Recent archeological finds have opened new directions for research into early Chinese philosophy and into the Daodejing in particular. The Mawangdui documents (ca. 168 B.C.E., discovered in 1973) and the Guodian documents (ca. 300 B.C.E., discovered in 1993) allow us to understand better the development of the text as well as the dynamic relationship between Daoist philosophy and other philosophies in early China. These archeological finds demonstrate conclusively that the Daodejing evolved gradually into its received form, the Han-era Wang Bi 王弼 version. In other words, the Daodejing belonged to what Gerald Burns calls a “manuscript culture,” a culture in which texts remained open to successive modifications, rather than to a “print culture,” in which texts were composed once and then closed. The Daodejing, like any early Chinese text, was hand-copied by individuals for specific purposes, and it could be (and was) occasionally modified to fit those purposes. Variants in terminology and editorial structure, therefore, can provide insight into the various philosophical purposes for which the Daodejing was composed.

"Embracing" (Bao 抱) and "Holding" (Zhi 軸)

Chapter 22 of the Mawangdui Daodejing shows evidence of being modified for a specific purpose, and I argue that this modification has far-reaching implications for our understanding of early Chinese philosophy. In the received Wang Bi version of the text, chapter 22 describes the activity of the sage in the following terms:

The Sage "embraces the One" (baoyi 抱一) to become "model" (shi 式) to the world.

The Mawangdui version of chapter 22 (both A and B), while similar to the Wang Bi in many other respects, contains the following variant:

The Sage "holds to the One" (zhiyi 軸一) to become "shepherd" (mu 牧) to the world.

Some scholars do not find baoyi and zhiyi to be importantly different. Harold Roth, in his study of breathing meditation in the "Inner Training" (Neiye 內業) tradition, finds that, in this context, the two phrases “imply the same thing.” The two phrases, however, seem significantly different at first glance. The verb zhi 軸 has the extended meaning of “to grab, to seize, or to manage.” The verb bao 抱 has the extended meaning of “to embrace, to cherish, or to hug.” Zhi means “holding to” in the manner that a law is followed. Bao means “to hold” in the manner that an infant is cradled in the arms. Zhi carries the negative connotation of holding on to something...
by force or as a stipulation. Mencius uses the phrase *zhiyi* in this way to represent an
to be despised:

What I detest about those who "hold to the One" (*zhiyi* 執一) is that they cripple *dao* 道.
One thing is taken up and a hundred others go by the wayside.\(^3\)

The verb *zhi* carries this negative connotation in the *Daodejing* as well: on two
occasions we read that when one "grasps" or "holds on" to something (*zhi* 執),
that thing is lost (*shi* 失).\(^4\) In the presence of such passages, the idea that the Daoist
sage *ought* to "hold to the One" (*zhiyi* 執一) reads like an aberration.

The most plausible explanation of the chapter 22 variant is that the phrase
"holding to the One" (*zhiyi*) is Legalist in nature and that, in this context, it reflects
the emergence of the Legalist-minded political philosophy known as "Huang-Lao."
The silk manuscripts discovered at Mawangdui include several Huang-Lao texts
along with its version of the *Daodejing*. Robert Henricks acknowledges this possi-
bility, noting that the term "shepherd" (*mu* 牧) is a "known reference to the ruler in
the political writings of the time," making the Mawangdui version "seem to have a
specific, political focus instead of a general one."\(^5\) If "holding to the One" (*zhiyi*) is
understood as a Legalist-minded phrase, then its appearance in chapter 22 can be
regarded as a continuation of what Chad Hansen calls the "authoritarian distortion
and appropriation" of the *Daodejing* by the Legalist school of thought.\(^6\)

Since chapter 22 of the Mawangdui exists in a physical form older than the
Wang Bi version, it is tempting to conclude that "holding to the One" (*zhiyi*) is the
earlier variant. The textual evidence, however, is inconclusive: there is no reason to
assume that the Mawangdui and Wang Bi manuscripts belong to a single, chronolo-
gical "line" of development. The evidence suggests to me that "holding to the
One" (*zhiyi*) displaces an earlier "embracing the One" (*baoyi*) and for specific philo-
sophical reasons. I argue below that "embracing the One" represents an older philo-
sophical attitude: an attitude that dovetails with a more primitive "Daoist" cosmology
of the "One" that is consistent with newly unearthed documents from Guodian.
Only later in the tradition did a more Legalist-minded, "Huang-Lao" cosmology of
the "One" emerge in opposition to this earlier Daoist cosmology and inspire the
chapter 22 variant in the Mawangdui. Thus, I contend that the Wang Bi version of
chapter 22, while physically younger, reflects an older version of the chapter, either
restored or transmitted unaltered. My main argument, in any case, regards the philo-
sophical implications of the variant substitution itself.

