

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

**Band:** 63 (2009)

**Heft:** 4: The genius loci of Chinese manuscripts

**Artikel:** Texts, textual communities, and meaning : the genius loci of the warring states Ch Tomb Gudiàn One

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147835>

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# TEXTS, TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES, AND MEANING: THE *GENIUS LOCI* OF THE WARRING STATES CHŭ TOMB GUŌDIÀN ONE

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## *Abstract*

The term '*genius loci*' – the 'spirit of place' – has long referred to the unique or cherished aspects of a place. In contemporary usage, it can also denote the characteristic atmosphere of a space. In this article, I use *genius loci* to refer to the physical boundaries of a specified *locus* – tomb Guōdiàn One – that hosts a broad range of philosophical texts. The spirit of this space is characterised by the immanent tension between text and tomb. The historical and material environment in which texts were produced is an essential but generally neglected context for dealing with early Chinese intellectual practices. Exhumed philosophical materials from the Warring States period provide insights into the complex correlation between texts and their material carriers, texts and textual communities, textual communities and the practices of philosophising in contemporary China. This article will focus on these issues and so establish a methodological groundwork for investigating the social practice of reading and writing philosophical texts in early China. I will pose the following questions: Is there a potential conflict between the physical boundaries of a confined space – tomb Guōdiàn One – and its hosting different kinds of philosophical texts? If so, how should we deal with the tension between a confined space and its variety of texts in methodological terms? Does the tension illuminate how philosophical texts were used in contemporary China? Is it possible to reconstruct the audiences of these texts? Who were the target audiences? And how exclusive were these groups?<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, thousands of tombs have been excavated, including more than 5000 tombs in modern Húběi and Húnán alone. Despite this large number of excavations, only 133 tombs dating from the Warring States (ca. 481–222 BC) until the Eastern Hàn (ca. AD 25–

1 I wish to thank Áine McMurtry (Oxford), Martin Kern (Princeton), Michael Nylan (Berkeley) and Uffe Bergeton (Michigan) for helpful comments and corrections.

220) periods have yielded textual contents.<sup>2</sup> In many cases, these textual findings, typically written on wood, bamboo, or silk, contain only a few characters.<sup>3</sup>

It is no surprise that the academic community reacts with great enthusiasm whenever more substantial numbers of texts are brought to light. Following the discovery of texts from Tomb Number One at Guōdiàn (henceforth Guōdiàn One), or the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts, thousands of scholarly articles have been produced which deal with these philosophically oriented texts. Entire conferences now dwell exclusively on these new materials, and one could go so far as to say that the study of early Chinese manuscripts has turned into an area of research of its own. Given these developments and the enthusiasm of an entire field, it is surprising to see in what way these new finds are dealt with. Most studies focus solely on the philosophical contents of the exhumed texts, or simply compare newly found texts with their received counterparts. Textual traditions and philosophical affiliations are (re-)constructed on the basis of the exhumed materials, whilst other scholars attempt to retrieve an imagined *Urtext* or, in a mono-linear fashion, hypothesise about source texts of later textual recension. Exhumed texts (or philosophical texts in general) are seen as though they were mere repositories of ideas, and so the rich potential of exhumed palaeographic materials for our understanding of intellectual activities of the ancient world is artificially limited.<sup>4</sup>

This contribution aims to correct this picture. I look at texts as meaningful objects brought together in the non-textual – but meaningful – context of tomb Guōdiàn One. These objects contain vital information about the production, use, and function of philosophical texts more than two thousand years ago. In so doing, I hope to further our understanding of the material and intellectual contexts for philosophising in the Warring States period.

2 PIÁN/DUÀN, 2003, provide basic information about important textual findings between the years 1900–1996. GIELE, 2001, provides a convenient overview over the various tomb-finds in China; although his site would need another update. See also GIELE, 1998–1999.

3 See KERN, 2002:144.

4 There are, of course, exceptions to this. Martin Kern's *Text and Ritual* (KERN, 2005) is certainly an attempt to look at texts also as ritual objects, and not only as repositories of ideas, and Michael Nylan's contribution reflects on the format and materiality of early Chinese texts (NYLAN, 2005). Martin Kern (KERN, 2002) already points to the rich potential of newly excavated texts for our understanding of the social aspects of reading and writing in early China. For a broader study beyond the borders of China, see MCKENZIE, 1999, who demonstrates the impact of the material form of texts on their meanings. McKenzie shows that, reproduced and reread over time, texts take on different forms and meanings. On the idea that 'form produces meaning', see also CHARTIER, 1989:48f.

## 2. Tomb Guōdiàn One and Its Texts: Methodological Considerations

Of the philosophical texts from the Warring States, those from tomb Guōdiàn 郭店, Húběi 湖北 Province, are exceptional in many ways. They were part of a tomb assemblage and came to light during a documented excavation.<sup>5</sup> To date, Guōdiàn One is the only well-documented Warring States tomb to contain a broad variety of philosophical texts. It thus provides a solid framework in which to work with texts. This work would never be possible for texts from a less well-documented environment, such as those from the so-called ‘Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts’, about which we only know that they were purchased at an antique market in Hong Kong.<sup>6</sup>

The framework of the tomb allows us to locate its textual contents fairly precisely in temporal and spatial terms. We know accordingly that the textual

- 5 Tomb Guōdiàn One is located only nine km north of the old capital of the kingdom of Chǔ 楚 at Jinán 紀南, Húběi province, close to Guōdiàn village in Shāyáng district 沙洋區, Sìfāng 四方, city of Jīngmén 荊門. See the excavation report HÚBÈI SHÈNG JĪNGMÉN SHĪ BÓWŪGUǎN, 1997.
- 6 The Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts was acquired by the Shànghǎi Museum in 1994. It contains some 1,200 inscribed bamboo strips. Since 2001 the Shànghǎi Museum is publishing these, and, so far, volumes 1–7 have appeared in print. Bought from unknown dealers at an antique market in Hong Kong, the provenance of these manuscripts remains uncertain. After the manuscripts were made publicly accessible, it was repeatedly assumed that these strips also came from a site close to Guōdiàn One, or even from the same tomb. (See, for instance, Mǎ, 2001, 1:2.) The assumption that the Shànghǎi bamboo strips might have come from tomb Guōdiàn One is based on three observations: firstly, the chronological proximity of the appearance of these strips with those from Guōdiàn One; secondly, the overall style of calligraphy in which the strips are inscribed; thirdly, the similarity of the texts as far as their philosophical orientation is concerned. Despite the similarities between the strips from Guōdiàn One and those from the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts, I argue against the assumption that the Shànghǎi strips were originally taken from tomb Guōdiàn One. I question this on the basis of two observations. Firstly, physical differences: measuring up to 57 cm, the strips from the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts are exceptionally long by Guōdiàn One standards; secondly, the overlap of texts: whereas none of the two collections of manuscripts display an *internal* overlap of texts, they both yield an instantiation of the texts “Zī yī” 緇衣 (Black Robes) and “Xìng zì mìng chū/Xìng qíng lùn” 性自命出/性情論 (Nature Derives from Heaven/Treatise on Nature and Sentiment), and it would be highly unlikely that the tomb robbers would have made such a clear-cut selection of manuscripts that were, when found, in disarray. Thus, it is most likely that the two caches of bamboo come from different sites but probably the same area.



materials from Guōdiàn One, together as a group, formed one part of the tomb assemblage. As such, they came to us as one ‘set’. For the purpose of this argument, it therefore is irrelevant – although deeply regrettable – that the tomb was looted at least twice before archaeologists from the Jīngmén Museum decided to carry out the rescue excavation.<sup>7</sup> Even though the looters destroyed parts of the tomb assemblage and might even have taken an appreciable number of inscribed bamboo strips from the tomb, it can nevertheless be ruled out that they might have added further (fake) strips to the assemblage of Warring States manuscripts. People enter tombs for material gain, not to hoodwink the student of early Chinese thought. Methodologically, the group of texts exhumed from Guōdiàn One can be considered a ‘closed’ set of manuscripts, namely, a ‘tomb corpus’, defined exclusively by its *locus*, viz., tomb Guōdiàn One, and not by the tomb occupant. In this light, the common term ‘tomb library’ is revealed as misleading. Unlike the word ‘library’, tomb corpus as defined here carries no connotation of any *a priori* connection of the exhumed texts with the – unknown – deceased. Talking about a library inevitably brings to mind the tomb occupant and introduces a subjective element relating to the selection of texts that is difficult to justify. So far it is unclear why these texts were included in the tomb. Methodologically, it is therefore important to define the tomb corpus exclusively based on its textual contents in the context of the tomb. This approach permits evaluation of these materials and their different strategies to construct meaning, even if one were to hypothesise that the philosophical texts from Guōdiàn One were used as mere burial objects, and therefore were not read (or selected) by the unknown deceased whom they accompanied.

