METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ANALYSIS OF TEXTUAL VARIANTS AND THE MODES OF MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION IN EARLY CHINA

BY

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Abstract

Even more than other recent archaeological finds from East Asia, ancient Chinese manuscripts have ignited strong academic excitement. While much attention is focused on the philosophical interpretation of these texts, we are only beginning to explore their social circumstances and modes of production, to relate them to other tomb artifacts alongside which they were buried, and to explain their very physical appearance. According to a not uncommon view, texts with a reception history—e.g., the classics, but also a broad range of recently discovered technical writings that were handed down across generations—represent lineages of writings, with each manuscript being a copy of an earlier one. Yet on closer examination, graphic idiosyncrasies suggest the mutual independence of various written versions of the same text and thus a local, individual mode of textual production where scribes enjoyed considerable freedom in choosing particular characters to write the intended words. In their written form, texts with a transmission history—among them works of canonical status—do thus not seem fundamentally different from occasional writings without such a history. Compared to administrative writings, for which certain written blueprints existed, they were indeed less, not more, defined in their graphic form. This is not surprising if we consider that texts to be transmitted were also texts to be committed to memory; their modes of storage and communication of knowledge did not entirely depend on the writing system. One necessary step towards the discussion of such manuscripts, and ultimately to their function and nature, is the systematic linguistic analysis of their textual variants. The present paper outlines the methodological preliminaries towards such an analysis and suggests which scenarios of early Chinese manuscript production are plausible according to our present evidence, and which others are not.

Introduction

The unprecedented series of discoveries of ancient Chinese manuscripts since the Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb no. 3 finds of 1973 has greatly

contributed to the dramatic development of the field of early Chinese studies over the last three decades, and indeed to the very definition and self-definition of this field in the beginning.[1] It is certainly no exaggeration to state that without the newly excavated manuscripts, the field, in terms both institutional and intellectual, could not possibly have developed into its present exuberance and academic stature. In the study of early China, each year now sees the publication of numerous books and articles, the establishment of new scholarly positions, a continuously increasing number of dissertations, a strong influx of new graduate students, and a broad range of scholarly interaction and collaborative work across the national and linguistic boundaries of academic communities. Up to the year 2000, 133 Warring States through Eastern Han archaeological sites have yielded manuscripts on wood, bamboo, and silk, in many cases containing not more than just a few characters on an inventory slip, but sometimes including very substantial collections of manuscripts (Giele 2000).

The number of sites with manuscripts, most often tombs, is tiny compared to the thousands of recent archaeological discoveries that have yielded tens of thousands of material objects from early China. Yet despite the mesmerizing beauty and technological perfection of so many early Chinese artifacts—one may just think of the famous mid-fifth century BC tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng 曾侯乙, from which more than 15,000 objects were unearthed—nothing has attracted the attention of scholars in the way the manuscripts have. By the time this communication reaches its readers, close to 1,000 scholarly publications will have been devoted to the manuscripts from Guodian 郭店 tomb no. 1 alone, that is, material discovered in 1993 and published only in late 1998 (Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998). This enormous tide of scholarship is currently being followed by a potentially even higher one, this time concerning the early manuscripts purchased by the Shanghai Museum on the Hong Kong antique market in 1994 (Ma 2001). It is not difficult to understand why manuscripts have ignited this incomparable degree of excitement despite the fact that on their outer appearance, they certainly pale against the wonders of ancient Chinese bronzes, lacquerware, or textiles. The manuscripts contain texts, and texts have always found the broadest attention in the scholarship on ancient China. In some sense, today's intense focus on manuscripts still reflects the enduring attitude, established some two thousands years ago, that the culture of early China is defined by its important texts. Moreover, among the texts discovered so far, it is only a small group that has captured most

[1] Note that the primary Western journal of the field, *Early China*, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in the year 2000.

of the attention. These are the philosophical writings that can now be related to what was always regarded the true intellectual center of the classical Chinese world: the intellectual traditions of, presumably, the fifth through third centuries BC.[2] Not surprisingly, the vast majority of publications on the Guodian manuscripts are devoted to discussions of their philosophical positions, and hence to how they relate to their counterparts in the transmitted literature.

There are good reasons to quarrel with this situation: why are we still so much inclined to privilege textual over non-textual materials as an expression of early Chinese culture? And within the realm of texts, why focus mainly on those texts that in one way or another can be connected to the philosophical tradition? The answers to these and similar questions may tell us something about ourselves. They also may help us to reflect upon our conceptualization of the early Chinese world, to alert us to the need to integrate the ancient texts into their non-textual environment, and to hint at our self-imposed limitations in concentrating too narrowly on certain philosophical issues. The present communication will not pursue these broader issues any further. Instead, it falls to some extent within the boundaries just described: it also is devoted to manuscripts, and the core of its data comes from the analysis of excavated fragments of the ancient canon *par excellence*, the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩). However, leaving the interpretation and philosophical contextualization of these fragments aside, I wish to raise the question, of interest equally to archaeologists and philologists, of how to deal with the very materiality of their written form. What can their graphic appearance tell us about the manuscript production of early Chinese texts, especially those texts that are distinguished as having a history of transmission?

To define the scope of the present paper, it is necessary to clarify the term "text with a transmission history," or simply "text with a history," and to distinguish such texts from others of a different nature. By "texts with a history," I refer to texts that were not confined to a single, geographically, chronologically, and functionally specific purpose—an inventory slip, an administrative order, a divination record, and so on—but were transmitted and received over time.[3] This transmission and reception may or may not have taken a written form, or may have happened in both writing and oral transmission concomitantly, with or without some direct interaction of the two modes. Texts with a history

[2] I say "presumably" because certain texts, e.g., the *Lunyu* 論語 or the *Laozi* 老子, have traditionally been claimed as works of the fifth or even sixth century BC. So far, our manuscript evidence does not reach beyond the very late fourth century BC.

[3] For a sophisticated classification of early Chinese excavated manuscripts see Giele forthcoming, "Appendix."

were neither necessarily stable in their wording or graphic appearance nor always fixed in their borders. They may have circulated in fragments, with different internal orders, or integrated with other texts; their different versions may have been reduced or extended; they may have adopted diverging choices of style, grammar, and vocabulary. However, in all of this, they must have maintained a recognizable core. Regardless to which extent the various versions of, e.g., the Wu Zixu 伍子胥 legend, may differ across a range of early transmitted texts, we recognize all of them not as mutually independent texts but as different versions of what is basically the same story.[4] Similarly, we have no problem identifying the texts of certain excavated manuscripts as versions of texts that we know from the literary tradition, even where transmitted and excavated versions differ—as seems to be the rule—in their internal order.

The three Guodian *Laozi* 老子 manuscripts are neither individually nor in sum identical with the received *Laozi*. The received *Laozi* comprises material not found in the Guodian manuscripts—possibly, but not necessarily, because it did not yet exist at the time when these manuscripts were written. At the same time, the *Laozi* C manuscript from Guodian is physically indistinguishable from a previously unknown text that the editors have labeled "Taiyi sheng shui" 太一生水 and that itself is probably better understood not as one but as two separate texts (Boltz 1999: 595–596). Perhaps the "Taiyi sheng shui" material had accompanied the *Laozi* C passages for some time prior to and following the Guodian manuscripts in one or more lines of textual (not necessarily written) transmission. Perhaps the Guodian arrangement represents but a single, idiosyncratic choice. We do not—perhaps only not yet?—know. In any case, the Guodian manuscripts include both more and less material than the Mawangdui *Laozi* and thus testify to a still ongoing textual formation, to a text not yet closed. But clearly enough, the respective Guodian writings are part of the history of the *Laozi* text whose manuscripts were found at Mawangdui. Similarly, the "Ziyi" 緇衣/紂衣 text that has appeared in both the Guodian and the Shanghai Museum corpora matches a received chapter of the *Liji* 禮記. The manuscript versions show a different internal order, and they do not include all sections of the respective *Liji* chapter. But again: it

[4] There are many texts that appear in various versions across the early transmitted literature. Due to its abundance of details that change from source to source, the Wu Zixu legend is an excellent example of the phenomenon of a text in multiple versions. Important studies of the Wu Zixu include those by Durrant (1995: 71–98) and Johnson (1980), the latter tracing the Wu Zixu legend from its sources to a Tang "transformation text" (*bianwen* 變文) manuscript found at Dunhuang 敦煌. Wang 1994 discusses the legend on the basis of its depictions in Eastern Han bronze mirrors.

is obvious that the latter, now part of a Han dynasty compilation, is a text with a history, and that the two manuscript versions represent earlier stages of this history. The *Liji*, in turn, is a collection of various shorter texts that initially may had circulated individually or in certain clusters. These texts or clusters of texts constituted separate textual histories before becoming finally unified as chapters of a single book. The same situation is documented also for other early Chinese texts (Yu 1985: 93–98).

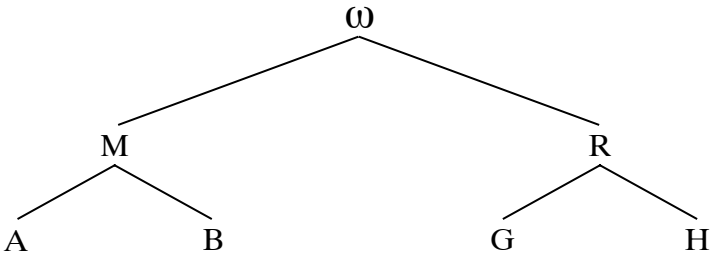
For excavated manuscripts, texts with a history are not confined to those with a received counterpart. The best example is that of the two "Wu xing" 五行 manuscripts from Guodian and Mawangdui. The "Wu xing" text did not enter the tradition that was fixed in late Western Han (202 BC–AD 9) and Xin 新 (9–23) times by the imperial editors and bibliographers Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BC) and his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23) and that has partly survived through later ages. Yet clearly, the Mawangdui "Wu xing" silk manuscript is a version—now expanded by a commentary—of the same text that a century earlier was included among the Guodian bamboo manuscripts. And while the Guodian manuscript is now our earliest evidence of this history, there is no particular reason to assume that the "Wu xing" text indeed originated with it.

