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# Interlocking parallel style: Laozi and Wang Bi

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The purpose of this paper is to show that most of the *zhang* (chapters, paragraphs) of the *Laozi* and most of the writing of his best-known commentator Wang Bi are written in 'interlocking parallel style'. A conscious application of the rules of this stylistic pattern, which I will try to extract from the two texts mentioned, will help to solve a number of riddles both texts have offered to translators and scholars.

1. The stability of the transmitted *Laozi* text has in the main been confirmed by the two manuscripts which have been unearthed in Changsha, Ma Wang-dui No. 3.<sup>1</sup> The tomb there is dated and from the taboo-writing (帛 *bang* being changed into 國 *guo* in Ms 2 to account for the taboo on Liu Bang's name) it can be safely inferred that MS 1 was written between 206 and 195 and MS 2 between 194 and 180. The only major change in both texts is the inversion of parts 1 and 2 (in some later texts differentiated as *Dao-jing* and *De-jing*)<sup>2</sup> and the inversion of a number of *zhang*

- 1 The text has been edited by the compilation group for the silk texts from the Ma Wang-dui tomb in *Wen wu* 文物, Peking, 1974. 11, p. 8–20 under the title *Ma Wang-dui Han-mu chutu «Laozi» shiwen* 馬王堆漢墓出土老子和釋文. These two texts have contributed strongly to a lively discussion in Chinese scholarly journals concerning the role of Daoism in early Han. Cf. as an example Theoretical study group of workers from the Central Laboratory of the Shanghai Steel factory No. 2 and Yan Feng 延風: *Hanfei dui «Laozi» sixiang di pipangaizao* 韓非對老子思想的批判改造 (The critical transformation of the ideas of Laozi by Hanfei) *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 1975. 3 p. 76ff.; Kang Li 康立, «*Shi da jing» di sixiang he shidai* 十大經的思想和時代 *Lishi yanjiu* 1975. 3 S. 81ff. (Ideas and time of the *Shi da jing*). Lan Si 蘭思, *Daojia yu xi Han Ru Fa douzheng* 道家與西漢儒法斗争 (The Daoists and the struggle between Confucianism and Legalism in the Western Han) *Lishi Yanjiu* 1975. 3 p. 86f.; Gao Heng 高亨 and Dong Zhi'an 董治安 «*Shi da jing» chu lun* 十大經初論 (Introduction to the *Shida jing*) *Lishi yanjiu* 1975. 1 p. 89f.; Kang Li and Wei Jin 康立, 卫今 *Fajia luxian he Huang-Lao sixiang, du boshu «Jing fa»* 法家路線和黃老思想, 讀帛書《經法》 (The legalist line and the Huang-lao ideology – on the *Jingfa* on silk) *Hongqi* 1975. 7.
- 2 This tradition started with Yan Zun 嚴尊, the teacher of Yang Xiong 揚雄, in his *Tao-dejing zhigui* 道德經指歸, Daozang ed., which however is probably spurious.

within each part.<sup>3</sup> Many of the textual differences of these two MS compared to the *textus receptus* of the He-shang gong tradition, which dominates most editions, are already recorded in the so-called «old manuscript» edited by Fu Yi/傅奕 of the Tang-dynasty. The argument that the *Laozi* was somehow dismembered and put together again by «later» people ignorant of its content is severely shaken by this important find.<sup>4</sup>

In my opinion however this theory is the product of a deeply felt uncertainty expressed by many scholars as to the content of the individual *zhang* of the *Laozi*. Some argue that the *Laozi* is a 'mystical' text and that more than ordinary understanding is required to grasp its meaning.<sup>5</sup> Others argue that the text consists of proverbs and similar popular sayings glued together by more or less incidental «hence» and «therefore» or an occasional conclusion; this theory has recently been reargued by Kimura Eiichi and D.C. Lao in their translations.<sup>6</sup>

None of the authors however denies some general coherence of the text as a whole. This holds true as well for the studies made recently in China concerning the position of the *Laozi* and the *Laozi* tradition in the framework of the struggle between Confucianism and Legalism.<sup>7</sup> It seems to me accordingly that there is a contradiction between the general impression that the text as a whole is somehow ideologically more or less coherent and the feeling that there are many obstacles in the way of understanding the content of the individual *zhang*. The attempts to rearrange the text (be it according to the theory of the bamboo-sticks fallen apart and reas-

3 MS 1 has the sequence 38, 39, 41, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45–66, 80, 81, 67–79, 1–21, 24, 22, 23, 25–37, MS 2 has the sequence 38, 39, 41, 40, 42 etc. like MS 1. Cf. «*Laozi*» *shiwén*, op. cit.

4 I have dealt with the transmission of the *Laozi* text of Wang Bi in an unpublished paper «Zur Philologie des *Laozi* Kommentars».

5 This theory is especially prevalent among many amateur translators of the *Laozi*.

6 D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, Baltimore 1963, p. 14: «In my view not only is the Lao-tzu an anthology but even individual chapters are made up of shorter passages whose connection with one another is at best tenuous.» On p. 15 he writes: «Since we cannot expect a high degree of cohesion in the thought, the most sensible way of giving an account of it (i.e. the *Lao tzu*) is to deal with the various key concepts, and to relate them wherever possible, but also to point out inconsistencies when these are obstinately irreconcilable.» L. Hurvitz gives in *Monumenta Serica* XX. 1961, 326ff. an account of the related theories of Kimura Eiichi, cf. Kimura Eiichi, *A new study of Lao-tzu*, in: *Philosophical Studies of Japan*, I. 1959 p. 93f.

7 The modern Chinese authors in my view justly see the text as a whole, as a more or less coherent philosophical work and not as an accumulation of proverbs. This is shown by the fact that they quote various passages from the text without explicit justification of their coherence.

sembled in the wrong order or according to the proverb-theory) are therefore mainly directed towards the *zhang*. The concrete attempts to rearrange the text however have not proven successful and Kimura Eiichi and Mr. Lao are forced for reasons of rhyme to leave passages together where their translation cannot provide much meaning; I will try to document this in the course of this study with some examples. The analysis turns into a 'quodlibet' if D.C. Lao explicitly says that «individual chapters are usually made up of shorter passages whose connection with one another is at best tenuous»<sup>8</sup> and states: «If the reader can see a connection between parts that I have separated, he can simply ignore my section markings.»<sup>9</sup>

2. Large sections of the Chinese tradition of the *Laozi* have in my opinion analyzed this text not as an «anthology»<sup>10</sup> of proverbs, but as a text written according to a very common stylistic pattern – interlocking parallel style – which was copied in the writings of many of the eager students of the text, but may be found as well in the *Li ji*<sup>11</sup> as in poetry and other texts. The chief protagonist of this line of argument is – as far as the transmitted texts show – Wang Bi (226–249); Waley and many other scholars in the field have regarded the Chinese commentaries as quarries from which to pick an occasional note about a tricky passage but have maintained that they are completely useless for scholarly research on the original text. A. Waley writes: «All the commentaries, from Wang Pi's onwards down to the 18th century, are «scriptural»; that is to say that each commentator reinterprets the text according to his own particular tenets without any intention or desire to discover what it meant originally. From my point of view, they are therefore useless.»<sup>12</sup> This rather sweeping statement in my opinion blocks the way for a detailed analysis of the contribution these commentaries may make. Indeed Wang Bi and the other commentaries tried to interpret the text according to the political and ideological struggle they were in, but just in order to increase the argumentative weight of their own position they were forced to invoke the authority of the «ancients» and therefore to a certain extent had to prove the compatibility of their own views with that of the «ancients» through their commentary. If these commentaries were just random notes jotted down

