laozi*. It is also distinguished by its frequent use of end rhymes. Zhang speculates that it might be material that has gotten in by mistake, maybe from 主道. However, the similarities with that chapter are superficial. There are much more striking similarities between this passage and *Dao Yuan* 道原, the fourth 'book' of the *Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts* 黃老帛書, unearthed at Mawangdui in 1973, including the repeated use of the '...得之以...' pattern. Most likely, this is some other Huang-Lao document that has gotten into this chapter by mistake.

操，是以死生氣稟焉，萬智斟酌焉，萬事廢興焉。天得之以高，地得之以藏，維斗得之以成其威，日月得之以恆其光，五常得之以常其位，列星得之以端其行，四時得之以御其變氣，軒轅得之以擅四方，赤松得之與天地統，聖人得之以成文章。道與堯、舜俱智，與接輿俱狂，與桀、紂俱滅，與湯、武俱昌。以爲近乎，遊於四極；以爲遠乎，常在吾側；以爲暗乎，其光昭昭；以爲明乎，其物冥冥；而功成天地，和化雷霆，宇內之物，恃之以成。凡道之情，不制不形，柔弱隨時，與理相應。萬物得之以死，得之以生；萬事得之以敗，得之以成。道譬諸若水，溺者多飲之即死，渴者適飲之即生。譬之若劍戟，愚人以行忿則禍生，聖人以誅暴則福成。故得之以死，得之以生，得之以敗，得之以成。

Dao is that by which the myriad things are so, the sum of the myriad principles. Principles are the patterns out of which things are composed; the Dao is that by which the myriad things are composed. Hence it is said, "The Dao is that which principles them."³⁴ Since things have their own patterns they cannot encroach upon one another; since they cannot encroach upon one another, patterns are deemed the definers of things. The myriad things each has its own pattern, and the Dao is the sum of all the principles. Hence it cannot but transform. As it cannot but transform, it has no constant mode. As it has no constant mode:

Death and life are endowed with *qi* from it,
The myriad wisdoms are ladled out from it,
The myriad affairs wax and wane because of it.

Heaven obtains it and thus becomes high.
Earth receives it and thus stores everything.

The polar star receives it and thus achieves its imposing influence. (威 *jwer*)
The sun and the moon receive it and are persistently radiant. (光 *kwang*)
The five constants³⁵ receive it and thus establish their positions. (位 *ylwer*)
The arrangement of stars receive it and thus aright their movements. (行 *grang*)
The four seasons receive it and thus regulate their changing climates. (氣 *xjer*)
The Yellow Emperor³⁶ received it and thus appropriated the world. (方 *pjwang*)

³⁴ Some have altered the text to read 道，紀之者也 ('the Dao is what threads them together'), which better conforms to the last line of *Laozi* 14. The change, however, seems unnecessary and arbitrary given the context. The distinct style and philosophy of this section, coupled with the conspicuous absence of a quote from the *Laozi*, convince me it is an interpolation.

³⁵ Most probably the 'five phases' or 'five processes' (五行) of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth (金木水火土).

Chi Song³⁷ received it and attained the longevity of Heaven and Earth.
Sage obtained it and thus perfected the emblems of culture. (章 *tjang*)

The Dao joined with Yao and Shun³⁸ in perfect wisdom, and it joined with Jie Yu³⁹ in perfect madness. It joined with Jie and Zhou in perfect destruction, and it joined with Tang and Wu in perfect prosperity.

When you think it close at hand, (近 *gjan*)
it has roamed the four corners of the world; (極 *giek*)
When you think it far off, (遠 *yjwan*)
it's right by your side. (側 *tsiek*)

When you think it obscure and dim,
it radiates the brightness of a sun; (明 *miweng*)
When you think it clear and luminous,
its stuff is hidden and obscure.

It's accomplishment is the completion of heaven and Earth.
Its harmonious activity gave rise to thunder. (震 *deng*)
All things under the Heavens (物 *mjwet*)
Wwe their formation to it. (成 *djieng*)

Generally, these are the properties of the Dao: (*dzjieng*)
It neither has structure nor takes shape; (形 *geng*)
It is pliant and yielding according to the time, (時 *diey*)
And responds and adapts according to principles.