The "Wu xing" example opens an additional perspective on other texts that did not become part of the later tradition and are now known only from a single manuscript. Apart from writings confined to very specific circumstances, virtually any manuscript may be regarded as potentially representing a text with a history. This is particularly true for those manuscripts, usually called "philosophical," that discuss moral, cosmological, or political principles and models; yet it also applies to a broad range of technical writings that may have been transmitted in lineages of specialized learning. Finally, texts with a history can also appear embedded in other texts; for this, the best example are the *Odes* quotations scattered across a series of early manuscripts. Any text quoted in a manuscript is a text with a history because the practice of explicit quotation is a performance of cultural memory, pointing backwards in time. If a quotation does not reappear at a later historical stage (e.g., the received tradition), we conclude that the history of its text had ended prior to that stage; we do not question that there was an earlier textual history.

While "texts with a history" is thus a wide-ranging concept, it still allows us—at least in categorical terms, if not always for the individual text—to distinguish between narrowly occasional writings and those texts that implicitly or explicitly relate to the past and are thus part of

the cultural memory. The former are defined by their singular, individual written form; as soon as the writing disappears, the text disappears with it. The latter, by contrast, may or may not exist in writing, or may exist in numerous written or oral forms at the same time. As a text, it transcends each of its particular written instantiations. This illuminates an important aspect in the ancient practice of writing. Not the text to be transmitted, which was anyway memorized by its respective specialists, but the pragmatic and occasional text (divinatory, economic, legal, administrative, and so on) depended most on the technology of writing (Assmann 2000: 131–38). For the period of our manuscript evidence, it is therefore not surprising that we find divinatory records to be extremely formulaic and coherent (Li 1990) and that administrative writings were based on blueprints providing the required standard structure of expression (Xing Yitian 1998). The present paper is not concerned with these forms of early Chinese writing—doubtlessly the most pervasive ones—but with "texts with a history." Thus, its findings and suggestions are not intended to apply to *all* kinds of early manuscripts. On the other hand, this disclaimer shall also not exclude that some of the following considerations may prove relevant for reflections on the early Chinese practice of writing in general.

There can be no question about the philological and palaeographical feats that pre-modern and modern Chinese scholarship has accomplished on the ancient texts of its own linguistic and cultural tradition. Methodologically, this invaluable work can be fruitfully complemented by reference to the principles of European philology. The scholar who over the past two decades has most consistently pursued the combination of both philological traditions in order to systematically approach early Chinese manuscripts, in particular their plethora of textual variants, is William G. Boltz (Boltz 1982, 1984, 1985, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000). Professor Boltz's work is firmly grounded in the principles of Western textual criticism developed for the Western classics. As such, it discusses the problem of textual variants from the perspective of written textual lineages, assuming an original written text from which a series of subsequent versions then has departed in different ways. This useful model of textual filiation is often represented as a "family tree of manuscripts" (*stemma codicum*), that is, as a straightforward tree diagram. In Boltz's example for the *Laozi*, the top level stands for the original text; on the middle level, M stands for Mawangdui and R for the received text; on the lower level, A and B stand for the two *Laozi* versions found at Mawangdui, while G and H stand for two versions of the received text, that is, the so-called Heshang Gong 河上公 (H) and the Fu Yi 傅奕 *guben* 古本 (G) versions (Boltz 1997: 266–269):



In all its usefulness, the constraints of the *stemma codicum* model are twofold: the tree diagram implies (a) a single written *Urtext* and (b) the continuous process of copying, that is, writing a new version of the text on the basis of an existing one. In other words, the model is devoted not only to a text with a history, but to a text whose history can be traced neatly along a line of written versions. However, one may suggest to abandon, completely or in part, the double assumption of the written *Urtext* and its subsequent continuous process of copying. One could instead propose the existence of multiple, mutually independent written versions that at least once, and perhaps more often, were generated not from copying but from a memorized or orally transmitted text. For such a scenario, the *stemma codicum* model naturally reaches its limits because it is only designed to trace the interdependence of versions within one or more uninterrupted written textual lineages. Here, the *stemma codicum* may come into play only at some later point of the overall textual history, that is, after one particular written version served as the written *Urtext* for all subsequent versions. This *Urtext* represents not the earliest form of the text itself but its earliest written version.

My own recent work on textual variants of *Odes* quotations in a series of six excavated manuscripts has led me to assume such a more fluid state of various, mutually independent written instantiations of what is essentially the same—i.e., in its wording largely stable—text.[5] I suggest that while all these versions go back to an *Urtext* that can no longer be recovered, their various written forms do not stem from a single model; strictly speaking, there is no single *written* original behind the different versions. This is not meant to rule out the possibility that the unrecoverable *Urtext* was initially composed in writing. It only suggests that after the composition, the text was not continuously transmitted along the genealogical lines of the *stemma codicum*.[6] I thus differ from the view

[5] In the following, my data on *Odes* variants in excavated manuscripts come from Kern forthcoming [a], forthcoming [b].

[6] The notion of a single moment of composition is, of course, only of hypothetical value. In reality, as is obvious from the *Laozi* example noted above, texts developed over time, undergoing several stages of composition and recomposition.

that in early China, textual lineages of single works were assigned high prestige first and foremost *as writings* and were primarily transmitted through the process of copying.[7]

More archaeological, philological, and historical research is needed to account comprehensively for the various linguistic and social aspects of ancient Chinese textual production, reproduction, and transmission. As part of the philological work, a strict, consistent, and transparent analysis of textual variants in manuscripts is only a first step; it needs to be followed by a systematic discussion of which scenarios of manuscript production are able to explain the appearance of which types of variants. It is my hope that in yet another step—this one beyond the scope of the present paper—the following methodological reflections may be integrated into the broader discourse on textuality in its manifold cultural contexts in early China.[8]

Preliminary principles in dealing with textual variants

Four preliminary principles should govern any discussion of textual variants:

The first principle is the most fundamental one, as it concerns our basic attitude towards the relative value of excavated versus transmitted texts. On methodological grounds, there is no reason to privilege *prima facie* any particular version, received or not, of a text. That a received version follows the writing conventions it does, or presents the text in a particular internal order, reflects nothing more and nothing less than

[7] An important example of the emphasis on writing is Lewis 1999; but see Kern 2000 and Nylan 2000 for a discussion. With respect to the *Odes*, Jiang 2002 has recently offered a tightly knit reconstruction of the written anthology during Warring States times, trying to establish how the text went from hand to hand. I am skeptikal about this approach for three reasons: first, it involves a considerable degree of speculation; second, it does not resonate well with the manuscript evidence (see below); third, it does not explain the wide distribution of the *Odes*—clearly the most memorized and most quoted text in early China—across the entire Chinese realm. Contrary to Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC) assertion that Confucius had compiled the anthology out of a ten times larger corpus of existing songs (*Shiji* 47.1936), the early literary tradition suggests a quite uniform use of the *Odes* among the Eastern Zhou nobility from various quarters, if we trust works like *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, *Guoyu* 國語, and others of Warring States *Ru* 儒 provenance.

[8] In the following, readers familiar with Boltz's oeuvre will recognize where for need of contextualization I take up certain points he has made previously. It should go without saying that his studies noted above are required reading for anyone engaging seriously in the philology of early Chinese manuscripts. In addition, the two most substantial works on the early Chinese writing system must be consulted, namely Boltz 1994 and Qiu 2000. While basic issues discussed below are dealt with in these two books as well as in He 1989, they have not been extended there towards the discussion of textual transmission.

the editorial decisions made at some point(s) in the process of transmission. It is a mistake to believe that a manuscript is "correct" where it conforms to the received text and "incorrect" where it differs; equally misguided is the idea that an early manuscript is more "original" than a later manuscript or the received text, as a later version may still reflect an earlier recension. In principle, there are no "good" and "bad" copies unless we can show what exactly is good or bad about them. That a text differs from something we are familiar with, or that it is more difficult to understand, might be a problem, or—*lectio difficilior potior!*—it might be a solution. Nothing suggests *a priori* that the received version is any "better" than that of the manuscript; we should rather be prepared to challenge the received text on the basis of any manuscript version. The countless paronomastic glosses which Han exegetes like Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) added to their versions of the classical texts, and the whole enterprise of Xu Shen's 許愼 (ca. 55–ca. 149) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 to resolve problems of meaning in them, make it abundantly clear that the Han scholars' received texts—which to a large extent are still our received texts—were not considered to always contain the character of choice for a given word. On the contrary, every early loan character gloss implies a statement that the written text does not use the standard graph for a particular word, and that the graph that is used should not be taken at face value. In supplying such glosses, the early scholars were careful not to rule directly into the graphic appearance of the text. Good philologists and respectful towards their received texts, they chose the commentary format to express their interpretation.

At the same time, there can be little doubt that in their written appearance, the received versions of the classical texts are products of pervasive retrospective standardization, a standardization that may have clarified an earlier version of the text at some points and may have distorted it at others. Either way, transmitted versions are the result of multiple layers of contestation. That two manuscripts of the same text differ markedly from each other as well as from their received counterparts, and that we are able to find the better—presumably the original—representation of an individual phrase sometimes in one and sometimes in the other, contradicts the idea of a straightforward hierarchical order between them. Regardless of their age relative to each other, if they are written down independently, our preference for one version over the other may change from passage to passage.[9] The great enthusiasm over now presumably having moved closer to the "original" *Laozi*, the "original"

[9] I should add that this is not advocating some arbitrary picking and choosing from different versions. Different versions may reflect different interpretations. Therefore, when deciding on lexical choices, we also need to consider the context and the integrity of these interpretations.