8 Cf. D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 14.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

10 This theory today is maintained by Mssrs. D.C. Lau, Kimura Eiichi, G. Debon and others.

11 See p. 35ff.

12 A. Waley, *The Way and its Power*, New York 1958, p. 129.



here and there they ended up in oblivion – and had no effect. At the time of Wang Bi there was an intensive struggle between various political trends as to who could justly inherit the authority imparted by this text, and the commentaries were therefore closely scrutinized and criticized. The fact that Wang Bi's commentary remained influential throughout the ages is of course mainly due to the political position he represented, but the fact that he presented it in a very close interpretation of the *Laozi* added greatly to its authority. My own work was mainly concerned with the political philosophy of Wang Bi. One of the first obstacles to overcome was the structure of his writing and argument, the second, that of the text(s) he was commenting upon. In the presentation of the argument I will not follow the development of my own research. I do think that the structural understanding of the *zhang* represented by Wang Bi is sound and I will therefore present it not as some weird ideas of one Chinese commentary, but as a fruitful scholarly contribution to the understanding of the *Laozi* (and Wang Bi's own writings which have been equally misunderstood.)

3. There are several levels of coherence of a text, depending on the questions it is exposed to. It may be coherent within the framework of the political and ideological discussion of a given time, coherent in the framework of the other works of the same author, coherent in that the text as a whole presents a comprehensible and more or less logical ensemble. Finally there is the question whether the word for word, sentence for sentence argumentation within a given *zhang* of the *Laozi* is coherent – and it is here that most problems crop up. My argument will relate only to this type of coherence. The text of the *Laozi* is divided into *zhang*; in the old MS there is no spacing or visible limit between the *zhang* so that their length is determined by content and some markers such as particles. The relative stability of the *zhang* can be seen from the fact that all extant editions divide them at the same point (or more or less at the same point) and that the oldest extant MSS exchange various *zhang* within one of the two parts of the text – but exchange them in exactly the length they have in the extant editions. We have accordingly relatively stable text-units called *zhang*. Their structure must now be analyzed.

4. There are a number of passages with open interlocking parallel style in the *Laozi*. In *zhang* 64 it says:<sup>13</sup>

13 I will use the *Guyi congshu* 古逸叢書 edition with the title *Ji Tangzi laozi daodejing zhu* 集唐字老子道經注 as a basis for the *Laozi* and Wang Bi; I shall however draw

為者敗之

執者失之

是以聖人無為故無敗

無執故無失

A translation may run:

- 1 He who acts on it, destroys it;
- 2 He who retains it, loses it.
- 3 Therefore the sage is without action and therefore does not destroy
- 4 is without retention and therefore does not lose.

The words *wei* 為 and *bai* 敗 from phrase 1 are explicitly taken up in phrase 3; the words *zhi* 執 and *shi* 失 from phrase 2 are taken up again in phrase 4. Phrases 1–4 therefore consist of two couples of phrases 1/3 and 2/4, the words «therefore the sage» refer to both phrases following it. The text consists of two interlocked strains:

- a He who acts upon it, destroys it; therefore the sage is without action and therefore does not destroy
- b He who retains it, loses it; therefore the sage is without retention and therefore does not lose.

Both strains are not just forced together in this construction, but are opposites. Action and destruction are mainly related to societal activity (ruling) while the b strain is mainly related to the possession of wealth. The same antonymic pair appears in formulas containing the notions of «fame» and «wealth» abounding in the other *zhang* of the text. This complicated question cannot be dealt with here, but it should be stated that there is as a rule an antonymic relationship between the contents of a and b, they together forming a whole in the manner of Heaven and Earth or *Yin* and *Yang*. The literary structure of the text however stresses a different point. The parallelisms do not connect phrase 1 with 3 and 2 with 4, i.e. the phrases belonging together from the point of view of content. They exist between phrase 1/2 on the one hand and 3/4 on the other. The parallel phrases have the same structure on a different level. He who «acts on it» would normally have some achievement in the end, but he «des-

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on all available historical and critical material to check the readings of both text and commentary. In this section however I shall not go into details of philology if the main structure of the text is not touched by it, in order not to confuse the central argument.

troys»; he who retains would normally have much in his possession, but he «loses». The same structure is to be found in two opposite realms of being, and this is expressed in the form of parallelism. Section I of the passage quoted here gives the general rule, section II (comprising phrase 3 and 4) gives its application by the «sage».

This short passage certainly does not offer many problems in terms of translation. It was selected here for detailed presentation, because some key factors of interlocking parallel style are distinctly visible in it, namely, the passage consists of two interlocked complete utterances (1/3 and 2/4) their subjects are opposite to each other and together form a whole. This is the vertical structure of the text. Its horizontal structure is marked by two sets of parallelism 1/2 vs. 3/4 pointing at the identical structure of the opposite phenomena dealt with in a resp. b.

After this pedantic analysis I present a structural notation which brings out the profile of this passage:

- |    |                                                      |                                                      |
|----|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| I  | 1a He who acts on it destroys it                     | 2b He who retains it, loses it.                      |
| II | (c) Therefore the sage                               |                                                      |
|    | 3a is without action and therefore does not destroy. | 4b is without retention and therefore does not lose. |

The phrases belonging together – although separated – are visible in their vertical coordination, the phrases containing the parallelism in their horizontal coordination. The macro-structure of this passage is indicated by I and II. The element (c) represents a part common to both utterances (3)a and (4)b. Here it is only a means of economizing, in the developed form of interlocking parallel style there are definite phrases summarizing a and b without being integrated into the parallelism. This may be shown more clearly in a section of *zhang* 27, where again there is open interlocking parallel style with explicit references.

故善人者不善人之師  
 不善人者善人之資  
 不貴其師  
 不愛其資  
 雖智大迷

A first translation may run according to Wang Bi's commentary:

- 1 If therefore – given the fact that the good ones are the teachers of the bad,
- 2 and the bad are taken by the good ones as their material –
- 3 (the bad) don't honour their teachers
- 4 and (the good ones) don't love their material
- 5 there will be, even if there is knowledge, great mistakes.

資 *zi* in phrase 2 is defined by Wang as *qu* 取, bearing some resemblance to his commentary to *zhang* 49.4; the same definition is given by Xuan-zong in *Xiaojing* 孝經 5.1. Phrase 5 is interpreted by Wang Bi: «Even if there is knowledge, it will go astray if it is applied in its own right and not by basing itself upon things. Therefore it says 'Even if there is knowledge, there will be great mistakes'.» The focus in these examples however is *not* on the translation, but on the structure. My translation attempts to reconstruct Wang Bi's reading.

