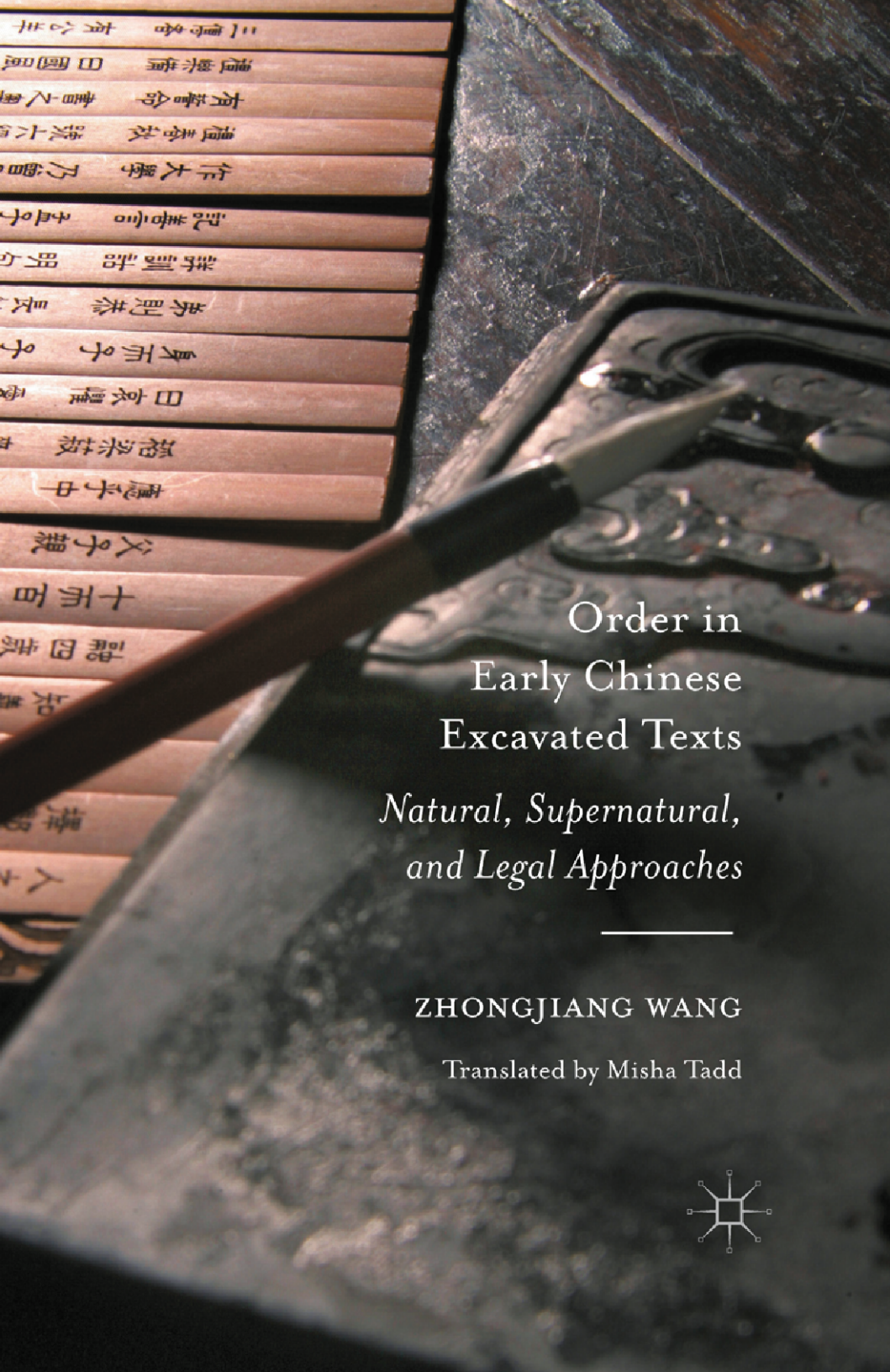

Order in Early Chinese Excavated Texts

Natural, Supernatural, and Legal Approaches

ZHONGJIANG WANG

Translated by Misha Tadd

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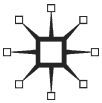

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Prolegomenon

The study of newly discovered bamboo strip and silk manuscripts is one of the most exciting and fresh fields in China today. Beginning in the previous century, this globally significant topic has become one of the three main branches of scholarship on ancient China. Unlike with the finite discoveries of the Shang dynasty oracle bones or the Dunhuang manuscripts, starting the 1970s, and especially into the 1990s, there has been a continual stream of these early texts emerging from the ground. This field is thus constantly changing and evolving, and one cannot exaggerate its rapid ascent to prominence.

As these texts have been appearing for some time, previously skilled analyses of the excavated materials have already improved our knowledge of ancient Chinese civilization, history, culture, and thought, and such research continually strives to deepen and reformulate our understanding of the past.[1] We can definitely affirm, without overstating the case, that the excavated texts indeed present numerous, exciting opportunities for expanding our general knowledge of ancient Chinesec ulture.[2]

This current project unearths innovative theories about early Chinese thought from within a variety of buried books. In particular, we would like to draw attention to three mutually related aspects of ancient thought that, because of the finds, have gained prominence and undergone significant reassessment. These three will comprise the core focus of the following chapters and highlight theories of order: the natural order of cosmology, the supernatural order of divine will, and the human order of law and governance.