The pathway into this argument begins with a reconstruction of the Legalist-
minded meaning of the phrase "holding to the One" (*zhiyi*). The *Lüshi chunqiu* sug-
gests what the phrase stands for in Legalist philosophy:

The king who "holds to the One" (*zhiyi* 執一) rectifies the ten-thousand things. Armies
must have generals to unify (*yi* 一) them; states must have rulers to unify them. An empire
must have a Son of Heaven to unify it. The Son of Heaven must "hold to the One" to
seize control. Where there is unity (*yi* 一) there is order; where there is duality, there is
chaos.\(^7\)

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In a Legalist context, “holding to the One” stands for the seizure of political control and the establishment of order by positive law. Rules are posited by a supreme ruler and enforced by heavy punishment. One can easily understand why a progressive-minded Confucian like Mencius would despise the phrase “holding to the One.” As he says, “One thing is taken up and a hundred others go by the wayside.” “Holding to the One” is a zero-sum game: diversity, richness, chaos, and “duality” lose, and “unity” (yi) alone prevails.

This Legalist-minded preference for “unity” over “duality” is evident in the later Huang-Lao tradition. In his analysis of the difference between Huang-Lao and Daoism, Randall Peerenboom utilizes to good effect what David Hall and Roger Ames call the “logical” versus “aesthetic” conceptions of order. Briefly, “aesthetic” orders are those orders that begin with the uniqueness of the “One” particular as it collaborates with other particulars in an emergent complex of relatedness, resulting in an order that is site-specific and reflective of the achieved togetherness of just that diversity of particulars. “Logical” order, on the other hand, begins with a pre-assigned pattern of relatedness; it begins with the “One” of unity. The constituents of an order are then recognized not in their particularity but for their ability to satisfy a pre-designated function in a precedent order. Peerenboom argues that Huang-Lao thought diverges from Daoism in that it understands dao itself as a “pre-configured natural order,” one that is “characterized by a constant, pervasive unity, and hence deemed ‘the One’ (yi—).” Tu Wei-ming concurs and writes: “the method by which the unalterable standard of the One is obtained becomes the main focus of the Huang-Lao texts.” While Huang-Lao, according to Peerenboom, distinguishes itself from the more draconian political legacy of Legalism (illustrated in the Lushi chunqiu passage above), it builds off that legacy by embracing an essentially top-down, “logical” approach to order on the cosmological level.

In embracing such a “logical” conception of order, Huang-Lao thinkers dispense with the idea that dao facilitates the emergence of novel, unforced orders that begin, in Peerenboom’s words, “with the uniqueness of the one particular.” Thus, whereas in Daoism “there is always an element of spontaneity, a potential for novelty,” this element is “negligible if not completely lacking in the world of Huang-Lao.” If Peerenboom is correct, and if the chapter 22 variant indicates a Huang-Lao substitution of the verb “hold” (zhì 埁) for the verb “embrace” (bāo 抱), then we can deduce with some likelihood what the phrase “embracing the One” (bāoyī 抱一) meant in the existing context of philosophical Daoism. Unlike “holding to the One” (zhīyī 埁一), which represents a disregard for spontaneity in favor of a more “top-down” instantiation of a predetermined order, “embracing the One” would represent a difference toward particularity and a preference for unforced, spontaneous orders, an association that the Legalist-minded editors meant to dispense with. If this interpretation is correct, then it can be noted that the term “One” (yì) undergoes a significant change in meaning when modified by zhī in the Mawangdui variant. The substitution amounts to replacing the “One” of particularity, spontaneity, and “duality” with the “One” of totality and “unity.” It signals, in other words, a complete shift in cosmic emphasis.
Hall and Ames have contributed much by foregrounding the important role that "particularity" plays in early Daoist thought. "Appreciating the particular" is a central theme in their interpretation of the *Daodejing*.\(^{15}\) According to my reading, the meaning of "embracing the One" (*baoyi*) encompasses much of what Hall and Ames call "appreciating the particular." There are, however, multiple meanings of the term "One" within the *Daodejing*, and I am not suggesting that every occurrence signifies "particularity." There is, however, one crucial occurrence in which it might, namely in the first line of chapter 42, which reads, "Dao Produces One." Chapter 42 has rightly been called "the crux of early Daoist ideology and cosmology."\(^{16}\) My reading is that it provides the cosmological framework within which "embracing the One" makes sense as a Daoist philosophical attitude.

The opening lines of the chapter have inspired a long, illustrious tradition of textual commentary. Such an enigmatic formulation makes commentary hard to avoid. The passage begins:

*Dao produces One (yi —); One produces two; two produces three; and three produces the ten-thousand things (wanwu 真物).*\(^{17}\)

The most influential commentaries on this passage were written in the third century of the Common Era. By that time, the decision had been made to read the sequence as a cosmogonic account. As Alan K. L. Chan observes, however, "there is no clear indication that the generation of things is to be taken in the past tense" in chapter 42, and it is only later in the tradition that “the ambiguity is clarified” by interpreting the passage "as referring to the coming to be of the constituent forces of the world.”\(^{18}\)

Understood as cosmogony, chapter 42 has inspired a variety of compelling accounts wherein "One," "two," and "three" represent various formative elements in the creation of the world. Norman Girardot, with his extensive command of the commentarial tradition, contributes the most recent of compelling accounts in this vein.\(^{19}\)

