



BRILL

JOURNAL OF CHINESE HUMANITIES 10 (2024) 108–128



brill.com/joch

# The Development and Varieties of “Oneness” in Early Daoism

Wang Zhongjiang 王中江

Professor, Department of Philosophy, Peking University,

Beijing, China

wzhjhd@sina.com

Received 23 January 2024 | Accepted 6 February 2024 |

Published online 15 July 2024

## Abstract

Having both similarities with and differences from *dao* 道, *yi* 一 is an important concept which occupies an important position in early Daoist thought. As is the case with *dao*, “oneness” can also be traced back to the *Laozi* and subsequently went through a complex process of conceptual change. As a foundational concept, it serves as a description of *dao* while also referring to the innermost basis for the emergence and unity of everything that exists. As the foundation of the *dao* of political authority and effective governance, “oneness” refers to a basic principle and method which the ruler should grasp and put into practice 執一, but also designates an elementary goal and value in the ruler’s own process of self-cultivation 貴一. In comparison to the idea of *dao*, the concept of “oneness” approaches the relation between the one and the many as entailing a rich variety of relations of identity/difference and commonality/diversity which manifest themselves within the myriad things and affairs in the world in a more direct manner.

## Keywords

Daoism – oneness – development – varieties

The crucial concept of *dao* 道 (the Way) has long been the primary focus for scholars of Daoism. If we factor in the persistent skepticism toward the authenticity of a number of Daoist texts in which the related concept of “oneness” (*yi* 一) plays a central role, it becomes easy to see why the latter idea has been neglected and the textual corpus available for studying its meaning and usage has remained relatively limited. As a matter of fact, however, “oneness” occupies an incredibly important position in Chinese philosophy at large and in Daoist philosophy in particular. As is the case with *dao*, “oneness” refers to the origin of everything that exists and was first put forward by Daoist thinkers, thus becoming one of the defining concepts of Daoism and one the most important elements we have at our disposal for retracing the genealogy of this current of thought. A number of developments in the field have changed the prevailing neglect of the Daoist concept of “oneness” and have led scholars to become more aware of the importance and role of this idea. We can think here of the discovery of a number of texts which have provided intellectual historians with new source material, such as the excavated manuscripts *Taiyi sheng shui* 太一生水 (The Great One Gives Birth to Water), *Fanwu liu xing* 凡物流形 (All Things Flow into Form), and *Huangdi si jing* 黃帝四經, as well as the revisiting of ancient sources of early Daoist philosophy such as the *Yinwenzi* 尹文子, *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, and *Wenzi* 文子. These developments have resulted in a degree of renewed interest in “oneness” and have enabled scholars to uncover some of the richness and salience of this concept.<sup>1</sup> That being said, the available scholarship on the Daoist concept of “oneness” remains rather underdeveloped. For one thing, scant attention has been paid to the fact that this idea went through significant changes in the history of early Daoist thought, displaying distinct features and characteristics across time and in different texts. As such, it is of crucial importance to try to reconstruct the emergence, development, and main varieties of “oneness” in early Daoism.

## 1 From Number to Origin: *yi* 一 and the Innovations of the *Laozi*

As is the case with many other philosophical terms, the character 一 initially had a straightforward numerical sense, as we can see in the text of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 when it speaks of “numbering [things] as first, second, third, and fourth.”<sup>2</sup>

1 See Wang Zhongjiang 王中江, “*Fanwu liuxing ni okeru ‘yi’ no shisō kōzō to sono ichi*” 「凡物流形」における「一」の思想構造とその位置, in *Shutsudo shiryō to kanji bunkaken* 出土資料と漢字文化圏, ed. Yanaka Shinichi 谷中信一 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2009), 145–70.

2 Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Zhuangzi jin zhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 908.

Obviously, “one” is not just an ordinary number, since it is the smallest positive integer and was thus considered to be “the beginning of numbers” (*shu zhi shi* 數之始). This is precisely what is meant in the following passage from the *Yinwenzi*: “All numbers, from ten to one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, and ten million, or from ten million to ten thousand, one thousand, one hundred, and ten all originate in one.”<sup>3</sup> In the oracle bone inscriptions, the character is written simply as 一. Apart from its most commonly found version, the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 also lists the ancient script variant *yi* 弌 (弌). There are many other stylistic variants of the character 一 in the available textual corpus: the *Dingzheng liushu tong* 訂正六書通, for example, includes instances where *yi* is written as 𠄎 or 𠄎.<sup>4</sup> In the Guodian 郭店 manuscript *Taiyi sheng shui*, *yi* is occasionally written as 𠄎 (罷 in the clerical script). In *Fanwu liu xing*, we find the variant 𠄎 (𠄎 in the clerical script) for *yi*. Similar variations on the same character occur in an inscription on a tall pot (*hu* 壺) found in the tomb of king Cuo 厓 of Zhongshan 中山 from the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) 𠄎 and in the bamboo manuscript *Jian dawang bo han* 柬大王泊旱 in the Shanghai Museum collection, which includes the slightly simpler variant 𠄎.

An important change took place when the meaning of the character 一 was extended from a purely numerical to a properly philosophical and ontological sense. In the *Shuowen jiezi*, *yi* is explained as follows: “at first there was the Great Beginning, the Way was established in oneness, creating and dividing Heaven and Earth, transforming and completing the myriad things”<sup>5</sup> to paraphrase, this means that at the very beginning of the universe, all things were in a state of primordial non-distinction and *dao* was in a state of unity, with Heaven and Earth emerging and dividing themselves from *dao*, Heaven and Earth in turn giving rise to everything that exists through a process of transformation. What we encounter here is obviously not the primary, but rather a derived and distinctly philosophical sense of *yi*, the invention of which should be credited to Laozi 老子.