"Ziyi," or Confucius' "original" comments on the *Odes* is understandable, but it is not exactly logical. When modern scholars, dealing with *Odes* quotations in early manuscripts, resort to the canonical Mao version for guidance out of the idiosyncratic choices of the manuscript scribes, they are actually ascribing more authority to the received Mao text than the Mao commentary itself was willing to grant, or any of the later commentators from Zheng Xuan onwards.

The second principle is the need to pay attention to the actual graphs as they appear in the manuscripts. Very fortunately, the quality of Chinese manuscript publications has greatly improved recently. The high-quality photographic reproductions of the Guodian and Shanghai Museum bamboo slips allow every scholar to scrutinize with his or her own eyes what is actually there. In most cases, we will find ourselves following the transcription by the Chinese editors, who are true specialists in this practice. However, in a number of instances, a vivid discussion of individual graphs has evolved mainly among Chinese and Japanese experts. Scholars argue intensely about how to interpret certain characters and frequently offer improvements over the initial transcriptions offered by the manuscript editors. In this matter, the crucial problem to begin with is the *kaishu* 楷書 representation of the respective Chinese character in the manuscript. Boltz (2000: 40–41; cf. also Boltz 1999: 596–97) has stated two "transcription rules" that he wishes to see observed: "Transcription Rule I: Characters that are wholly visible and legible must be transcribed exactly as written, without either abbreviation or elaboration of their constituent graphic structure . . . Transcription Rule II: The transcription must rigorously distinguish what the manuscript writes from what the editor adds, subtracts, or emends by way of conjecture."

A simple example of the issue is the character 弋 in the Guodian manuscripts, which the editors of the initial 1998 publication consistently transcribe as 弋 despite the fact that the additional stroke is clearly visible in all cases (Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998: 18, 20, 28, 61, 72, 130–131, 145, 179, 188; Zhang et al. 2000: 1; Cheung 1999: 2). The editors are surely correct in interpreting the less common 弋 as the more familiar 弋, which is an older form of *yi* 一 ("one"), as is already noted in the *Shuowen jiezi* (Duan 1988: 1A.1b). Both 弋 and 弋 are well-known to be interchangeable (He 1998: 1080), and the Guodian texts further confirm 弋 as a variant for 一.[10] However, it is not accurate to transpose this interpretation of 弋 already into the *kaishu* representation

[10] Parallels in the transmitted text of the *Liji* chapter "Ziyi" as well as in the Shanghai Museum manuscript of that chapter leave no doubt that 弋 is indeed used for 一. See *Liji zhengyi:* 55.420b, and Ma 2001: 64, 195.

of the character. In the present case, the difference does not affect our understanding of the text; in others, it may well do so (e.g., Boltz 1999: 599n17).

At the same time, it is important to keep the limits of *kaishu* representations in mind. First, a strict transcription can be quite misleading. A good example is a character, appearing 35 times in the Guodian manuscripts (Cheung 1999: 123), that in strict transcription would appear as 售. Without doubt, the editors are correct in identifying the graph as an idiosyncratic way of writing *wéi* 唯 (*ljuəj). However the graph is then further interpreted (e.g., as a graphic variant), *shòu* 售 (*djəwh; "to sell") is in none of these cases the intended word. What causes the confusion here is that the displacement of the "mouth" (*kǒu* 口) element from the left side to the bottom of the character does not yield—as in many other cases—a non-standard graphic form but one that, incidentally, happens to be perfectly familiar. The second, and more obvious, problem with the strict transcription rule is that not every graphic idiosyncrasy can be faithfully reproduced in *kaishu* because certain forms encountered in manuscripts do not have an exact *kaishu* equivalent. A third problem are the so-called *suzi* 俗字 ("vulgar/popular characters") that can be found in early as well as in medieval manuscripts (and occasionally even in transmitted texts). Here, the graphic form has to be interpreted by reference to its standard counterpart.

While such transcription problems are serious, it would be imprudent to use them in order to argue for a more liberal transcription practice, that is, one that moves the act of graphic interpretation into the transcription itself. Such a practice would obscure the graphic peculiarities of a given manuscript and would thus suppress an important piece of archaeologically recovered information. Moreover, a liberal or interpreting transcription would always be in danger of deteriorating into arbitrary and uncontrollable editorial decisions. Fortunately, there is no need to give up the principle of strict transcription. Problems like those just noted can all be registered in an annotated transcription, either in the text itself ‹ in the usual format of adding, in brackets, the editorial interpretation after the actually transcribed character—or in a footnote. Naturally, the expectation of strict transcription will be brought to the initial Chinese editions of newly excavated manuscripts. But it is not limited to these editions. Western scholars need to become familiar enough with the script of the early manuscripts to reach their own interpretative decisions on individual graphs. A series of excellent Chinese reference works now allows us to compare graphs both within individual manuscripts and across a range of excavated texts.[11]

[11] For the graphs in the Guodian corpus, see Zhang et al. 2000, and Cheung 1999;

The third preliminary principle is phonological. In order to decide on the nature of any given textual variant, it is necessary to identify its phonological value. This can be done either in the traditional Chinese categories of old Chinese initials and *Odes* rhyme groups or through the use of reconstructions based on these categories.[12] Without attention to phonology and a rigorous application of the phonological rules of rebus use,[13] it is not possible to determine in a systematic fashion what can or cannot constitute a loan character. The often read characterization of two characters as "close in sound" (*yin jin* 音近) might sometimes appear as a convenient shortcut, but it cannot substitute for actual phonological analysis; otherwise, as Qiu (2000: 293) has noted, "the scope of graphic borrowing has scarcely any limits." If the two characters in question do not belong to the same *xiesheng* 諧聲 ("shared phonophoric") series, or if they do not share the same *Odes* rhyme group and also homorganic initials, any argument about their rebus use must be presented according to established precedent or an additional, comprehensible analysis. In a number of instances, it is indeed possible to make such an argument, as most of the evidence for our reconstructed categories of finals and initials in Zhou Chinese words comes only from the received *Mao Shi* 毛詩 and may not fit all other texts in every detail. However, each individual case of a less strict rebus use needs to be transparently argued to be fully credible.

The fourth preliminary principle concerns the interpretation of manuscript characters that in numerous cases differ from their later standardized form. For each instance, the interpretation according to context, graphic structure, and rebus use must explain whether the variant is graphic, lexical, or a scribal error. To distinguish explicitly between these three basic variant types that affect individual characters—there also are textual variants above the level of the character, e.g., transpositions of whole textual sections—is important for two reasons: first, it clarifies the nature of the individual variant under discussion, which is the prerequisite to its systematic interpretation. Second, for texts with

for the graphs in the Mawangdui corpus, see Chen 2001 and Zeng 1993; for the graphs in the Baoshan manuscripts, see Hubei Sheng Jingsha Tielu Kaogudui 1991; for a compendium of graphs in Chu script, see Teng 1995, with numerous corrections offered by Li 1999; for a discussion of graphs in Warring States documents, see He 1989, 1998.

[12] It should be noted that reconstructions can only be used with full understanding of their underlying rationale, that is, the traditional Chinese categories and their emendations in recent scholarship.

[13] The strictest rule for the use of loan characters (*jiajie zi* 假借字) in early Chinese texts is twofold: the words usually represented by the graphs in question must belong to the same Odes rhyme group, and they have to have homorganic initials (Karlgren 1968: 1–9).

a history it allows us to establish a distributional pattern of types of variants that appear in the manuscript at hand.

Such a distributional pattern can be used to discuss the different modes of textual transmission possibly involved in the production of the respective manuscript: in general, if text A is a direct copy from text B, with the scribe looking at text B while writing text A, we can reasonably expect—in type as in scope—a different overall set of variants between the two texts compared to a situation where the scribe, while writing text A, does not look at text B because he writes from memory, or because he only hears the text being spoken. In the following, I will offer a typological distinction of variants and what its application may imply not only for individual problems of interpretation but also for the broader issue of manuscript production in early China.

The typological distinction of textual variants

In the development of the Chinese writing system, both diachronic and geographic differences can be observed and have to be taken into consideration when comparing different ways in the writing of the same graph. For Warring States times, the major geographic distinction in the development of the writing system is that between the region of Qin 秦 in the West and the area of the various other states in the East (He 1989: 77–183; Qiu 2000: 78–103); yet also among the Eastern states one finds substantial differences in writing the same graph.[14] Despite these often striking differences, the writing system followed the same principles of character composition across the Chinese realm. While keeping in mind that certain graphs reflect particular regional writing conventions, it therefore remains both possible and necessary to develop a typology of textual variants in early Chinese texts. Altogether, I propose to distinguish nine types of variants:[15]

[a] variant forms of characters that stand for the same word, e.g., *hăo/hào* 好 and 玨子 (*həwʔ, həwʔh);[16]

[b] characters with different, omitted, or added semantic classifiers

[14] For some examplary cases showing the extent to which individual graphs could differ from region to region, see He (1989: 170).

[15] In the following, I include old Chinese reconstructions as given in Schuessler 1987. I use these reconstructions merely as a convenient device to indicate the relevant phonological categories (initials and finals), not because I think they necessarily represent the actual sounds of Zhou Chinese.