The archaeological finds at Guodian, however, now force us to reconsider the relationship between early Chinese cosmogony and chapter 42. Unearthed in 1993 was not only the earliest extent version of the *Daodejing* (one without a "chapter 42") but also, attached to it, the earliest cosmogonic account ever discovered in China, a text titled "Great One Produces the Waters" (*Taiyishengshui 太一生水*).\(^{20}\)

This document describes the emergence of the world-system in some detail: first the waters were produced, then heaven, earth, spirits, *yin* and *yang*, the four seasons (hot and cold, wet and dry), and finally the annual cycle. Considerable interest has been paid to the identity of the "Great One" (*taiyi 太一*), from which these elements are said to emerge and to which they are said to return. Henricks reports the consensus view: in pre-Qin philosophical texts, the phrase "Great One" appears to be another name for *dao*.\(^{21}\) He goes on to suggest that while the phrase "Great One" is absent from the *Daodejing*, the term "One" (*yi —") "[also] seems to be used to mean the Way (*dao*) in several chapters," citing chapter 42 as one example.\(^{22}\) There is an obvious tension in this analysis. If "Great One" and "One" both

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refer to dao and are semantically interchangeable even in the context of chapter 42, then the first line of that chapter can be glossed as “dao produces dao.” As I have already suggested, the term “One” can mean different things in different contexts according to how it is modified by different verbs. Simply put: where “Ones” are concerned, there is no “one-to-one” correspondence in meaning.

As it now stands, the relationship between the Taiyishengshui and chapter 42 is a matter of considerable debate and uncertainty. Some suggest that the latter text is related to the former, as either its recapitulation or its development. Some suggest that the two texts represent very different views. Sarah Allen maintains that the two accounts of world production might be linked in some general manner given the presence of the number “One” in each, but the two accounts, she observes, “cannot be reconciled as numerical sequences.” If we accept the consensus view that the “Great One” (taiyi) is a style-name for dao, then at issue in determining the relationship between these two formulations is the nature of the relationship between the “products” of two primary, generative equations. In both the Taiyishengshui and chapter 42 something is “produced” (sheng 生). If the two primordial sources of production overlap in meaning—and the consensus is that they do—then their respective primary products should also overlap in meaning. But in order to sustain this line of reasoning and answer Sarah Allan’s concern, we must drop the assumption that the “Ones” in these two equations correspond in meaning. If we refuse to drop this assumption, then we are indeed faced with an irreconcilable numerical sequence.

I propose a two-step solution to the problem, one that renders these two formulations consistent with each other. First, allow the “One” of “Great One” (taiyi) to mean something like the “One” of continuity; meanwhile, allow the “One” of chapter 42 to mean the “One” of particularity. Next, regard the Taiyishengshui as cosmogony and regard chapter 42 not as cosmogony but as cosmology. The difference then becomes that between a description of the origin of the world and a description of the world as it is. For any given world, one would expect such descriptions to be consistent but not to be identical.

The Taiyishengshui is clearly a cosmogony. According to its own account, “Great One” produced the waters (shuǐ 水), and the waters are said to have then assisted “Great One” in producing the heavens (tiān 天). Earth was cooperatively produced in kind, and so, too, the spirits, and so forth, in what is most easily envisioned as a “historical” sequence of events. Once a thing is born into this world, however, it immediately changes and grows. The text explains that the cooperative generation of the ten-thousand things continues beyond this initial sequence. The waters continue to flow, and the “Great One” becomes “concealed in the waters, moving through each temporal phase (shí 時), completing a cycle only to begin anew: making itself the mother of the ten-thousand things.” At this very moment, “Great One” continues to operate in the waters. Such a cosmogony naturally leads into the cosmological question: what are the features of this world, so produced and still ongoing?

Chapter 42 provides an answer. The never-ending “waters” (shuǐ) continue to introduce novelty and spontaneity into the world-system. Dao producing “One”
describes this feature of the world as we find it. "Dao exists because it produces," writes Isabelle Robinet. What it produces is the "One" (yi) that is unprecedented, different, and unique at every moment. According to Robinet, "the term dao does not connote any single thing precisely, but since it connotes the production of things, it connotes things other than itself." In other words, difference issues directly from dao, such that each "One" that is generated is distinct from all other Ones: thus, each "One" is a particular. To say that the "One" in this equation signifies particularity is another way of saying that dao represents the perpetual advent of novelty in the world-system. This makes good sense if dao is understood as a fundamentally process-oriented notion, as it is increasingly understood to be. Hall and Ames, citing the etymology of the term dao, argue that "the character [itself] is primarily gerundive, processional, and dynamic." Sarah Allen, citing the pervasive association of dao with water imagery, argues that dao behaves "like the water that comes from a deep spring, ceaselessly emerging from the depths of the earth." Hans-Georg Moeller, citing the wheel motif, argues that dao is best understood as "something that moves," literally a process of "going forward." Such "process" readings make little sense unless what is generated in the process is something perpetually other, new, and different. Within such frameworks, dao must be understood as producing the particular "One."