While the concept of “oneness” is repeatedly used in a philosophical sense in the *Laozi*, there are important differences in its precise usage and importance. In its most elementary sense, which is also a major innovation of the text, *yi* is taken as referring to the origin or substance of the world. As is

3 Xu Zhongliang 徐忠良, *Xinyi Yinwenzi* 新譯尹文子 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1996), 181.

4 Min Qiji 閔齊伋, *Dingzheng liushu tong* 訂正六書通 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1981), 336.

5 Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, punct. and coll. Tao Shengkui 陶生魁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), 1.

well-known, the *Laozi* generally tends to use the concept of *dao* in this ontological and cosmological sense, with “oneness” appearing as the product of the creative transformation of *dao*. However, the text does not exclusively use *dao* to refer to such an origin or substance, but also takes “oneness” as occupying a similar position or playing an auxiliary role to *dao*, often mentioning the two terms together. An example of this usage can be found in chapter 14: “What can be looked at but not seen is called *yi* 夷 (minute), what can be listened to but not heard is called *xi* 希 (silent), what can be grasped but not held is called *wei* 微 (subtle). These three cannot be conveyed and investigated [i.e. captured in language], and thus they are muddled and one.”<sup>6</sup> Although what we find here is clearly an attempt to describe the transcendent origin or substance of the world, this chapter has traditionally been read as offering a description of *dao*, with commentators and interpreters appealing to editions such as that of Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) for proof. It seems clear, however, that chapter 14 of the *Laozi* is first and foremost about “oneness,” not *dao*. The expression *yi zhe* 一者 (the One), which follows after *gu hun er wei yi* 故混而爲一 in the Fu Yi 傅奕 (d. 639) version of the text, refers to the “oneness” expressed in the preceding phrase (muddled and one). This muddled “oneness” transcends the reach of the human senses (sight, hearing, touch, and so on) and refers to an ontological substance (*benti* 本體) that is not part of the world of normal human experience. When the text goes on to speak of “the One,” this can be taken as another descriptive term for such a substance, which is fully real and actual despite its formlessness, lack of physical appearance, and intangible nature. While there are several chapters and sections of the *Laozi* which explicitly treat *dao* as their main subject and conceive of it in terms of a transcendent substance, chapter 14 offers us with the only clear example where this is also the case for “oneness.”

A second passage in the text of the *Laozi* which supports the interpretation of “oneness” as an ontological substance can be found in chapter 39: “As to those who formerly obtained oneness: Heaven obtained oneness and thus became bright, Earth obtained oneness and was thus peaceful, Spirits [i.e. the original spirits (*yuanshen* 元神)] achieved oneness and were thus efficacious, the valleys obtained oneness and were thus replete, the myriad things obtained oneness and thus came into being, lords and kings obtained oneness and all-under-Heaven became upright.”<sup>7</sup> Logically speaking, “Heaven,” “Earth,” “Spirits,” “the valleys,” and “lords and kings” are all part of the “myriad things”

6 Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Laozi zhuyi ji pingjia* (*xiuding zengbu ben*) 老子注譯及評價 (修訂增補本) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 113.

7 *Ibid.*, 212.

(*wanwu* 萬物), which makes it strange for them to be referred to as a totality while also being enumerated individually. If we leave out the phrase referring to the “myriad things,” we are left with a total of six instances of the expression “obtaining oneness” (*de yi* 得一) in this chapter. Interpreting these as referring to an ontological substance is supported by the fact that the text describes “oneness” as the source or foundation of the “brightness” of “Heaven,” the “peacefulness” of the “Earth,” the “numinosity” of “Spirits,” the “fullness” of the “valleys,” and the “rectifying” efforts of “lords and kings.” Bearing in mind that the character *de* 得 means “receiving” or “acquiring” here, the text thus presents the difference between distinct entities as stemming from the fact that different aspects of an integrated “oneness” have been, so to speak, allotted to them. Clearly then, just as the *Laozi* contrasts *dao* with concrete things (such as “Heaven,” “Earth,” and “human beings,” *ren* 人), it also draws a similar distinction between “oneness” on the one hand and various distinct entities in the world (“Heaven,” “Earth,” “Spirits,” “valleys,” “lords and kings”) on the other.

Two other passages from the *Laozi* may suffice to corroborate the interpretation of “oneness” put forward here: firstly, there is the “oneness” mentioned in chapter 10, where we read: “joining together form and spirit endowed with life into one, can you keep them together for all time?”<sup>8</sup> and secondly, in chapter 22 the statement “this is why the sage embraces oneness [i.e. *dao*] and becomes an example to all-under-Heaven.”<sup>9</sup> The first passage refers to the fact that a sage uses *dao* in order to both spiritually and physically cultivate himself. The equivalence between “oneness” and *dao* apparent in both chapters implies that the former also counts as the foundation of everything that exists. However, the idea that “oneness” can be treated as analogous to or synonymous with *dao* only makes sense if we recognize that the concept of “oneness” already occupies this foundational ontological position by and of itself. In chapter 10, “oneness” is discussed as the origin of all things and as having direct relevance for human self-cultivation. In other words, reaching a state of harmony between mind and body is presented here as being predicated on the ability to maintain “oneness.”

Apart from denoting the origin or foundation of all things, the *Laozi* also uses the concept of “oneness” in a rather different and very particular manner, namely as referring to an entity that emerges at the first stage of the process through which *dao* generates everything that exists. As we read in chapter 42: “the Way gives birth to One, One gives birth to Two, Two gives birth to Three,

---

8 Ibid., 93.

9 Ibid., 150.

and Three gives birth to the myriad things.”<sup>10</sup> In other words: *dao* is something wholly singular, this non-distinct unity gives rise to Heaven and Earth, and Heaven and Earth give rise to *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 as the two forms of *qi* 氣 (vital stuff), *yin* and *yang* in turn intermingling to form the “myriad things.” According to the *Laozi*’s cosmogonic model, *dao* is the origin of all creation and counts as the supreme substance of all things. What the text calls “oneness” here is something that issues forth from *dao* at the first stage of the generation of the world and plays the crucial role of engendering “Two” or “duality” (*er* 二). However, “oneness” in this sense occupies a secondary position relative to *dao* and should not be understood as referring to the deepest foundation of existence here, as was the case in the passages from the *Laozi* discussed above.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, we can adduce that Laozi was the first to endow the term “oneness” with philosophical significance as denoting the origin of the world and the “myriad things.” As such, “oneness” strongly resembles the idea of *dao*, which it often accompanies and runs parallel with, and presents us with a different concept of a supreme substance in Daoist philosophy. In proceeding from the numerical sense of *yi* to “oneness” in a philosophical sense, the *Laozi* bears witness to a revolutionary change in the meaning of this concept and would also come to serve as the primary point of reference for all subsequent reinterpretations of “oneness.” The existing scholarship on the basic ideas of this text has consistently focused on *dao* and taken “oneness” to be a derivative notion, thus leading to an overall lack of attention for the latter’s precise importance. At the very least, the above discussion hopes to have shown something of the conceptual diversity of the philosophy of the *Laozi* and pointed to the need to pay more attention to its approach to “oneness.”