Phrase 3 in the passage selected here takes up the word *shih* (teacher) explicitly from phrase 1, and phrase 4 takes up the term *zi* from phrase 2. Two texts are interlocked, 1/3 and 2/4. This has serious consequences, namely a change of subject in the two parallel phrases 3/4, the first one having the good ones as subject, the second the not good ones. It can be seen from this example that a conscious application of the concept of parallel style may change the understanding of the text considerably. The structure of the first phrases 1–4 closely resembles that of the preceding passage from *zhang* 27, the parallelism showing the parallel structures in the utterances 1/2 viz. 3/4. Phrase 5 is without parallel. It obviously refers to both a and b as much as did the «therefore the sage», but it is different in that it expresses a general conclusion concerning both a and b and is not just an instrument of textual economizing. The phrases of the c-type frequently have the function to express an overall conclusion which is based on the identical structure of two divergent subjects. In the same structural writing proposed above, the passage reads:

- |    |                                                                                      |                                                     |                                                                  |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I  | If therefore –<br>1a given the fact that the good men are the<br>teachers of the bad | 2b                                                  | and the bad are taken by the good<br>men as their material –     |
| II | 3a (the bad) do not honour their teachers                                            | 4b (and the good men) do not love<br>their material | 5c there will be, even if there is knowledge,<br>great mistakes. |

In purely numerical writing the structure reads

I	1a	2b
II	3a	4b
	5c	

Another example may be quoted from *zhang* 70:

吾言甚易知  
 甚易行  
 而人莫之能知  
 莫之能行  
 言有宗  
 事有君  
 夫唯無知是从我知

A translation may read:

- 1 My words are (still) very easy to understand
- 2 and very easy to enact.
- 3 (However) nobody is able to understand
- 4 and nobody is able to enact them.
- 5 (My) words (still) have the principle
- 6 (my) actions (still) have the guide.
- 7 Therefore only he who is without knowledge is unable to understand me

Phrase 3 takes up with *zhi* 知 the same term from phrase 1, phrase 4 takes up with *xing* 行 the same term from phrase 2. We have an interlocking couple 1/3 and 2/4. Phrases 5 and 6 present a problem. The term *yan* 言 in phrase 5 seems to take up phrase 1, but there the term stands for both 1 and 2. A new term appears in phrase 6, namely *shi* 事. 5 and 6 obviously conform to the rules of parallelism and a coordination with the established a and b categories seems necessary, assuming that the stylistic continuity is maintained and the discussion started in 1–4 goes on. Obviously the term *shi* 事 is connected with *xing* 行; the antonym dominating the a/b series in 1–4 is *yan* 言 / *xing* 行, words and deeds, a very common antagonism in texts of this kind, together forming the ensemble of human

activities. Phrase 5 has to be connected accordingly with 1/3 and phrase 6 with 2/4. This, however, changes the character of the term *yan* 言 in phrase one, where it provided the common subject for 1 and 2; *yan* in the beginning of the text must be understood as a *pars pro toto* expression for *yan* 言 and *shi* 事 in the sense these terms are used in 5 and 6. The series runs now 1/3/5 and 2/4/6. Phrase 7 has no parallel, it stands alone and starts with a conclusive «therefore» taking up the first 2 phrases. It repeats the *pars pro toto* construction by taking up the term *zhi* 知 only and not the term *xing* 行.

In structural writing the above passage reads like follows:

- I 1a My words are (still) very easy to understand 2b and very easy to enact.  
 II 3a (However), nobody is able to understand 4b and nobody is able to enact them.  
 III 5a (My) words (still) have the principle 6b (my) actions (still) have the guide.  
 7c therefore only he who is without knowledge is unable to understand me.

This *pars pro toto* structure which can be identified through the structural analysis of the phrases appears also in *zhang* 26 which reads in full:

重為輕根  
 靜為躁君  
 是以君子終日行不離輜重  
 雖有榮觀燕處超然  
 如何萬乘之主而以身輕天下  
 輕則失本  
 躁則失君<sup>14</sup>

A translation:

- 1 The heavy is the basis of the light
- 2 the calm is the master of the excited.
- 3 Therefore the sage (even in) a daylong march never leaves the heavy carts

14 The existing variant for *yan* 宴 in line 5 does not alter the structure.



- 4 even if (where he goes) there is a military camp with watch-towers, he stays calm and superior.  
 5 How can someone be master over 10'000 chariots and be lighter with his own person than the empire?  
 6 If he is lighter, he loses the basis  
 7 If he is excited, he loses his position as master.

Again the correctness of my analysis is not touched by the question whether my translation of phrase 5 can be accepted. The heavy carts in 3 take up the term *zhong* from phrase 1. There is no *word* in phrase 4 which takes up the word *jing* 靜 from phrase 2, but the content of 燕處超然 comes close to it. All translators I have checked have indeed started from the assumption that there is a direct correlation between phrases 2 and 4.<sup>15</sup> Although this seems to be a trifle, to me it seems very important; direct verbal correlations are not necessary to establish the link between two phrases. The more «literary» the text becomes the more correlations are expressed in an indirect way, through allusions, use of words which «usually» belong together, or use of common patterns of thought. A large number of the instances of interlocking parallel style on the surface only shows a number of parallel couplets with some general sentences in between, and only a detailed analysis on the basis of an understanding of the basic structure of interlocking parallel style can establish the specific correlations within a passage.

Phrases 6 and 7 neatly fit into the established pattern, phrase 5 in between being without a parallel. Phrase 6 with the term *qing* 輕 and the word *ben* 本, which is closely related to *gen* 根 in phrase 1, takes up the thread of phrase 1; phrase 7 with *zao* 躁 and *jun* 君 takes up the words of phrase 2. Phrase 5 seems to belong to the series 1/3/6 because of the emphasis on the word *qing* 輕. However it stands alone and therefore must structurally be associated with position c, i.e. general utterances dealing with both a and b. The fact that *after* this phrase the phrases 6 and 7 again take up the discussion about *qing* and *zao* proves the term *qing* in phrase 5 to be a *pars pro toto* for both *qing* and *zao*.

This means that phrase 5, although formally only talking about the emperors being «lighter than the empire», implies at the same time a phrase of similar structure about the emperor being more «agitated» than the empire.

15 E.g. Waley, Duyvendak, Lau, Kimura Eiichi, Debon et al.

In structural writing the *zhang* reads:

- |    |    |                                                                                                          |    |                                                                                                      |
|----|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I  | 1a | The heavy is the basis of the light                                                                      | 2b | the calm is the master of the excited.                                                               |
| II | 3a | Therefore the sage (even in) a daylong<br>march never leaves the heavy carts,                            | 4b | even if (where he goes) there is a<br>military camp with watch-towers,<br>he stays calm and superior |
|    | 5c | How can someone be master over<br>10'000 chariots and be lighter with his<br>own person than the empire? |    |                                                                                                      |
|    | 6a | If he is lighter, he loses the basis                                                                     | 7b | if he is excited, he loses his position<br>as master.                                                |

An exception in this *zhang* is the very vague parallelism between phrase 3 and 4, which is based mainly on content. There is one further irregularity in interlocking parallel style, namely the sequence a b b a. The comparison with the Changsha MSS shows that some of these inversions may be due to irregular copying,<sup>16</sup> but I think the sequence a b b a, which appears in the next *zhang* to be analyzed, must be counted among the regular features of interlocking parallel style.

I believe that a solid part of the *Laozi* is written in interlocking parallel style. Most of the *zhang*, however, do not show the open form of this style, which prevails in the passages analyzed hitherto and which have not led to much disagreement among sinologists. The more complicated analysis of the closed – indirect – form of this style however must in my opinion be based on the knowledge of the rules of this style which can be deduced from the open examples.

In a critical debate with some recent translations I will try now to analyze some *zhang* of the *Laozi* with the instrument developed above.