The tomb dates from the mid-to-late Warring States period. Despite some disagreement, consensus holds that it was sealed around 300 BC.<sup>8</sup> This gives a

7 Tomb looters forced access to Guōdiàn One in August 1993, and again in October of the same year. The second attempt was successful.

8 For a discussion of the date of burial, see CUI, 1997, 1998, LUÓ, 1999, PÉNG, 1999a–c, Lǐ, 2000a, b, among many others. WÁNG, 1999, defends the isolated view that Guōdiàn One might have been sealed as late as 227 BC. The structure of tomb Guōdiàn One is typical for a mid-to-late Warring-States tomb, as comparison with other sites from this period suggests. See for instance Tomb Number Two from Bāoshān 包山, Jīngmén, Húběi Province (HÚBĚI SHÈNG JĪNGSHĀ TIÈLÙ KǎOGŪ DUÌ, 1991), Tomb Number 245 from Yǔtáishān 兩台山, Jiānglíng 江陵, Húběi province (HÚBĚI SHÈNG JĪNGZHŌU DÌQŪ BÓWŪGUǎN, 1984), and Tomb Dàngyáng Zhàojiāhú 當陽趙家湖, Húběi Province (HÚBĚI SHÈNG YÍCHĀNG DÌQŪ BÓWŪGUǎN 湖北省宜昌地區博物館, 1992), among others. The *terminus ante quem* of the burial is probably the conquest of Yǐng 郢 in 278 BC. It is generally assumed that the structure of (aristocratic) tombs differed drastically after the assault of Yǐng by invaders from Qín 秦.

fairly precise *ante quem* for the composition of this group of exhumed texts before the institutionalising of thought during the Qín (ca. 221–210 BC) and Hàn (ca. 202 BCE – AD 8; 23–220) empires.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the palaeographic materials from Guōdiàn One give us a glimpse of philosophical texts before they might have been altered (or even suppressed) by later hands. In this respect they differ from those texts for which we lack a precise *ante quem*, in which case there is good reason to assume editorial interference. However, because these authors adopted archaising styles, the different chronological layers can hardly ever be established with certainty.

The tomb is located close to Jinán 紀南, the old capital of the kingdom of Chǔ 楚. This might explain why, albeit to different degrees, all the manuscripts from Guōdiàn One manifest a Chǔ-specific handwriting.<sup>10</sup> The manuscripts display southern features. But as the archaeological records make plain, the *texts* were quite certainly not produced (or composed) for the occasion of the burial, and it is clear that not all of the texts originated in this area. This discrepancy between text and manuscript can be explained. A text can be defined as the formulation of an idea that was abstracted from its material carrier. It could travel independently of material contexts, orally, for instance via trade routes or on markets, from person to person. Thus, when studying the habits of early reading and writing, it is essential to distinguish between text, viz., the matter to be transmitted, and the material textual witness, viz., the manuscript as the physical instantiation (or representative) of the text.<sup>11</sup> The production of philosophical

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See the discussion in WANG, 1999:366–367, which also summarises other scholars' positions.

- 9 For a detailed discussion of changes in intellectual climate following the Warring States period, see PETERSEN, 1995; KERN, 2000:184ff., with further references. There are, however, also arguments claiming that the influence of imperial patronage after 221 BC may be overstated. See NYLAN, 2009, with further references.
- 10 Two texts deviate from this standard. Scholars such as Qiú Xīguī and Péng Hào have observed that the calligraphy of the two texts “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” 忠信之道 and “Táng Yú zhī dào” 唐禹之道 differs to some extent from that of the other materials. Despite these differences, Lǐ Xuéqín's assumption that the two texts are not written in Chǔ script at all, overrates peculiarities in the calligraphy of the manuscripts. It is instead more adequate to say that the calligraphy of the two shows some additional non-Chǔ characteristics (see MEYER, 2008a:55, n. 1, with further references).
- 11 To pay close attention to the strategies of meaning construction in texts (as opposed to the manuscripts) furthers our understanding of the nature of a text with its different instantiations, as seen from the “Wǔ xíng” (from Mǎwángduī Three and Guōdiàn One) or the “Xíng zì míng chū” (in comparison to the “Xíng qíng lùn” from the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ

texts and of manuscripts as the material realisation of ideas were two different activities, and when dealing with exhumed manuscripts, we must bear in mind that ideas or entire texts could travel independently of their carrier and materialise in different environments. Text and its material realisation should therefore be kept separate in our analysis of text, composition, and writing in early China. Hence, assuming that manuscripts became a commodity at the time when Guō-diàn One was sealed, which implies that professional copyists produced one physical manifestation of a text that existed independently of any material carrier, the texts had an independent existence that enabled them to materialise in all kinds of environments, and were therefore not related to specific target audiences. The autonomy of text from material carrier is not the only indication of a text's potential independence from its milieu of origin. By placing texts in the physical boundaries of a tomb, each manifestation of a text as materialised on bamboo was taken out of its previous contexts, and so extended into new ones.

These observations have important implications for the study of reading and writing, as well as for the different practices of philosophising in early China. The fact that these texts were, in different ways, extended into new environments implies that they assumed some meaningful function in their new context (both in an abstract and concrete sense). The commodification of texts, the independence of text and material carrier, and the disconnection between text, target audience, and previous contexts thus suggest that certain philosophical concepts were so prevalent that they transcended locally based interpretations. The enduring value of a philosophical text beyond its original setting calls for an explanation of how philosophical texts were used in early China. The following situations – perhaps mutually contradictory – can be imagined.

First, the fact that ideas and texts travelled independently of local contexts might imply that the texts carrying these ideas were fully self-contained because the way in which they constructed meaning could be understood by different audiences. As a result, these texts were comprehensible even to those groups that did not constitute their target audience. Secondly, the ideas which these texts set out to transmit could have transcended the target audiences of the texts. Even if the texts were not understood in their entirety, some of their core ideas were still recognisable, so that different groups could identify themselves with the overall text. Thirdly, it is possible to imagine a situation in which the ideas that were

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manuscripts). For a detailed study of the different manifestations of these texts, see MEYER, 2008a, especially chs. 4 and 5.

conveyed in the texts were both sufficiently stable and ambiguous. Texts might then have been used in all kinds of situations so that these texts themselves generated ever new contexts. In this setting, texts would have become easily adaptable, and by implication movable, modules. I shall discuss the different possibilities below.