The myriad things:
Receive it and live, (生 *sreng*)
Receive it and die, (死 *sjier*)

The myriad things:
receive it and fail, (敗 *brwar*)
receive it and succeed. (成 *djieng*)

³⁶ A fictitious historical sage, said to have invented administration and war. Often listed as the last sage before Yao and Shun. He was one of the figureheads of the Huang-lao 黃老 school of thought (the other being Laozi), but is mostly frowned upon in the outer chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

³⁷ Or the 'Crimson Pine Master'. Also said to be the 'master of rain' during the time of the Yellow Emperor. Fictitious.

³⁸ Historical sages, perhaps fictitious. They are the heroes of the Confucian school.

³⁹ Seems to crop up everywhere in the ancient literature when a madman is needed. He also appears in the *Analects* and the *Zhuangzi*, among other texts.

The Way can be compared with water:

If a drowning man swallows too much of it he dies, (死 *sjier*)

if a thirsty man drinks just enough of it he lives. (生 *sreng*)

Compare it to a sword or a spear:

A fool uses it out of anger and misfortune arises, (生 *sreng*)

a sage punishes crime with it and fortune results. (成 *djieng*)

Therefore;

You receive it and die, (死 *sjier*)

receive it and live; (生 *sreng*)

You receive it and fail, (敗 *brwar*)

you receive it and succeed. 成 。 (*djieng*)

Commentary 07 on *Laozi* 14

人希見生象也，而得死象之骨，案其圖以想其生也，故諸人之所以意想者皆謂之象也。今道雖不可得聞見，聖人執其見功以處見其形，故曰：『無狀之狀，無物之象。』

People seldom see a living elephant, so they obtain the bones of a dead elephant, and, according to their design, imagine a living one. Therefore, that which people use to imagine a thing is called 'form'. Now, though the way can't be heard or seen, the sage gets a hold of its visible⁴⁰ effects to settle on and see its shape, hence it is said, "The shapeless shape, the thing-less form."

Commentary 08 on *Laozi* 1⁴¹

凡理者，方圓、短長、麤靡、堅脆之分也。故理定而後可得道也。故定理有存亡，有死生，有盛衰。夫物之一存一亡，乍死乍生，初盛而後衰者，不可謂常。唯夫與天地之剖判也具生，至天地之消散也不死不衰者謂常。而常者，無攸易，無定理，無定理非在于常所，是以不可道也。聖人觀其玄虛，用其周行，強字之曰道，然而可論，故曰：『道之可道，非常道也。』

Generally, principles account for the difference between short and round, short and long, coarse and refined, hard and brittle. Hence only after principles are fixed can

⁴⁰ Here, 見 means 現, i.e. the what 'can' be seen' or what is 'visible'.

we get at what the Dao is. Among these fixed principles are survival and destruction, life and death, flourish and decay. Things that now survive and now perish, suddenly come to life and suddenly die, which flourish at the start and later decay - they cannot be called constant. Only that which existed together with the cleaving apart of Heaven and Earth and which can last until their disintegration without dying or decaying may be called constant. Yet what is constant is without change or fixed principle of its own. Since it has no fixed principle, it is not something that resides in a constant condition. This is why one cannot talk about it. The sage sees its mysterious emptiness uses the functionality of its great cyclical movement. Forced to give it a name he calls it *Dao*.⁴² and only then can it be discussed. Hence it is said “The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way.”⁴³

Commentary 09 on *Laozi* 50

人始于生而卒于死。始之謂出，卒之謂入，故曰：『出生入死。』人之身三百六十節，四肢，九竅，其大具也。四肢與九竅十有三者，十有三者之動靜盡屬于生焉。屬之謂徒也，故曰：『生之徒也十有三者。』至死也十有三具者皆還而屬之于死，死之徒亦有十三，故曰：『生之徒十有三，死之徒十有三。』凡民之生而生者固動，動盡則損也，而動不止，是損而不止也，損而不止則生盡，生盡之謂死，則十有三具者皆為死死地也。故曰：『民之生，生而動，動皆之死地，之十有三。』是以聖人愛精神而貴處靜。

People begin in birth and end in death. Beginning is called ‘emerging’, and ending is called ‘entering’, hence the text says, “Emerging is life, entering is death.” A person’s body has three hundred and sixty sections, and the four extremities and nine openings⁴⁴ are its greatest implements. The four extremities and nine openings total thirteen. The movements of these thirteen all belong to life, and so can be called

⁴¹ This section follows nicely from the previous one. There, we were told that the sage knows of the Dao because he can see its visible effects, a point that is echoed here below.