## 2 Generating the Myriad Things: *taiyi* 太一 in *Taiyi sheng shui* and *yi* 一 in *Fanwu liu xing*

While Laozi was the first to turn “oneness” into a philosophical notion, this concept would later go through a complex process of change and development which deserves to be considered more closely by scholars of Daoist philosophy. The concept of *taiyi* 太一 (Great One) in the Guodian text *Taiyi sheng shui* and the idea of *yi* found in the manuscript *Fanwu liu xing* (part of the Shanghai Museum collection) can be seen as parts of the first stage of this process.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 225.

The philosophical concept of *taiyi* is undoubtedly the most eye-catching aspect of *Taiyi sheng shui*, where it denotes the origin which gives birth to the “myriad things.” The most obvious reason why the idea of the “Great One” in this manuscript can be seen as the supreme source of creation is the fact that it occupies the position of the starting point for the generation of everything that exists in the cosmogony of the text. As we read there, the first thing to issue forth from the “Great One” is “Water” (*shui* 水): “The Great One produced Water, [once formed] Water returned to assist the Great One and thus formed Heaven; [once formed] Heaven returned to assist the Great One and thus formed the Earth.”<sup>11</sup> As we can see, the text places “Water” at a stage prior to the emergence of “Heaven” and “Earth” as the very first entity to emerge within the generation of the whole cosmos. Generally speaking, Daoist cosmogonies start out from the very beginning of the universe and describe a succession of different stages of creation, each stage giving rise to the one next in line. The cosmogonic model put forward in *Taiyi sheng shui*, however, is somewhat different and this is at least in part due to the role played by the idea of the “Great One.” After the “Great One” (stage 1) has given birth to “Water” (stage 2), the latter does not engender “Heaven” (stage 3) independently, but rather is said to “return to assist the Great One” in forming “Heaven.” Likewise, “Heaven” (stage 3) does not produce “Earth” (stage 4) by itself, but also “returns to assist the Great One” in the creation of “Earth.” A remarkable feature of the cosmogonic vision of the *Taiyi sheng shui* is that it conceives of the “Great One” as continuing to play a guiding role in the various ensuing stages of the process of creation, whereas “Water” and “Heaven” in the second and third stages merely perform an auxiliary function. This explains why the concept of *taiyi* is inserted into each successive stage of creation in the cosmogony of the text.

The fact that the concept of *taiyi* constitutes the origin and matrix for the creation of the whole universe and everything within it also becomes apparent from the statement that “Heaven and Earth are engendered by the Great One.”<sup>12</sup> *Taiyi sheng shui* contains two different cosmogonic accounts: firstly, we find a movement from the highest level of the “Great One” that goes through a descending succession of stages, with “the Year” (*sui* 歲) appearing as the final product of creation; secondly, we also find a reverse movement, running from the lowest cosmogonic stage back to the highest level at the beginning of creation: “Therefore, we can say that the Year was engendered by Wet and Dry, Wet and Dry were engendered by Cold and Hot, Cold and Hot were engendered by

11 Li Ling 李零, *Guodian chujian jiaodu ji (zengding ben)* 郭店楚簡校讀記（增訂本）（Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 262.

12 Li Ling, *Guodian chujian jiaodu ji*, 263.



the Four Seasons, the Four Seasons were engendered by *yin* and *yang*, *yin* and *yang* were engendered by Spirits and Luminosity, Spirits and Luminosity were engendered by Heaven and Earth, and Heaven and Earth were engendered by the Great One.”<sup>13</sup> Although one would expect to find “Water” appearing before “Heaven and Earth” in this “upward-directed” succession and the text to read “Water was engendered by the Great One,” the term *shui* is not mentioned here. As is the case in the “downward-directed” account, the final and highest stage is the “Great One,” but “Heaven and Earth” now occupy the place immediately after the “Great One” as the latter’s own product. Moreover, in the “downward” account which opens *Taiyi sheng shui*, the “Great One” is not described as operating by itself, but as requiring the assistance of “Water,” an aspect which is missing from the “upward-directed” version. Instead, the latter presents us with a simplified cosmogonic vision focused on the relation between the “Great One” and “Heaven and Earth.” Even though this section of the text does not speak of “Water” as the creation of the “Great One,” it immediately goes on to offer a different account of the relation between these two concepts: “This is why the Great One is concealed [i.e. lodged] within Water and progresses through time.”<sup>14</sup> The fact that “Water” now appears as the place where the “Great One” is “concealed,” speaks to the importance of the concept of “Water” and shows that it has a somewhat privileged relation with the “Great One.”

In the passage just quoted, the “Great One” is not only described as being “concealed within Water,” but also as moving through and acting within time. This movement designates a common pattern for the “myriad things” in the world, which brings us to another sense in which *taiyi* serves as an ontological foundation for everything that exists in *Taiyi sheng shui*. As the text reads: “completing its circuit and [starting] anew, [the Great One turns itself into] the Mother of the myriad things.”<sup>15</sup> This statement describes the movement of the “Great One” through time in cyclical terms,<sup>16</sup> as a cycle of interaction which brings order to the “myriad things” and thus serves as their ultimate foundation.

In *Fanwu liu xing*, a text from roughly the same period as *Taiyi sheng shui*, the expression *taiyi* does not occur. This short text consistently speaks of *yi* instead, a term which occurs as many as 19 in these pages. In this respect, it

13 Ibid., 263.

14 Ibid., 263.

15 Ibid., 263.

16 This brings to mind the cyclical alternation between different lunar phases (a succession of waxing and waning).



differs from *Taiyi sheng shui* and more closely resembles the *Laozi*. Just as is the case in both the *Laozi* and *Taiyi sheng shui*, we also find the terms *dao* (two instances) and *tian zhi dao* 天之道 (the Way of Heaven) (one instance) in this manuscript. Both *yi* and *dao* are usually considered to refer to the foundation or origin of the world in *Fanwu liu xing*, although, as we will see, the idea of “oneness” plays a much more prominent role.