Such different approaches to order all emerge from a search for constancy in the world and society and often all interact in nuanced ways. For example, within the excavated materials one finds new cosmologies and perspectives on social order that reveal the union of Daoist and Legalist thought indicative of the post-Laozi Daoism that we call the "Huang-Lao tradition." The interconnections of these topics reveal important historical developments in the conceptions of both the cosmos and society. Moreover, while many archeological texts employ abstract notions of "natural order" as a basis for human

communal organization, others also reveal a persistent belief in the supernatural and a reliance on that worldview for the establishment of political legitimacy, purpose, value, and social norms.

The many texts addressed in this project complicate and enhance our awareness of the intricate relationship in early Chinese thought between the natural and supernatural orders as sources for social organization and legitimacy. The wealth of rediscovered works now highlights the diversity of these early views and helps us to go beyond the simple evolutionary model of Chinese thought that suggested a movement from superstition to natural holism. Instead of considering the history of Chinese thought as a straight line, we should regard it as a loose net of divergent views and interests. This more realistic perspective still finds a sense of continuity in the shared search for a reliable source of order. A search we can now more fully recall.

Recovered Memories

In every field of study new methods have the ability to open up novel paths to knowledge, but in the discipline of history, the discovery of new texts and materials holds a special place of honor that supersedes even that of methodology. In this regard, the bamboo and silk manuscripts can assist us in further confirming that which we previously understood, while also further expanding our awareness. If one proposes that history is essentially a recollection of the past,[3] then the discovery of the excavated texts represents an awakening and rebirth of such memories. The events that occurred in the past (what was said and what was done) were incredibly numerous and multifarious, and so our maintained and preserved memories represent only a small fraction of what actually took place. To put it another way, in its very origin, the creation of history accompanies a massive amount off orgetfulness.[4]

In terms of storing the information of history and human thought, the bamboo and silk manuscripts represent an unusual type of memory in that they transcend the "mythologized" memories passed down over the millennia. Because the manuscripts were preserved as burial objects and only recently excavated, they are historical memories that were sealed away and forgotten and have once again arisen into the light; they are precious beyond description. Due to the large quantity of excavated manuscripts, we can now imagine how the national library at Luoyang might have looked during the Eastern Zhou, and we can more accurately speculate on the diversity present within early

Chinese civilization. Some go so far as to consider the Chinese culture recorded on bamboo and silk as representing a unique "Bamboo and SilkC ivilization."[5]

Actually, during the Zhou and Qin dynasties, Chinese culture was mostly recorded on bamboo strips, though there were also wooden and silk books as well. All the ancient texts that the Han dynasty father-son duo Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 BCE-23 CE) edited were most likely written on these materials. Thus, we must remember that the "bamboo book" was not only a particular manifestation of material culture but also carried the entire content of ancient Chinese civilization.

In contrast to the Western technologically based notion of the "Bronze Age," the historical period of Early China should more accurately be termed the "Bamboo and Silk Age." This is a broader and more syncretic understanding of what constitutes an "Age." Its vast timespan began in the second millennium BCE with the Xia or at least the Shang dynasty (as supported by the mention of bamboo book records, *ce* 册 and *dian* 典, in the *Shangshu* 《尚書》),[6] and extended down to the Eastern Han and the Jin of the third century CE: this period reached its zenith during the Zhou and Western Han.

These bamboo and silk books are the creation of early Chinese civilization, and the vast information they convey about its history, culture, knowledge, and thought is invaluable. Within them, we find the foundations of all subsequent Chinese historical memory. This is why we might refer to early Chinese civilization as a "Bamboo and Silk Civilization" and use this term to indicate the rich variety and brilliance of ancient China preserved and transmitted on bamboo strips, inscribed on wooden tables, and penned on silk manuscripts. Ancient Chinese philosophy holds a prominent position in this civilization as well.

As for the recently excavated texts, they represent only a small component of the total bamboo and silk culture, but they include significant content relating to the history of Chinese philosophy and thought. These records belong to the broad category of historical memory known as "intellectual memory." While we must admit that the most important works of early Chinese thought were all transmitted down through the ages, regaining so many precious lost components of early philosophy has revealed a world of ancient thought vaster, richer, and more varied than we could have previously imagined.

Just as Ikede Tomohisa says, "The bamboo and silk excavated materials are unquestionably profound and important resources that open new vistas in the study of the history of Chinese thought."[7] When compared to transmitted texts, the different excavated works, the Mawangdui bamboo and silk texts, the Qin dynasty bamboo strips of Shuihudi, the Chu kingdom bamboo strips of Guodian, and the Chu kingdom bamboo strips held by the Shanghai Museum unveil novel components of ancient thought that significantly alter our previousc onceptions.