⁴² Chapter 25 of the *Laozi* has a similar passage: 吾不知其名，字之曰道。

⁴³ A.C. Graham, in *Disputers of the Tao*, offers the following interpretation of this section: “By relating the universal Way to the local patterns of things Han Fei is able to give a rational account of the opening sentence of *Lao-tzu* ‘the Way that can be ‘Way’-ed [formulated in words as the Way] is not the constant Way.’ Since the Way includes all the contrasting courses which things follow, the way which a thing may be described as following can only be one of the localized regularities.”

⁴⁴ Probably referring to the eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, urethral meatus (pee-hole), and anus. Compare to the ‘seven openings’ referred to in Commentary on *Laozi* 59.

‘dependencies’, hence the text says, “Life’s dependencies number thirteen.” Arriving at death, these thirteen great implements all belong to death, so death’s dependencies also number thirteen, hence the text says, “Life’s dependencies number thirteen, and death’s dependencies number thirteen.”

In general what keeps people living is certainly movement. When movement is exhausted harm results. But as long as movement never ceases harm never ceases as well. When harm does not cease, the life will be thoroughly depleted. A life thoroughly depleted is also called ‘death’, so these thirteen equipment all act and die already in this condition of ‘death’. Hence the text says, “As for people’s lives, as long as they live they move, yet every move leads to the land of death through thirteen avenues.”⁴⁵ Therefore the sage cherishes his vital essence and esteems dwelling in quietude and stillness.⁴⁶

此甚大于兕虎之害。夫兕虎有域，動靜有時，避其域，省其時，則免其兕虎之害矣。民獨知兕虎之有爪角也，而莫知萬物之盡有爪角也，不免于萬物之害。何以論之？時雨降集，曠野閒靜，而以昏晨犯山川，則風露之爪角害之。事上不忠，輕犯禁令，則刑法之爪角害之。處鄉不節，憎愛無度，則爭鬥之爪角害之。嗜慾無限，動靜不節，則瘞疽之爪角害之。好用其私智而棄道理，則網羅之爪角害之。兕虎有域，而萬害有原，避其域，塞其原，則免于諸害矣。凡兵革者，所以備害也。重生者雖入軍無忿爭之心，無忿爭之心則無所用救害之備。此非獨謂野處之軍也，聖人之遊世也無害人之心，無害人之心則必無人害，無人害則不備人，故曰：『陸行不遇兕虎。』入山不恃備以救害，故曰：『入軍不備甲兵。』遠諸害，故曰：『兕無所投其角，虎無所錯其爪，兵無所容其刃。』不設備而必無害，天地之道理也。體天地之道，故曰：『無死地焉。』動無死地，而謂之『善攝生』矣。

This is much greater than the harm of a rhinoceros or tiger. The rhinoceros and tiger have their own habitats and rest and act at certain times. By avoiding their habitats and keeping alert of such times, you may escape the harms of the rhinoceros and tiger. People but know that rhinos and tigers have horns and claws, but no one knows that each of the myriad things has its own horns and claws, and therefore they cannot escape the harms of the myriad things.

⁴⁵ This line appears in both silk manuscripts at Mawangdui.

⁴⁶ This last sentence also appears in Commentary on Laozi 59.

How can we discuss this? When the seasonal rains fall and gather and the desolate wilderness is idle and tranquil, you risk climbing mountains and crossing rivers with dusk and dawn, then the horns and claws of the bitter wind and exposure will harm you. When serving your superiors you are not loyal, when you violate prohibitions and decrees lightly, the horns and claws of punishments and the law will harm you. When dwelling in the countryside you don't restrain yourself, and love and hate others indiscriminately, the horns and claws of quarrel and dispute will harm you. When your lusts and desires are unrestricted, your movements unrestrained, the horns and claws of sickness and disease will harm you. When you prefer using your own biased knowledge and abandon the principles of the way, then the horns and claws of nets and traps will harm you. Rhinos and tigers have their limited habitats, and the myriad harms have their origins, so if you avoid their limited habitats and prevent their origins, then you can escape all harm!