The Cosmology of Chapter 42

The remainder of chapter 42 can be understood as an account of how particulars manifest qualities in relation to other particulars, and how order itself emerges from such qualitative relations, forming patterns that enable the "ten-thousand things" to proliferate and be as they are. The notion of an ever-transforming "configurative energy" (qi) informs this cosmological vision, and it reads, in full:

Dao produces One (yi); One produces two; two produces three; and three produces the ten-thousand things (wanwu). The ten thousand things shoulder yin and carry yang; their configurative energies "blend" (chong 沖) to create harmonies (he 和).

Reminded by Chan of the "ambiguity" of tense in this passage, I join Moeller in resolving that ambiguity in a present-tense, "cosmological" reading. In his study of the Daodejing, Moeller writes:

What is envisioned [in chapter 42] is not really a "historical" process of linear causation or generation, not a diachronic development, but rather a process in which all elements combine into a synchronous order. Oneness, twoness, threeness, and multiplicity do not follow each other in a sequence, they rather go along with each other.

In Moeller's reading, "One," "two," and "three" are synchronically present. Similarly, in my reading, the "One" is the cosmological mark of the primordial "waters" that began to flow at the start and continue to run. As long as dao produces the particular "One," novelty and change are inescapable. One might say that, in the Daoist world, Heraclitus' dictum remains in effect: "On those stepping into the same rivers, other and other waters flow."
Be that as it may, one can step into the same river twice. Any cosmology that stalls at the level of particularity fails to do justice to the many forms of endurance that equally characterize our world. Thus, the generative equation must continue: "One produces two." In a process-driven world, every particular "One" gives way to another "One." Suddenly there are "two" and a relationship obtains. Let moments of time serve as the paradigmatic example. Each moment is utterly and irreducibly particular; yet, each acquires its qualitative characteristics in relation to other moments. Moments acquire the qualities of Earlier/Later, for instance. That a moment bears its own particularity and its relational quality simultaneously is the dual feature of all moments. Being in relation does not diminish the particularity of a moment—nothing can stamp that out. But neither does a focus on the particularity of a moment permit it to escape its relations—one is always in the presence of others. Particularity and relations are, in Moeller’s words, “elements” in a “synchronic order.”

My interpretation of the number “two” in chapter 42 conforms to the standard interpretation: “two” stands for the relational bipolarity of yin and yang. In my reading, however, yin and yang signify correlative qualities that can emerge only together and in relation among concrete particulars. Earlier/Later moments are one example; but every qualitative relationship—Light/Dark, Hard/Soft, Masculine/Feminine—exhibits the same correlative trait. There is not a quality in the world that does not entail its own compliment on the spectrum. Such spectrums do not, however, swing free of the particulars that manifest them; qualities are entirely “shouldered” and “carried” by particular things in concrete relationships. As chapter 42 says, the “ten-thousand things shoulder yin and carry yang.” According to the “historical” account in “Great One Produces the Waters,” yin and yang arose early on by virtue of the spiritual natures of heaven and earth. Hot/Cold and Wet/Dry are identified as the earliest specific relations that obtained. Chapter 42 speaks only of “twoness” and lacks the specificity of the “historical” cosmogony. In a cosmological account, a lack of specificity underscores the generality of the principle.

To end our account here would be to leave off at a discordant relativism: each thing takes as its quality what another is not, and there is no framework within which any quality might become a value in a larger whole. This is not how our world operates. The sequence must continue: “Two” produces “three.” At the level of “three,” order arrives. The tendency of natural objects to persist and to achieve equilibrium is an obvious general feature requiring treatment in any cosmology. Chinese thinkers developed a cluster of terms to describe the order of nature. Li 是 the most general term, and it eventually comes to mean “pattern,” “coherence,” or “principle.” Chapter 42 uses the term “harmony” (he 和). Suggested here is that fluid-like “energies” (qi 氣) “blend” and “collide” (chong 撞), and, as they do, they have the tendency to coalesce into pockets of order resembling steady-state systems. Such “harmonies” mark temporary suspensions of flux without entailing the negation of novelty. Novelty persists, but now it manifests itself in determinate, qualitative forms that larger harmonies promote and proliferate. Let the four seasons represent the paradigmatic example of a “harmonious” equilibrium in nature. The four seasons
proceed with regularity; major transformations are normally slow, but they do occur. Simultaneous with and sponsored by such regular cycles are the myriad qualities that phase in and out within the system. At a still more concrete level, the novel particulars that bear these qualities multiply beyond reckoning. As Confucius makes clear, "harmony" is not about achieving uniformity (he'erbutong 和而不同).37 "Harmony" is instead about sustaining an ordered richness; it is the achievement of an order that promotes the optimal level of diversity and difference within itself. In this way, "three" produces the "ten thousand things."

As a general cosmology, the conditions described here are operative on both the macro and the micro levels. All things have a "One," "two," and "three" about them. The most important feature of this cosmology, for our purposes, is its emergent notion of order. While order is a temporary suspension of flux, that suspension actually grows out of the qualitative relations made possible by the influx of difference. While, at some level, the presence of order is completely unfathomable,38 the fact that it cycles into the world-system makes some sense in light of our present cosmogony and cosmology. While the "Great One" (taiyi) is the "One" of continuity, the "One" of particularity is born in sheer discontinuity, something Daoists refer to as "spontaneity" (ziran 自然). The fact that the spontaneous "One" will invariably "shoulder" relational qualities (two) and "blend" into larger orders (three) is guaranteed by the primordial "One" of continuity (taiyi). As continuity itself, the "Great One" sponsors all order but is not itself an order. As another name for dao, it represents what David Hall refers to as the "sum of all orders" or simply "Chaos."39 Against such a background, every discontinuity must produce both relation (two) and order (three).