[16] Another very prominent example is that of the two completely different forms in which dào 道 (*gləwʔ) is written in the Guodian manuscripts (Cheung 1999: 5962), often appearing within the very same text.

that belong to the same *xiesheng* series, e.g., *qīng* 清 (*ʔtshjiŋ), *qíng* 情 (*Csjiŋ), *jīng* 菁 (*tsjiŋ, tsiŋ), etc.;

[c] characters conventionally standing for words that are semantically related and also homophonous or near-homophonous, e.g., *shì* 示 (*mgjiəjʔh) and *zhǐ* 旨 > 指 (*kjiəjʔ);

[d] characters conventionally standing for words that are semantically unrelated but homophonous or near-homophonous, e.g., *zhōu* 舟 (*tjəw) and *zhōu* 州 (*tjəw);

[e] characters conventionally standing for unrelated words that serve similar purposes, e.g., grammatical or rhythmic particles, e.g., *yě* 也 (*ljajʔ), *yǐ* 矣 (*ljəʔ?), and *xī* 兮 (*giʔ);

[f] characters that are graphically similar but otherwise unrelated and therefore appear to be scribal errors, e.g., *ér* 而 (*njə) and *tiān* 天 (*thin);[17]

[g] characters that are similar only in meaning but not in shape or sound, e.g., *guǒ* 國 (*kwək) and *bāng* 邦 (*pəruŋ);

[h] characters that are unrelated in any visual, phonetic, or semantic aspect;

[i] characters that are left out, added, or transposed.

Obviously, some variants are more informative or interesting than others. For example, the avoidance of tabooed characters in the two Mawangdui *Laozi* versions generate a particular set of type [g] variants that allows us to date one of the manuscripts before 195 BC and the other between 195 and 188 BC (Boltz 1997: 263–264).

Variants of type [a] testify to the existence of different written forms of the same word. At the same time, as a number of these rare and long forgotten character forms can be found in the *Shuowen jiezi*, in the extant Song dynasty character compendia *Han jian* 汗簡 by Guo Zhongshu 郭忠恕 (d. 977) and *Guwen sisheng yun* 古文四聲韻 by Xia Song 夏竦 (984–1050),[18] or in medieval and late imperial lexicographical scholia, we now possess compelling evidence for their actual longevity and for the accuracy of their records in traditional Chinese scholarship.

Variants of type [b] are by far the most common and least surprising ones. *Xiesheng* variants in pre-imperial and Han texts testify to the only gradual consolidation of a standardized writing system, and they are by definition unproblematic as potential loan characters (Karlgren 1968: 6–9). Nevertheless, one has to judge them on a case by case basis, considering that either one of two or more alternatives—or yet a differ-

[17] In Chu script, the two characters are extremely similar (Zeng 1993: # 30, 75; Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998: 115n45).

[18] These two titles have been conveniently reprinted together; see Guo and Xia 1983.

ent member from the same *xiesheng* series—might be the best choice for representing the intended word. Still in Han times, not every word had yet been assigned its own character. This can be seen, e.g., in the case of the character 說 that routinely is used to write not only the words *shuō* 說 (*hljuat; "to explain") and *shuì* 說 (*hljuats; "to persuade") but also *yuè* 悅 (*ljuat; "to be pleased"), as in the common phrase *wang da yue* 王大悅 ("the king was greatly pleased"). The *Shuowen jiezi* does not yet contain the character 悅, and commentators like Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) have argued that in this dictionary, 說 should be primarily understood as *yuè* 悅. Duan's interpretation is supported by the *Shuowen* definition of *duì* 兌 (*gluats, hluats; "to clear, to please") as 說 which in this case certainly has to be understood as *yuè* 悅 (Duan 1988: 3A.15a, 8B.8b). Similarly, the *Shi ming* 釋名 (ca. 200), attributed to Liu Xi 劉熙 (n.d.), only contains the character 說 but not 悅 (Wang 1984: 4.3b). It is not before the dictionaries of the sixth and seventh centuries that we see how the numerous meanings initially assigned to 說[19] become distinguished phonetically and assigned to different graphs, including 悅.[20] In the short Guodian "Zhong xin zhi dao" 忠信之道 manuscript, Qiu Xigui is perfectly justified to read the thrice occurring *duì* 兌 twice as *shuō* 說 and once as *yuè* 悅 (Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998: 163–64).

Variants of type [c], where characters are both semantically and phonologically related, may sometimes give us additional insights into the relation between words considered "cognate" ("born together") and, by extension, into the development of word families from an early stage of the Chinese language. Occasionally, they also may allow us to identify two different characters as actually writing the same word, a fact obscured by the writing system. These variants, while relatively rare, are hence of particular interest: they show a scribe in full command of both the sound and the meaning associated with the different graphs, perhaps making careful decisions in choosing one graph over the other.

By contrast, the far more numerous variants of type [d] reveal the

[19] For the full survey in the *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典, see Zhang et al. 1985: 1298.

[20] The earliest example might be Gu Yewang's 顧野王 (519–581) *Yupian* 玉篇 of 543, transmitted in the recension of the *Daguang yihui Yupian* 大廣益會玉篇 of 1013 (Gu, Chen et al. 1987: 1.86b). However, this recension does not reliably preserve the original *Yupian*. Manuscript fragments found in Japan differ substantially from the received version of the *Daguang yihui Yupian* (Li and Luo 1985). Unfortunately, the fragments do not contain the entries for 說 and 悅 we are concerned with here. The most reliable source for the graphic, phonetic, and semantic distinction of 說 and 悅 is Chen Pengnian's 陳彭年 (961–1017) *Guangyun* 廣韻 of 1008 (Yu 1993: 376, 498–99). The *Guangyun* faithfully represents Lu Fayan's 陸法言 (n.d.) *Qieyun* 切韻 of 601. Its division of 說 and 悅 can also be found in *Qieyun* and *Tang yun* 唐韻 (751) manuscript fragments from the seventh and eighth centuries (Zhou 1983: 407, 496, 517, 590, 613, 707).

use of the writing system in its most elementary sense, that is, to represent the sounds of the spoken language. What seems to count in these variants is the sheer representation of sound: the scribe knows that a certain character can be used to write the words of a distinct sound, and he uses it for just this purpose, regardless of the meaning of the word involved that is normally written with that character. In such cases, the semantic reconstruction will lead to nothing, while only a careful phonological analysis might be able to identify the actual word intended in the text. Extreme cases of this type of variant are personal names and rhyming, alliterative, or reduplicative binomes. Even in transmitted sources, we find the writing of a person's name to vary greatly from text to text (Schaberg 2002), and the same is certainly true for names appearing in excavated manuscripts. The particular vulnerability of names to be written in some arbitrary fashion points to their weak semantic value—"name is but sound and smoke," as Goethe puts it in *Faust*.

As can be shown by any number of examples from both transmitted and excavated texts, the case of binomes in early Chinese is not unlike that of names. What counts here is the sound, sometimes even for onomatopoeic purpose, not the meaning of the individual graph. This phenomenon has been observed mainly in poetic texts like the transmitted *Odes* or the Han *fu* 賦 (rhapsody), texts that not merely convey propositional meaning but that employ and self-referentially display the performative force of literary aesthetics (Kamatani 1996; Jian 1980: 45–100; Kennedy 1959; Knechtges 1987: 3–12). Similarly, excavated manuscripts contain a significant number of binomes mostly in their *Odes* quotations, and the appearance of these binomes matches what we know from the transmitted poetic literature: any such binome could be written in vastly different forms, and rarely does one version match any other. A typical example is the reduplicative like *hèhè* 赫赫 (*hərak-hərak) that appears in the Guodian, Shanghai Museum and Mawangdui quotations from "Jie nan shan" 節南山 (Mao 191) and "Da ming" 大明 (Mao 236) as 虩虩, 宲宲, 虢虢, 虘虘, 壑壑, or 赤赤. The reduplicative *qiúqiú* 仇仇 (*gjəw-gjəw) from "Zheng yue" 正月 (Mao 192) appears as 𢦚𢦚 in the Guodian and as 𢦔𢦔 in the Shanghai Museum "Ziyi." Similarly, *yānyān* 燕燕 (*ʔians-ʔians; in "Yanyan" 燕燕, Mao 28) is written as 嬰嬰 (Mawangdui), 匽匽 (Shuanggudui 雙古堆),[21] or 鬝鬝 (Shanghai Museum). In the quotations from "Cao chong" 草蟲 (Mao 14), *chuòchuò* 惙惙 (*trjuat-trjuat) appears as 祋祋, while *chōngchōng* 忡忡 (*thrjəwŋ-thrjəwŋ) is written as 𢙴𢙴, 𢥞𢥞, or 冲冲. The rhyming

[21] For the early Western Han times Shuanggudui (Fuyang 阜陽) fragments of the *Odes*, see Hu and Han 1988.

binome in "Guan ju" 關雎 (Mao 1), *yáotiáo* 窈窕 (*ʔiəwʔ-gliawʔ), in the variant 窈糾 also attested in "Yue chu" 月出 (Mao 143), is written as 葽芍 in Mawangdui. Nothing of this should surprise us; it simply points to the aural quality of language that is of particular importance in poetic texts.

Variants of type [e] present their own set of problems. While we tend to think of particles primarily in terms of more or less narrowly defined function words that do not appear arbitrarily in classical Chinese texts, their appearance in early manuscripts shows them as another set of words prone to be written in different ways. In poetic texts, this may indicate their weakened grammatical force in favor of a primarily rhythmic function, e.g., when *yě* 也 [*ljajʔ] and *yǐ* 矣 [*ljəʔ?] can stand in for one another without even being phonetically close. In philosophical prose, by contrast, such changes are more likely to indicate deliberate shifts in meaning. Dictionaries of Chinese particles (*xuzi* 虛字), e.g., the excellent collection by Pei Xuehai 1982, which list numerous grammatical functions for individual particles and thus apparently corroborate a rather fluid state of affairs, may in part be based on the conflation of the two principles.