### 3. The Corpus of Tomb Guōdiàn One: A Mirror of Different Ways of Philosophising

The tomb corpus Guōdiàn One contains 804 bamboo strips, of which 730 are inscribed with characters. Taken as a whole, these carry some 13,000 characters, written in beautiful calligraphy with obvious Chǔ characteristics. The inscribed strips differ in length. Six groups of texts can be distinguished. The first group contains strips of 32.3–32.5 cm in length. The second group contains strips of 30.6 cm in length. The third group contains strips that measure between 28.1 and 28.3 cm in length. The fourth group contains strips of 26.4–26.5 cm; the fifth and sixth groups contain strips that are decidedly shorter, namely 17.2–17.5, or 15.1–15.2 cm, respectively. Depending on the principles of text delimitation underlying the analysis of these materials, they can be grouped into fifteen to eighteen, or even twenty-one individual texts.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, it is significant that the size of the strips is no indication of the status of the text recorded. As mentioned, text in the Warring States period is not directly related to its material carrier.<sup>13</sup> Only with the Latter Hàn (AD 25–220) can statements be found which describe a correlation between the status of a text and the length of the bamboo strips on which it had been written down.<sup>14</sup>

12 I basically follow EHLICH, 1998, in that I use ‘text’ in a sense that comprises the everyday-mundane category, yet in a way that it does not need to be written. A text can also appear in oral form or, as Martin Kern puts it, “co-exist in both” (KERN, 2005:293, n. 1). Thus, text does not denote any utterance, but an identifiable entity. See also EHLICH, 1982.

13 For a study that explores the correlation of purpose, formal genre, and possessor of a manuscript in early China, see HÚ, 2000. See also RICHTER, 2005:92–93, for different views.

14 In his preface to *Chūnqiū Zuǒ zhuàn zhèngyì* 春秋左傳正義 (7a), Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (AD 127–200) notes the length of two feet four inches for the ‘Classics’, of one foot two inches for the *Xiào jīng* 孝經, and of eight inches for the *Lúnyǔ* 論語. (All lengths refer to Hàn Dynasty measures.) Two feet four inches corresponds to 55.44 cm; one foot corresponds to 23.1 cm. See TWITCHETT/LOEWE, 1986:xxxviii. Trusting Wáng Chōng’s (AD 27–97) words,

If there was indeed a scenario that prescribed the length of bamboo strips for different texts, it does, however, not mean that it started in the Latter Hàn, but must have come from the imperial context, more specifically, the imperial library. This situation differs strikingly from that of the Warring States. In the context of imperial libraries, books and texts almost certainly began to take on a fairly fixed form, from which also resulted a new notion of a direct correlation of the status of a text with its material carrier. In the context of the Warring States, however, no indications of that kind of organised record-storing exist.<sup>15</sup> As can be deduced from exhumed materials, the manuscripts of the Warring States period rather reflect cases when, occasionally, a predominantly oral text was written down. In fact, none of the texts reconstructed from the corpus of Guōdiàn One were written on strips which conform to the length described by Eastern Hàn authors, such as Wáng Chōng 王充 (AD 27–97) or Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (AD 127–200). Whenever different manifestations of a philosophical text from the Warring States come to light, they take quite different physical form. The physical variations among the strips, such as their varying length, cutting, or the different styles of calligraphy with which the strips are inscribed, reflect different *modi* and different *loci* of manufacture, that is, differences in time and space in the production of the manuscripts. But this says nothing about the texts themselves.

The texts from Guōdiàn One share an endeavour to establish stable philosophical concepts. They were part of a discipline and so may be termed ‘philosophical’. The texts reflect different kinds of philosophical reasoning, and they even address different audiences. This broad variety epitomises the wide range of – even conflicting – textual materials that came to us as one closed set of texts, brought together in the confined space of a tomb.

Methodologically, the diversity of the philosophical texts in Guōdiàn One is interesting in at least two respects. Firstly, it mitigates the danger that we gain only a one-sided picture when using the tomb as a reference point for our study of text and thought in early China. Secondly, the diversity of this set of texts highlights the tension between text and tomb. On the one hand, we see a broad variety of ideas, including those which contradict other philosophical positions as materialised in this corpus of texts. On the other hand, there is the physical

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instead, the “sayings of the ancients were written on tablets of two feet four inches”. See TSIEN, 2004:116.

15 I am aware of speculations about archives dating as early as to the Shāng dynasty (see FALKENHAUSEN, 1993:163–164), which, however, lack substantial evidence.



context of a tomb that unites these heterogeneous materials as one set of grave goods. This tension between text and tomb will be followed up on below.

The diversity of the tomb corpus is also manifest in the different ways in which meaning is constructed in these texts. The texts reflect two broad strategies of philosophising. These two ways of philosophical reasoning in writing were described for the first time in 2008, where they are termed ‘authority-based texts’ as opposed to ‘argument-based texts’.<sup>16</sup> Their categorisation should be understood as ‘ideal types’ of texts. Tradition has left us unprepared for the latter, as it would not outlast the imperial age.

#### 4. Authority-based Texts versus Argument-based Texts

‘Ideal type’ does not refer to the Platonic idea of a perfect thing or phenomenon. Referring to the Weberian concept, it instead denotes the attempt to order the complexity of reality by highlighting certain characteristics of a given object or phenomenon. Hence, by using the concept of ideal types I do not aim to depict all elements and peculiarities of these texts, but their common characteristics.<sup>17</sup> Applied to the textual materials from Guōdiàn One, I propose to draw a distinction between argument-based and authority-based texts. It goes without saying that this distinction cannot be an absolute one but, by highlighting the common characteristics of these materials, it describes two extremes on a continuous scale of texts.

The present discussion does not set out to give a full analysis of the two types of texts but only points to their differences with respect to the overall theme of this paper, that is, to reflect on the environment of the exhumed texts – from Guōdiàn One – to explore the overall function of philosophical writing in early China.

Both types of texts contain particularly stable units out of which they eventually evolved. William G. Boltz has coined the notion of building blocks for these textual units.<sup>18</sup>

In authority-based texts, the individual building block remains an isolated unit. Different building blocks are not related to one another on the formal level of the text. Ideas are not developed beyond the level of the individual building

16 See MEYER, 2008a ,b.

17 For Weber’s concept of ‘ideal types’, see WEBER, 1977.

18 See BOLTZ, 2005.

block. The building block thus remains the final textual unit for the communication of a concern and so represents what Rudolf G. Wagner has called a ‘unit of thought’.<sup>19</sup> As this unit forms the only and ultimate level of communication in writing, it also spells out the entire philosophy of the text because the individual building block *is* the entire – written – text. Every new unit reflects a different concern and should thus be seen as a distinct text in its own right. The so-called Guōdiàn One “Lǎozǐ” [sic!] as collected in the three bundles of strips “A”, “B”, “C”,<sup>20</sup> and the “Zī yī” may serve as examples of this type of text. See the following units from bundle “A”:

- 19 See WAGNER, 1999b. Wagner’s concept is problematic as he does not define what he means by ‘thought’. I use ‘unit of thought’ to denote a textual unit that puts forward one isolated concern.
- 20 That the different units of thought as anthologised in bundles “A”, “B” and “C” have already taken on the shape of authoritative ideas prevailing in some élite circles of the Warring States (see MEYER, 2008a:163), does not of necessity also imply the inverse conclusion that the authoritative character of these statements results from the existence of a prevailing concept of one authoritative “Lǎozǐ” behind these statements. Without a doubt, such a concept would connect these units of thought into one philosophically prevalent current, thus lending a group identity in those circles. However, just as William G. Boltz (BOLTZ, 1999:596) has put it so convincingly, we should beware of labelling a late fourth century BC manuscript “with a name, for which our first evidence is a century or more later”.



## “A” 2:

江海所以為百谷王，以其<sup>A3</sup>能為百谷下；  
是以能為百谷王。

聖人之在民前也，以身後之。

其在民上也，以<sup>A4</sup>言下之；

其在民上也，民弗重也。

其在民前也，民弗害也。

天下樂進而弗詹；

<sup>A5</sup>以其不爭也，故天下莫能與之爭。

That by which rivers and seas [can] be kings of the  
many valley streams, is their<sup>A3</sup> ability of being  
below the many valley streams;

That is why they [can] be kings of the many valley streams.

What makes the wise man stand in front of the  
people, is [his ability to] put himself behind them.