Natural Order

One of the profound revelations from the buried texts is the importance and variety of early Chinese cosmogonic speculation. Emblematic of this trend are the works found in end the twentieth century at Mawangdui, Guodian, and among Shanghai Museum's collection. Most of the texts within these three groups belong to either Confucianism or Daoism (including Huang-Lao), and the content of these rediscovered manuscripts confirm that Confucians of this period were not particularly concerned with the realm of metaphysics. This signifies a major contrast between the teachings of early Confucianism and early Daoism, as the latter often engaged with questions concerning the origin of the universe and the creation of Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things.

Among the newly excavated materials, one finds "The Way's Origin" ("Dao Yuan"《道原》) within *The Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi sijing* 《黃帝四經》) found at Mawangdui, *The Great One Birthed Water* (*Taiyi shengshui*《太一生水》) from Guodian, and *The Primordial Constant* (*Hengxian*《恒先》) and *All Things Are Forms in Flux* (*Fanwu liuxing*《凡物流形》) from the Shanghai Museum's collection. These four are notable for preserving metaphysical theories lost for thousands of years, and there is a general consensus among Chinese scholars that these texts all belong to the Daoist or Huang-Lao traditions.

Among these recovered works, there exist two types of metaphysics: ontology and cosmology. "The Way's Origin" belongs to the first type, while *The Great One Birthed Water, The Primordial Constant,* and *All Things Are Forms in Flux* represent the second. The key distinction of these two types is that ontology investigates the foundational nature that unifies everything, while cosmology addresses how the universe and all the ten thousand things were created and why

they continue to transform. Previously, Han dynasty metaphysics was classified as "cosmology," and Wei-Jin Neo-Daoist and Song-Ming Neo-Confucian metaphysics were identified as "ontology," but the excavated texts reveal a less linear history of thought.

"The Way's Origin" affirms the Way as the foundational body that supports all creation and is quite comparable to the view found in "The Great and Venerable Teacher" 《大宗師》 chapter of *Zhuangzi* 《莊子》.[8] Actually, this conception of the Way represents a similar but more developed version of Daoist metaphysics found in the "The Way's Origin" ("Dao Yuan"《道原》) chapter of the *Wenzi* 《文子》 and the "Originating in the Way" ("Yuan Dao"《原道》) chapter of the *Huainanzi* 《淮南子》. In these three texts, the Way mainly appears as an ontological reality, in contrast to the *Laozi*'s mostly cosomolgical depictions and explanations of it. However, by supplemmenting the content of the two received texts, the Mawangdui version of "The Way's Origin" has enriched and expanded our understanding of Daoist ontology. This is especially true for its equation of the Way and the One, as it says of the Way that "the One is its style name."[9] By using the One to discuss the Way, the text explicitly names the Way as the foundational nature that unifies the diversity of the ten thousand things.

Laozi's metaphysics includes both ontology and cosmology but prioritizes cosmology. Previously our understanding of pre-Qin Daoist cosmology mainly relied on the key passage in *Laozi* Chapter 42: "The Way birthed the One, the One birthed the Two, the Two birthed the Three, and the Three birthed the ten thousand things."[10] This model is both staggeringly simple and unnervingly vague. Beyond this, all we had was Zhuangzi's metaphysics which presented a heavy dose of *qi* transfiguration theory but lacked a clear cosmological model. Now, *The Great One Birthed Water*, *The Primordial Constant*, and *All Things Are Forms in Flux* provide new sources for understanding the cosmological side of early metaphysics.

These discoveries have revealed how Daoist cosmology developed after Laozi. Notably, within the cosmological models of *The Primordial Constant*, *The Great One Birthed Water*, and *All Things Are Forms in Flux*, the "Way" *Dao* 道 is not the supreme central concept. In *The Primordial Constant*, the core term is the eponymous "Primordial Constant" Hengxian 恒先, in *The Great One Birthed Water* it is the "Great One" 太一*Taiyi*, while in *All Things Are Forms in Flux* it is simply the "One" *Yi* 一.

These three key terms form the center of each texts' distinctive cosmology and cosmogony. The cosmogonic process in *The Primordial*

Constant proceeds as follows: the Primordial Constant → Space → *Qi* → the Manifest → the Beginning → Movement. Following a detailed analysis of other explanations found in the text, we more or less are able to understand what each of these stages represents. However, in the case of *The Great One Birthed Water,* a more complex process of cosmic creation and transformation has been depicted as: the Great One ←→ Water (Great One) ←→ Heaven ←→ Earth → Spirit and Illumination → Yin and Yang → the Four Seasons → Cold and Hot → Dry and Wet → the Year. This model presents something much more intricate because during the first few steps the newly created components continually return to the previous stage before being able to divide again and generate the next step. The text terms this shift "returning to assist" *fanfu* 反輔. Yet, after the emergence of Heaven and Earth, the subsequent stages either depict the simultaneous creation of opposite pairs or multiple interrelated factors like the four seasons. The text calls these "repeated mutual assistance" *fuxiangfu* 復相輔.[11] Together, the two types of "assistance" represent binary relationships and complicate the model of simple linear cosmic emergence. Lastly and most simply, *All Things Are Forms in Flux* says, "The One birthed the Two, the Two birthed the Three, the Three birthed the Mother, and the Mother completed the Congelations." This includes heavy shades of *Laozi* Chapter 42.