At a similar juncture in reasoning, Charles Sanders Peirce observed the following:

I draw a chalk line on the board. This discontinuity is one of those brute acts by which alone the original vagueness makes a step towards definiteness. There is a certain amount of continuity in this line. Where did this continuity come from? It is nothing but the original continuity of the blackboard which makes everything upon it continuous.40

The continuity manifest in the chalk line begins with a "step toward definiteness," a "brute act" of becoming self-so (ziran 自然). This spontaneous breach of continuity is the "One" of particularity standing forth (daoshengyi 道生一). As soon as this discontinuity occurs, relations obtain between the line and the board (two). Thus, in contrast with the board, the finite continuity of the line takes on some degree of order (three). Among the conditions for the possibility of this order is the originally vague continuity of the board itself, which can be thought of as the "Great One" (taiyi). The actual emergence of the chalk line itself, however, traces back to the influx of novelty.41

In the limited space here, my purpose is merely to sketch out a cosmological vision in which "embracing the One" (baoyi 抱一) can be meaningfully distinguished from a competing philosophical attitude, that of "holding to the One" (zhiyi 執一). The account given is admittedly brief, but perhaps sufficient for this purpose. The vi-
sion that I have in mind is really quite simple; its salient points are summarized in any classic “mountains and waters” (shanshui 山水) painting in the Northern Song style. The “Great One” produces the waters, and our classic painting features such waters in a swiftly moving river that cuts sheer through the heart of the composition. Tracing the origin of this river leads us back to the misty emptiness, or to nowhere. Our eyes travel from place to place. There are myriad things to see: rocks and pools; trees and leaves; cliffs and valleys; and plays of Light/Dark, Soft/Hard, Above/Below, all without a vanishing-point perspective. Above, there are imposing mountains: emblems of persistence and order, seemingly permanent if not for the fact that, in the encroaching distance, they are fading into the mist—the same mist that shrouds the headwaters of the river.

Consider the painting in its totality. It is emblematic of our world-system: an emergent order of concrete “particulars” (One), “relations” (two), and “harmonies” (three), woven together against an indeterminate background. The “Great One” of continuity flows throughout: novelty continues, relationships change, and patterns go through their cycles and begin again. The overall “coherence” (li 理) of the work seems inexplicable: its perspectives are multiple, they shift before our eyes, and yet the work sustains itself as an aesthetic whole. How does one best appreciate this artwork, this world? Is it our impulse to cherish each particular focal point, allowing our eyes to travel freely from point to point? Or do we grow agitated by the lack of uniformity, desiring to eliminate every disparity and force all constituent elements into a single, unified perspective? Forcing uniformity of perspective on a Chinese landscape painting would clearly violate its uniqueness and uncanny beauty. The quality of our encounter with such an artwork does not result from any single order that we, or the artist, impose. As the characters “Swift” and “Sudden” learn in Zhuangzi’s famous parable, when one privileges a single perspective and imposes that perspective on “Chaos” (hundun 混沌), one kills a friend. The death of this friend marks the demise of a primordial generosity, one that yields to multiple orders and allows them to emerge as they will.

Again, this study aims to reconstruct the philosophical context in which two basic impulses are recognized as competing in early China. Each impulse prioritizes a different notion of the “One” (yi —). The first is the Legalist-minded impulse to seize on a “unity” (yi —) that can be formulated and applied to particulars ahead of their own self-organization. In Zhuangzi’s cautionary tale, “Swift” and “Sudden” learn what can happen when such an attitude is hastily assumed and acted upon. The contrary, Daoist-minded impulse is to defer to the novel “particulars” (yi —) that contribute to the advent of freely emergent orders. Chapter 42 of the Daodejing can be read as underwriting the latter, Daoist-minded impulse.

The Huang-Lao tradition, insofar as it adopts a more Legalist-minded attitude toward the “One,” must repudiate the Daoist cosmology of chapter 42. This is done in the very first line of the Mawangdui “Cannon Law” (Jingfa 聲法) when the text declares: “Dao produces law” (Daoshengfa 道生法). In this keynote statement, the particular “One” of Daoism is eclipsed and the notion of law is established as primary. That this “law” (fa 法) entails the “One” of a predetermined order and “uni-
"Embracing the One" as a Daoist Attitude

Baoyi 抱一 appears only twice in the received Daodejing: once in chapter 22 and once in chapter 10. The latter begins with a question: "Nourishing the soul and 'embracing the One,' can you not depart from these?" This line is obviously pertinent to our study. There is, however, a long-standing problem in translating chapter 10, and philological justification is required for the translation above. All extant versions of the chapter begin with the topical phrase, zaiyingpobaoyi 戴營魄抱一. The most common strategy is to read zai 戴 as a verb and thus render the topic of the sentence something like "In bringing your spiritual and bodily souls to embrace the One." Some scholars, appealing to the fact that lines 2–6 of the same chapter each begin with four-character phrases, emend the line, reading zai as an exclamatory particle that belongs at the end of the preceding chapter. This shortens the line and renders it stylistically consistent with the lines that follow. Henricks considers the lack of punctuation in the Mawangdui version as further warrant for shortening the phrase and reading ying 营 rather than zai as the verb. Thus, Henricks begins his translation of chapter 10 with the co-topical phrase, "nourishing the soul and embracing the One."