What makes him stand above the people, is  
[his ability to] set his<sup>A4</sup> words below them;

He stands above the people, and yet the people  
do not regard [him] as heavy.

He stands in front of the people, and yet the people  
do not suffer harm from [him].

The entire world is delighted to advance him and never  
to criticise him;

<sup>A5</sup> For he never competes, nobody under Heaven has the  
ability to compete with him.

## “A” 3:

罪莫重乎甚欲，

咎莫憚乎欲得，

<sup>A6</sup> 禍莫大乎不知足。

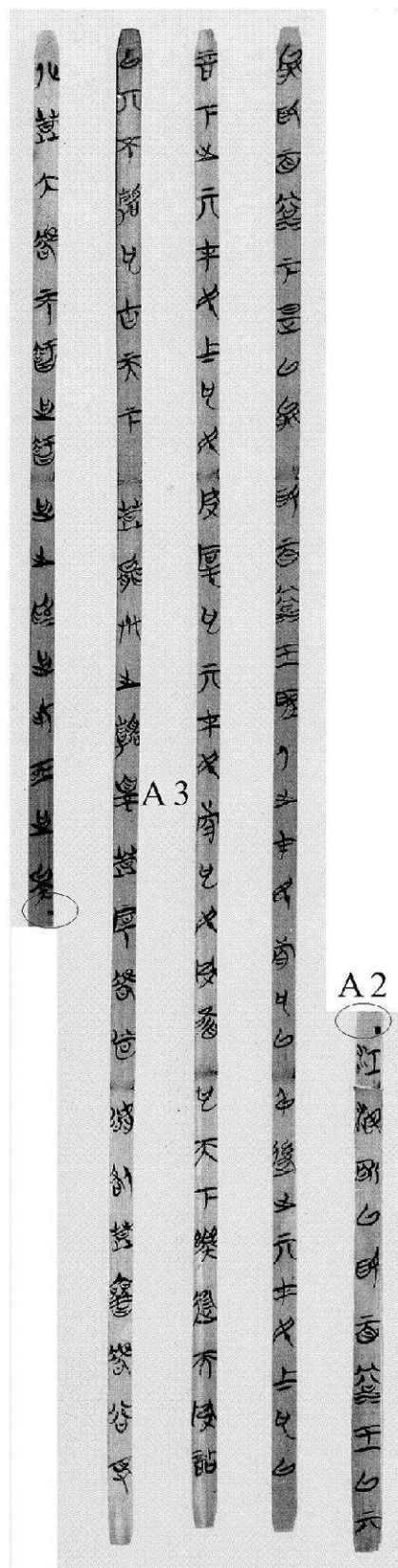
知足之為足，此恆足矣。

Of all faults, none is heavier than excessive greed,

Of all blemishes, none leads to more grief than yearning for  
gain,

<sup>A6</sup> Of all disasters, none is  
greater than not knowing  
when [you] have enough.

When understanding that [having] enough is sufficient,  
[you] always have enough.



Obviously, the two units share no relation with each other in terms of a formally coherent approach to a certain issue. Even though the concerns of the two are related to a certain degree – the two units clearly adopt a position directed against greed and human striving for superiority – they do not share any formal features. Not even the use of the negating particle *mò* 莫 ‘none, nobody’<sup>21</sup> is a symmetrical grammatical feature of the two units.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, even though there are no markings on the strips that would help to distinguish the two units of thought,<sup>23</sup> each of them presents an isolated answer to a particular concern, regardless of the physical organisation of the bamboo strips.

Since authority-based texts do not combine the different units of thought into a coherent whole, they lack the means to generate reasoned philosophical systems. The different units of thought in the bundles “A”, “B”, and “C” simply reflect a situational response to a given concern. The individual written units remain ambiguous, sometimes even enigmatic. At times one wonders why these units were written down and transmitted to the present day. Yet they are surprisingly stable. Methodologically, the label ‘authority-based text’ might seem misleading, as it potentially suggests that the different units of thought form a coherent whole. This is exactly what I argue against. Nonetheless, the individual units of thought anthologised in bundles “A”, “B” and “C” do seem to belong to a common tradition, thus justifying their denotation as ‘authority-based *text*’ (as opposed to authority-based *anthology*).

Similarly, calling the units of textual communication in authority-based texts ‘building blocks’ is slightly misleading. Isolated and conceived in response to a given concern, these units do not ‘build’ or contribute to larger and coherent wholes on the formal level of the authority-based text. By implication, they should not be called ‘building blocks’ in authority-based texts but, for the moment, will be referred to as ‘units’ or ‘units of thought’.

This picture differs radically in the case of argument-based texts. The unit of thought in authority-based texts, as I have shown, represents the final textual level of communication. The textual unit of the argument-based texts, on the contrary, is a building block of a larger whole. Whereas the individual unit in authority-based texts is stable but ambiguous, and isolated, the building blocks in argument-based texts contribute to a greater whole. By relating the different

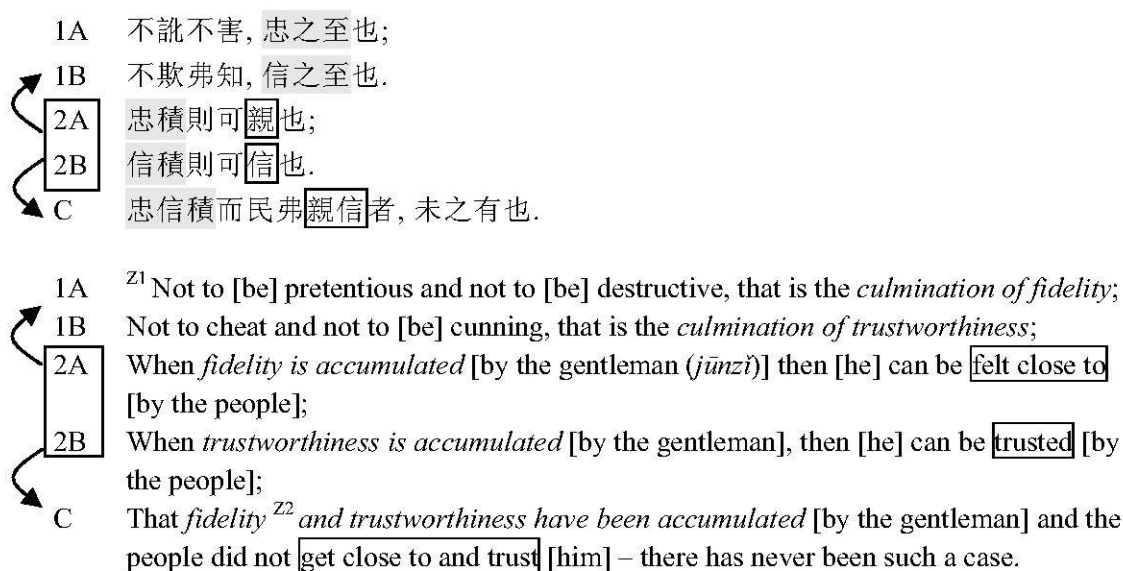
21 That is, in the last line of “A” 2 (strip *a5*) and the first part of unit “A” 3 (strip *a6*).

22 Whereas the grammatical particle *mò* 莫 of “A” 2 negates an auxiliary verb, that of “A” 3 negates a full verb.

23 See the panel of the strips as given above.

building blocks to one another, argument-based texts develop a stable terminology, and so achieve high precision.<sup>24</sup>

Argument-based texts connect their different building blocks into larger consistent entities. Various ideas advanced in the different building blocks are connected into greater schemes – and finally into a coherent picture. The “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” serves as an example of this. It is made up of six highly consistent building blocks. Each of these is composed in an identical manner with a recurring “AB AB C” scheme. The second “AB” pair furthers the notions introduced in the first pair, and the entire textual unit is brought to a conclusion in the final “C” component. This scheme of a parallel “AB AB C” pattern is referred to as ‘overlapping structure’.<sup>25</sup> See the figure below:



Different from the units of thought in bundles “A”, “B”, “C”, referred to above, the text combines the individual building blocks into one integrated system of thought (see figures 2 and 3 below). Ideas introduced at one point in the text inform those in other units and, finally, present a coherent vision. Indeed, the text as a whole reduplicates the parallel “AB AB C” pattern of an overlapping structure that characterises its individual building blocks:

24 I disagree with William G. Boltz, who has written that the feature of building blocks implies a “composite nature” that opposes “integral, structurally homogeneous texts” (BOLTZ, 2005:70–71).