Although concepts used in the cosmological models of *The Primordial Constant*, *The Great One Birthed Water,* and *All Things Are Forms in Flux* were all influenced by Laozi to differing degrees, they also used novel ideas and terms beyond his own core concepts. Thus, Laozi's and their cosmologies noticeably diverge. Most significantly, they present more detailed depictions of the process of creation. The discovery of these three texts confirms that the problem of cosmology remained a core issue of Daoist philosophy and hints at the variety that existed during this more historically advanced stage of Daoist metaphysics.

The three previous explanations of the origin and creation of the universe help to substantiate the view that ancient Chinese cosmology primarily involves theories of "generation" and not "creation," "birthing" and not "constructing." Pondering the origin of the cosmos, the Daoists were perhaps inspired by observing the reproduction of humans and animals as they envisioned the universe coming about through a process of pregnancy and birth. This sort of cosmology could be called a "birthing model of cosmology," and the Daoist establishment of this new "procreative metaphysics" provided a long-lasting source of inspiration for Chinese thinkers.

As a matter of fact, after the universe was birthed, it existed for an extremely long time and covered a profoundly vast space. However, as surely as it began, the life of the universe must come to an end, a view that happens to concord with beliefs in contemporary physics that the universe will eventually disperse. Significantly, ancient Chinese cosmologists were only concerned with the process of the emerging cosmos, and never considered the issue of a final reversion to its origin. Therefore, they were not "Finalists" let alone "Eschologists." They remained focused on understanding the origin of cosmic order, that constant source of stability.

Supernatural Order

Though the abstract and naturalistic models of cosmology found in lost texts represent a major strand among the early attempts to find a constant and reliable order in the cosmos, the archeological materials have also taught us much about the religious beliefs of the Eastern Zhou and early theories of divine will. These discoveries complicate a commonly held model of Chinese intellectual history.

It is generally believed that the transition from the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou) to the Eastern Zhou involved a shift from "religion" to "philosophy." More concretely this has been described as a pivot from the belief in the Will of Heaven *Tianyi* 天意 or Divine Will *shenyi* 神意 toward a humanism that emphasized human subjectivity and the value and function of the individual and a naturalism that did not rely on any supernatural power to explain the cosmos or its constituents.

Because of abruptness of this shift, the appearance of the early Chinese philosophical masters in the Eastern Zhou (771–221 BCE) has been called China's "Axial Age." That is to say, the philosophies of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods represent a creative and diverse break from past religious beliefs, and this original moment of awakening is seen as the fountainhead of all later Chinese thought.

When only considering large trends and circumstances, the reductionism of the Axial Age model and the notion of linear transformation from religion to naturalistic philosophy rest on stable ground. It is especially pertinent to the shift represented by Daoist thought and Confucianism's progression from Mencius to Xunzi, as the Daoists and Xunzi indeed propounded new philosophical stances concerning a naturalistic Way of Heaven, natural humanism, and the subjectivity of the human mind. Furthermore, within Zhuangzian and Xunzian

style naturalism, the divine nature and divine will of Heaven 天 *Tian* were completely excoriated, and Heaven was transformed into a purely natural ideal, a standard of value, and a natural order.

However, due to recent archeological discoveries, we have become more cognizant that the religious beliefs of the Three Dynasties persisted during the transformative age of the Eastern Zhou, and often appeared in modified forms in the writings of that period's philosophical masters. One classic example is Mozi's views on the Will of Heaven *Tianzhi* 天志 and the "spirits and gods" *guishen* 鬼神. We can firmly say along with the dominant Eastern Zhou trends of humanism and naturalism, we can find another cultural scene filled with stanch views on the Will of Heaven and the spirits and gods. The conspicuousness of Mozi's religious views forces us to admit that the philosophers of the Eastern Zhou were not solely promoting naturalistic notions of the Way of Heaven. Furthermore, when approached without secular bias, the *Analects* 《語語》 and the *Liji* 《禮記》proclaim to us that Confucius and many non-Xunzian Confucians, in fact, had not divorced themselves from the ancient religious traditions of honoring spirits and gods.

This last claim requires in-depth explication, as it runs counter to popular narratives about early Confucianism. We assert that Confucius did by no means reject the existence of Heaven, the Mandate of Heaven *Tianming* 天命, or the spirits and gods. He said, "Respect the spirits and gods, but keep them at a distance."[12] By this we propose he did not mean that people are "estranged from the spirits and gods," but instead that one should "honor and respect the spirits and gods, and not profane them."

Support for this reading comes from the *Guoyu*《國語》. That text mentions "severing the communication between Heaven and Earth,"[13] This statement does not negate the divinity of Heaven or promote estrangement from it but actually represents a solemn proclamation about the boundaries between gods and men, and the importance of preventing "the people from having a hodgepodge of deities that cannot be clearly differentiated" or "individuals giving offerings as their own families' shamans."[14] The key aim of the passage is for the ruler to regain a monopoly on religious order and divine power to promote the idea that "people and gods have different roles, and so [people should] respect them and not profane them."[15] Following this textual support, the *Guoyu* statement that "[people should] respect them and not profane them" becomes a revealing gloss to the *Analects'* saying, "Respect the spirits and gods, but keep them at a distance." Confucius

is not rejecting supernatural beings, but is promoting the maintenance of sacred and profane categories.