Variants of type [f] are quite rare. If appearing only sparsely, they may be taken as the occasional lapses; if clustering in a particular manuscript, they may suggest conclusions on the care—or lack of it—with which a manuscript was prepared, and perhaps also on the ability of the scribe involved.

Variants of type [g] seem to be genuinely lexical variants by nature, representing the conscious choice not merely of a different character but of a different word. The reasons for such choices may be manifold, with the above mentioned avoidance of tabooed characters in Western Han manuscripts being one of them.

Finally, the variants of types [h] and [i] cannot be classified in any single way, as we are unable to define a common rational principle for them. Here, only a case by case evaluation—if anything—will help to explain their individual occurrence.

Across the nine different types of variants I am proposing here, the most basic distinction is that between lexical variants, graphic variants, and scribal errors. On the one hand, this distinction looks fairly straightforward. We do not need to worry too much about what is manifestly a type [a] variant, nor do we have a general perspective on type [h] and [i] variants. In addition, the particle variants of type [e], as they may or may not involve phonological relations, each call for an individual decision on whether the character in question represents a genuinely different word (i.e., constitutes a lexical variant), or whether it merely is a less standard way to write a word usually written with a

different character (graphic variant). In cases of types [b] and [d], the first assumption—although then always to be tested—would be that we are dealing with graphic variants, as the phonological analysis suggests that the characters are chosen according to the sounds they represent. A similar argument can be made for type [c] variants, although here, it seems clear that the respective choice of character was guided not only by representing the correct sound but also a particular meaning. By contrast, type [g] variants can be unambiguously identified as lexical variants, with the scribe being concerned primarily with meaning, not with sound. Only type [f] variants, which happen to be statistically insignificant,[22] can be interpreted as plain writing errors.

Such a schematic picture, however, falsely suggests a simple, mechanistic approach. In reality, a profound understanding of palaeography, phonology, and lexicography is often necessary to reach the correct decision on a specific case. Variants of types [c] and [d] are not always easy to distinguish, as certain semantic relations are difficult to identify; this may let us mistake a type [c] variant for one of type [d]. Variants of both types can sometimes also be confused with those of type [a]. On the other hand, what looks like nothing more than a graphic variant of type [b], [c], or [d], may indeed be a lexical one, as Boltz (1997: 258–62) has shown. And what at first glance may appear as a genuine lexical variant of type [g] or [h] can occasionally be identified as only graphic. A good example for the last point is the following, taken from an "Yi" 抑 (Mao 256) quotation in the Guodian "Ziyi" manuscript. Here, I compare the graphs as they appear in the received Mao recension of the *Odes* with the quotations in the Guodian and Shanghai Museum "Ziyi" manuscripts (Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998: 19, 130; Ma 2001: 193–194):

Mao:	白圭之玷
Guodian:	白珪之石 (slip 35)
Shanghai:	白珪之砧 (slip 18)

While *guī* 圭 (*kwi) and *guī* 珪 (*kwi) as well as *diàn* 玷 (*tiamʔ) and *zhēn* 砧 (*trjəm) belong to the same respective *xiesheng* series, *diàn* 玷 / *zhēn* 砧 and *shí* 石 (*djak) are neither phonetically nor graphically related, and they also differ semantically ("flaw" vs. "stone"). While without further evidence, and without considering the line from the Shanghai Museum slips, this may look like a type [h] lexical variant difficult to rationalize, the combination of the Shanghai Museum parallel and the immediately following line from "Yi" clarifies the matter:

[22] This does not mean that they are truly absent; they are statistically insignificant only when measured against the overall number of textual variants.

Mao:	斯言之玷
Guodian:	此言之砧 (slip 36)
Shanghai:	此言之砧 (slip 18)

Here, both Shanghai Museum and Guodian have 砧 for what in the received *Mao Shi* is 玷; we are thus dealing with variants within a single *xiesheng* series. With this evidence, we may safely conclude that the preceding variant 石 is a scribal error [f] while writing a type [b] *xiesheng* series variant; it seems that in the first Guodian quotation, the scribe mistakenly wrote only the left half of the character he had in mind (and that he wrote then in its complete form in the following line). Had the Guodian manuscript quoted only the first line, and had we also not seen the evidence from the Shanghai Museum manuscript, such a suggestion would have remained a wild guess.[23]

What does this mean for our interpretation of textual variants in excavated manuscripts? First, while we have our typology of variants in place, it cannot be applied mechanically. Second, in many cases, we can expect that new manuscript finds with their own particular sets of variants will allow us to revise some earlier conclusions on previously known manuscripts. Such reinterpretations are common with every major manuscript find; archaeology will continue to be of the greatest importance to philology. Yet while certain individual cases remain difficult to explain or will find new explanations through future textual discoveries, it remains important to operate with a clear typology of textual variants. True, all variants have the potential to be lexical; yet it seems quite obvious that in the reality of the manuscripts, most of them are probably not. In other words, we do assume a certain stability of the underlying text, even if the various instantiations of this text in written form display remarkable graphic instability. Textual variants in the *Odes* quotations from the Shuanggudui, Mawangdui, Guodian, and Shanghai Museum manuscripts, the only body of text for which I have performed a statistical survey, show on average a character/variant ratio in the high thirty per cent range, compared to the received version of the *Mao Shi*: 50 out of 158 characters (31.6 %) in the Mawangdui "Wu xing" manuscript, 18 out of 50 characters (36.0 %) in the Guodian "Wu xing" manuscript, 70 out of 193 in the Guodian "Ziyi" manuscript, 67 out of 157 in the Shanghai Museum "Ziyi" manuscript, 26 out of 64 in the Shanghai Museum "Shi lun" 詩論 manuscript, and between

[23] Indeed, without the additional evidence, one might have been tempted to take "stone" as a lexical variant for "flaw." A blemish in a piece of jade (*xiaci* 瑕疵 in modern Chinese) can be understood as an inclusion of a small stone. This is still not impossible, although the choice of 砧 that in Guodian immediately follows 石 does suggest to take the latter as an incomplete form of the former.

200 and 369 (26.8~45.0 %) out of 820 characters in the Shuanggudui *Odes* anthology manuscript.[24] I have further observed that only a fraction of all these variants show no immediately apparent phonological relation: only 3 out of 50 variants in the Mawangdui "Wu xing," 3 out of 18 in the Guodian "Wu xing," 7 out of 70 in the Guodian "Ziyi," 8 out of 67 in the Shanghai Museum "Ziyi," and 3 out of 26 in the Shanghai Museum "Shi lun."[25] This means that while more than one third of all characters in manuscript *Odes* quotations are textual variants compared to the received *Mao Shi*—and in fact also compared to one another—only about one tenth of these variants resist a narrowly defined phonological explanation.

I have not systematically counted and classified the numerous variants of the texts in which these *Odes* quotations are embedded, or of similar manuscripts in the Guodian and Shanghai Museum collections, most of which may be tentatively regarded as texts with a history. But even the cursory perusal of these writings shows how pervasive the phenomenon of textual variants indeed is, and how most of these variants are clearly graphic, not lexical. In this respect, the single major difference between the *Odes* and their embedding prose is the strong presence of reduplicative, alliterative, or rhyming binomes in the former. However, there is one major uncertainty in the statistical account of lexical versus graphic variants: could it not be that many of the apparently graphic variants are indeed lexical? The question may be answered with another question: if there was indeed a substantial number of lexical variants, that is, beyond some one tenth of all variants, why were they predominantly homophonous or near-homophonous? The quest for methodological rigor still obliges us to analyze every single variant on its own grounds, but I believe that in the great majority of cases, we probably will settle on graphic instead of lexical variants. What is the significance of such a conclusion for the issue of early manuscript production?

Textual variants and the production of early Chinese manuscripts

There is no question about the widespread use of loan characters in early Chinese manuscripts and about the large number of textual variants

[24] The unclear number of variants on the badly damaged Shuanggudui bamboo slips results from the fact that many characters are only partly legible. 220 is the number of variants clearly visible in even the character fragments; 369 were be the number if all characters varied in their illegible parts. A conservative guess would see the actual number somewhere between the two extremes. On this assumption, the character/variant ratio of the Shuanggudui text would fall into the average range observed in the other five manuscripts.

[25] I have not calculated the statistics for the Shuanggudui manuscript.

among early manuscripts or between a manuscript and its transmitted counterpart. While the phenomenon of loan characters has long been recognized also in transmitted texts, and has generated a string of dictionaries and studies,[26] the evidence from the manuscripts finally shows how extremely common this phenomenon actually was in early China. At the same time, we now realize to which extent the orthography of all transmitted early texts must have been retrospectively normalized by the tradition. This situation raises a broad range of fascinating questions about early Chinese textual culture, most of which have not yet been fully appreciated.

First of all, we need to recognize that textual variants in Chinese are very much like those in alphabetic writing systems, and also very much unlike them. They are similar as they can be distinguished according to the same basic distinction of lexical versus graphic variants. Also, graphic variants in both types of writing systems operate according to the same principle, that is, different graphic forms could be used to represent the same sound, and thus the same word. However, Chinese textual variants are dramatically different from their counterparts in alphabetic scripts because they are far less transparent towards the word they actually write. In English, the change of a single letter in a written word constitutes a textual variant, but in most cases it does not really affect the understanding of the word in question. In other words, textual variants rarely extend to the level of the full word; they are mostly limited to smaller graphic units below the level of the word. For the written form of a whole word, what looks basically the same still is in most cases recognizably the same. In the largely monosyllabic language of classical Chinese, however, where the single character represents a single syllable and also word, one missing, additional, or misplaced stroke may change a character into an entirely different character. Here, what looks largely the same is often completely different; very similar graphs can represent entirely different, and unrelated, sounds and thus words. Conversely, phonetic proximity does not need to manifest itself in graphic similarity. In many cases, a loan character in an early text is not immediately transparent to the eye; for us, who do not share in the original aural experience of the text, it becomes intelligible only through a clear understanding of the phonological categories involved. Without such understanding, the script of early Chinese manuscripts may in large parts appear as an opaque system of signs pointing nowhere.