In general, troops' armour is their provision against harm. One who values life, though he may enter the army, he won't have any hateful or confrontational intentions, and without hateful or confrontational intention, there will be no need to make provision to rescue oneself from harm. And this is true not only for those troops in the wilderness; the sage, too, making his way through the world has no intention to harm people, and if there's no intention to harm people, you can be certain that no people will seek to harm him as well. If there are no people seeking to harm him then there is no need to prepare and guard against the people, hence the text says "When travelling by over land he doesn't encounter rhinos or tigers." When making his way through manned mountain ranges he has no need to rely on provisions against harm, hence the text says "When he enters the army he suffers no wound from weapons." Having distanced himself from all these harms, hence the text says "The rhinoceros has no way to strike at him with horn, the tiger has no way to strike at him with claw, and weapons of war have no way to use point or edge against him."

To have established no provision to rescue oneself from harm and yet be certain not to come to harm - this follows the principles of the Way of Heaven and Earth. The sage embodies the way of the heavens and earth, hence the text says: "There is no realm

of death for him.” Since he does not move in the realm of death, so he is called “Good at preserving life.”

Commentary 10 on *Laozi* 67

愛子者慈於子，重生者慈於身，貴功者慈於事。慈母之於弱子也，務致其福，務致其福則事除其禍，事除其禍則思慮熟，思慮熟則得事理，得事理則必成功，必成功則其行之也不疑，不疑之謂勇。聖人之於萬事也，盡如慈母之爲弱子慮也，故見必行之道，見必行之道則明，其從事亦不疑，不疑之謂勇。不疑生於慈，故曰：『慈故能勇。』

One who loves children will be compassionate to his child. One who values life will be compassionate to his body. One who esteems results will be compassionate in his affairs. The compassionate mother, when it comes to her delicate newborns, will work to extend their good fortune, and in working to extend their good fortune will strive to rid them of calamities. If she would work at ridding them of calamities she has to ponder things deeply. If she ponders deeply, she will recognize the principles of affairs, and if she recognizes the principles of affairs then she will be certain to fulfil efficacy.⁴⁷ If she is certain to fulfil efficacy she will be unhesitant in her actions, and this is called ‘bravery’.

The sage, when it comes to the myriad affairs, thoroughly resembles the compassionate mother’s reflections on the well-being of her children, and thereby sees the way that must be practiced. To see the way that must be practiced is illumination, and when following affairs he, too, will be unhesitant, and this is called ‘bravery’. Being unhesitant arises out of being compassionate, hence the text says: “It is thanks to compassion that one can be brave.”

周公曰：『冬日之閉凍也不固，則春夏之長草木也不茂。』天地不能常侈常費，而況於人乎？故萬物必有盛衰，萬事必有弛張，國家必有文武，官治必有賞罰。是以智士儉用其財則家富，聖人愛寶其神則精盛，人君重戰其卒則民衆。民衆則國廣，是以舉之曰：『儉故能廣。』

⁴⁷ An identical passage occurs in Commentary on *Laozi* 58.

The Duke of Chou said, “If the enveloping ice of winter days is not rigid, then the growing vegetation of spring and summer won’t flourish.” Heaven and earth cannot be constantly extravagant or constantly wasteful, let alone man! Hence the myriad things are certain to flourish and decline, the myriad affairs are certain to contract and expand, states are certain to have the civil and the military,⁴⁸ and officials and administrators are certain to have reward and punishment. Therefore the wise nobleman uses his assets frugally, and so his family prospers; the sage treasures his spirit fondly, and so his quintessence abounds; the ruler of men takes war seriously, and so his population multiplies. If his population multiplies his state will expand. Therefore, this is praised, and so it is said: “It is thanks to frugality that one can expand.”

凡物之有形者易裁也，易割也。何以論之？有形則有短長，有短長則有小大，有小大則有方圓，有方圓則有堅脆，有堅脆則有輕重，有輕重則有白黑。短長、大小、方圓、堅脆、輕重、白黑之謂理。理定而物易割也。故議於大庭而後言則立，權議之士知之矣。故欲成方圓而隨其規矩，則萬事之功形矣。而萬物莫不有規矩。議言之士，計會規矩也。聖人盡隨於萬物之規矩，故曰：『不敢爲天下先。』不敢爲天下先則事無不事，功無不功，而議必蓋世，欲無處大官，其可得乎？處大官之謂爲成事長，是以故曰：『不敢爲天下先，故能爲成事長。』

Generally speaking, anything that has a form can be easily cut, easily hacked out. How shall we discuss this? If it has form they have length or shortness, so largeness or smallness, so squareness or roundness, so hardness or softness, so lightness or heaviness, so whiteness or blackness. Long or short and square or round and hard or soft and light or heavy and white or black – these are called ‘properties’. As properties they are fixed and so things are easily hacked out.⁴⁹ Therefore, when planning and discussing things in a large gathering, if you speak last then you can establish your position, and those in authority will be sure to know it.