In *Fanwu liu xing*, the primary conceptual role of “oneness” is that of the origin which generates the universe and all things within it. In the cosmogonic model we find here, “oneness” occupies the position the supreme source of creation which produces “Two” or “Duality” (*er*) from within itself.<sup>17</sup> In conceiving of *yi* as the supreme source of creation, the text shows important differences with the approach to “oneness” in the *Laozi* and calls to mind the notion of the “Great One” in *Taiyi sheng shui*. As already indicated in the previous section, following the *Laozi*, the majority of Daoist thinkers described *dao* as a something transcending the ordinary world of physical form. The formless and non-physical qualities of *dao* and its transcendent status vis-à-vis ordinary human sensibility are what sets it apart from all other things in the world. By contrast, the concept of “oneness” in *Fanwu liu xing* does not refer to the supersensible, but rather to something observable and tangible: “this is why the taste of oneness can be savored, its odor [can be smelled], and its sounds ring forth when struck.”<sup>18</sup> It is also possible, however, that this is simply meant as a metaphorical expression stressing the reality and actuality of “oneness.”

From the account of the relation between “oneness” and all things and natural phenomena in the world offered in *Fanwu liu xing*, it becomes clear that *yi* refers to the ontological foundation of everything that exists and to the reason for why things are the way they are. According to the statements found in this text, everything there is can only come into existence because of “oneness” and would cease to exist without it: “therefore, when there is oneness, there is nothing in all-under-Heaven that will not be; if oneness is missing, the world will also be without oneness [i.e. there would be nothing whatsoever].”<sup>19</sup> Apart from this general account of the relationship of dependence between “oneness” and the “myriad things” which make up the world, *Fanwu liu xing* also repeatedly uses the concept of “oneness” to offer an explanation for the

17 “Oneness gives birth to duality [i.e. *yin* and *yang* as the two forms of *qi*], duality gives birth to the triad [through the unification of *yin* and *yang*], the triad gives birth to [the body of the] Mother, the [body of the] Mother gives birth to the bonds [i.e. the myriad things].” Yu Shaohong 俞紹宏 and Zhang Qingsong 張青松, eds., *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo chujian jishi* 上海博物館藏戰國楚簡集釋 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2020), 7: 144.

18 Ibid., 144.

19 Ibid., 144.

existence of various natural phenomena: “having no [eyes], it can still know the names [i.e. still see things]; having no ears, it can still hear sounds. It is by obtaining [oneness] that grass and trees can come into being; it is by obtaining [oneness] that birds and beasts can call out [i.e. can exist].”<sup>20</sup> Clearly then, “oneness” is presented here as the basis of the generation and development of the “myriad things,” as well as that which makes them into what they are.

In the *Laozi*, *dao* and “oneness” refer both to the origin of all things in a general ontological sense, as well as to a principle for governing the state and bringing order to human society. Compared to the approach found in the *Laozi*, the idea of “oneness” in *Fanwu liu xing* even more explicitly appears as a universal principle of governance for the ruler, as we see in the following passage: “This I have heard: a person who can hold fast to oneness will succeed in all things; a person who fails to hold fast to oneness will fail in all things.”<sup>21</sup> According to the text, the reason why the ruler should “hold fast to oneness” or “grasp oneness” (*zhi yi* 執一) and “attain oneness” (*de yi* 得一) is because this will enable him to be successful in governing the state. As such, “oneness” is presented here as a crucial element in and yardstick for effective governance, thus foregrounding the political dimension of this concept.

A closer look at the text shows that the ruler’s understanding of “oneness” is supposed to endow him with extraordinary abilities which reflect the supreme adaptability and prodigious efficacy of “oneness.” That being said, “oneness” does not merely play the role of an abstract concept in Daoist thought, but also has a more concrete layer of meaning, denoting particular qualities, behaviors, actions, and so on. In the *Laozi*, the closely related notion of *dao* is associated with “not acting” (*wuwei* 無爲) and “weakness” (*rouruo* 柔弱). Something similar can be found in *Fanwu liu xing*, as can be gleaned from this passage: “[He who] is reticent and [he who] can bring oneness into the self.”<sup>22</sup> The abstract idea of “bring oneness into the self” (*neng yi* 能一) is paired with the more concrete injunction to be “reticent” (*guayan* 寡言) here. In combining these two expressions, “oneness” is given a more concrete reference by being linked to a specific type of behavior, possibly reflecting the influence of the ideas of “being sparing with words” (*xi yan* 希言) and “undertaking teaching without words” in the *Laozi*.

Given the crucial importance of “oneness” and its combined qualities of abstraction and concreteness, how does *Fanwu liu xing* conceive of the manner in which the ruler can come to an understanding of “oneness” and put it into practice? According to the text, “if he desires to grasp oneness, he will be

20 Ibid., 143.

21 Ibid., 144.

22 Ibid., 144.

able to see it when looking up, he will be able to conceive it when stooping down. He does not seek far for the guidelines but examines it (oneness) within his own person.”<sup>23</sup> As such, there is nothing particularly complicated about “grasping oneness”; the ruler simply needs to “lift his head” or “bend down” in order to find what he is looking for. As the text stresses, there is no need for the ruler to overthink it; he can simply rely on his own judgement and attempt to observe things from the perspective of “oneness.” This assumption is grounded in the idea that all things are, in some sense, one and the same and marked by relations of similarity. Accordingly, practicing “oneness” and “the Way” are not all that complicated: when the ruler comes to an understanding of these principles, he has already grasped what is most fundamental. In governing the state, he should exclusively concern himself with the most important aspects of rulership, instead of being bogged down in the details or, even worse, occupying himself with things that fall outside his purview. The political wisdom articulated in *Fanwu liu xing* through concepts such as “grasping oneness,” “grasping the Way,” and “one word” (*yi yan* 一言) can thus be seen as both heir to and a further development of the political philosophy of the *Laozi*.