There is a lot at stake in this decision. The emended line much better represents chapter 10 as a source text for understanding the distinct meaning of "embracing the One" (baoyi) in philosophical Daoism. Translations that take the alternate route, taking zai as the verb, tend to regard baoyi as merely the completion of the topical phrase. The subsequent comment (nengwulihu 能無離乎) is then made upon a quite different topic, one that has only to do with "uniting" body and spirit. The net effect reads: "In carrying about your more spiritual and more physical aspects and embracing their oneness, are you able to keep them from separating?" Or, alternately: "In keeping the spirit and the vital soul together, are you able to maintain their perfect harmony?" To follow Henricks in reinstating baoyi as co-topical amounts to saying that "embracing the One" is itself something that the Daodejing tells us not to
“depart from.” I follow Henricks in emending the line. For in addition to rendering the passage more stylistically consistent, the emended line corresponds better with what is likely its own paraphrase in the Outer Chapters of the Zhuangzi. There, the character Laozi asks, “Can you ‘embrace the One’ (baoyi) and keep from letting it slip away (shi 失)?”^5 Restored as topical in the first line, the rest of chapter 10 can be read as a gloss on what this memorable phrase from the Daodejing means.^52

With the first line amended, the Wang Bi version of chapter 10 reads:

Nourishing the soul and “embracing the One,”
can you not depart from these?
Concentrating the qi 氣 and making it pliant,
can you be like an infant?
Cleansing and purifying the profound mirror,
can you be without blemish (wuci 無疵)?
Caring for the people and ordering the state,
can you be without knowledge (wuzhi 無知)?
Opening and closing the gates of tian 天,
can you play the part of the female (weici 為雌)?
Apprehending things clearly in all directions,
can you be without coercive action (wuwei 無為)?

Produce things (shengzhi 生之); nurture them.
Produce, but do not possess.
Act, but do not be presumptuous (shi 誠).
Enable growth, but do not dictate (changerbuzai 長而不宰).
This is called profound efficacy (de 德).^53

In this chapter, “embracing the One” (baoyi) is located within a broad cluster of themes associated with early Daoist thought: themes relating to cosmology, spirituality, ethics, politics, and self-cultivation. The chapter is commonly read, however, as primarily relating to the more “mystical” components of early Daoism, specifically the practice of breathing meditation. Roth, for whom chapter 10 is “probably the most important evidence for breathing meditation in the [Daodejing],” makes a very compelling case for this based on numerous parallels between chapter 10 and other texts that focus explicitly on such practices.^54 Michael LaFargue, who regards chapter 10 as “the most detailed instruction for meditation in the Daodejing,” even suggests that the passage’s ethical and political instruction were “not an original part of the meditation instruction, but [rather] a connective addition” made at a later date.^55 I do not deny that chapter 10 is related to traditions of breathing meditation, as these commentators maintain. I am, however, uneasy with any suggestion that we are getting at the “original” meaning of the chapter by pursuing this interpretation. My argument thus far leads me to conclude that in the “manuscript culture” of early China, texts were mobilized and modified in several ways in various contexts depending on who was handling them at the time. There is no “original” meaning to be recovered, only these various contexts.

The specific context in which I am reading chapter 10 is that in which the dis-
tinction between “embracing the One” (baoyi) and “holding to the One” (zhiyi) signifies a serious philosophical difference. Roth is probably right that in the context of meditative practice these two phrases “imply the same thing” and that baoyi means something like “retaining a sense of the unity achieved in the introvertive mystical experience of merging with the Way…” My understanding of the phrase however, in the philosophical context reconstructed here, is completely different from Roth’s. But this is as it should be. As Arthur Waley points out:

The phrase baoyi 抱一 or zhiyi 執一 (“holding to the Unity”) has a curious history, very typical of the way in which the various schools, while retaining the same time-hallowed watchwords, adapted them to their own needs.

At some juncture, these two phrases were used to signify two very different philosophical approaches: one more “Daoist” and the other more “Legalist” in nature. I am reading chapter 10 exclusively in this context.