⁴⁸ The pairing of 文武 is also found in the Huang-Lao silk documents found at Mawangdui (黃老帛書), but is otherwise rare in texts of the same period.

⁴⁹ My translation here follows Graham, *Disputer of the Tao*, p. 286. He goes on to comment: “This is a striking example of the Chinese tendency... to treat things as divisions of the universe rather than the universe as the aggregate of things. Distinctions are seen in binary terms, as in the first place between pairs of opposites (with even figure and colour reduced to square/round and white/black)... Things are not conceived as isolated each with its own essential and accidental properties; on the contrary, distinguishing characteristics are seen as mostly relative (of the six selected in this passage, all but figure and colour).”

Therefore, just as those who wish to achieve a square or a circle must comply with compass and square, so too the myriad affairs must achieve successful shapes. And the myriad things in no case do not have their own ‘compass and square’, so those who would put forward strategies must plan in accordance with such ‘compasses and squares’. The sage thoroughly follows the ‘compasses and squares’ of the myriad things, hence the text says, “He does not presume to be first among all under Heaven.” If you do not presume to be first among all under Heaven, then all of your affairs will be taken care of [‘affaired’], all your deeds will be completed [‘deeded’], and your strategies will be imprinted on your generation; then even if you desired to be without a seat in high office, would this desire be attainable? To take your seat in high office is called ‘becoming a minister that is successful in completing affairs.’ Thereby it is said, “It is because he does not presume to be first among all under Heaven that he is able to become a minister that is successful in completing affairs.”⁵⁰

慈於子者不敢絕衣食，慈於身者不敢離法度，慈於方圓者不敢舍規矩。故臨兵而慈於士吏則戰勝敵，慈於器械則城堅固。故曰：『慈，於戰則勝，以守則固。』夫能自全也而盡隨於萬物之理者，必且有天生。天生也者，生心也。故天下之道盡之生也，若以慈衛之也。事必萬全，而舉無不當，則謂之寶矣。故曰：『吾有三寶，持而寶之。』

Those who are compassionate to their children dare not refrain from providing them clothing and food; those who are compassionate to their persons dare not deviate from rules and limits; those who love figures dare not forego the compass and square. Therefore, when about to deploy your troops you are compassionate toward the ‘rank and file’ then you will defeat the enemy, and if you are compassionate towards the instruments and machinery of warfare then your city walls will be secure. Hence the text says: “It is thanks to compassion that when one takes the field he is victorious, and when he takes a defensive position he holds firm.” Now, he who is able to preserve himself and also thoroughly complies with the principles of the myriad things, he is certain to have the life which Heaven endowed him. To live this ‘Heavenly life’ generates ‘mind’. And so the Way of all under Heaven fulfils such a life, as though it were kindly guarding

⁵⁰ The text here is different from the received *Laozi* (不敢爲天下先，故能成器長).

it. If one's affairs are certain to be completed, and if not a single of one's initiatives is inappropriate, that is a treasure. Hence the text says: "I have three treasures, which I hold tight and treasure."⁵¹

Commentary 11 on *Laozi* 53

書之所謂大道也者，端道也。所謂貌施也者，邪道也。所謂徑大也者，佳麗也。佳麗也者，邪道之分也。朝甚除也者，獄訟繁也。獄訟繁則田荒，田荒則府倉虛，府倉虛則國貧，國貧而民俗淫侈，民俗淫侈則衣食之業絕，衣食之業絕則民不得無飾巧詐，飾巧詐則知采文，知采文之謂服文采。獄訟繁、倉廩虛、而有以淫侈為俗，則國之傷也若以利劍刺之。故曰：『帶利劍。』諸夫飾智故以至於傷國者，其私家必富，私家必富，故曰：『資貨有餘。』國有若是者，則愚民不得無術而效之，效之則小盜生。由是觀之，大姦作則小盜隨，大姦唱則小盜和。竽也者，五聲之長者也，故竽先則鍾瑟皆隨，竽唱則諸樂皆和。今大姦作則俗之民唱，俗之民唱則小盜必和，故服文采，帶利劍，厭飲食，而貨資有餘者，是之謂盜竽矣。

That which the text calls the "Great Way" is the orthodox Way. That which it calls the "apparent course of things" is the heterodox Way. The so-called "shortcut to the Great" is disguised with beautification. Being disguised with beautification is one particular aspect of the heterodox way.