### 3 *Zhi yi* 執一, *yi zhong* 一衆, *yi fa* 一法: *yi* 一 in the *Guanzi* 管子 and the *Huangdi si jing* 皇帝四經

The *Laozi*'s concept of “oneness” would follow two major lines of development in the history of Daoist thought subsequent to *Taiyi sheng shui* and *Fanwu liu xing*: firstly, it would be approached as a foundation for social and political order in the Huang-Lao 黃老 tradition; secondly, it would come to play a crucial role in the *Zhuangzi*'s concern for the unity and identity of all things, its individualistic spiritual outlook, and its vision of society as an integrated whole. Huang-Lao thinkers drew upon the *Laozi*'s notion of “oneness” as well as that of *dao* in their attempts to rethink the foundations of sociopolitical order and combined these concepts with the idea of *fa* 法 (law), the latter referring to a strict system of institutionalized norms. In their pursuit of wealth and power for the state, they promoted a form of governance grounded in the universal validity of unified “laws.” The texts of the *Guanzi* and the *Huangdi si jing*, which for the most part fit into the Huang-Lao tradition, are good examples of this approach.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 144.

In the *Guanzi*, both “oneness” and *dao* refer to the origin of all things in the world, although “oneness” is not extensively discussed in these terms in the text. Instead, the originary status and function of “oneness” primarily manifests itself in a sociopolitical sense, more precisely as the most fundamental and universally applicable standard and principle to be observed by a competent ruler: “if [the ruler] can hold fast to oneness and not lose it, he can become a lord to the myriad things [...] with one word comprehended, all-under-Heaven submits to him; with one word established, all-under-Heaven obeys him. This is known as a common principle.”<sup>24</sup> In this passage, “oneness” clearly figures as the basis of governance, allowing the ruler who has understood this principle to effectively govern the world and all things within it. Similar to what we find in *Fanwu liu xing*, “oneness” also has a more specific reference in the *Guanzi* and is used to designate “one word,” that is to say, a verbal utterance that is of fundamental importance to the ruler.<sup>25</sup>

One of the main ways in which the Huang-Lao tradition’s usage of “oneness” differs from the *Laozi* is that it combines this concept with an advocacy of an integrated system of laws. As such, the ideas of “grasping oneness” (*zhi yi*) and “obtaining oneness” (*de yi*) are effectively treated as synonymous with “grasping law” (*zhi fa* 執法) and “obtaining law” (*de fa* 得法). Governing by means of the fundamental concept of “oneness” comes down to employing a unified and universal system of “law” in carrying out the business of government. The *Guanzi* is a typical example of the combination of the ideas of “oneness” and “law.” As we read in the *Mingfa jie* 明法解: “Law constitutes regulations for all-under-Heaven; it is the proper order for the myriad affairs in the world.”<sup>26</sup> “Oneness” thus gains concrete expression as a universally binding and unified system of “law.”

Governing by means of unified “laws” that embody “oneness” means unifying the behavior of the people, which is another important aspect of the *Guanzi*’s understanding of “oneness”: “Law is that through which those above [i.e. the ruler] unify [the words and deeds of] the people and command those below [...] Anything that does not fall within the reach of law should not

24 Liu Ji 劉績, *Guanzi buzhu* 管子補注, punct. and coll. Jiang Tao 姜濤 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2016), 335.

25 With regard to the idea of “being sparing with words” (*guayan*), the *Guanzi* has the following to say (in the “Jie” 戒 chapter): “Being sparing in action and accomplishing great things is known as understanding the proper employment [of things]. Threading together the myriad things through a single word is known as understanding the Way. Being loquacious when this is not fitting; how much better it is to be sparing with words.” Ibid., 189.

26 Ibid., 419.

be dealt with rashly.”<sup>27</sup> “Unifying the people” (*yi min* 一民) is also called “unifying the multitudes” (*yi zhong* 一眾) in the text, which means standardizing and controlling a population’s behavior by means of unified “laws.”

Governing through foundational and unified “laws” concretely expresses the Huang-Lao school’s concern for “mastering the essential and grasping the origin” (*bingyao zhiben* 秉要執本). According to this current of thought, what unites human beings is not the purity of their innate disposition, but rather their inborn self-centered tendency to seek out what is profitable to them, avoid harm, and always choose life over death. It is in this precise sense that the human temperament is characterized by a form of “oneness” and “unity” (*tong* 同) allowing people to be “made equal” (*qi* 齊). The *Guanzi* places considerable emphasis on the fact that human beings are naturally inclined to pursue their own interests. To give but one example: “The disposition of most people is such that they are happy when they attain what they desire and are grieved when faced with what they detest. In this, the noble and the base are the same.”<sup>28</sup> According to the account we find here, the reason why the “people” or “multitudes” can be governed through a unified system of “law” is due to the fact that the rewards and punishments doled out through binding laws suit this “unified” natural inclination shared in common by all human beings. In this respect, the Huang-Lao school takes the outlook of the *Laozi* in a different direction: it stresses that the people can “transform by themselves” (*zihua* 自化), but does not examine the inner driving force behind the human desire for any such “self-transformation.” While taking up the *Laozi*’s notion of *zihua*, the *Guanzi* also pushes it further in trying to establish an inborn ground for the human pursuit of this goal.

Departing from the idea that human beings are united precisely through their self-centeredness, the *Guanzi* argues that the ruler has to take this innate human disposition into account in his attempt to mobilize the population and get them to devote their physical and mental energies to his cause. In other words, the ruler has to enable the people to satisfy their own needs, because only in this way will they “focus on oneness” (*zhuan yi* 專一), that is to say, fully devote themselves to their respective tasks and responsibilities. The ability of the masses in society to mentally “focus on oneness” depends on a form of governance that is grounded in “law” and suits the shared natural disposition of the entire population. According to the Huang-Lao tradition, the ability of a ruler to “grasp oneness” (i.e. govern through unified laws) is also tied up with the ruler’s own practice of a form of spiritual cultivation which consists in “focusing the mind” (*zhuan xin* 專心), that is to say, “focusing on oneness”

27 Ibid., 320.

28 Ibid., 359.

(*zhuan yi*). “Focusing on oneness” entails “grasping oneness,” “employing oneness” (*yong yi* 用一), and “employing laws” (*yong fa* 用法), as we read in the following passage: “Focusing his intentions and bringing unity to his mind [...] the ruler who can grasp oneness [i.e. the importance of unified laws] without losing it can become lord to the myriad things.”<sup>29</sup>

The Huang-Lao current of thought rejects the idea that politics is about “worthiness” (*xian* 賢) and “competence” (*neng* 能) on the part of the ruler, qualities which the *Guanzi* for instance considers to be unnecessary for a form of governance grounded in the ruler’s ability to “focus the mind” and “focus on oneness,” that is to say, govern by means of a unified system of “law”: “a sage ruler relies on law, and not on wisdom; he relies on procedure, and not on rhetorical persuasion; he relies on what is common, and not what pertains to himself; he relies on the great Way, and not trifling affairs. Thus he can withdraw himself from the world and yet bring order to all-under-Heaven.”<sup>30</sup> The *Guanzi* assumes this to be a precondition for effective governance and argues that governing by “focusing on oneness” and employing unified laws is both the easiest and the most efficient form of governance available, an outlook which can be seen as reflecting the Huang-Lao school’s take on the notion of “not acting yet leaving nothing undone.”