Following this reading, chapter 10 showcases “embracing the One” (baoyi) as an ideal habit or attitude that involves a kind of attentiveness to particularity. Its moral and attitudinal prescriptions correspond closely to the cosmology of chapter 42. Recall that in this cosmology, dao produces the “One” of particularity (daoshengyi 道生一), allows this “One” to enter into relations (“One produces two”), and enables these relations to grow freely into systems of ordered richness (“Two produces three”). So how does the Daoist coordinate her actions with such a dao? Chapter 10 explains: she joins in the “production” (sheng 生) of things, but without taking ownership of them; she nourishes the growth of things, but without dictating their development. This is to cherish and defer to the irreducible particularity of things: to “embrace the One” (baoyi). The idea, according to chapter 10, is to approach the world at a restored level of infancy, much like the toddler: with spontaneity, always present, and without pretense or prejudice. To “embrace the One” is to take things as they come, to keep one’s “mirror” free of second-order expectations. The wu 無 forms in chapter 10 underscore the close connection between “embracing the One” and maintaining a generally “non-coercive” (wuwei 無為) attitude in all of one’s affairs: political, practical, intellectual, spiritual, and moral.

As a specifically moral ideal, “embracing the One” involves suspending the kind of premeditated moral theorizing that would stipulate the parameters of what constitutes a “good” order prior to any encounter with the ever-unique circumstances in which moral judgments are made. Both “embracing the One” and wuwei entail remaining open to the potential of situations to resolve themselves in ways that are unanticipated and peculiar to themselves. A saying in the Shijing perfectly encapsulates this moral attitude:

Efficacy (de 德) has no constant (chang 常) model; it is oriented toward what is good (shan 善). What is good has no constant orientation; it accords with what is adequate in a particular instance (xieyukei 協於克一). The contrary, Legalist-minded attitude is one that upholds (zhi 執) constant rules and standards (fa 法) in the place of such openness to particulars. From the Daoist per-

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spective, doing so is to risk overlooking the potential that is always at play in an essentially process-driven world. For the Daoist, “embracing the One” means becoming humble to the fact that, given the steady emergence of novelty into the world-system (daoshengyi 逍生一), things will always outrun our ability to completely determine them. The Daoist is one who remains open and responsive to the subtle changes that make every moment unprecedented. Underwriting this Daoist-minded attitude is an ancient cosmogony and an elegant, three-tiered cosmology.

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, this is an exciting time to read the Daodejing. It is thrilling to think that documents only recently unearthed might help us to better understand this enigmatic text. I recognize that my interpretation diverges in significant ways from the “standard” interpretation, particularly of chapter 42. We need, however, to be prepared to entertain alternative readings in light of new evidence. Of course my interpretation is speculative and qualified; every interpretation must be. In fact, reading the Daodejing is a perfect object lesson in the hazards of “holding to the One” (zhiyi). Since there has never been a single reading of the text, to “hold to” a single reading would be to “lose” (shi 失) the richness of its varied meanings. In contemporary scholarship, all that we should hope to accomplish with any degree of accuracy is the recovery of contexts in which this mercurial “text” has been read over the centuries. My attempt here is to reconstruct one such context in the Warring States period. If this context has indeed been adequately reconstructed, then there are some far-reaching implications to consider.

Above all, a reading of the Daodejing that foregrounds its process cosmology and stresses its antithesis to Legalist-minded tendencies tends to align it philosophically with the early Confucian tradition. One can cite Mencius, for instance, in support of the “negative” reading of the phrase “holding to the One” (zhiyi). This phrase relates his special disdain for the Mohists and for all such moral theorists who, in his words, “cripple dao by holding to the One (zhiyi 執一).”59 Also, in articulating the features of “harmony” and “particularity” in chapter 42, one can cite Confucius in support of the notion that “harmony” is about ordered richness and not about preordained uniformity (he'erbutong 和而不同).60 These are hardly incidental citations; they are philosophical sentiments that represent the heart of early Confucianism. They express what Confucius and Mencius stood for in relation to the “Legalist-minded” tendencies in their midst.

Might it be, then, that an early Confucian circle could read some version of the Daodejing, as reconstructed here, approvingly, and for philosophical inspiration? The idea that the Daodejing could ever be “Confucian-friendly” seemed unthinkable prior to the Guodian finds in 1993. Perhaps the most startling set of variants in the Guodian version of the Daodejing (the Guodian Laozi) are those in chapter 19, variants that effectively neutralize the anti-Confucian sentiment from a chapter which, in the Wang Bi version, is explicitly anti-Confucian.61 So, today we have a more Confucian-congenial version of an early Daodejing recovered from what is clearly
a Confucian library. Given the fluidity of the "manuscript culture" in early China, we will never know if "chapter 19" was originally Confucian-friendly or not. Still, the idea that an early Confucian might adopt an attitude similar to those described as "Daoist" here makes philosophical sense. Perhaps as Legalist-minded tendencies crept into Confucianism in the later Warring States period, the Daodejing was re-composed as an anti Confucian text in response. This, of course, is pure speculation. I like to imagine that more evidence lies buried in the ground somewhere.

Notes

3 – Mencius 7A.26.
4 – Daodejing 29, 64.
9 – Mencius 7A.26.
11 – Peerenboom, Law and Morality in Ancient China, pp. 35–36.
13 – Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China*, p. 34; italics mine.

14 – Ibid., p. 196.


17 – *Daodejing 42.*

18 – Alan K. L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 125. This is an exemplary study of two of the most influential commentaries on the *Daodejing,* also providing an account of some of the hermeneutical issues involved in interpreting the text (see pp. 1–13).