16 In MS 1 there occur inversions in *zhang* 56 (p. 9), 61 (p. 10), 66 (p. 10), 80 (p. 10), 81 (p. 10), 69 (p. 11), 78 (p. 11), 14 (p. 12), 15 (p. 12), 28 (p. 13), 31 (p. 14), i.e. very frequently. Cf. «*Laozi*» *shiwen*, *op. cit.*

*Zhang* 68 of the *Laozi* runs:

善為士者不武  
 善戰者不怒  
 善勝敵者不與  
 善用人者為之下  
 是謂不爭之德  
 是謂用人之力  
 是謂配天古之極也

A translation may run:

- 1 He who is good at being an officer is not martial
- 2 He who is good at fighting does not get angry
- 3 He who is good at winning does not engage with others
- 4 He who is good at using people humbles himself before them
- 5 This is called the capacity not to fight
- 6 This is called the power to use people
- 7 This is called to equal the utmost of heaven and antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

The *zhang* seems to consist of four more or less parallel phrases 1–4 and three more or less parallel phrases 5–7. It is not clear what interrelates the first four phrases – some military orientation notwithstanding – and it is not clear to what the word *shi* 是 in its triple repetition points. I think the *general* thought contained in the *zhang* is somehow apparent, but the detailed and concrete argument by which it is put forth remains mysterious. D.C. Lau translates:

- 166 One who excels as a warrior does not appear formidable;  
 One who excels in fighting is never roused in anger.  
 One who excels in defeating his enemy does not join issue.  
 One who excels in employing others humbles himself before them.

17 Wang Bi uses the term *peitian* 配天 separately in the last lines of his commentary to *zhang* 38 where he says «The great beauty equals Heaven», *tian* 天 and *gu* 古 therefore have to be translated separately.

166a This is known as the virtue of non-contention;  
 This is known as making use of the efforts of others;  
 This is known as matching the sublimity of Heaven.<sup>18</sup>

D.C. Lau translates his belief that the *Laozi* is composed of proverbs into what amounts in my opinion to a vivisection of the *zhang* into independent proverbs. Having arrived at *zhang* 68 he has counted already 166 such proverbs or proverbial expressions. The number 166a means that there may be a loose connection between 166 and 166a. He provides some information concerning his interpretation of the structure of these two parts through the interpunction. The first two phrases are divided by semicolon, while 3 and 4 are divided by a period. Obviously the first two phrases are supposed to be in closer relationship than are the two later ones. 5, 6, and 7 obviously form a unit, as they are divided through a semicolon. Both groups 1–4 and 5 through 7 have only a casual relationship. In this form the *zhang* is in my opinion simply nonsense, it being completely unclear what the three *shi* 是 in '166a' are pointing at. A. Waley long before Lau translated:

«The best charioteers do not rush ahead;  
 The best fighters do not make display of wrath.  
 The greatest conqueror wins without joining the issue;  
 The best user of men acts as though he were their inferior.  
 This is called the power that comes of not contending, is called the capacity to use men,  
 The secret of being mated to Heaven, to what was of old.»<sup>19</sup>

The interpunction again gives the only hint at the structure, 1/2 and 3/4 obviously being more closely related, while the triple repetition of *shi* in the second part seems to be some kind of emphasis only, its subject being the *general* point made in 1–4. This does not solve the riddle either.

Hurvitz has rendered the translation of Kimura Eiichi into English:

«(There is an ancient proverb which says) 'He who plays the part of the warrior (truly) well is not brave; he who fights (truly) well does not get angry; he who defeats a rival realm (i.e. a country evenly matched with his own) truly well does not rely on the help of an associated realm (i.e. an allied country); he who employs others (truly) well (humbles himself and) occupies a position inferior to them.'  
 This is called 'The virtue of non-contention' (or) it is called 'using the strength of others' (or) it is called 'matching heaven', and it is the ultimate of the Way of antiquity.»<sup>20</sup>

18 D.C. Lau, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

19 A. Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

20 L. Hurvitz in *MS XX*. 1961, 359f.

He takes the first section as a four-part proverb, which is followed by three definitions, the *shi* 是 always relating towards the the general meaning of 1–4. In the end there is a general statement which encompasses the three definitions. From a formal point of view phrase 7 is not structured in the same way as 5 and 6 in grammar and content; an integration into a series of 3 parallelism (which I do not remember having seen in ancient chinese texts) is accordingly highly dubious. There are in my opinion a number of very clear indicators in the text showing its structure.

*yong ren* 用人, «to use or employ people», in phrase 6 takes up the utterance about «who is good at using people. . .» 善用人者 in phrase 4. The *bu zheng zhi de* 不争之德, the «capacity not to fight» (the word for «fighting» here being different from the term in phrase 2) relates to the phrase about «not engaging with others». Theoretically it could be constructed in other ways as relating to 1 or 2 directly, but I think that, as there are binary parallel structures, the fact that the relationship 4/6 has been established, is a strong argument in favour of phrase 5, which parallels 6, correlating with phrase 3. The officer in phrase 1 is obviously the one «employing» or «using» people, and he does it best by not being martial, and by humbling himself before them. The first group accordingly consists of the phrases 1/4/6. He who – in phrase 5 – does not fight and – in phrase 3 – nevertheless wins is the one from phrase 2, who is good at war and does not get angry. The *shi* 是 in 5 and 6 does not refer to the «general meaning» of 1–4, but to different subjects, in phrase 5 it refers to him who is good at war, in phrase 6 to the officer who is good at using people. The remaining phrase 7 is not integrated in this structure. It makes a general statement about him who fights well himself and the officer who is good at using people to fight. The *shi* here refers to the two ‘virtues’ mentioned in phrases 5 and 6, and it should be translated «these two».

A structured translation would run:

- |                                                                |                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1a He who is good at being an officer is not martial           | 2b He who is good at fighting does not get angry                                                                            |
|                                                                | 3b He who is good at winning, does not engage with others.                                                                  |
| 4a He who is good at using people humbles himself before them. | 5b This (i.e. 2/3) is called the capacity not to fight.                                                                     |
| 6a This (i.e. 1/4) is called the power to use people.          |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                | 7c This (i.e. the capacity not to fight and the power to use people) is called to equal the utmost of heaven and antiquity. |

There are accordingly two interlocking parallel texts with the common variation a b b a concluded by a general statement c. The insistence of the text on repeating the *shi wei* 是謂 three times is not some purely stylistic feature but an emphasis on the different subjects pointed at. This structure certainly does not leave the translation untouched. While the translations quoted tried to render phrases 1–4 on the basis of their similarity in a series, according to my analysis they have to be translated in the context of their direct connection with each other, which leads to a strongly different emphasis in the understanding and the translation; but most of all it leads to a rational understanding of the structure of this argument, which the other translations did not seem to provide.