The texts included in the *Huang di si jing* are another important part of the Huang-Lao corpus and contain much more information on the concept of “oneness.” Discussions of this concept in the *Huangdi si jing* are not uniform in either form or content, some being similar to those found in the *Guanzi*, while others are quite different. One obvious difference is that “oneness” is sometimes used as a descriptive term for *dao* in here. This occurs in two different ways: firstly, “oneness” is used to denote the primordial and unified state of *dao*, as is the case in the “Guan” 觀 chapter: “how muddled and unclear, how dark and obscure, like a *qun* 囿, there was neither light nor darkness, *yin* and *yang* were not yet [divided].”<sup>31</sup> “Oneness” is linked to the word 囿 here, which literally means “granary.” Perhaps this is meant to describe an ineffable state of existence in which all things (all individual “grains”) are still indistinguishable (within the space of the “granary”). Secondly, the *Huangdi si jing* corpus also uses “oneness” to refer to a “name” or “designation” (*hao* 號) of *dao*, as is the

29 Ibid., 283.

30 Ibid., 318.

31 Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Huangdi si jing jinzhuzhu jinyi: Mawangdui hanmu chutu boshu* 黃帝四經今注今譯—馬王堆漢墓出土帛書 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 210–11. I am following Chen’s reconstruction of this passage on the basis of the *Wenzi* (*Shi shou* 十守 chapter), where we read: “Before Heaven and Earth had taken shape, how dark and obscure, [everything] was muddled into one.”

case in “Daoyuan” 道原 chapter: “The one is its [i.e. *dao*’s] name.”<sup>32</sup> The idea here is that the designation “oneness” can be used to characterize and refer to *dao* as a singular and fundamental unity. In passages such as these, “oneness” appears as a component of *dao*, specifically meant to highlight the latter’s central and foundational status.

Given the importance of the quality of “oneness” to the concept of *dao*, the former is also used to designate the foundation of proper governance throughout the texts which make up the *Huangdi si jing*. In “Daoyuan,” for instance, we read: “To achieve oneness without changing, this is the root for attaining *dao*; to understand the many through the few, this is how one attains what is essential.”<sup>33</sup> Here, “oneness” is directly contrasted with “the many” (*duo* 多), as is also the case in the “Cheng fa” 成法 chapter: “Oneness is the root of the Way, how could it have no strong points? [...] oneness is what drives the transformation [of all things], it is through the few that the many are known.”<sup>34</sup>

In the *Huangdi si jing*, the concrete implications of the notion of “grasping oneness” (*zhi yi*) for the ruler are laid out in much more detail than in texts such as the *Guanzi*. Sometimes, this notion is understood to refer to remaining passive and “not acting” (*wuwei*), such as in this passage from the “Ming xing” 名形 chapter: “The form [of all things in the world] is always settled by itself and thus I must remain tranquil; the unfolding of affairs always follows its own course, and thus I do not engage in action.”<sup>35</sup> In other sections, “grasping oneness” is taken as referring to “being sparing in the use of words” and to the importance of “essential words” (*yaoyan* 要言), as in this example from the “Cheng fa” chapter: “I have heard that the established methods in the world do not require much to be said and that a single word is all it takes. Returning to oneness by following the names [of things], the people will not disturb the bonds [i.e. social order].”<sup>36</sup>

The connection between “grasping oneness” and “grasping law” in the *Huangdi si jing* corpus is probably the most remarkable and significant aspect of the Huang-Lao tradition’s further development of Laozi’s concept of “oneness.” As we have seen, just as is the case in the *Guanzi*, these texts believe that “grasping *dao*” and “grasping oneness” means acting in accordance with and governing on the basis of a fixed system of laws. On a more concrete level, the “established methods” discussed in the “Cheng fa” chapter by means of

32 Ibid., 402.

33 Ibid., 409.

34 Ibid., 291.

35 Ibid., 336.

36 Ibid., 286.



abstract concepts such as “names” (*ming* 名), “rectitude” (*zheng* 正), and “oneness” refer to precisely such a system, which counts as the most important type of “name” or “oneness”: “A system of law is the highest form of rectitude. In governing [the state] through a system of law, there is no place for wanton and rash action.”<sup>37</sup> The reason why “law” is presented as the standard for carrying out a unified form of governance in the *Huangdi si jing* is that this type of system of punishment and reward matches the natural human inclination to pursue one’s own interests and avoid harm, which is referred to by means of the concept of “acting for oneself” (*zi wei* 自爲), as for example in the “Cheng” 稱 chapter: “This is why [in giving orders to others], one should rely on how they act for themselves [i.e. follow their natural disposition], not on how they act for me [i.e. refrain from forcing them].”<sup>38</sup>

#### 4 A World of Unity and Commonality: the *Zhuangzi*’s Notion of “Making Things Equal”

As already mentioned, the *Zhuangzi* took the *Laozi*’s notion of “oneness” in a direction that is quite different from the approach found in the Huang-Lao tradition. Departing from the *Laozi*’s ideas of *dao* and oneness, the *Zhuangzi* elaborated an encompassing view of the world and the universe that has already been the subject of many studies. The fascination exerted by concepts such as “making things equal” (*qi wu* 齊物), “unified and one” (*qi yi* 齊一), and “the unity of Heaven and human beings” (*tian ren heyi* 天人合一) has led to a considerable amount of scholarly attention for this aspect of the text as well. That being said, there is still a serious lack of research on the notion of “oneness” throughout the *Zhuangzi* as a whole.<sup>39</sup> In the *Zhuangzi*, “oneness” is used in a manner that is distinct from the rest of the early Daoist corpus. In this text, the idea of *dao* is developed into a vision of the world as an interconnected whole and used to describe an ideal state of “oneness” in which “Heaven” and human beings have not yet been separated. As such, “oneness” has two different