"The government offices are clean" means that litigations have multiplied. But if litigations multiply, then the fields will be desolate. If the fields are desolate, then the storehouses and granaries will be emptied. If the storehouses and granaries are empty, then the state becomes impoverished. The state becomes impoverished as peoples' customs remain overly extravagant. If the peoples' customs remain overly extravagant, then the food and clothing industries will come to an end. If the food and clothing industries come to an end, then the people can't but use pretense and cleverness to swindle others. If the people can't but use pretense and cleverness to swindle others, then they come to know decorations and embellishment. Knowing decorations and embellishment they are "garbed in patterned and decorative clothes". When litigations multiply, when fields are desolate, and when the peoples' customs remain overly

⁵¹ Again, different than the received text: "我有三寶，持而保之。"

extravagant, then the harm to the state comes as if pierced by a sharp sword. Hence it is said: “Carrying swords at their sides!”

All those who make an ornament of their wisdom deliberately do so to the extent that they bring harm to the state - their families are certain to be wealthy. It is because they are certain to be wealthy that it is said: “overflowing with goods and wealth.” If the country has such people, then the ignorant peasants can’t help but try to mimic them, and by mimicking them petty thieves arise.

Looking at it like this, when great villains act petty thieves soon follow; and when great villains lead off, petty thieves harmonize in with them. The *yu*⁵² is the foremost instrument for the Five Notes, so when the *yu* plays the bells and lutes follow, and when the *yu* sounds all the other instruments harmonize with it. Nowadays the great villains act and the common peasants jointly with sing after them, and when the common peasants sing with them then petty thieves are certain to harmonize. Therefore those garbed in patterned and decorative clothes, carrying swords at their side, satiating themselves with food and drink, and overflowing with goods and wealth – they are what are called the *yu* of the thieves.

Commentary 12 on *Laozi* 54

人無愚智，莫不有趨舍。恬淡平安，莫不知禍福之所由來。得於好惡，怵於淫物，而後變亂。所以然者，引於外物，亂於玩好也。恬淡有趨舍之義，平安知禍福之計。而今也玩好變之，外物引之，引之而往，故曰：『拔。』至聖人不然，一建其趨舍，雖見所好之物不能引，不能引之謂不拔。一於其情，雖有可欲之類，神不爲動，神不爲動之謂不脫。爲人子孫者體此道，以守宗廟不滅之謂祭祀不絕。身以積精爲德，家以資財爲德，鄉國天下皆以民爲德。今治身而外物不能亂其精神，故曰：『脩之身，其德乃真。』真者，慎之固也。治家，無用之物不能動其計則資有餘，故曰：『脩之家，其德有餘。』治鄉者行此節，則家之有餘者益眾，故曰：『脩之鄉，其德乃長。』治邦者行此節，則鄉之有德者益眾，故曰：『脩之邦，其德乃豐。』蒞天下者行此節，則民之生莫不受其澤，故曰：『脩之天下，其德乃普。』脩身者以此別君子小人，治鄉治邦蒞天下者各以此科適觀息耗則萬不失一，故曰：『以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以邦觀邦，以天下觀天下，吾奚以知天下之然也以此。』

⁵² A large panpipe.

If people would do without ‘stupidity’ and ‘wisdom’, none would fail to have the power to accept and reject. If people lived tranquilly, none would fail to know where disaster and fortune come from. Yet when people are captivated by notions of fondness and aversion, when they are enticed by lascivious objects, then turmoil will occur. The reason for this is that they are lured by external objects, disordered by amusing pleasures. While tranquil, they have the ability for proper selection; while at peace, they know how to plan for disaster and fortune. Now, amusing pleasures change them, external objects lure them, these lure them and the people go along, hence the text says they are “uprooted.”

As for the sage, he is not so; for once he establishes his method of selection, though he may see pleasurable objects they can’t lure him. Since he cannot be lured, it is said he’s “not uprooted.” When he is one with his innate tendencies, even if there is that type of desirable object his spirit won’t waver. Because his spirit doesn’t waver he’s called “not fallen off.” If, as someone’s descendant, you embody this Way to safeguard the ancestral temple and prevent its destruction – this is what is meant by “sacrifices will not cease.”