25 See MEYER 2005a.

Figure 2: The higher abstraction of the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”

1A	1.1A [不訛不害], 忠之至也;
	1.1B [不欺弗知], 信之至也。
	1.2A 忠積則可親也;
	1.2B 信積則可信也。
	1.C 忠信積而民弗親信者, 未之有也。
1B	2.1A 至忠如土, 化物而不伐;
	2.1B 至信如時, 比至而不結。
	2.2A 忠人亡訛;
	2.2B 信人不背。
	2.C 君子如此, 故不誑生, 不背死也。
2A	3.A [大舊而不渝], 忠之至也;
	3.B [大古而諸常], 信之至也。
	3.C 至忠亡訛, 至信不背, 夫此之謂此。
2B	4.1A 大忠不悅,
	4.1B 大信不期;
	4.2A 不悅而足養者, 地也;
	4.2B 不期而可要者, 天也。
	4.C 巽天地也者, 忠信之謂此。
Transformation of the argument	5.1 口惠而實弗從, 君子弗言爾;
	5.2 心疏而形親, 君子弗申爾;
	5.3 古行而鱗悅民, 君子弗由也;
	5.C 三者, 忠人弗作, 信人弗為也。
C	6.1A 忠之為道也, 百工不楛而人養皆足;
	6.1B 信之為道也, 群物皆成而百善皆立。
	6.2A 君子, 其施也[忠], 故蠻親附也;
	6.2B —— 其言爾[信], 故亶而可受也。
	6.C 忠, 仁之實也; 信, 義之期也。

是故古之所以行乎蠻貉者, 如此也。

1A	1.1A <sup>z1</sup> Not to [be] pretentious and not to [be] destructive, that is the culmination of fidelity;
	1.1B Not to cheat and not to [be] cunning, that is the culmination of trustworthiness;
	1.2A When fidelity is accumulated [by the gentleman ( <i>jūnzi</i> )] then [he] can be felt close to [by the people];
	1.2B When trustworthiness is accumulated [by the gentleman], then [he] can be trusted [by the people];
	1.C That fidelity <sup>z2</sup> and trustworthiness have been accumulated [by the gentleman] and the people did not get close to and trust [him]—there has never been such a case.

- 1B 2.1A The highest fidelity is like the soil; it develops the things but does not attack them;
- 2.1B The highest trustworthiness is like the seasons, [they] succeed [each other] and [the circle] does not break off.
- 2.2A Men of fidelity have no <sup>23</sup> pretension;
- 2.2B Men of trustworthiness are not perfidious;
- 2.C The sovereign (gentleman) goes along with this, and therefore [he] does not cheat life, nor is [he] perfidious [upon] death.
- 2A 3.A To hold old ways in high esteem and never counteract [them], that is fidelity in its culmination;
- 3.B To hold antiquity in high reverence and take it as principle, that is trustworthiness <sup>24</sup> in its culmination.
- 3.C The highest fidelity has no pretension;  
The highest trustworthiness is not perfidious; that is what this is about.
- 2B 4.1A The highest fidelity is not pleasant for [the people];
- 4.1B The highest trustworthiness is not restricted in time;
- 4.2A Not pleasant for [the people] [and yet] providing enough to nourish, such is the Earth;
- 4.2B Not to be restricted in time <sup>25</sup> and yet able to restrain [others], such is Heaven.
- 4.C To be in tune with Heaven and Earth, this is what fidelity and trustworthiness are about.
- Transformation of the argument 5.1 If [only] kind with words, but factually not acting in accordance with them, the sovereign (gentleman) rather refrains from speaking;
- 5.2 If letting the mind loose, {and yet being} <sup>26</sup> intimate in [one's] appearance, the sovereign (gentleman) rather refrains from displaying [this];
- 5.3 If acting according to the old, but pleasing the people by serving [them the special taste of] *zhēng*, the sovereign (gentleman) rather refrains from relying on this.
- 5.C As to these three [fallacies], the man of fidelity would refrain from doing [so], and the trustworthy man would refrain from acting [accordingly].
- C 6.1A When fidelity becomes the <sup>27</sup> way [in the state], all kinds of skilled labour will not decay, and the nourishing of the people will [thus] all be sufficient;
- 6.1B [And] when trustworthiness becomes the way [in the state], all groups of things will be completed, and all goods will [thus] be established.
- 6.2A [As a consequence] when the conduct of the sovereign (gentleman) indeed [turns out to be] <sup>28</sup> of fidelity, for this reason, [even] the Mán barbarians come close to and follow [him];
- 6.2B [And] when words [of the sovereign] indeed [turn out to be] trustworthy, for this reason, [they] are sincere and can be endured.
- 6.C Fidelity is the realisation of benevolence (*rén*). Trustworthiness is the basis for righteousness (*yì*)

It was for this reason that [the sovereign] in the days of old [even] <sup>29</sup> applied this principle to the Mán and Mò barbarians.