37 Ibid., 71.

38 Ibid., 355.

39 Notable exceptions include: Wang Yongxiang 王永祥, who discusses the *Zhuangzi*’s vision of “identity” in his *Zhongguo gudai tongyi sixiang shi* 中國古代同一思想史 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991), 59–65; and Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久 who tackles the notion of oneness through his interpretation of the idea that “the myriad things form one body” (*wanwu yiti* 萬物一體) in his *Daojia sixiang de xin yanjiu: yi Zhuangzi wei zhongxin* 道家思想的新研究—以《莊子》爲中心, trans. Wang Qifa 王啟發 and Cao Feng 曹峰 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2009), 317–42.

layers of meaning here: it refers to the unity characteristic of primitive human communities while also designating a harmonious state of “oneness” between body and mind and a form of spiritual transcendence in which the self and the “myriad things” are united.

The notion of “oneness” in the *Zhuangzi* has to be understood in connection with the idea of *dao*, since it is primarily used to highlight a particular feature of *dao* throughout the text and is thus part of the latter’s semantic sphere rather than appearing as an independent concept. This is an important point of difference with the *Laozi* and texts such as *Taiyi sheng shui* and *Fanwu liu xing*. The *Zhuangzi*’s take on “oneness” becomes apparent in its *dao*-centered cosmogony, according to which “oneness” is produced at the second stage of the generation of the universe: “At the Great Beginning there was non-existence, it was without being and without name. When oneness emerged [from *dao*], it was still without form.”<sup>40</sup> Initially, the universe was in a state of “non-existence” (*wu* 無) in which there were no particular entities yet. The very first thing to emerge from *dao* as the “Great Beginning” (*taichu* 太初) of the world was “oneness,” which does not refer to anything with a determinate shape and form, but should rather be understood as denoting a state of complete non-distinction similar to the kind of “oneness” referred to in the *Laozi* when it states in chapter 42 that “*dao* gave birth to One.”

Within this line of reasoning, it is precisely because all things emerge from *dao* that they also take part in it. The *Zhuangzi* ascribes two further aspects to *dao*: firstly, it counts as the innermost basis for the existence of everything that exists: “As for *dao*, it is where the myriad things start out from [i.e. depend upon]”;<sup>41</sup> and secondly, it constitutes the supreme unifying essence of and the point of commonality between all things. This brings us to one of the major functions of “oneness” in the *Zhuangzi*, namely its ontological significance, which becomes apparent in the idea that “*dao* connects and unites [everything] into one” (*dao tong wei yi* 道通爲一) and the notion of “being unified and one” (*qi yi*), which in turn closely resemble the concepts of *qi tong* 齊同 (equal and identical) and *qi wu* (making things equal).

The reason why the “myriad things” can be “united into one” or “made equal” and “identical” is because they all embody *dao* and are all grounded in *dao*. The following two expressions from the *Zhuangzi* are worth invoking here: firstly, there is the statement that “the myriad things are all seeds, succeeding each

<sup>40</sup> Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhū jīnyī*, 335.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 875–76.

other in different forms,”<sup>42</sup> so while all things have their own “seeds,” *dao* constitutes the “seed” of all these different “seeds” and is thus responsible for the basic unity of everything there is; and secondly, there is the idea that there is “a single *qi* through the whole world,”<sup>43</sup> meaning that the “myriad things” share the common feature of being grounded in the same “vital stuff.” When the *Zhuangzi* asserts that “the sage cherishes oneness” (*shengren gui yi* 聖人貴一), this refers to the *qi* shared in common by all things.

In the *Zhuangzi*, the unity and oneness of all things is also presented as being the result of “observing things from the perspective of *dao*” (*yi dao guan zhi* 以道觀之) and thus refers to a form of “oneness” that is essentially the product of a type of spiritual insight. Since human beings have different perspectives and interests, they tend to approach and see the world in different ways. The “Qiusui” 秋水 chapter, for instance, lists five different perspectives or modes of “*guan*”: “observing things from the perspective of *dao*,” “observing things from the common perspective” (*yi su guan zhi* 以俗觀之), “observing things from the perspective of their differences” (*yi cha guan zhi* 以差觀之), “observing things from the perspective of their achievements” (*yi gong guan zhi* 以功觀之), and “observing things from the perspective of their tendencies” (*yi qu guan zhi* 以趣觀之). Each of these perspectives presents us with an entirely different world. That being said, the *Zhuangzi*’s overall focus lies on the unity of all phenomena and on observing the points of commonality between the “myriad things.”

According to the *Zhuangzi*, seeing the world from the perspective of *dao* enables us to gain insight into the “unity” and “identity” of all things. Such an insight comes from observing the world and also refers to a specific horizon of spiritual development in which we come to realize that “in all-under-Heaven, the myriad things are one.”<sup>44</sup> Far from merely designating a spiritual perspective, however, the idea of “making all things equal and one” also has a supremely ethical dimension: by observing the world from a “unified” point of view, people are able to overcome their own narrow-mindedness and learn to develop a sense of empathy and tolerance. As the text states, human beings should “unite with the great [*dao*] which runs through everything,” since “by becoming one [with the myriad things], a person is without specific preferences.”<sup>45</sup> In the *Zhuangzi*, “oneness” thus also refers to a supreme kind of tolerance and

42 Ibid., 775.

43 Ibid., 597.

44 Ibid., 577.

45 Ibid., 226.

to a spiritual form of “great vacuity” (*taixu* 太虛) that helps usher in unity and harmony: “Only a truly accomplished person understands that unity runs through everything; thus he has no need [to remain attached to his own prejudices] and relies on all things as he finds them.”<sup>46</sup> The “sages,” “authentic persons” (*zhenren* 真人), and “spirit-like persons” (*shenren* 神人) we encounter in the *Zhuangzi* refer to exemplary figures who have attained a spiritual horizon of “oneness” and have also managed to put it into practice as a moral value.