This creates a serious problem. How do we know that early Chinese

[26] To my knowledge, the most systematic and comprehensive study of individual loan characters the problem is still Karlgren 1968. For a discussion of the phenomenon, see Qiu (2000: 261–96) and Boltz (1994: 90–101).

readers were able to identify the right words behind the characters? In fact, we know that already for Han scholars, at the latest, this issue was real—it is the *raison d'être* of the thousands of textual glosses on the classics, and of a whole series of early dictionaries, most prominent among them—but not at all singular—the *Shuowen jiezi*. Early Chinese scholars knew their own spoken language; but we do not really know to which extent this spoken language corresponded to that of the written classical tradition. And even if the two were reasonably close: the enormous amount of homophonous or near-homophonous words, over the course of many centuries only to some extent also graphically distinguished by an expanded number of characters, still must have left a considerable degree of ambiguity that would have made the transmission of texts as purely written artifacts, independent from a competent instruction on how to read them, unreasonably problematic.

Judging from the manuscripts, it appears that the writing system of preimperial and early imperial times was not consistently used to clarify the ambiguities resulting from homophony. Instead, the great number of graphic—homophonous or near-homophonous—variants often perpetuated the problem of homophony on the level of the script. While there definitely was a level of standardization governing the writing system—otherwise, this system could not have been functional—individual scribes, or perhaps groups or schools of scribes, arrived at vastly different choices of characters to write individual words. Evidence that a scribe within a single manuscript could use different graphs to write the same word suggests generous license on his part, which in turn helps to account for the fact that graphic variation affected roughly one third of all words in any given text. Warring States and early imperial scribes as well as their sponsors must have felt comfortable with a high frequency of graphic variants in their manuscripts—a phenomenon certainly obvious to all of them—as long as these variants represented with some exactitude the sound of the respective word. Yet no few of the hermeneutical problems that modern scholars, in good company with their premodern Chinese forebears, face in the interpretation of early texts stem from this fact.

The problem identified thus far is one of transmission. I suspect that in order to be fully intelligible, texts were transmitted within a defined social framework, most likely a master-disciple(s) structure of face-to-face teaching and learning. This framework enabled the interaction of the oral and the written word, implying the necessity of direct personal contact between those who master the text and those who learn it.[27]

[27] A sophisticated discussion of the nexus between the oral and the written in early China is overdue in our field, and it has to be informed by a thorough familiarity

Such a scenario accords with what many of the early philosophical texts tell us through their explicit organization as master-disciple dialogues, and there is no reason to dismiss this central element in the self-representation of the early tradition. Indeed, the graphic appearance of the manuscripts does not suggest that these were physically traveling on their own, that is, as writings self-contained in their message to be sent over large geographical distances from silent reader to silent reader. Han textual scholarship, by modern readers all too easily disparaged for its purportedly forced political and moralizing readings, emphatically testifies to the hermeneutical struggles of early China.[28]

For two reasons, these struggles concern primarily the venerated texts of old, foremost among them the *Odes*, the *Documents* (*Shu* 書), the *Changes* (*Yi* 易), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). First, these texts, however their pre-imperial collections may have differed from the Han versions, had gained high prestige already by mid-Warring States times; their understanding concerned the cultural foundation of the early Chinese elite. Second, their archaic and terse diction in conjunction with the fact that by Warring States times, they were already long disconnected from their original contexts, posed a unique exegetical challenge. In many cases—especially with the *Odes* and the *Documents*, the two most often quoted text collections in Warring States philosophical discourse—they required great traditional learning to comprehend the particular grammar and diction of preclassical Chinese, to identify the correct words and their archaic meanings behind the graphs, and to recontextualize individual passages. On all these levels, the classics were open to, and dependent upon, careful acts of interpretation in a way and to an extent the texts of Warring States philosophical discourse were not. In short, they required specific modes of instruction and transmission. (One may perhaps also assume that the older and the more prestigious the texts, the more fully and widely they were committed to memory by members of the cultural elite.) Thinking about manuscript production and transmission, we therefore need to distinguish not only between texts with a history and those without, but also between texts of shorter and longer history.

This distinction may not be immediately recognizable on the surface of the manuscripts. As noted above, the appearance of textual variants—with the exception of euphonic binomes—affects the *Odes* quotations in the same way as their embedding Warring States philosophical

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with the current literature on ancient and medieval textuality in other traditions. While obviously related to this complex issue, the present communication cannot be the place to dwell on it at any depth.

[28] For more extensive discussions of the matter of early *Odes* interpretation, see Van Zoeren 1991; Lewis 1999: 147–193; O 2001; Kern forthcoming [a].

prose. But it is still useful to register that in principle, the hermeneutical problems involved with the latter must have been less pressing. Here, the student could operate within the confines of a common discourse and its vocabulary and diction. In addition, the expository prose of the philosophical texts was devoted to a certain intellectual coherence that for an archaic *Ode* could only be reconstructed, or constructed, by sophisticated exegetical efforts. On yet another level of early textuality, in the capacious world of technical (medical, astrological, divinatory, military, administrative, etc.) literature—much of which has become known to us only through the great archaeological discoveries of the last decades—the hermeneutical problems may have decreased further. This is partly because of an even more limited and, among the specialists, mutually shared storehouse of knowledge and words, partly because of the often (not always!) more local context of such writings. However, even with such technical works, as soon as they were to be transmitted, developing into texts with a history that transcended their initial context, the authoritative instruction by a teacher was deemed a *sine qua non* (Keegan 1988: 219–47).

As the nature and scale of textual variants in early manuscripts lends itself to important questions concerning the transmission and reception of writings, it is also suggestive with respect to the very production of such writings in the first place. In the following, I maintain the more general distinction between texts with a history and those without; my focus is on the former (which include all texts that might be discussed within the *stemma codicum* model). I have already noted that scribes or schools of scribes enjoyed considerable freedom of graphic choice when producing their manuscripts in a distinct local environment; these choices may have been idiosyncratic or guided by certain regional or local calligraphic conventions. But how did conventions and idiosyncrasies intersect with the manuscript production of texts with a history, that is, texts that in their transmission across multiple generations and large geographic regions transcended any local and situative context and that already for this reason alone could have become hermeneutically problematic?

The *stemma codicum* model of textual lineages implies not so much the production as the reproduction of texts: every new written instantiation of a text emerges from the knowledge of one or more earlier written versions of the same text. The assumption about such textual reproduction is that the scribe acted as a copyist, looking at an earlier version while reproducing it in the form of his own new version. For texts with a history, every manuscript we now see would be considered not a unique writing but a copy of another copy, a member of a shorter or longer genealogical chain that ultimately could be traced back to a

single beginning. At any point in this chain there were probably many interrelated versions, as copies presumably circulated not only chronologically along a single descending lineage but also synchronically in parallel versions. Only on the grounds of multiple coexisting copies can we assume that earlier manuscripts now excavated from tombs—that is, buried texts—were in their written form ancestral to later manuscripts and in some cases even to the literary tradition emerging from this early manuscript culture. Obviously, the Mawangdui scribe did not see the particular "Wu xing" copy or the *Laozi* fragments buried at Guodian (simply because these were buried underground), nor did the later *Liji* editors look at the "Ziyi" versions buried at Guodian and in the tomb (close to or identical with the Guodian site) from which the Shanghai Museum slips were looted. The assumption that, e.g., the Mawangdui "Wu xing" version represents a revision of its earlier Guodian counterpart (as argued by Xing Wen 1998) logically implies the existence of at least one more parallel copy of the former that was circulating above ground.

However, I wish to suggest the possibility that a text with a history—*Laozi*, "Wu xing," "Ziyi," *Odes*, etc.—does not need to be reproduced exclusively by the process of copying. In other words, the *reproduction* of such a text has to be distinguished from the *production* of its particular written form; the two may be working together, but they are not the same. In this distinction, *textual reproduction* refers to an earlier textual model, written or oral; *manuscript production* points to an original creation of the written form of this text. The result is a text controlled by tradition but written in a form that was guided by local conventions and the individual experience and predilections of the scribe.

Considering multiple versions of early texts as we now see them in excavated manuscripts, there are three possible scenarios to explain their production. The first is the one most widely held, if not always explicitly acknowledged: the scribe reproduces an earlier written text in front of him and is thus able to compare his own writing to the text he is copying. The second is one in which somebody reads a text aloud to the scribe, who then writes it down. Here, we would naturally expect that once the scribe finishes writing, a comparison between the old and the new version is being performed, very likely resulting in some corrections to the latter. The third scenario is one in which the scribe writes the text from memory, or how he hears it recited without any written copy at hand. The principal distinction can be drawn between scenarios one and two on the one hand, and scenario three on the other: was a new manuscript controllable against, and thus controlled by, a written predecessor, or was there a moment of transmission based on memory or oral instruction? Was the new manuscript a reproduction

of an already existing written text, or was it the genuine production of a written form and as such to some extent independent from parallel—earlier or contemporaneous—written versions of the same text?