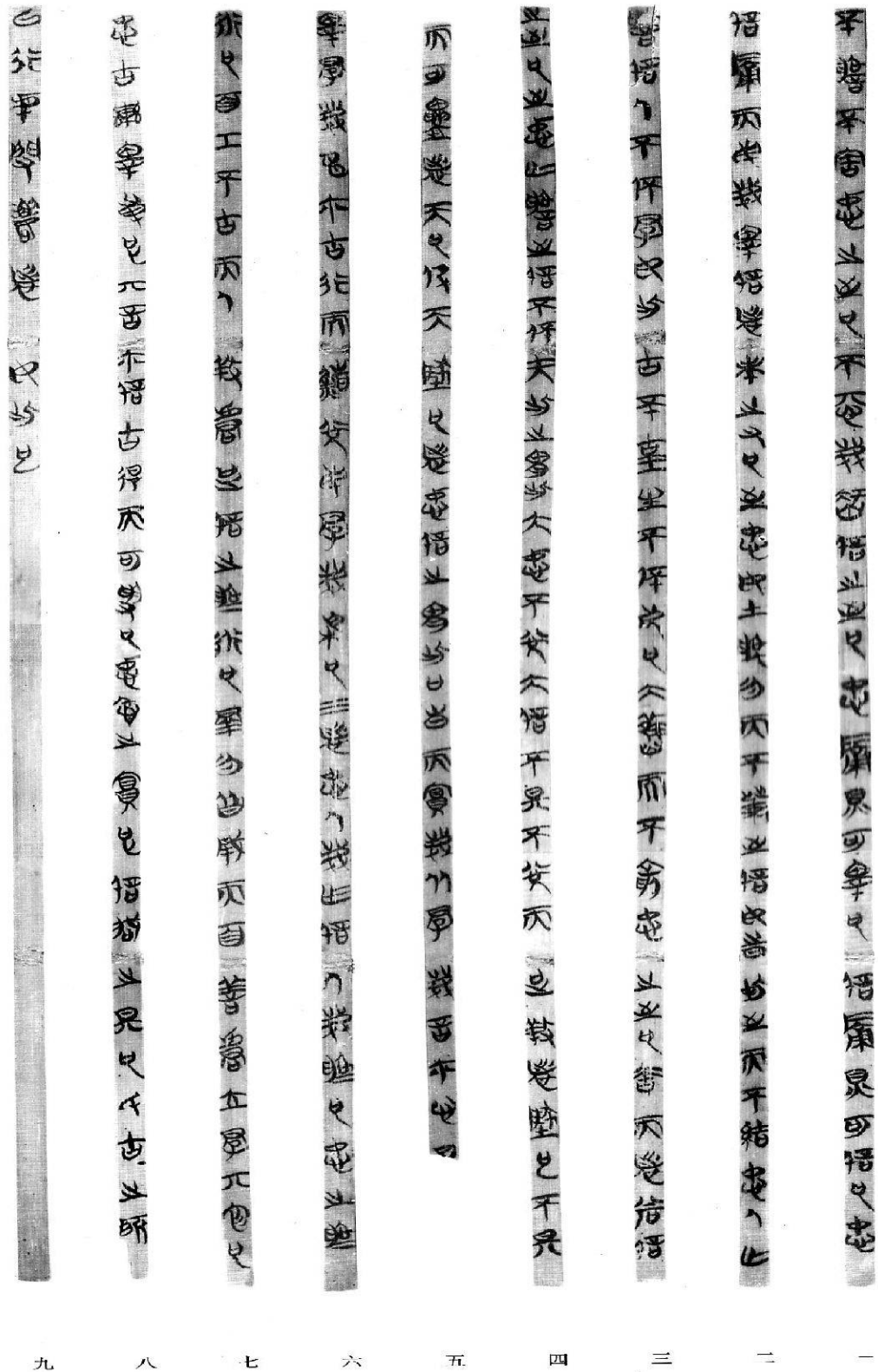


Image of the “Zhōng xīn zhī dào”; after HÚBÈI SHÈNG JINGMÉN SHÌ BÓWÙGUǎN. 1998:45.



This is not the place to describe in detail the strategies of argument construction in the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”.<sup>26</sup> It probably suffices to remark that the concepts used in the text’s different building blocks inform one another through a system of cross-references. Hence, the formal structure of an argument-based text serves as a vital means of generating meaning beyond the level of the lexicon and syntax. Meaning is constructed by connecting the various concepts and ideas advanced in the individual building blocks to positive classifications provided elsewhere in the text. The authors of the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” thus establish persuasive definitions and so provide a determinate meaning of the various concepts advanced in the text.<sup>27</sup>

It follows that in argument-based texts, the formal structure facilitates highly systematic definitions of text-immanent – and, by implication, also text-idiosyncratic – concepts. Whereas authority-based texts only represent the situational response to a certain concern, argument-based texts establish reasoned and precise systems of thought. Moreover, the written units of authority-based texts remain ambiguous, and sometimes even enigmatic. As a result, a *Gegentext* – the productive environment against which a given text was produced – can hardly ever be reconstructed with certainty. Argument-based texts, however, develop a coherent system in that they contain all the information needed to make sense of these texts. Explaining the relevant concepts used, they become reasoned philosophical edifices that can stand on their own. Argument-based texts thus aim for autonomy from their context. Authority-based texts, in contrast, require a context in order to be meaningful. Since they are isolated and stable, and at the same time ambiguous, the units of authority-based texts can be adapted to different settings and contexts. The units of thought thus become movable modules.

26 For a comprehensive discussion of meaning-construction in the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”, see MEYER, 2005a.

27 Note that the construction of meaning through a text’s formal structure is in no way exceptional in the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào”, but is characteristic of all argument-based texts from the Warring States (see MEYER, 2008a). For the concept of ‘persuasive definitions’, see Charles Stevenson who distinguishes between ‘emotive’ and ‘conceptual’ meaning (STEVENSON, 1938). In a later publication (STEVENSON, 1945), he refined his classification by replacing ‘conceptual’ with ‘descriptive’ meaning. According to Stevenson’s terminology, the “Zhōng xìn zhī dào” establishes persuasive definitions of conceptual – or descriptive – meaning.



## 5. Text, Textual Communities, and Meaning

Given the different structure of the two types of text, it can be assumed that they were used in fundamentally different ways. On the one hand, the written units of authority-based texts provide a situational response to a given concern. Argument-based texts, on the other hand, develop closed philosophical systems. As a tendency, texts of the latter type are meaningful in their own right, and so they become self-contained entities. By implication, they need no further (oral) contextualisation but can stand on their own. The written modules of authority-based texts, instead, depend on further information to expound the relevant contexts which remain unspecified, and thus outside of the different modules. This becomes even more obvious when looking at those modules that quote foreign sources:

“Guōdiàn One Zī yī”, unit 1

<sup>28</sup> 夫子曰：「好美如好緇衣，惡惡如惡巷伯，則民咸服而型不頓。」<sup>28</sup>

詩 <sup>29</sup> 云：「儀型文王，萬邦作孚。」

<sup>29</sup> Now the master said:<sup>29</sup> “Love beauty as [I] love Black Robes,<sup>30</sup> hate wickedness as [I] hate Senior Palace Eunuch<sup>31</sup> – and the people will then all submit [to you], and [your] model will not fall down.”

Odes <sup>29</sup> say: “A model of propriety, that was King Wén – and the ten-thousand states [all] acted sincerely.”<sup>32</sup>

28 I follow the suggestion of the editors of the Shànghǎi “Zī yī” manuscript (see Mǎ, 2001ff., 1:175) that *zy1/17* should be read with *xián* 咸 ‘all’ instead of *zāng* 臧 ‘good’, as proposed by the editors of the Guōdiàn One “Zī yī” (see HÚBÈI SHÈNG JĪNGMÉN SHĪ BÓWÚGUǎN, 1998:131, n. 4). For the graph *zy1/18* *fú* 服 ‘to submit’ (它 in the manuscript) I follow SHAUGHNESSY (2006:94, n. 39) as the archaic forms of 服 and 孚 (the last word of the ode cited) are cognate. For the graphs *zy1/21* (‘model’) and 23 (‘crumble’) I follow SHAUGHNESSY, 2006:72–74 (see also XIÀ, 2004:294f.).

29 The formula *fū zǐ yuē* 夫子曰 could also be translated as “the honourable Master said”. I explain *fū* as used in the same way as the first word in the *Huáinánzǐ*, viz., referring to a preceding (but for us unknown) context). It is the only unit, in which the “Zī yī” introduces the words of the Master with the formula *fū zǐ yuē* 夫子曰; the other units introduce the Master’s words with *zǐ yuē* 子曰 “the master said”.

30 Black robes (*zī yī* 緇衣) were used as court dress for high ministers during the Zhōu dynasty (ca. 1025–256 BC). Moreover, “Black robes” is a song in the *Odes* (Máo 75).

31 Senior Palace Eunuch (*xiàng bó* 巷伯) is a title at the Zhōu court. It is also a song in the *Odes* (Máo 200).

32 Quoting the ode “Dà yǎ: Wén wáng” 大雅: 文王 (Máo 235).

“Guōdiàn One Zī yī”, unit 2:

子曰：「有國者章好章惡，以視民厚，則民<sup>ㄗㄩ</sup>情不[糸弋].」

詩云：「情共爾位，好是正直。」

The master said: “If he who possesses a state displays [what he] loves and displays [what he] hates so as to show the common people [what he] values important, then the<sup>ㄗㄩ</sup> sentiments of the people will not be flawed.”

Odes say: “Be thoughtful and deferential at your position; love those that are honest and [those that are] righteous.”<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the authority-based texts found on bundles “A” and “B” (the different modules of bundle “C” are signalled by markings on the strips), the individual modules of the Guōdiàn One “Zī yī” are indicated by black markings on the strips.<sup>34</sup> The modules quoted here further illustrate in how far the construction of meaning in texts of this type relies on the reference to authority – whether master(s), odes, or other sources of cultural authority – and not on the construction of formal textual patterns that, in their use, generate argumentative force.<sup>35</sup> The written modules of authority-based texts plainly string together statements of authoritative value, and so the recipient of these units simply has to trust that “If he who possesses a state displays [what he] loves and displays [what he] hates” then the sentiment of common people will “not be flawed”; or that loving beauty and hating wickedness (like the master’s love for Black Robes and hatred for the Senior Palace Eunuch) will ultimately result in the people’s submission to the ruler, who will thus be like King Wén – the ultimate model of proper rule.