To be sure, attaining this level of spiritual and moral development is no easy feat: people require the guidance of a teacher and need to fully commit themselves to the process, as becomes clear in the “Zaiyou” 在宥 chapter: “The teaching of a great person is like the shape onto the shadow and like the sound onto the echo.”<sup>47</sup> The implication here is that arriving at “unity and oneness” is impossible without the assistance of a teacher and also presupposes engaging in practices of self-cultivation. In the “Gengsang Chu” 庚桑楚 chapter, the figure of Laozi is credited with “a method for guarding life” (*wei sheng zhi jing* 衛生之經), “guarding life” referring to the injunction to “embrace oneness” (*bao yi* 抱一): “[You ask of] the method for guarding life; [well], can you embrace oneness?”<sup>48</sup> As is the case with the *Laozi*’s notion of “preserving life” (*shesheng* 攝生), “guarding life” in the *Zhuangzi* mostly has a spiritual significance. As such, “embracing oneness” refers to maintaining a state of mental harmony in which the mind is run through with “oneness.”

Apart from denoting an individual spiritual value, the *Zhuangzi* also takes the idea of being “unified and one” and “identical and one” to refer to a goal for society as a whole. According to the *Zhuangzi*, primitive human society was still characterized by an ideal state of integration and unity. Unfortunately, however, this state of unity was lost and the world ended up in a chaotic condition of “disunity” (*bu yi* 不一) and division. As we read in the “Tianxia” 天下 chapter: “What was generated by the sages and accomplished by the kings all originates in oneness [...] Now there is great confusion in the world and the worthies and sages remain unseen, the *dao* and its power have become divided [...] the arts of the Way will be torn asunder by the world.”<sup>49</sup> In the *Zhuangzi*, arriving at a “unity between Heaven and human beings” and “unifying the myriad things” on the level of human society comes down to returning to a primordial state of simplicity, that is to say, a more elevated condition of unity and cooperation.

46 Ibid., 69.

47 Ibid., 316.

48 Ibid., 641.

49 Ibid., 908–9.

In order to return to such a harmonious and unified world, the *Zhuangzi* puts forward a mode of political governance based in *dao* and “oneness” and centered around the values of “non-action” and tranquility: “Although Heaven and Earth are expansive, their transformation is well-balanced. Although the things in the world are many, their arrangement is one and the same. Although the people are numerous, they are all governed by their lord.”<sup>50</sup> The ideal human community constitutes an integrated whole in which everything is “united into one” and “identical and one.” In order to become capable of effectively “employing oneness” (*yong yi*), the ruler has to “concentrate his mind” and “concentrate on oneness,” which are also prerequisites for attaining “oneness” on an individual level.

## 5 Conclusion

In sum, we have seen that “oneness” is an incredibly important concept in Daoist philosophy and played a crucial role in the genesis and development of early Daoism. Although this paper has only given a partial overview of the entire history of the idea of “oneness,” it has tried to outline the most representative stages in the initial development of this concept. Our survey of the changing trajectory and the different manifestations of “oneness” in early Daoist philosophy makes it clear that “oneness” already occupied a position similar to *dao* and started denoting the ontological origin or foundation of the world from the moment it was turned into a philosophical concept in the *Laozi*. In this text, “oneness” came to be interpreted as denoting the supreme essence and innermost ground of everything that exists and this interpretation would remain the basis for all subsequent approaches to “oneness.” In the later evolution of this concept, we also find different designations, such as the “Great One” in *Taiyi sheng shui*. In this sense, “oneness” or the “Great One” refers to the creative source of the “myriad things” located at the beginning of the entire universe. It is through the creative power exerted by “oneness” as the “Mother of the myriad things” that the world and everything within it can come into being through a succession of different stages. In terms of its relevance for establishing an effective social order, “oneness” is also taken to refer to a supreme form of governance which concretely expresses itself in a universally binding and unified system of “law.” The idea that the ruler should “hold fast to oneness” implies that he must grasp the basic principle of “oneness,” while also governing by means of unified “law” and spiritually cultivating

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 320.

his own ability to “concentrate on oneness.” Additionally, we have seen that “oneness” is sometimes used as a description of *dao*. More specifically, it is the quality of “oneness” which serves to reconcile the unity characteristic of *dao* with the multiplicity that marks the “myriad things” in the world, thus allowing the world to form an integrated and unified whole. A person who seeks to gain insight into “oneness” not only needs to attain an extraordinary mental state, but also needs to develop a profound moral sense of empathy and tolerance.

*Translated by Ady Van den Stock*

### Works Cited

- Chen, Guying 陳鼓應. *Huangdi si jing jinzhuzhu jinyi: Mawangdui hanmu chutu boshu* 黃帝四經今注今譯—馬王堆漢墓出土帛書. Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007.
- Chen, Guying 陳鼓應. *Laozi zhuyi ji pingjia (xiuding zengbu ben)* 老子注譯及評價（修訂增補本）. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009.
- Chen, Guying 陳鼓應. *Zhuangzi jinzhuzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009.
- Ikeda, Tomohisa 池田知久. *Daojia sixiang de xin yanjiu: yi Zhuangzi wei zhongxin* 道家思想的新研究—以《莊子》為中心. Translated by Wang Qifa 王啟發 and Cao Feng 曹峰. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2009.
- Li, Ling 李零. *Guodian chujian jiaodu ji (zengding ben)* 郭店楚簡校讀記（增訂本）. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007.
- Liu, Ji 劉績. *Guanzi buzhu* 管子補注. Punctuated and collated by Jiang Tao 姜濤. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2016.
- Min, Qiji 閔齊伋. *Dingzheng liushu tong* 訂正六書通. Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1981.
- Xu, Shen 許慎. *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字. Punctuated and collated by Tao Shengkui 陶生魁. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020.
- Xu, Zhongliang 徐忠良. *Xinyi Yinwenzi* 新譯尹文子. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1996.
- Wang, Yongxiang 王永祥. *Zhongguo gudai tongyi sixiang shi* 中國古代同一思想史. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991.
- Wang, Zhongjiang 王中江. “*Farwu liuxing ni okeru ‘yi’ no shisō kōzō to sono ichi*” 「凡物流形」における「一」の思想構造とその位置. In *Shutsudo shiryō to kanji bunkaken* 出土資料と漢字文化圏, edited by Yanaka Shinichi 谷中信一, 145–70. Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2009.
- Yu, Shaohong 俞紹宏 and Zhang Qingsong 張青松, eds. *Shanghai bowuguan cang zhanguo chujian jishi* 上海博物館藏戰國楚簡集釋, vol. 7. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2020.