The influence of the understanding of structure on the understanding of content and the translation can be still more clearly shown in *Lao zi, zhang 44*:

名與身孰親  
 身與貨孰多  
 得與亡孰病  
 是故甚愛必大費  
           多藏必厚亡  
 知足不辱  
 知止不殆  
 可以長久

A. Waley translates this *zhang*:

« Fame or one's own self, which matters to one most?  
 One's own self or things bought, which should count most?  
 In the getting or the losing, which is worse?  
 Hence he who grudges most pays dearest in the end;  
 He who has hoarded most will suffer the heaviest loss.  
 Be content with what you have and are and no one can despoil you;  
 Who stops in time, nothing can harm.  
 He is forever safe and secure.»<sup>21</sup>

21 A. Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 197.



D.C. Lau, Chan Wing-tsit and Kimura Eiichi do not even differentiate between phrase 1 and 2 on the one hand and phrase 3 on the other; the superficial parallelism induces them to overlook the obvious fact that phrase 3, translated here by Waley with «In the getting or the losing, which is worse?» refers to the two preceding phrases, both concerned with getting (fame and riches) and losing (the self), a structure which in Waley's translation is visible.<sup>22</sup> In Waley's translation the reader is at a loss to understand why after three questions the next phrase can start with «hence» or, in the translations of Lau, Kimura Eiichi, and Chan, with «therefore».<sup>23</sup> An analysis of the use of the term *shu* 孰 in the *Laozi* shows that it is only used in rhetorical questions where the answer is supposed to be perfectly obvious.<sup>24</sup> This is the reason why a «hence» or «therefore» makes sense, but only under the condition that the translation brings out the character of the rhetorical question. In all translations consulted the connection between the first and the second part of the *zhang* remains mysterious. The term «therefore» normally implies that there is such a connection. In the various translations the idea seems to be that only the formula of the «things bought» is taken up again in the second part of the *zhang*, given the lines about «grudging» and «hoarding», which both obviously are meant to refer to some kind of riches, while the «fame» of the first line has completely disappeared. Fan Ying-yuan 范應元, a Sung compiler and commentator who bases his interpretations on the structure of

22 D.C. Lau, *op. cit.*, p. 105; Chan, *A source book in Chinese philosophy*, Princeton 1969, p. 161, Kimura Eiichi in trsl. L. Hurvitz *op. cit.*, p. 348.

23 Cf. n. 22.

24 In *Laozi* 15 Wang Bi comments justly that the *shu* 孰 in the twofold *shu neng* 孰能 «points at the difficulty to do this»; this means it should be translate «who possibly could. . .» with the expected answer «no one» or «hardly anyone». In *zhang* 23 the question is asked *shu wei ci zhe* 孰為此者? This refers to storm and heavy rains. The answer is naturally Heaven and earth. It should be translated «Well, who is effecting them? Heaven and earth naturally.» In *zhang* 58 the question is asked 孰知其極 *shu zhi qi ji*? Wang Bi comments correctly in my opinion that this refers to the impossibility to recognize this «utmost» as it is impossible to grasp it in terms of forms or names. The translation must run: «Who after all recognizes its ultimate?» (Answer: no one). In 73 Wang Bi comments the question 孰知其故 *shu zhi qi gu*? as implying the answer «Only the sage». The text therefore can go on as if this answer was actually given with «therefore the sage». This «therefore» would be nonsense if the answer would not have been actually implied by the text. The *shu gan* 孰敢 «who would dare» in 74 obviously implies the answer «no one». In 77 the question «who after all is capable to have something in excess to offer to all under heaven?» is followed by the answer: «Only he who has the way, naturally.» These are *all* instances where *shu* appears in the *Laozi*.

interlocking parallel style and may have been the last one in the Chinese tradition to do so, very clearly related the term *ai* 愛, which most translators render in its rare meaning «parsimonious, grudging», to the *ming* of the first line, thus clearly showing the structure of the entire *zhang*.<sup>25</sup> In his version the first two phrases concerning fame and riches are taken up again in lines 4 and 5. The same problem appears for phrases 6 and 7, which are rendered by all translations consulted according to the same idea – namely that parallelism basically means that the same thing is said twice – with other words. But parallelism is no reduplication, as I have tried to show, and a translation based on this concept is bound to stress the factor of identity which is expressed by the parallelism of the structure, and not the factor of the parallel structure of two entirely different things. Waley's translation of the two lines only refers to riches. But in *Laozi* 33 it is said 知足者富 *zhi zu zhe fu* «he who knows how to be content becomes rich», and I think this clearly shows that the *zhi zu* refers to riches, so that a link is established between phrases 2, 5 and 6. According to *Laozi* 32: 名亦既有夫亦將知止知止所以不殆. «Once there are names there will be those who will know where to stop (with them). If they know where to stop (with name/fame) there will be no danger for them.»<sup>26</sup> It seems to me very clear that the *zhi zhi* 知止 in *zhang* 44 refers to the name/fame in line 1, so that a link is established between phrase 1, 4 and 7. Phrase 3, which as we have seen is not following the parallelism of the first two lines, is, as Waley correctly pointed out with his translation, a statement concerning the two preceding phrases and belongs to the category c. The same obviously holds true for phrase 8, where however in my opinion in the two terms 長 and 久 the binary structure is taken up again. As will be seen from the analysis of the next *zhang*, the term 長 *zhang* refers to high social rank metaphorically expressed by the position of heaven. I therefore think it must be associated with the series 1, 4, 7 in this *zhang*. *Jiu* 久 is associated with earth and must in this concrete context be associated with the material goods and riches of the second group. This cannot only be deduced from a reference to *zhang* 7, but also from the structural laws governing interlocking parallel style as I have tried to infer from the material. The meaning of the terms used in interlocking parallel style is defined not only by the «general» meaning of the words, but equally by the association of these words with the subjects they are referring to. In the light of the well-known problem of a language which had to create its philosophical terms,

25 Fan Ying-yuan 范應元, *老子道經古本集註*, ed. 續古逸叢書, *comm. ad hoc*.

26 See the key passage on p. 44f.

it is in my opinion of prime importance to correctly define the context these words are introduced in, because they have to define themselves *mainly from this context*. This becomes all the more important in a text using poetic language where efforts to rationally understand what is rationally understandable have to be doubled and tripled in order to prevent its disappearance into the mystical abyss of chinoiserie.

In structural writing the *zhang* could be translated as follows:

- I 1a When fame is put together with one's own person, what is after all coming closer? (Naturally fame)
- 2b When one's own person is put together with goods, what is after all being increased? (Naturally the goods)
- 3c If (thus) getting (fame and goods) is put together with perishing (of one's own person) – what is it after all which is doing the damage (so that one's own person perished)? (Naturally the damage is done by others who become envious of one's fame and goods)
- II 4a Therefore, if one craves (for fame) very much, this will necessarily lead to a great loss (of one's own person caused by the attacks of others who become envious)
- 5b if one is hoarding many (goods) this will necessarily lead to great disaster (for one's own person caused by the attacks of others whose greed is evoked)
- III 6b (Accordingly) he who knows how to be content (with his goods) will be without spoil
- 7a (accordingly) he who knows where to stop (showing off his fame) will be without danger (of being attacked by others)
- 8c (Thus by means of these attitudes) he can excel and endure.

The sequence 4a/5b/6b/7a repeats the a b b a scheme already encountered earlier. The entire *zhang* has the structure a b c a b b a c. It concerns the tactics of survival of the ruling class or rather of its members,

i.e. of people with both high social standing (fame) and great riches. These two factors are dominating a number of *zhang* in the *Laozi* as well as giving the basis for the philosophical notions of *gong* 功 and *wu* 物 in Wang Bi.<sup>26</sup> They are dealt with in the series a and b respectively. The parallelism of the phrases dealing with both of them indicates in a formal way that although they are completely different halves of social reality (in the meaning of the author) they share the same basic structure, which is dealt with explicitly in the c-phrases. The macro-structure of the *zhang* consists of a statement of fact and its consequences in parts I and II, with the correct attitude described in part III.