To further support this more religious reading of the *Analects*, we turn to the "Biaoji" 《表記》 chapter of the *Liji* 《禮記》 which provides a record of the religious traditions of the Three Dynasties. It says:

> The way of the Xia dynasty was to honor the mandate, and serve the spirits and respect the gods but keep them at a distance . . . The [rulers] of the Shang dynasty honored the gods, and led the people in serving them. Thus, they prioritized spirits before ritual propriety . . . The [rulers] of the Zhou honored ritual propriety and valued engagement. They served the spirits and respected the gods, but kept them at a distance.[16]

This passage illustrates the different methods people used during the Three Dynasties to serve the spirits and gods and does not indicate that during those periods people neglected or were estranged from these supernatural beings. Consequentially, Confucius stating, "Earnestly caring for the people, while respecting the spirits and gods but keeping them at a distance, can be called wisdom," should definitely not be interpreted to mean, as is so common, that Confucius values only the human and rejects or neglects the divine.

Those who promote the popular view that Confucius distanced himself from spirits and gods affirm this stance by relying on the passage, "The Master did not speak about the extraordinary, strength, disorder, or gods."[17] Yet, looking closely one finds this reading rests on questionable interpretive decisions.

Such analysis of this famous passage can be traced to the commentary of Wang Su 王肅 (195–256) who explains:

> "Extraordinary" means "bizarre," "strength" refers to feats like Ao pulling the boat, or Wu Huo lifting a weight of 30,000 catties, "disorder" refers to ministers killing kings and sons killing fathers, and "gods" refer to the affairs of spirits and gods. Some of these contribute nothing to teaching and transforming people, and some of these are not worthy ofme ntion.[18]

While I generally accept the interpretations of Wang Su, in this case the alternative reading of Li Chong 李充 (c. 323) that appears in the *Lunyu jijie* 《語語集解》 is worth considering instead. The key shift is that instead of seeing the four characters on which Confucius does

not speak as the individual terms "extraordinary," "strength," "disorder," and "gods," Li Chong suggests these actually should be read as the two compounds "strange powers" and "disordered gods." He explains:

> Powers that do not follow the normal order are called strange powers. Gods that do not follow the proper order are called disordered gods. Strange powers and disordered gods are grouped with evil and contribute nothing to education. Thus they are not discussed.[19]

Incorporating Confucius' view on spirits and gods explained above, Li Chong's reading seems to accord with Confucius' original intent. That is to say, Confucius certainly did not reject spirits and gods and actually offers discourse on these beings.

This understanding of the religiosity of Confucius and Confucians finds multiple sources of support within the excavated manuscripts. For example, in *The State of Lu's Great Drought* (*Lubang dahan* 《魯邦大旱》) discovered among the bamboo strip collection of the Shanghai Museum, Confucius proposes to Duke Ai two methods to control the disaster. The first involves correcting the use of punishment and virtue, and the second entails sacrificing to the rivers and mountains.[20] In this regard Confucius was continuing the great traditions of the Three Dynasties that approached the issues of cosmic and social order from a religious and moral angle.

The rich body of texts in the Shanghai Museum collection further includes a manuscript called *The Three Virtues* (*San De* 《三德》) that seems to explain Confucian religious beliefs.[21] Carefully investigating this text reveals it to be filled with naturalistic approaches to the Way of Heaven, as well as discourses on the divine nature of Heaven and the will of the gods. It uses many religious expressions like "Heaven" *Tian* 天, "God of Heaven" *Tianshen* 天神, "August Heaven" *Huangtian* 皇天, "Lord on High" *Shangdi* 上帝, "Heaven's Rituals" *Tianli* 天禮, "Mandate of Heaven" *Tianming* 天命, "spirits and gods" *guishen* 鬼神, "Heaven sent disasters" *Tianzai* 天災, "Supreme Heaven" *Shangtian* 上天, and "ritual sacrifice" *jisi* 祭祀. It also reveals a theory of calamities and anomalies that suggest that it is Heaven which sends these "natural disasters." We consider this a lost work of the Confucian tradition that reflects the religious and theological views of Eastern Zhou Confucians.

The religious concerns of *The Three Virtues* do not focus on human salvation or liberation, but on the preservation, ordering, and stabilization of the empire and its states. This represents a continuity of activity

and form where the "Way of Heaven" *Tiandao* 天道 and the "Way of Humanity" *Rendao* 人道 interact, and the "Will of Heaven" *Tianyi* 天意 and the "Will of Humanity" *Renyi* 人意 are mutually bound together. This type of synthesis combines differentiation and intimate involvement; it is religious and also naturalistic; it combines "governing with the constant" and "governing with virtue" with "establishing the way of gods to govern" and "unifying gods and governance." This vision that integrates cosmic and social order provides a new hybrid example of the search for a stable foundation of existence.