The individual by accumulating his essence becomes virtuous; the family by accumulating riches and wealth becomes virtuous; the village, state, or world by means of common people becomes virtuous. Nowadays, if you regulate yourself, then external objects cannot disorder your vital essence, hence the text says: “If you cultivate it in your person, your virtue will be authentic.” Authentic refers to the security of prudent action. If you manage your family, then useless objects will never cause it to waver in its plans, and so its resources will surpass all need, hence the text says: “If you cultivate it in your family, its virtue will surpass all need.” Now, if those who manage villages act on this principle, then households with a surplus of resources will increase and multiply, hence the text says: “If you cultivate it in the village and its virtue will endure.” And if those who manage states act on this principle then villages with virtue will increase and multiply, hence the text says: “If you cultivate it in the state, and its virtue will be abundant.” And if those who oversee the empire act on this principle, then in no case

will the lives of the people not receive its benefits, and so the text says: “If you cultivate it among all under Heaven, its virtue will reach everywhere.”

He who cultivates his person will, by means of this [principle], be able to differentiate the gentleman from the knave; and those who manage villages, manage states, and oversee empires, will, by means of this [principle], be able to properly judge between accrual and squander. Under these circumstances, they can’t go wrong, not even once in ten thousand times! Hence the text says “See the person from the perspective of the person, the family from the perspective of the family, the village from the perspective of the village, the state from the perspective of the state, and the empire from the perspective of the empire. How do I know the empire is so? Just so.”

APPENDIX I - JIE LAO AND YU LAO AUTHENTICITY CHART

Commentator	Work	Yes/No	Jie Lao 解老	Yu Lao 喻老
Hu Shih 胡適	中國哲學史大綱 (1919)	⊗	Probably by another (大概...另是一人所作)	Probably by another (大概...另是一人所作)
Liang Qichao 梁啟超	要籍解題及其讀法 (1923)	⊗	Of secondary importance when studying Han Fei	Of secondary importance when studying Han Fei
Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖	韓非子考證 (1927)	⊗	Huang-Lao or Daoist writings that have been mixed into the book (similar to 道原 of the 淮南子)	Huang-Lao or Daoist writings that have been mixed into the book
Chen Qianjun 陳千鈞	韓非子書考 (1935)	☺	Authentic daoist studies	Authentic daoist studies
Kimura Eiichi 木村英一	韓非子考證 (1938)	⊗	Compiled relatively late by follower of Han Fei Zi basing themselves on Huang-Lao thought (similar to the <i>Huainan Zi</i> and from early Han)	Compiled relatively late by follower of Han Fei Zi basing themselves on Huang-Lao thought (similar to the <i>Huainan Zi</i> and from early Han)
Chen Qitian 陳啓天	韓非子校釋 (1940)	⊗	More or less dubious (不 無可疑)	More or less dubious (或偽)
Guo Moruo 郭沫若	韓非子的批判 (1944)	⊗/☺	Confucian content conflicts with Han Fei's philosophy	Accords well with the rest of Han Fei's philosophy
Jiang Boqian 蔣伯潛	諸子通考 (1948)	⊗	Later interpolation (疑亦屬 入) and suspects it was written during the early Han	Suspects it was written during the early Han (similar to 道應 of the 淮南子)
Liang Qixiong 梁啟雄	韓子淺解 (1960)	☺/☺	Some parts are suspect (局部有問題), namely the Confucian sounding bits	No major problems (無大問題)
Feng Youlan 馮友蘭	韓非 <解老> <喻老> 篇 新釋. (1961)	☺	Authentic	Authentic
Pan Chonggui 潘重規	韓非著述攷 (1966)	⊗	Elegant writings from old works that have been copied and wrongly attributed to Han Fei	Elegant writings from old works that have been copied and wrongly attributed to Han Fei
Wang Hsiao Po and Leo S. Chang	The Philosophical Foundations of Han Fei's Political Theory (1985)	☺	Authentic	Authentic
Bertil Lundahl	Han Fei Zi: The Man and the Work (1992)	⊗	Not authentic	Not authentic
Zheng Liangshu 鄭良樹	韓非之著述及思想 (1993)	☺/⊗	Authentic	Not authentic.

⊗ = inauthentic, ☺ = parts are suspect/undecided, ☺ = authentic

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