It is immediately apparent that different answers to these questions of manuscript production would lead us to different conclusions about the use, transmission, and reception of texts in early China. For the first time ever, the newly excavated manuscripts allow us to discuss these issues systematically on the basis of unadulterated material evidence. As the results of this discussion are of potentially far-reaching consequences, one is obliged to caution and circumspection when weighing how the different scenarios might account for the available evidence from the manuscripts. This brings us back to the different types of textual variants, and how we can use the typology outlined above as an analytical tool.

Of the nine types of variants that I propose to distinguish, only the small number of scribal errors of type [f]—downright miswriting of the apparently intended character—seem to be pointing directly towards a scenario of copying (and miscopying). However, such errors are but a fragment of those one tenth of all variants that resist a straightforward phonological explanation; they are rare enough to defy meaningful statistical representation. In addition, traces of actual corrections are scarce as well. Interesting evidence of correction can be found in the Shanghai Museum "Ziyi" manuscript. Here, we see two instances where a particle (*qí* 其 on slip eleven, *yǐ* 以 on slip thirteen) was initially left out and was then, in very small script, squeezed in between two characters of regular size (Ma 2001: 55, 57, 186, 188–89). We cannot judge when and by whom these particles were finally added: by the scribe himself, perhaps as soon as he had finished the following character, or during a later—how much later?—process of proof-reading performed by the scribe or someone else? Two other cases of obvious correction appear on slip forty of the Guodian "Ziyi" manuscript and on slip twenty-seven of the Guodian "Yucong" 語叢 manuscript: in both cases, the scribe apparently first forgot to write several characters and then added them on the back of the slip (Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998: 20, 131, 136n103; 107, 218, 218n26).[29] The only other possible instances of corrections that are mentioned in the publication of the Guodian manuscripts appear in the *Laozi* manuscripts A and B: once in each manuscript, a little black stroke can be found at a place where a character had been mistakenly left out in the text. As Qiu Xigui has suggested, these little

[29] Because the calligraphy of the seven characters on the back of the slip matches that of the whole manuscript, I conclude it was most likely the scribe himself who added the characters.

strokes might have been added to indicate the respective omission (Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 1998: 3, 111, 114n17 [*Laozi* A, slip eight]); 7, 118–119n7 [*Laozi* B, slip six]). Unfortunately, such marks are not found at any other of the various spots of the three Guodian *Laozi* manuscripts where characters had been—presumably by mistake—left out.

While obvious scribal errors in the Guodian and Shanghai Museum texts are statistically insignificant compared to the number of graphic variants, their remaining instances could have been caught by some systematic proof-reading. This would have resulted in a number of corrections like those just noted. For example, in the above-mentioned case of *shí* 石 (*djak) for *diàn* 玷 (*tiamʔ) / *zhēn* 砧 (*trjəm), even a cursory reading would presumably have spotted the error, and the scribe could have easily scraped the bamboo slip and rewritten the character.[30] It seems that, for whatever reason, such proof-reading did not happen, although the general possibility of scraping off and then rewriting graphs infuses some uncertainty into our statistical account of textual variants. Perhaps such scraping was done and its traces have disappeared or have so far been overlooked. Or, even less verifiable, perhaps whole slips were taken out and rewritten. Such possible interventions are important to keep in mind especially when facing manuscripts of a certain length that are, as far as modern scholarly judgment may be able to discern, free of scribal errors (graphic or lexical variation, of course, cannot be regarded as such errors.) At the same time, the assumption of scraped characters and replaced slips might be less plausible for manuscripts that (a) actually contain scribal errors obvious enough to be caught by a proof-reader and (b) show other means of correction, e.g., writing characters on the back of a slip. Both qualifications apply to the Guodian and Shanghai Museum corpora. While textual correction was occasionally performed in these, it was not pursued as thoroughly and systematically as would have been possible.

Before generalizing this conclusion from the Guodian and Shanghai Museum bamboo slips to other early manuscripts, the evaluation of scribal errors in any given manuscript needs to involve the question of the quality of the text. It is possible that a manuscript cannot be viewed as a representative expression of its text; it may be a bad local copy, executed by an incompetent scribe, provided for some subordinate person, created for some casual purpose. The production of such a manuscript is likely to have been more relaxed in its demands and rules. For texts found in tombs, one fact to consider is thus the social status of the tomb occupant. Where this status is of particular distinction—as

[30] For examples of character scraping and rewriting on the wooden slips found in tomb no. 6 from Mozuizi 磨嘴子 (Wuwei 武威, Gansu), see Giele forthcoming.

may be the case with all the tombs that so far have yielded texts related to the *Odes*—the "bad copy" hypothesis seems less suggestive.[31]

If we now envision the production of a specific manuscript, we need to consider the respective manuscript as a whole, and perhaps even the complete group of manuscripts that were similar in nature and found together in the same tomb. For a single manuscript, it is not possible to propose the coexistence of two modes of textual production: either it was controlled by another written version, or it was recreated on the basis of a memorized or orally received text. For the scenario of copying an existing manuscript into a new one, what kinds of variants could we reasonably expect? In a first step, we should be looking for the types of scribal errors that seem, compared to other types of variants, so rare in our texts: possible instances where a scribe forgot something, where his eye slipped between certain characters or whole lines, or where he confused a character with another one that was similar in appearance but represented a completely different sound. None of such errors offers conclusive proof for a process of copying (see below) but in a certain accumulation, they might still be suggestive. By contrast, we would not expect a large amount of graphic variants. There seems little reason why a Mawangdui scribe, while he was actively looking at a written copy of the Guodian *Laozi* fragments, "Ziyi," or "Wu xing," would want to depart frequently from his model only to come up with his own graphic choices, that is, often very different characters meant to represent nothing else than the very same sounds. In this case, we were to assume two steps: first, that the scribe understood the characters in his model perfectly well (otherwise, he would not be able to substitute them by his own homophonous or near-homophonous choices), and second, that he still had both the rationale and the energy to transform his model text into something new that was graphically very different. This is not impossible, but it is certainly implausible. I thus conclude that the overwhelming number of graphic variants in our manuscripts, paired with the virtual absence of what could possibly be regarded as copyists' errors, does not suggest the *stemma codicum* scenario of direct copying between two versions of the same text. While this scenario might account for a tiny, statistically insignificant subset of all textual variants (i.e., the scribal errors), it fails to provide a reasonable explana-

[31] The identity and status of the Guodian tomb occupant are unclear, with suggestions ranging across different levels of the aristocracy (Allan and Williams 2000: 123–24). The tomb from which the Shanghai Museum materials were taken is unknown but several of its manuscripts are closely related to those from Guodian. The Mawangdui tomb belongs to the family of Li Cang 利蒼 (d. 185 BC), Marquis of Dai 軑 and Chancellor of the princedom of Changsha in early Han times; tomb no. 3 was closed in 168 BC. The Shuanggudui tomb belongs to Xiahou Zao 夏侯竈 (d. 165 BC), Marquis of Ruyin 汝陰.

tion for the overwhelming majority of graphic variants. In addition, it also suggests an exponentially higher degree of graphic stability than the manuscripts under discussion can offer.

The alternative model of manuscript production without a written model at hand easily explains the ninety per cent of all variants that are graphically different but phonologically interchangeable. If the scribe producing the Mawangdui version of the "Wu xing" did not look at the corresponding sections of the earlier Guodian version, he was not only free but indeed forced to make his own character choices according to how he remembered or heard the text. This moves the manuscript production of a text with a history—e.g., the "Wu xing"—closer to the process of writing a text that is unique and specific to a particular situation. There still remains a fundamental difference between the two types of texts, but it is not surprising to find the same range of loan character use in both. Assuming both a certain degree of script standardization and the great number of homophonous words in early Chinese, a manuscript that in two thirds of its characters would match any of its counterparts, and that in one third—usually in the more difficult words—would differ from it, is probably what one would expect from manuscript production not immediately based on a written model.

But how does such a scenario account for the existing scribal errors, even if they are only few in number? Even where a manuscript contained just a single mistake that is explicable only as a copyist's error, this singular instance would suffice to prove the process of direct copying. However, scribal errors are not necessarily copyists' errors.They are individual mistakes in writing characters or sequences of characters: confusing graphic forms, transposing characters, leaving them out, or adding them where they do not belong. Such mistakes are not unique to the process of copying but happen under various circumstances when writing down an internalized text. It is thus exceedingly difficult to isolate copyists' errors from the larger category of scribal errors. This is not to say that there are no copyists' errors; where manuscripts are copied, errors do happen. But we are not free to interpret scribal errors as copyists' errors if we cannot prove them as such, e.g., through circumstantial evidence or information that a manuscript was indeed being copied. Instead, we should actually expect scribal errors in manuscripts generated from memory or oral transmission, especially as the process of writing was not guided and supported by an existing model.

So far, the discussion has only focused on the direct comparison of two manuscripts without considering the probably more complex textual history between them. For a single manuscript, we can propose only a single mode of production: it was either copied or not. But this does not preclude the concomitant appearance of manifestly different

types of variants in a single manuscript, some resulting from a process of copying (even where the latter remains difficult to prove), others from writing on the basis of memory or oral transmission. The point is that the written appearance of a manuscript may reflect not only the mode of its own production. It may in addition also embody earlier stages in the process of textual transmission and thus constitute an artifact of several chronological layers.