This confidence in the cosmic justice of Heaven appears somewhat weakened in another text from the Shanghai Museum, *The Divine Insight of Spirits and Gods* (*Guishen zhi ming*《鬼神之明》). There one can observe a previously unknown Eastern Han perspective on divine beings that is neither as naturalistic nor as idealistic as texts like *The Three Virtues*. When compared to the three *Mozi* chapters on "Shedding Light on Spirits" 《明鬼》 that provide prolonged theologically resolute expositions on the belief in these supernatural beings, the small size of the lost text *The Divine Insight of Spirits and Gods* seems trivial. However, the text's stance, that sometimes spirits and gods have divine insight and sometimes they do not, reveals a view on divinity that significantly diverges from that of either Mozi or Confucius. This perspective affirms that accepting the existence of spirits and gods must entail an admission that their bestowal of rewards and punishments is inconstant and their surveillance of human activity incomplete.

Such a view is a major adjustment to the Confucian and Mohist convictions that spirits and gods universally "provide fortune to the good, and bring calamity to the evil" or the notion that good and evil people always get what they deserve, and so it should be considered an ambiguous take on the divine that contains a measure of skepticism. The discovery of this lost manuscript has provided a small window into the previously unrecognized diversity of religious beliefs during the Eastern Zhou and represents a unique instance where the active search for observable constancy in the cosmos comes into tension with tradition.

Legal Order

Our final theme concerns the renewed understandings of the legalistic manifestation of a "communal rationality" in the Huang-Lao tradition and the importance of the consistency of law during the Qin. As for the pre-Qin Daoist philosophical lineage, we have long possessed

a strong grasp on the development of its thought from Laozi to Zhuangzi and have frequently stressed the importance of Zhuangzi's individualism and political and civil disobedience within that early tradition. However, this approach dilutes Laozi's philosophical enthusiasm for politics and his political insights on ruling with nonaction, and obscures the connection of this political thought to the Huang-Lao tradition.

Previously, because transmitted texts like *Guanzi* 《管子》 and *Shenzi* 《慎子》 had not received much attention and the works of the Huang-Lao tradition had been lost, we were unable to recognize that the post-Laozi Huang-Lao tradition integrated components of Legalism and Confucianism. Yet, with the discovery of the Mawangdui silk manuscript *The Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor* (*Huangdi sijing* 《黃帝四經》), these previous impediments to Huang-Lao research were shattered. Relying on this new work, we now understand how the political philosophy of Laozi was received and transformed by the Huang-Lao tradition. "Naturalness and non-activity" are Laozi's highest principles that are used to control and limit the power of the ruler and reject interventionism, maintain a state of purity, stillness, and nonaction so that everyone can manage their own affairs in their own way. Yet, Laozi's "Way of naturalness and non-activity" is highly abstract and weak on implementability. He appeals to cosmic constants, but never provides concrete guarantees to ensure that the ruler will consistently employ said constants.

By incorporating the Legalist notion of a "system of laws" into Laozi's political thought, the Huang-Lao tradition established a Way-centric conception of natural laws that functioned as a foundation for a transcendent and unified legal system. The formation of this unified and universal system finally provided an objective guarantee for the ruler to follow the ideal of nonaction and not arbitrarily or unfairly impose his whims on the people. The reason that the ruler can be "non-active" is because of the existence of this unified system of laws, which operates as a standard of measure for human behavior and a guarantee of national and governmental order. Moreover, this legal system can operate as a standard measure for human behavior because it accords with human nature and the natural order.

As people naturally seek to gain and avoid harm, reward based laws are effective; similarly, as people flee injury and fear death, punishment based law are also effective. In this sense, the ruler's approach of following what is "natural" for the hundred clans becomes laws that accord with human nature. From this origin, we can easily understand why the Huang-Lao tradition emphasizes the legal system, and why

it promotes "the way of still accord" and "according and following." This new view reveals a major change in post-Laozi Daoist political philosophy and explains why Huang-Lao focuses so heavily on politics.

This ideal of a single legal system emerged from the Legalism of Qin. That tradition and its association with the first Chinese empire has historically been reviled by Confucians and historians due to the infamous instance when Qin Shihuang "burned books and buried scholars" in an effort to forcibly create a single unified society. With the discoveries of the numerous Qin legal documents at Shuihudi, we have a new understanding of the importance of law within the political life of Qin officials and the complexities of implementing a single constant standard within a diverse empire.

Summation

We are greatly inspired by the continued revelations emerging from the yellow earth of China. The scores of excavated documents not only affirm the existence of the Silk and Bamboo Age but also arouse new appreciation for the diversity and sophistication of ancient Chinese thought.

This collection of essays hopes to offer renewed insight into how the ancient Chinese viewed the universe (supernatural or natural) and how those views related to their search for social order and stability during the Warring States and into the early Han. In all cases, these thinkers and writers expressed the importance of a constant foundational order, or relied on this lever to question sources of such order, as is the case of *The Divine Insight of Spirits and Gods.* This longing for something stable on which to build a peaceful and prosperous society stimulated great creativity and led to rich conceptualizations of the universe, its functions, its gods, and the rule of law.

We are grateful for these findings that have both historical and philosophical value and look forward to future discoveries that will only further broaden our perspective on these questions and many others.