An analysis of *zhang* 7 will help to fortify these arguments. Let me repeat again that differences in textual transmission and details of translation are not the issue in this study, which deals with the *structure* of a number of *zhang* of the *Laozi*. *Zhang* 7 runs

天長

地久

天地所以能長且久者以其不自生故能長久

是以聖人後其身而身先

外其身而身存

非以其無私邪故能成其私

The translation of Kimura Eiichi is rendered by Hurvitz as follows:

« 'Heaven and Earth never perish.' The reason that heaven and earth are able to be eternal is that (they are unselfish and mindless, and that) they make no attempt to prosper by their own devices: therefore they live forever. Thus the sage (in obedience to this universal truth,) places (others first and) himself last, but (as a result he automatically) finds himself in the fore. (He attempts to save others while) ignoring himself, but (as a result automatically) remains in existence. Is (this) not because the sage 'has no personal desire'? For this very reason (the result, contrary to all expectation,) is that he is 'able to satisfy his personal desires fully.' »<sup>27</sup>

The translations presented by D.C. Lau, Duyvendak, Waley and others are similar. It remains unclear why the terms 長 and 久 are repeated

27 L. Hurvitz, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

if they mean the same thing. It remains unclear how the sage of the second part imitates heaven and earth with his actions, because in these translations their relationship seems to exist only for one of his attitudes. The term *shi yi* 是以 indicates that the actions of the sage result from his imitating heaven and earth. The first thing said about the sage however is, that he «comes to the fore», and there is no indication in the translation in what way he imitates either heaven or earth in this respect. The second point – that he «remains in existence» – goes back to the fact that heaven and earth – in this translation – «never perish». In this translation *zhang* 7 of the *Laozi* seems to be helter-skelter, a phrase is said, but not taken up, another is taken up twice, – and this a rigorous formal structure notwithstanding which indicates that the writing was done in a conscious and planned way.

From the general rules of interlocking parallel style, which I have tried to extract hitherto, it can be supposed *a priori* that given the obvious parallelism the *zhang* must have been written in interlocking parallel style, because there is not a single example of reduplicating parallel style (if such a thing exists at all). The phrase about heaven obviously must provide the model for the sage's «coming to the fore». If *zhang* (or *chang*) 長 is synonymous with *jiu* 久 there would be no such model. Heaven however is the model for the emperor and the sage in that it is high above. From the connection with *xian* 先, «coming to the fore», it becomes clear that *zhang* in the first phrase must mean something like «to excel», *zhang* being the opposite of *duan* 短, in the sense of «being excellent at. . .» as opposed to «being bad at. . .»; the sequence of the phrases must run accordingly a b c a b c.

My translation would be:

- I 1a Heaven excels.
- 2b Earth endures.
- 3c That by which heaven excels and earth endures is that they do not live for their own benefit. Therefore they can exist for a long time.  
Therefore
- II 3a the sage puts himself last and his person will come to the fore;
- 4b he disregards his own person and his person will endure.
- 6c Is it not because of the absence of personal interest that he is able to realize his personal interests?



There is in my understanding no reason why the term *chang sheng* 長生 should be put into relation with the *zhang* and *jiu* of phrases 1 and 2, but every reason to put it into relation with the *zi sheng* 自生 and the second c-phrase at the end of the *zhang*. The discussion centers around the same problem discussed in the preceding *zhang* (no. 44). The sage does neither openly and directly go after his own interests – be they material goods or social status, but displays a complete disregard for both – and is thus able to realize his personal aims. The group 2b/4b thus mainly relates to the question of material benefits, while the group 1a/4a mainly relates to questions of social status. Both problems have the same structure. If greed and interest for material goods and social status (to say it in interlocking parallel style) are openly displayed the animosity of others will be encountered; this in turn will lead to their attacking the person openly displaying his fame and wealth which may considerably shorten his life; the dialectical turn that he who displays disinterestedness will get everything he wants brings home a point very frequently made even today, where for example the Rockefeller family projects an image of parsimony and modesty to ward off the attacks against the tycoons of Standard Oil.

The *zhang* presents in my opinion a well-structured completely understandable argument with nothing mysterious, presented with the dialectical turn characteristic for the *Laozi*. The relationship between part I and II is again that of model and imitation. A last example may be given to illustrate the use of interlocking parallel style in the *Laozi*, before turning to Wang Bi's and some other writings.

*Zhang* 9 of the *Laozi* runs:

持而盈之不如其已  
 揣而斲之不可長保  
 金玉滿室莫之能守  
 富貴而驕自遺其咎  
 功遂身退天之道

A first rough translation would run:

- 1 Is (the *chi-ying* 持盈 vessel, which stands as long as it is empty and falls when filled) kept up right and filled in addition, this is not as good as leaving it as it is.
- 2 If one passes (over a knife with one's finger) and sharpens it in addition, one will not long remain intact.



- 3 If a palace is filled with gold and pearls, no one can protect it.
- 4 If someone is rich and famed and arrogant in addition, he attracts his own doom.
- 5 To withdraw oneself once the work is achieved is the way of heaven.

Again the translations consulted give a very confused picture. Waley separates phrases 1 and 2 by semicolon, but 3 and 4 by period, thus indicating a different relationship between 1 and 2 on the one hand and 3 and 4 on the other. D.C. Lau has phrases 1 and 2 each ending with a semicolon, thus indicating that the first 3 phrases belong together, and he has phrases 3 and 4 ending with a period. Chan does not see any relationship between the phrases and separates them all by a period, i.e. he assumes this to be a series of phrases a, b, c, d.<sup>28</sup> (I have separated the phrases in the first rough translation by periods as well in order not to anticipate the structure). The correlations within the text however cannot be overlooked. The term *man* 𠄎 in phrase 3 evokes the term *ying* 盈 in phrase 1. The content of phrase 2 – to pass over a knife with the finger and sharpen the knife in addition to it – is taken up in phrase 4 where talk goes about someone who is rich and famed and arrogant in addition to it. Wang Bi explicitly comments phrase 4 by «he will not long remain intact» i.e. quoting phrase 2 directly. The same he does in the commentary for phrase 3 where he quotes phrase 1, «it is not as good as leaving it as it is.» If one already has a palace which certainly evokes the envy of others who would like to have it too (or who had to build it, as it goes) and in addition to this fills it up with gold and pearls, one will end up in disaster like the *chi ying* vessel which tumbles when filled. The last phrase is without parallel and easily recognizable as a c-phrase. In this *zhang* there is no single term from the first a/b couple being taken up in the second pair. I think however that from the explicit hint by Wang Bi and the textual analysis we may arrive at an understanding of the structure (and content) of the text which does not end up in some generality, but illuminates the argument by which the text arrives.

A structured translation would run in my opinion:

- 1a Is (the *chi-ying* vessel which stands as long as it is empty and falls when filled) kept upright and filled in addition, this is not as good as leaving it as it is.
- 2b If one passes (over a knife with one's finger) and sharpens it in addition, one will not long remain intact.

28 Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

3a If a palace is filled with gold and pearls  
no one can protect it.

4b If someone is rich and famed and arrogant  
in addition, he attracts his own  
doom.

5c To withdraw oneself once the work is  
achieved is the way of heaven.

I think it can now be established that parts of the *Laozi* are written in interlocking parallel style with a regular form a b c a b c and a frequent variation a b b a c, which may be partly due to errors in textual transmission, i.e. inversion of phrases.<sup>29</sup> There are frequent cases where rhymes are used as an additional medium to stress parallelism.<sup>30</sup> And there are a number of variations to the basic structure, which I will treat shortly. The first variation is in the form of a binary series

1a

2b

3c

4d

5e

6a

7b

8c

9d

10e

According to the interpretation of Wang Bi which I share in this instance *zhang* 22 is structured according to this pattern which Wang Bi himself uses in his own writings.<sup>31</sup> The text of the *zhang* runs:

29 cf. note 17.