The way the text is presented here – and this is true also for manifestation of the “Zī yī” from the Shànghǎi collection of Chǔ manuscripts – is characteristic of authority-based texts. The statements and quotations used in these modules remain isolated, just like the modules themselves, as there is no explicit voice in the text that attempts to contextualise these references to cultural authorities of ancient China.

Since the written modules of the “Zī yī” are devoid of an outspoken socio-philosophic position, familiarity with the traditions quoted is required to make sense of these passages. The written modules appear enigmatic and ambiguous, and so the construction of meaning largely takes place outside the written text.

33 Quoting the ode “Xiǎo yǎ: Xiǎo míng” 小雅: 小明 (Máo 207).

34 Unlike the authority-based texts on bundles “A”, “B”, and “C”, we may justifiably call the authority-based text “Zī yī” by its title because, already by the late fourth century BC, it was considered a ‘closed’ entity as is clear from its closing statement.

35 ‘Argument’ in the context of argument-based texts does not describe some kind of logic deduction but the presentation of philosophical positions with argumentative force.

The first unit may serve as an example. By advancing the names ‘Black Robes’ and ‘Senior Palace Eunuch’ the author(s) of this module refer to cultural information as agreed upon by an unspecified social or cultural community. Composing this unit of thought, the author(s) had to assume that within the confines of certain – abstract – groups, so-called ‘textual communities’,<sup>36</sup> the name ‘Black Robes’ had a connotation beyond its semantic level and evokes identification with the ode of the same title. This also implies that the witness to the text is being informed about a particular set of cultural interpretations of the ode as defined by the social community which the author(s) had in mind when composing this module. Accordingly, “Black Robes” did not only refer to the ode to be meaningful. Instead, the truncated reference alludes to something else, for instance, the virtuous behaviours of Duke Huán of Zhèng 鄭桓公 (r. 806–771 BC) and his son, Duke Wǔ 鄭武公 (r. 770–744 BC), as suggested by the Máo interpretation of these lines. In the same vein, the reference to ‘Senior Palace Eunuch’ might allude to the wickedness of a Senior palace eunuch during the reign of King Yōu of Zhōu 周幽王 (r. 781–771 BC) – and similar processes must also be true for the construction of meaning in the modules collected in bundles “A”, “B”, and “C”. Only when having such a cultural, that is, group-based and, accordingly mediated, interpretation in mind do the statements advanced by the unknown master(s) become meaningful.

The fact that the construction of meaning in a text like the one under review largely relates to its reference to authority and – implicit – cultural interpretations makes it plain that authority-based texts point to the world beyond the text to generate meaning. These texts rely on the philosophical contextualisation of their written modules, and so they remain crucially bound to the triangular relationship between the text, the mediator of meaning, and the witness to the text, viz., the receiver of the message.

It has been argued that the “Zī yī” developed out of a connected discourse and only became the presentation of isolated modules at a later stage of text development.<sup>37</sup> According to this hypothesis, the primary text layer(s) would have been reflections on rulership to which elements such as the formula *zǐ yuē* 子曰 (or *fū zǐ yuē* 夫子曰), ‘[and now] master(s) said’ and lines from odes were

36 On the phenomenon of communities grouping around particular texts, so-called ‘textual communities’, see the discussion by Brian Stock (1983) on literacy in medieval England. In this article, I use textual communities to denote more or less confined (cultural) groups that would identify one (ore more) corpus of texts (written or oral) consistently as authoritative, and which have agreed – in an abstract sense – on a consistent interpretation of these.

37 See KALINOWSKI 2000-2001. I thank Martin Kern for alerting me to this study.

added. Consequently, the connected discourse would have been broken up and the text assumed its modular form. Due to a reshuffling of the individual units and additional use of authoritative references, the received version would finally have lost the meaningful progression of statements underlying the primary text layer(s).

There is much to say about this hypothesis since the lines extracted from the imagined text layer do in fact group around dominant themes, but it is probably too early to substantiate the hypothesis for the development of the “*Zī yī*” with conclusive evidence. Even if one were to accept this hypothesis about the text’s development, it would not alter the reading of the manifestation of the “*Zī yī*” as an authority-based text. In the course of the imagined placement of the authoritative quotations that sometimes may even seem gratuitous, the modules gained a primacy over previous text layers. Already by the *Guōdiàn One* manifestation of the text, the “*Zī yī*” had lost the form of a connected discourse. The number of modules given at the end of the text, and the fact that the various modules were rearranged in the received version, make this plain. Whether certain textual communities might have made sense of the “*Zī yī*” primarily against the background of earlier text layers, or, in fact, in the context of a mediated, cultural knowledge, is therefore irrelevant. To evaluate the strategies of meaning construction applied by the textual communities in which the “*Zī yī*” as manifested on bamboo was circulating, it can be said that meaning was generated by reference to evocative structures that lay in the intellectual environment beyond the actual – written – text, but not in the modular “*Zī yī*” itself.

For argument-based texts, the opposite is true. They seek to establish all the relevant references within the written text itself, and this even applies to those argument-based texts that, just like the “*Zī yī*”, refer to alien sources of authoritative character. I shall discuss this briefly with reference to the “*Wǔ xíng*” as materialised on bamboo, but the example of the text from the tomb at *Mǎwáng-duī* would present the same picture.<sup>38</sup> Whereas authority-based texts predominantly string together authorities and locate the intellectual effort in the oral or written context of the textual communities around these texts, argument-based texts generate webs of cross-referential links within the written text itself. Persuasive definitions are thus established, as the notions introduced at one point in the text are reinforced by other units. Argument-based texts referring to authoritative traditions remove these references from their original contexts and, in a systematic fashion, integrate them into the argument proper. The triangular rela-

38 For a discussion of meaning-construction in the “*Wǔ xíng*”, see MEYER, 2008b.

tionship between text, mediator, and witness to the text underlying the structure of meaning conveyance in argument-based texts is thus broken up. In this way, the outside mediator of meaning tends now to be replaced by a textual web that establishes conceptual definitions of otherwise idiosyncratic notions. The following passage from the “Wǔ xíng” serves as an example:

[君]子之為善也，有與始，有與終也。

君子之為德也，<sup>w19</sup> □□□□□ [有與始，無與] 終也。†<sup>39</sup>

{For the gentle-}man in his acting for goodness, there is [always something] with which [he] begins, [and something] with which [he] ends.

For the gentleman in his acting for virtue, {there is [always something] with which [he] begins, but there is nothing with which} [he] ends.†

金聲而玉振之，有德者也。<sup>40</sup>

金聲善也；玉音聖也。

善，人<sup>w20</sup> 道也；德，天□□ [道也]。†<sup>41</sup>

唯有德者，然後能金聲而玉振之。

“Bronze [bells] may sound, but jade [stones] ring them”, this is a person possessing virtue.

The “sounding of bronze [bells]” is goodness; the “tone of jade” is sagaciousness.

Goodness, this is the <sup>w20</sup> way of humans; virtue, this is the {way} of Heaven.†

Only if there is a person possessing virtue, thereafter it can be that “bronze [bells] sound, but jade [stones] ring them.”

The unit here consists of two building blocks. They are linked by a discussion of the concept gentleman (*jūnzǐ* 君子), and his relation to goodness (*shàn* 善) and

39 The top of strip w19 has broken off. It seems that the missing passage originally contained five graphs. Taking the Mǎwángduī Three version into account (186), this passage may be reconstructed as [有與始無與] 終也 “{there is [always something] with which [he] begins, but there is nothing with which} [he] ends”.