For example, there may have been a succession of several "Wu xing" manuscripts between the one from Guodian and the one from Mawangdui. The transmission of the text may have occurred mainly through the continuous process of copying existing versions into new ones. But at any point, this steady succession of copied versions may also have been interrupted by an instance of writing based on memory or oral transmission. This single event in the history of the text would have largely erased the graphic coherence that had unified the entire lineage of manuscripts ("Sequence A") up to this point. The resulting new, graphically unique manuscript may then have served as the starting point for another unified lineage ("Sequence B") of copied versions. If any access to Sequence A—e.g., through some parallel copies related to it—was lost, Sequence B might have generated its own graphic coherence, clearly distinct from the earlier one by a particular set of textual variants. The Mawangdui version could still include a number of copyists' errors, but these would all have occurred after the last interruption of written transmission, that is, the watershed separating Sequences A and B. In such a case, the Mawangdui manuscript contained not only several chronological layers of textual history, but also layers generated from different modes of textual transmission. Similarly, if we allow for the even more complex scenario that the Mawangdui scribe was aware of two or more written versions, and that these came from both sequences, there was no limit to the conflation of graphic choices from both A and B. One can further spin this on, considering additional interruptions in both sequences. As a result, the number of possibly available sequences would, in principle, be infinite (A, B, C, D . . . n).

Comparing two manuscripts, or a manuscript and a received text, the evidence from textual variants therefore poses the following two alternatives to decide upon: either there is a direct act or an uninterrupted sequence of copying from the first to the second manuscript, or the transmission process included at least one interruption of such a sequence (or was perhaps entirely based on memory or oral transmission). In other words, all we can confirm is whether or not the *stemma codicum* model of uninterrupted copying is applicable; it is not possible to determine that a certain manuscript itself was not generated from

copying. The strong presence of graphic variants between the Guodian and the Mawangdui "Wu xing" manuscripts provides compelling evidence that the written form of the latter was largely independent from that of the former. Thus, if there was a line of copying, and not simply a continuously oral transmission, we can establish that this line was interrupted at least once. But we do not know the moment(s) of interruption, or whether or not there actually was any lineage of copied versions to be interrupted.

Towards a conclusion

The very materiality of the manuscripts, and the question of their actual production involved, remind us of the fact that texts are not just free-floating sets of ideas. They do not exist by themselves but depend on social acts and contexts of transmission and reception. Whether a text was circulated primarily from mouth to ear or from writer to reader, or through a combination of both, is not a feature inherent in the text itself. It reflects the text's actual use and, by extension, the nature and processes of philosophical, poetic, or technical discourse in early China. As the meaning of any text is to no small extent defined by its pragmatic function, due attention to this nature and these processes should be regarded as a prerequisite of textual interpretation. This is particularly true for our manuscripts, where texts are made into material artifacts: in each of these cases, there were pragmatic reasons to produce the text as artifact, to choose a certain style and medium of expression, and to place the manuscript into a particular social and spatial environment (e.g., a tomb). All of this needs to go into our interpretation of the text. Archaeologically recovered manuscripts are important not merely because they represent hitherto unknown texts, unknown versions of known texts, or ever earlier evidence for the existence of certain texts. Their great significance rests at least as much in the fact that they offer insights into the production, material forms, and social uses of texts. Towards our ongoing reconstruction of early Chinese cultural history, where archaeology, in fruitful combination with historical and philological research, plays such a central role, these aspects of the manuscripts will prove as relevant as any textual contents.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have raised the various possible models of manuscript production and textual transmission that may be gained from the systematic analysis of textual variants, regardless of how well or poorly these models fit what else we know about early Chinese textual culture. There is no good reason to privilege *a priori* a

particular model of textual transmission. Yet after exploring the possible models and appreciating their explanatory limitations, one finally has to consider which scenarios are more plausible, and thus preferable, than others. Towards this end, it is necessary to look beyond comparing a set of two writings—e.g., the Guodian and Mawangdui "Wu xing" manuscripts—that yield conclusive evidence neither on the nature of these particular writings nor on early Chinese textuality in general. Fortunately, we now have more Warring States and early imperial manuscripts available—their total number is still relatively small, but it is large enough to yield specific characteristics of early textual culture manifested in the overall nature and scope of textual variants.

At the same time, it is problematic to begin the comparison of manuscripts without paying attention to the nature of their texts. The general distinction between texts with a history and those without allows us to discuss the phenomenon of graphic variation in a certain perspective and for a certain—however loosely defined—defined of early manuscripts. It is not necessary that one can determine for every single manuscript whether or not it represents a text with a history. What the general distinction offers is a certain set of parameters of manuscript production to be tentatively applied to texts that are likely to fall into the respective category. Only the actual analysis of a given manuscript may reveal to which extent its graphic appearance matches that of other texts of the same category. Finally, on the basis of a larger sample of such empirical data, it will also become manifest where the two categories of texts overlap in their appearances and modes of manuscript production. In this, the guiding principle is not how to extend the findings from texts with a history to those without: the entire issue of textual transmission is simply not at stake with texts produced for a single, occasional use. It also does not apply to texts which, after being written down once, were archived and guarded, but not reproduced and disseminated, by those who controlled them (as may have been the case with certain technical writings as well as with court annals). If we find the textual variants in such texts to be similar to those in texts with a history, the question goes the other way: to which extent were the latter also produced locally and independently, without the process of direct copying and thus involving oral transmission?

Let me go back to the *Odes* quotations. These constitute our richest sample for the graphic analysis of a discrete textual body. *Odes* quotations are spread across different manuscripts from different sites and periods, they have in addition a received counterpart, and the literary tradition has even preserved a certain number of textual variants that presumably go back to the three Western Han *Odes* recensions (the *Han Shi* 韓詩, *Qi Shi* 齊詩, and *Lu Shi* 魯詩) that by late Eastern Han times

began to disappear under the new dominance of the *Mao Shi*.[32] This richness of data makes the *Odes* quotations an exemplary candidate for the analysis of textual variants in early manuscripts. The data from my research on *Odes* textual variants (Kern forthcoming [b]) I have summarized above: while highly coherent in their wording, the *Odes* quotations differ strikingly in their graphic appearance both from the received text, the variant traces preserved from the three lost Western Han recensions, and among the various manuscripts. I thus conclude that the graphic variants defy any attempt to reconstruct a *stemma codicum* for the early *Odes* anthology despite the fact that the different manuscripts come all from the southern region of Chu and fall into a limited span of time: only about a century separates the Guodian and Shanghai Museum materials from those found at Mawangdui and Shuanggudui; moreover, the tomb closure dates of the latter two—168 and 165 BC—differ by just four years. In short, nothing in the six manuscripts with *Odes* quotations hints at written lineages of the *Odes*. Even though on principle, no single manuscript can be identified as a product from memory or oral reception, the sheer multiplicity of *Odes* versions offers a strong case for the prevalence of textual transmission independent from particular written models. This applies equally well to both the Shuanggudui *Odes* anthology fragments and the *Odes* quotations embedded in the "Ziyi," "Wu xing," and "Shi lun" manuscripts. No two manuscripts concur in their graphic form of *Odes* quotations or otherwise point to a common written tradition.

The analysis of *Odes* quotations represents only a single, albeit rich, case study, and it would be problematic to draw broader conclusions on early Chinese textuality from this case study alone. The *Odes* enjoyed a particular cultural status, and they were organized in poetic form; for both reasons, their wide-spread memorization and oral exchange among the members of the cultural elite distinguished their overall presence from that of other texts. Yet as noted above, their textual variants are not fundamentally different from those found in other texts with a history. Moreover, as the *Odes* quotations—with the exception of the anthology fragments from Shuanggudui—are embedded in expository prose, it seems also difficult to argue for a *stemma codicum* line of transmission for the latter, that is, from the Guodian to the Mawangdui "Wu xing" or from the Guodian and Shanghai Museum "Ziyi" to the respective *Liji* chapter.[33]

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[32] These variants were assembled by several Qing dynasty scholars; their definite collection is Wang 1987.

[33] Possible *stemma codicum* relations may be identified between some of the Guodian and Shanghai Museum manuscripts. Their different "Ziyi" versions seem very closely related, sharing many graphic choices and being identical in length, contents, and internal textual

In sum, I propose that the strict analysis of textual variants according to the principles and caveats outlined above needs to precede any explicit statement or implicit assumption regarding the production of individual manuscripts (not to mention generalizations on early Chinese textuality at large). When thinking about whether or not the undoubtedly widespread production and circulation of texts was primarily shaped along extended lineages of copied writings, it is also useful to listen to important voices from the Chinese tradition. Post-Han thinkers and writers were thoroughly familiar with the process of manuscript copying—in its large-scale measure made possible only by the broad availability of paper, that is, probably not before Eastern Han times—and many of them take the same practice for granted also for the ancient period. On the other hand, there also was Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) who acutely sensed the great divide that separated Song dynasty print culture from the ancient world of manuscripts, recitations, and memories:

> 今緣文字印本多，人不着心讀。漢時諸儒以經相授者，只是暗誦，所以記得牢。故其所引書句多有錯字。如孟子所引詩書亦多錯，以其無本，但記得耳。
>
> Because nowadays, printed volumes of writings are numerous, people do not commit themselves to read with sympathetic attention. When in Han times the many Ru scholars instructed each other in the canon, it was entirely by profound recitation, which is why their memories were firm. Thus, their lines of quotation from earlier writings often included wrong graphs. For example, Mengzi's quotations from the *Odes* and the *Documents* are indeed often flawed because he did not have books and [his texts] only memorized.[34]

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order. The same coherence can also be observed between the Guodian "Xing zi ming chu" 性自命出 and the Shanghai Museum "Xing qing lun" 性情論 manuscripts. Ma (2001: 2) and others have raised the possibility that the latter—purchased on the Hong Kong antique market—may also have come from the Guodian area, if not indeed from the actual site. Be this as it may, there are still enough substantial graphic differences between the corresponding manuscripts to raise suspicion about any simple process of copying.

[34] *Zhuzi yulei* 10.330. I thank Kenneth Brashier for bringing this passage to my attention.

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