30 Cf. *Laozi*, *zhang* 2, 28, 41 etc. contain rhymes.

31 See the evidence given in the last part of this paper.

曲則全

枉則直

窪則盈

敝則新

少則得

多則惑

是以聖人抱一為天下式

不自見故明

不自是故彰

不自伐故有功

不自矜故長

夫唯不爭故天下莫能與之爭古之所謂曲則全者豈虛言哉

A translation may be given as follows:

- 1 He who is crooked will remain intact,
- 2 he who is bent will be straight.
- 3 he who is a pot-hole will be filled,
- 4 he who (looks) run down will be renewed.
- 5 (In short) he who diminishes will obtain.
- 6 he who multiplies will be in distress.
- 7 Therefore the sage keeps to the one and makes it the model of all under heaven.
- 8 He does not show off himself, therefore he is shining forth,
- 9 he is not self-righteous and therefore (the fact that he is right) shines forth,
- 10 he does not boast about himself and thus his achievements come about,
- 11 he does not brag about himself, therefore he excels.
- 12 It is only because he is not fighting that no one on earth is able to fight with him. What in ancient times was called «he who is crooked will remain intact» (etc.), how should these be empty words? Indeed it results in being intact.

The translation attempts to follow the hints given by Wang Bi. Wang Bi explicitly explains the structure of the *zhang* by quoting phrase 8 in the commentary to phrase 1, phrase 9 in the commentary to phrase 2 etc., thus linking phrases 1–4 directly with phrases 8–11. In addition he adds a subject to the verbal expressions after the *gu* 故, «therefore», in phrases 8–11 where this is lacking – viz. in 9 he inserts that his *shi* 是 shines forth, in 11 that his *de* 德 excels. Phrases 5, 6 and 7 are c-type general reflections on the series presented before, ending in the sage’s «keeping to the one». The second series 8–11 gives the consequences the sage is drawing from the general conclusions reached in the first part in the same serial order as 1–4. Phrase 12 obviously stands without parallel and represents a phrase of the c-type; the mention of the first of the series (phrase 1) is obviously a *pars pro toto* construction where phrase 1 is quoted to represent phrases 1–4.

The reasons for this coordination presented by Wang Bi are still not entirely convincing to me. However, a translation giving this obviously structured text as an accumulation of witticisms does not bring us anywhere. The attempt made by Wang Bi starts from the basically sound assumption that between the first 4 phrases and the 4 parallel phrases 8–11 there must be a correlation, because the latter are said to follow from the former. Starting from this structural insight the actual translation of the phrases in question has to be undertaken. But at the same time this text shows very clearly that the conscious knowledge of interlocking parallel style does in no way immediately lead to an understanding of the structure of a text, but that the concrete analysis of the passage has to be done nonetheless, only that the instruments of analysis have become more specific.

An attempt to interpret the formal structure of interlocking parallel style in terms of contents expressed will be made at the end of this paper.

I think it can be said that a number of *zhang* and passages within certain *zhang* are written in interlocking parallel style hitherto overlooked. The basic structure of this stylistic pattern is the interlocking of two texts with two different – usually antonymous – subjects, held together by general phrases and/or conclusions concerning both subjects. The parallelism of content as indicated by the c-type phrases is expressed in the parallelism of the utterances concerning both subjects. The standard form a b a c has a frequent variation a b b a c. Some of the texts written in interlocking parallel style are rhymed.

There is an open and a closed form of this stylistic pattern, the open form being characterized by open verbal reference of the second phrase

on subject a to the first phrase by the use of a word appearing in the first a-phrase, and the same reference between the b-phrases, as shown in the first examples studied in this article. In these cases little difference between scholarly translations and commentaries has occurred. The closed form does not explicitly take up any of the words of the related phrases but establishes the coherence by parallelism of content as in *zhang* 9, similarity of key terms or similar techniques. This closed form is either used in literary passages where hidden «closed» allusions are very frequent<sup>34</sup> or in philosophical texts where the two lines of thought have to be reconstructed from the common patterns of utterances concerning a certain subject. Thus, in a text of Wang Bi where *xing* 形 and *ming* 名 are the subjects and the organs of perception are mentioned in four consecutive phrases, touch and vision have to be associated to *xing* 形 and hearing and taste to *ming* 名, the relationship between taste and *ming* 名 being established through *Laozi* 35, «the words uttered about the way are trite and without taste.» Many of the *Xuan xue* 玄學 or «Science of the Dark» texts of the 2nd through 5th century are written in this way. The multiple forms and variations of this basic stylistic pattern, especially the inversion a b a and the frequent *pars pro toto* constructions in the c-phrases show in my opinion very clearly that there is no mechanical way to separate the two textual strains.

5. According to my understanding the following *zhang* of the *Laozi* are either written or partially written in interlocking parallel style, the more remote variations such as the one last analyzed (*zhang* 22) not included: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 44, 47, 50, 62, 63, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 77, 80, 81, i.e. about a third of the *zhang* of the *Laozi*. The specific proof which has to be adduced for each individual *zhang* will be presented with the translation of the *Laozi* in the understanding of Wang Bi. There may be other *zhang* where the structure still remains mysterious to me, but which may contain elements of interlocking parallel style.

6. The pattern of interlocking parallel style is already very common in pre-Han Chinese texts. I shall not try to arrive at anything like a quantitative, historical, geographical or linguistic description of the genesis and spread of this pattern. This would demand an analysis of practically all of classical literature and in my opinion would not provide insights worth

34 *Ibid.*, II, 2, p. 518.

this effort. The only proof I shall try to arrive at is that this kind of stylistic pattern is extant in other early texts as well and is no peculiarity of the *Lao-zi*.

I will adduce passages from the *Li ji*, the *Han fei zi*, the *Xiao jing* and the *Mo zi*; they are far from representative and they are the product of casual reading through these texts. The only aim is to establish the fact that interlocking parallel style with its variations is a standard element in Chinese stylistic expression in a wide variety of texts.

In *Li ji* 17 it is said:<sup>32</sup>

禮節民心  
 樂和民聲  
 政以行之  
 刑以防之  
 禮樂刑政四達而不悖則王道備矣  
 樂者為同  
 禮者為異  
 同則相親  
 異則相敬  
 樂勝則流  
 禮勝則離  
 合情  
 飾貌者  
 禮樂之事也

32 Cf. Couvreur, *Mémoires sur les bienséances et les cérémonies*, Paris 1930, Vol. II, 1, p. 55.



The binary construction based on *li* 禮 and *yue* 樂 goes on after this.  
A translation may run:

- 1 Rites regulated the people's hearts
  - 2 Music harmonized the people's voices
  - 3 Government policies served to execute (rites and music)
  - 4 Punishments served to prevent (their abuse)
  - 5 When there was no rebellion against these four means of rites, music, government policies and punishments, the way of the kings was flourishing.
  - 6 Music established conformity
  - 7 Rites established the differences
  - 8 conformity brought about affection
  - 9 difference brought about respect
  - 10 when music prevailed there resulted mixture
  - 11 when rites prevailed there resulted separation.
  - 12 to bring sentiments together
  - 13 and differentiate between the outer appearances
  - 14 is what rites and music have to achieve.
- .....