40 Compare this passage with *Mèngzǐ* 5B.1: “Kǒngzǐ is said to have ‘gathered great achievements’; ‘gathering great achievements’ is like a ‘bronze bell sounding and a jade stone ringing it’. A ‘bronze bell sounding’ is the beginning of an inherent pattern, the ‘ringing it with a jade stone’ is the end of an inherent pattern. Beginning an inherent pattern is a matter of the wise one; ending an inherent pattern is the matter of the sagacious one” (孔子之謂集大成集大成也者金聲而玉振之也金聲也者始條理也玉振之也者終條理也始條理者智之事也終條理者聖之事也).

41 Subsequent to w20/4 the bamboo strip is broken. With reference to the Mǎwángduī Three manifestation of the “Wǔ xíng” (188), the missing part can be reconstructed as *dào yě* 道也. Based on the structure of the argument and the Mǎwángduī Three manifestation of the text, graph w20/3 天 should be read as *tiān* 天 ‘heaven’. The graphs *ér* 而 and *tiān* 天 are indistinguishable in early Chinese manuscripts.

virtue (*dé* 德). The rather technical introduction to the second building block also appears in the *Mèngzǐ*.<sup>42</sup> The fact that both texts offer to explain it, though in different ways, bears witness to the fact that this statement originated from yet another source. The second building block of this unit conceptualises this quotation. The referential explanation is phrased in the parallel pattern of an overlapping structure.

- A [君]子之為善也,  
 B 有與始, 有與終也.  
 A 君子之為德也,  
 B <sup>w19</sup> □□□□□ [有與始, 無與] 終也.†

	「金聲而玉振之」, 有德者也.	quotation
1A	金聲善也;	] referential explanation of the quotation
1B	玉音聖也.	
2A	善, 人 <sup>w20</sup> 道也;	
2B	德, 天□□ [道也].†	
C	唯有德者, 然後能金聲而玉振之.	

Despite the enigmatic nature of the introductory statement, it serves as an authoritative peg for the argument. It can therefore be assumed that it carried important cultural information and belonged to the pool of shared knowledge of contemporaneous elite groups. Quoted here, it had authoritative value for the argument.

The subsequent passage serves as a referential explanation for the quotation from an authoritative source. The explanatory part rephrases the statement's technical terminology and so conceptualises the terms from that authoritative account. The author(s) substitute the word *yīn* 音 'sound' for *zhèn* 振 'to ring' (written as 晨 in the text) in line 1B. In this way, the two are accorded equal structural significance so that either can be substituted for the other. When quoting from a body of shared cultural knowledge, the author(s) thus carefully reproduce the original wording (introductory statement), but paraphrase it in the explanatory parallelism.<sup>43</sup> The conclusion (c) of the explanatory passage again reproduces the terminology of the opening line (振之), trusting that the witness to the text will now understand the quotation through the reference to the elaborating parallelism. The same is true for the pair *shèng* 聖 'sagacity' and *dé* 德

42 See *Mèngzǐ* 5B.1.

43 Otherwise the introductory statement also had to read *jīn shēng ér yù yīn zhī* 金聲而玉音之 (instead of *zhèn* 振); or the explaining parallelism would read 振 instead of 音.



‘virtue’. The first AB group has sagacity where – according to the parallelism of this unit – the word virtue could be expected. This suggests the interchangeability of these concepts in the line of this argument, and it is made clear that being sagacious is itself the full realisation of potency. This bears witness to the fact that this building block is more than just the exegetic effort to contextualise the authoritative quotation according to the argument developed in the “Wǔ xíng”. The line quoted also formulates a central insight of the text.<sup>44</sup>

From the modern perspective, the above passage may not be entirely convincing. But it casts light on how argument-based texts attempt to establish a homogenised picture of universally valid concepts. Ideas cited from authoritative sources become abstracted from their context and turn into more general concepts. As a consequence, argument-based texts relocate the intellectual effort from the unwritten context into the written text. These attempts may not always be successful. Yet on the whole, texts of this type become inherently coherent units, and therefore direct mediators of meaning.

## 6. Conclusion: The *Genius Loci* of Guōdiàn One

By taking Guōdiàn One as a case study of a space that hosts a corpus of different kinds of philosophical texts, I have examined the social practice of how philosophical texts were used in early China. The *genius loci* is characterised by a tension which is immanent to this place, viz., that between the confined space of a tomb and the set of diverse texts it hosted.

By presenting four different texts entombed in Guōdiàn One, I have highlighted the different facets of meaning construction underlying two ideal types of philosophical texts, namely argument-based and authority-based texts. The examples chosen show that this differentiation is not absolute but should help to order the complexity of reality by highlighting the common characteristics of diverse materials.

The argument-based texts as materialised on bamboo are characterised by the fact that they expound all relevant information within the written text itself.

44 Note that this unit reads like a collage. It consists of a quotation from the body of cultural knowledge and an explaining passage that is entirely composed of elements taken from other units of the “Wǔ xíng”. Spatial constraints prevent me from showing this here, but a detailed discussion of cross references as a feature of the “Wǔ xíng” can be found in MEYER, 2008a: ch. 4.



They tend to transport largely self-contained philosophical systems and need no specific contexts in order to be accessible. By becoming independent of locally based interpretations, they were potentially accessible to whoever had access to them and was able to read. We can safely assume that the texts of this type were already detached from oral contexts at an early point in time and circulated independently in writing, which furthered their wide distribution. Their argumentative nature facilitated their accessibility to a potentially wider audience. Yet, none of the argument-based texts survived outside of tombs, which is why their existence has only recently been recognised. This needs to be explained. Argument-based texts express autonomous philosophical systems, which leave less room for interpretation, and so these texts were prone to permutation and change.<sup>45</sup> Ideas expressed in these texts come to fruition in other textual contexts and, in the course of time, the texts become redundant, and some dissolve. The modular “Zī yī” might hint at such processes.

The independence of text from material carrier is also true for those texts that are authority-based. However, the written modules of authority-based texts tend not to carry a philosophical message, and so are crucially bound to the triangular relationship of text, mediator of meaning, and witness to the text. These modules functioned as platforms for all sorts of philosophical conversations. It follows that these modules functioned, and possibly even originated, in predominantly oral contexts. This renders impossible the reconstruction of a *Gegentext* for these modules, as well as ruling out their precise dating, let alone the reconstruction of an *Urtext*.<sup>46</sup> The fact that these modules did not establish the relevant references within the written text, but left these references to be construed, further accounts for the fact that the modules remained ambiguous, sometimes even enigmatic, when written down. Thus, these texts relied on a context in order to be meaningful. At the same time, the modules are intrinsically connected with authorities, be it masters, references to odes, or other sources of cultural importance, and it is one of our tasks to explore the nature of these authorities in further detail, if we want to understand how these texts were used over time. The connection with authority guaranteed the importance of these texts; ambiguity accounted for their continuous need of explanatory settings. These texts beg for repetition. This accounts for the open character of these texts

45 I owe this observation to a discussion with Michael Nylan (Berkeley) in the spring of 2008 when we were both in Princeton, NJ.

46 This should be kept in mind when confronted with a methodology such as that advanced by Bruce and Taeko Brooks, who attempt to locate the individual textual units of the *Lúnyǔ* precisely in time and space. See BROOKS/BROOKS, 1998.

to be used in different contexts. They became steady but moveable modules. Being applied here and there, but always calling for interpretation, these modules permuted their contexts. At the same time, authorities shifted. Whereas the connection with authorities of whatever kind guaranteed their importance and transmission in the first place, the authority shifted gradually from the texts to the textual communities who decide how to read and interpret these modules. As a result, the modules of authority-based texts could outlast their original target audiences. Generating new contexts, they moved among textual communities (and interpretations). In sum, because these texts were so open to interpretation, they could be applied to all kinds of arguments and contexts. The ever-evolving act of interpretation reconstitutes the authority-based text endlessly. In the end, their very ambiguity and need for interpretation is what has kept them alive. Ironically, it is the oral texts that finally survive the written textual tradition, while the early written texts drop out of the transmission process.

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