CHAPTER 1

The Cosmology of *The Great One Birthed Water*

Within the early records of human thought, one tends to find three major cosmogonic models. The first is the "mythological" model that imagines heroic figures who create Heaven and Earth and all the creatures therein.[1] The second is the "religious" model that envisions a supreme deity who makes the cosmos and humanity. The last is the "philosophical" approach, which asserts the world emerged from some foundational principle or substance. These three divergent cosmogonic modes of thought all appear to some degree within the traditions of early China. However, the historical relationship of these different perspectives remains extremely difficult to unravel.

Considering the records that predate the great masters of the Zhou (like *The Book of History*, *The Book of Odes*, the *Guoyu*, or the *Zuozhuan*), one finds a conspicuous dearth of cosmogonies that depict creation as a sequential concrete process. Instead one simply sees references to how "Heaven generated the people and established the ruler," "Heaven generated the multitudes of humanity that exists as creatures and that possess an order," "Heaven generated the five materials" and the like, all of which only represent a single moment of genesis and a simple relationship between creator and created. Compared with these early examples, later cosmological visions that rely on a transcendent "Divine Will" or "Way of Heaven" to explain the universe, its creatures, as well as natural and social orders present a much more dynamic perspective.

Previously, the only available early depiction of the process of cosmic creation was the pithy model in Chapter 42 of the *Laozi*: "The Way birthed the One, the One birthed the Two, the Two birthed the Three, and the Three birthed the ten thousand things."[2] Following the discovery of *The Great One Birthed Water* (*Taiyi shengshui* 《太

一生水》) among the tomb texts of Chu, we now can gaze upon a new cosmogonic model.[3] Because this text emerged together with the three bamboo strip groups of *Laozi A*, *B*, and *C*, and in particular because its appearence perfectly matches that of *Laozi B*, many questions have been raised over whether it was written before or after this *Laozi* edition.

If we postulate that the Guodian *Laozi* is the earliest edition of the *Laozi* or is the earliest stage in the formation of the *Laozi*, then *The Great One Birthed Water* could have been written around the same time or it could even predate the *Laozi*. By accepting either of these propositions, it means that *The Great One Birthed Water* could not possibly have been influenced by the bamboo *Laozi* text. Yet, if there is evidence of some kind of influence, it must be that *Laozi* was affected by *The Great One Birthed Water*. This could be the case because the Guodian *Laozi* does not include the passage "The Way birthed the One, the One birthed the Two, the Two birthed the Three, and the Three birthed the ten thousand things."

The author, however, is confident that the Guodian *Laozi* cannot be the original edition of the *Laozi* because of its inclusion of reduplicated chapters, and so we postulate that the Guodian *Laozi* is comprised of selections from the original 5,000 character edition.[4] Furthermore, the pervasiveness of *Laozi* citations in the Zhou and Qin periods strongly suggests an earlier origin. Because of both these points, we argue that *The Great One Birthed Water* must have emerged under the influence of the *Laozi*.

While this recently discovered text's cosmogonic model is quite close to the *Laozi*'s, it obviously has its own unique qualities and structures. For example, the concept of the "Way" *Dao* 道 does not hold such a central position in the text. It also lacks the extremely important terms "virtue" *de* 德 and *qi* 氣. Perhaps this omission is the result of lost passages, as our copy of *The Great One Birthed Water* emerged from the ground degraded and incomplete. However, the work clearly demonstrates its main goal of explaining the creation and origin of the cosmos.[5] It also happens to belong to the same category as the roughly contemporary *The Primordial Constant* 《恒先》.

There have been numerous academic debates within and outside of China concerning *The Great One Birthed Water*,[6] and this chapter hopes to build on the foundation of this previous research to further advance and broaden our understanding of the text.

The Primordial State of the Cosmos: The Great One and The One

As long as one accepts that the universe was created, one must also simultaneously admit it has a beginning and an origin. While this stance does not agree with the old "steady state" theory that the universe is infinite in regard to both time and space, it fits nicely with current views in physics and cosmology. According to the *Shizi* 《尸子》, the *Mozi* 《墨子》, and the "Qisu" 《齊俗》 chapter of the *Huainanzi*, "time" includes the past and the present but is never something infinite.[7]

Traditional Chinese cosmologies are generally understood to include cosmogonies that not only depict the beginning of the universe but also recount the full process of its emergence. While these records do not explicitly mention a terminus to creation, the fact that they portray a beginning implies that as some point everything must reach its end. Intriguingly, Chinese cosmologists generally focus on the origin and process of creation, and do not stop to consider the question of the ultimate fate of the universe. They are not interested in theorizing about the "apocalypse" or the end of the world. Instead the classic questions mainly concerned whether or not the universe had a beginning, when it might have started, and how things came to be.

Similarly, *The Great One Birthed Water* does not concern itself with the end of the world, but only depicts the origin and birth of the cosmos. This origin is identified as the *Taiyi* 太一 or "Great One." A prominent explanation of this term is that it refers to the god "Great One" who functions as the divine creator. While historically this term has been used to refer to a specific deity, it has other meanings as well. In philosophy, it is a conceptual term for the ultimate origin; in religion, beyond indicating a god, it has also been the name of a star.[8] It is unlikely these three different definitions could have developed simultaneously, and so to understand which usage is appropriate in this text requires some background on the history of the term.