21 – Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching,* p. 124. The “philosophical” context would be distinct from other contexts in which the phrase *taiyi* 太一是 has currency. There is evidence, for instance, that this phrase might also refer to a god with a red face, red legs, antlers, wings, and a beak. This need not concern us here.

22 – Ibid.


26 – Ibid., p. 133; italics mine.

27 – Hall and Ames, *Dao De Jing*, p. 57.


30 – *Daodejing* 42.


32 – Robert C. Neville develops a systematic cosmology that captures, among other things, the primacy and synchronicity of this dual feature of all determinate things. What Neville describes as “essential” and “conditional” features corresponds in certain ways to the notions of “particularity” and “qualitative relations” as used here. Neville writes:

> Conditional features are those a thing has by virtue of which it relates to other things. . . . Essential features are those a thing has unique to itself by virtue of which it orders the conditional features in a definite way defining its identity. Without conditional features the thing would not be determinate with reference to anything else. . . . Without essential features a thing would be a mere function of the other things to which it is conditionally related. . . . In fact, if there were no essential features there could be no conditional features, since there would be no focal point for the other things to condition or be conditioned by. Therefore, there must be both essential and conditional features harmonized together for there to be either essential or conditional features. (Robert C. Neville, “Sketch of a System,” in Robert C. Neville, ed., *New Essays in Metaphysics* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987], p. 256)

33 – These pairs, of course, are quite similar to those present in pre-Socratic speculations and, given our contemporary understanding of the origin of the universe, might still be imagined to be the first binary relations to obtain in a universe whose matter, the moment it expanded, began to cool.

34 – Perhaps such meanings accrue as *li 理* comes to do more of the work that the term *logos* does in the thought of Heraclitus. In a world prone to the perpetual influx of novelty, something must denote the fact that things do not simply fly apart. Little systematic treatment of *li* is evident in the Chinese tradition before the Han dynasty. The term becomes central in Neo-Confucian and Chinese Buddhist thought. For a discussion of the development of the term, see A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992), pp. 8–22.

35 – One classic example of a steady-state system is the unplugged bathtub. As water gushes into the unplugged tub, eventually and under the right conditions a point of equilibrium is reached and the water level remains constant. At this “steady-state” point, “other and other” waters flow, but one can still step into the “same” bath twice.
36 – The feature of “three” might be understood in terms of the “One” (yi —) of something like “equilibrium.” When the “One” of equilibrium is attained, the relational qualities “shouldered” by the particular “One” carry over and become definitive of the system itself. As chapter 39 of the Daodejing says, there are many things that have “attained the One of equilibrium” (deyi 得—): the heavens (tian 天) “attained the One of equilibrium” and became clear; earth (di 地) “attained the One of equilibrium” and became settled; the spirits (shen 神) “attained the One of equilibrium” and became charged with powers. The sequence continues, but note that the first three “attainments of equilibrium” match the initial generative sequence of the Taiyishengshui.

37 – Analects 13.23.

38 – In the Daodejing, the primordial “mother” is forever concealed in veils of mystery, and rightly so. As David Hume says, progress can be measured by our understanding of the law-like regularities before us, but “as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery” (David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion [London: Penguin Books, 1990], p. 145 n. 48).


41 – While the nature of order is here described, its arrival remains at bottom unfathomable. For the Daoist, actual orders are “manifest” and can be “named.” The potential for order itself, however, remains “hidden” and “nameless,” though we observe that it is there. As the opening chapter of the Daodejing suggests, “these two flow from the same source, though differently named; and both are called mysteries” (see note 38 above).

42 – It was not uncommon for painters during the European Renaissance to pencil in geometrical ratios before the brush even hit the canvas. This was to ensure for the viewer a single-point perspective. Some Chinese painters took to composing their landscapes horizontally on a long scroll, a medium that would literally recede in the process of viewing the work. This rendered a single-point perspective impossible to secure. I mention these only as examples.


45 – Yates, Five Lost Classics, pp. 80–81; translation mine.


49 – Hall and Ames, *Dao De Jing*, p. 90; italics mine. Hall and Ames alert readers to the connection between chapter 10 and other chapters that “also discuss ‘grasping’ and ‘embracing oneness’” (see p. 206 n. 18).


52 – Note that a similar phrase appears in the “Inner Training” as reconstructed by Roth: “Hold to the One and do not let it slip away” (zhiyibushi 執一不失) (Roth, *Original Tao*, p. 63). Roth has good reason to equate baoyi and zhiyi in the context of early meditative traditions. As argued below, however, equivalence in one context will not mean equivalence in every context.

53 – *Daodejing* 10. This recension is based on both the *receptus* version and Wang Bi’s commentary. See Rudolf G. Wagner, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi’s Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 146–153. Amended here is the line “can you play the part of the female,” which is negative (wu 無) in the *receptus* version, but interpreted as positive in Wang Bi’s commentary as well as in the Mawangdui. The Mawangdui version of chapter 10 differs grammatically from the Wang Bi in other respects: it replaces all the wu forms with alternate negatives. It also differs substantively: it omits the phrase “Act, but do not be presumptuous.” The significance of these variants, if any, is unclear to me.


59 – *Mencius* 7A:26

60 – *Analects* 13.23.