Li Xueqin long ago noted a connection between *The Great One Birthed Water* and a *Zhuangzi* passage in the "Tianxia" 《天下》 chapter that explains the teachings of Laozi and Yin Xi 尹喜 (first recipient of the *Laozi*, per legend): "They built [their system] according to the constantly unmanifest, and made their central [concept] the Great One."[9] This led him to suggest that the newly discovered text might be a lost teaching from Yin Xi's school of thought.[10] We

are thus inclined to suggest that the Great One in *The Great One Birthed Water* provided the theoretical foundation for the term's later use in identifying stars or deities.

This assertion further arises from the philological sense of *Taiyi* 太一. *Da* 大 "large" is another way to write *Tai* 太 "Great," a character which the *Shuowen jiezi* 《說文解字》 identifies as an image of a person. In the oracle bone records, this also appears to be the case where it means "big man."[11] The character *Yi* 一 "one" operates as the first counting number as far back as the oracle bones as well. In the compound constructed from these two words, we take "large" or "great" as the modifier of "one." As a result we must consider that the primary concept here is "one." The *Shuowen jiezi*, dated to the early second century CE, defines "one" as follows, "It is the origin of the Great Beginning and the foundation of the Way. It formed and divided Heaven and Earth and created the ten thousand things." The "one" defined here clearly had already become a philosophically sophisticated concept that far exceeds its usage as a simple counting number.

So how did this basic number attain its status as ultimate existence? We propose it was a metaphoric extension of the idea of "first number" to the concept of "first thing." Numbers also are used to identify the multiplicity of creation in contrast to the "one thing," as in the expression "The number for all things is ten thousand" found in *Zhuangzi*.[12] Considered philosophically, these numbers of "one" and "ten thousand" occupy the roles of the classic binary "The One" and "The Many." Because the multiplicity of "ten thousand" comes from an accumulation of the smaller "ones," we can say that ten thousand is contingent on the existence of one and that one is its origin. According to Wang Bi's comments on the *Laozi* Chapters 22 and 39, "One is the ultimate of the few," and "One is the origin of numbers and the ultimate of things."[13] Similarly, in the *Classic of Weiqi* 《棋經》, it notes: "The calculation of the ten thousand things begins with one . . . One is the master that creates numbers, and by residing in its extreme you can travel to the four ends of the Earth."[14]

Naturally, the transformation of a simple number into this philosophical term involves a long process. By becoming the opposite of multiplicity, "one" comes to mean things like *yiyang* 一樣 "one and the same," *yizhi* 一致 "identical," and *tongyi* 同一 "the same one." The *Zuozhuan* records that after the death of Yao "[the people of] the empire were like one, and with a common heart they raised up Shun as the Son of Heaven."[15] Here the "one" in "like one" means

"unified" and the "same." Similarly, in the *Guoyu* 《國語》 it says, "In controlling territory, partition the people as if [they are] one," and "The people are born from three, but serve them as though they are one."[16] In the *Xici* 《繫辭》 it says, "What do [the people of] the empire think? [The people of] the empire submit together but follow different paths; they have one goal but a hundred approaches."[17] Here one finds a contrast between "submit together" and "one goal" with "different paths" and "a hundred approaches."

While the teachings of Confucius are undoubtedly broad, he repeatedly emphasizes the "one" in his thought, especially in the famous "one thread that runs through it" passages.[18] The "one" in the "one thread that runs through it" passage is explained by Zengzi as "loyalty and sympathy." If he was right, then Confucius' teachings became "one" in loyalty and sympathy. Zhang Dainian 張岱年 indicated that Confucius' expression suggests employing a single general principle to unify the plurality of knowledge attained by studying a multiplicity of subjects.[19] Regardless of how Confucius means this "one" in his statement, its function is to unite multiplicity. Thus, this "one" encompasses the general abstract meanings of essentiality and oneness.

While Confucius provides hints of a philosophical conception of "one," the first conspicuous occurrence of the philosophical "one" appears in the *Laozi*. According to Zhang Dainian, Laozi gives the "one" in his cosmology the meanings of "oneness" and "self unification."[20] Laozi's understanding of "one," following the transmitted edition of the *Laozi,* appears in Chapter 42, "The Way birthed the One; the One birthed the Two," Chapter 14, "merge and become the One," and Chapter 39, "Heaven obtained the One and became clear".[21] Significantly, in these examples, the relationships between the Way and the One diverge. "The Way birthed the One" means the One must exist on a level lower than the Way. Yet, the One found in "merge and become the One" and "Heaven obtained the One" instead suggest it as an alternative appellation for the Way.

Consider the longer passage from Chapter 14:

> If you look but do not see it, call it "even." If you listen but do not hear it, call it "rarified." If you grasp for but do not obtain it, call it "subtle." These three cannot be realized through investigation. Thus they merge and become the One. On high, it is not bright. Down low, it is not dim. Oh it stretches on and is unnamable. It repeatedly returns to the unmanifest things. It is called the shape of unmanifest