It is obvious that this is a case of open interlocking parallel style, where most phrases can be associated immediately, the sequence here being 1a, 2b, 6b, 7a, 8b, 9a, 10b, 11a. Phrases 3 to 5 contain utterances referring to both a and b; with phrase 5 it becomes obvious that this pattern here is not «pure», because the *si da* 四達 are mentioned together and not only the *li* and *yue*. There follow three strictly parallel couplets, concluded by a single statement explicitly referring to both *li* and *yue*, both a and b. The interlocking of the phrases 6 through 11 is achieved through repetition of the key term of a and b respectively. The sequence of the entire passage is accordingly a b c b a b a b a c, phrases 3 through 5 forming one single c-passage referring to both a and b.

There are many passages with interlocking parallel style in the *Zhong yong* 中庸 chapter of the *Li ji* which certainly is of dubious antiquity. A passage in this chapter runs in open interlocking parallel style.<sup>33</sup>

33 *Ibid.*, II, 2, p. 428f.

喜怒哀樂之未發謂之中

發而皆中節謂之和

中也者天下之大本也

和也者天下之達道也

致中和天地位焉萬物育焉

A translation may run:

- 1 (The situation) before liking, hatred, sadness and happiness have arisen is called «middle».
- 2 When they have arisen but are all regulated from the «middle» (the situation) is called «harmony».
- 3 «Middle» is the big root of all under heaven.
- 4 «Harmony» is the way through which things under heaven are achieved.
- 5 When «middle» and «harmony» have come about, heaven and earth are in their position; the ten thousand things are nourished.

The a b a b sequence in the first four phrases does not need any explanation; the question is whether phrase 5 is to be considered generally as a c-phrase or whether it is again structured in that there exists a relationship between the phrase about heaven and earth and the phrase about the ten thousand things and the established a and b series. I think the relationship exists between the phrase concerning heaven and earth and the a-series and between the phrase concerning the ten thousand things and the b-series. Heaven and earth can be considered the framework, the big root, from which all under heaven emerges, they cover and carry all things and living beings, and they are without any sentiments towards them and therefore cover all of them, as the *Laozi* argues. «Harmony» is described as the «way of achievement» of all under heaven, i.e. the way by which they are kept up; the «nourishment» in the last phrase in my opinion takes up this term. Phrases 5–7 accordingly have to be written:

- 5 When «middle» and «harmony» have come about,
- 6 heaven and earth are in their position
- 7 and the ten thousand things are nourished.

The sequence of this text with mixed open and closed interlocking parallel style is accordingly 1a, 2b, 3a, 4b, 5c, 6a, 7b, with the c-passage explicitly taking up the two key terms. In structural writing:

- 1a (The situation) before liking, hatred, sadness and happiness have arisen, is called «middle».
- 2b When they have arisen but are all regulated from the «middle» (the situation) is called «harmony».
- 3a «Middle» is the big root of all under heaven.
- 4b «Harmony» is the way through which things under heaven are achieved.
- 5c When «middle» and «harmony» have come about
- 6a heaven and earth are in their position and
- 7b the ten thousand things are nourished.

There are frequent passages in the *Li ji* with interlocking parallel style lacking c-phrases. It may be assumed that this pattern belongs to the same stylistic type but does not share the philosophical content the a b c structure is presenting.

An example may be given from the *Li ji*.<sup>34</sup>

子曰君子道人从言  
而禁人以行  
故言必慮其所終  
而行必稽其所敝  
民謹於言  
而慎於行  
詩云慎爾出話  
敬爾威儀  
大雅曰穆穆文王於  
緝熙敬止

A translation may run:

- 1 The master says: The Junzi leads people with words
- 2                                      and controls them with deeds.
- 3 Therefore when speaking he has to consider where his words end up
- 4 when acting he has to find out what may be unworthy in his acts.
- 5 As a consequence people will be watchful with words
- 6                                      and circumspect with deeds.
- 7 The *Shi* says: Circumspect when uttering words
- 8                                      respectful in majestic attitude.
- 9 The *Da ya* says: Solemn indeed was Wen Wang
- 10                                     He constantly made efforts to fulfill his duties.

This passage again presents a mixture of open and closed interlocking parallel style, phrase 1–6 being open in repeating the key words «words» and «deeds», so that their sequence is a b a b a b; the dialectics of words and deeds being a constant theme in Chinese philosophy and political poetry, the text then takes up two quotations from the classics based on the same two factors in order to give some classical polishing to the argument. These quotations however do not explicitly use the key terms; in the *Shi* quotation the coherence is easily established with reference to *hua* 話, speech, clearly referring to the «words» above, and *i* 儀 referring to «deeds». The *Da ya* quotation denotes with the *mu mu* 穆穆 a quality of «virtue» associated with the field of the words *yan* and *hua* (and *ming* etc.), while the second part seems to refer to deeds and activities.

This passage may give some clue to an understanding of the genesis of interlocking parallel style; the c-phrases even in the *Laozi* frequently contain explicit elements of the a and b series, the examples are rare where this general remark really leaves aside the verbiage of the a and b series. I think the last phrases in the first stages of interlocking parallel style came to fulfill more and more the function of a summary, final remark and therewith gradually developed into a phrase containing elements of both series but breaking away from the parallelism until they finally were made into a separate general conclusion. The quotations from the *Shi* and *Da ya* in the preceding text are clearly different in character from the preceding lines and may represent a step into the direction indicated.

The *Li ji* also contains a number of passages where the discussion of more than two elements is presented in interlocking parallel style. Thus in the chapter *Li yun* of the *Li ji* there is an open triple construction around the terms *ming* 明, *yang* 養 and *shi* 事.<sup>35</sup>

35 *Ibid.*, I. 2, p. 514.

The *Han fei zi* opens with a statement in interlocking parallel style. In direct translation with structural writing it runs:  
«I have heard:

- 1a To know nothing but talk anyhow  
means being ignorant
- 2b to know but not to talk means being un-  
loyal.
- 3a To be a minister but to be illoyal de-  
serves death
- 4b To talk without its being true equally  
deserves death.
- 5c Nonetheless I want to say all I have  
heard. May the Great King fix my guilt  
for it.<sup>36</sup>

A long interlocking parallel passage further down in another chapter describes the dialectics between remuneration and punishment.<sup>37</sup>

The *Mo zi* opens with a passage in interlocking parallel style as well, spelling out the two basic factors of attracting qualified people. It argues:<sup>38</sup>

人國而不存其士則亡國矣  
見賢而不急則緩其君矣  
非賢無急  
非士無與慮國  
緩賢  
忘士  
而能以其國存者未嘗有也

36 Chen Qi-you, *Han Fei Zi jishi* I. 1, Shanghai 1974 陳奇猷, 韓非子集釋.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

38 *A concordance to Mo Tzu*, Harvard Yenching Inst. sinological Series, suppl. 21, reprint, 1961, p. 1 line 1ff.

The not too rigorous parallelism, the repetition of the keywords *xian* and *shi*, indicate a simple sequence a b b a b a c.

In the *Xiao jing* 孝經 a number of passages in interlocking parallel style may be found as well. In one case the commentary of Zheng Xuan gives a hint concerning the coherence of a phrase.<sup>39</sup>

The examples adduced here and in some of the notes are but a general indication of the presence of interlocking parallel style in texts written prior to the Han.

I think it can be safely assumed that interlocking parallel style is a frequent pattern in early Chinese texts. It seems from a cursory analysis that it evolved out of a «zipper» construction, of which the last pair gradually was used to assume the functions of a general conclusion, this qualitative difference calling for a formal differentiation coming about in the breaking up of the parallelism for the c-phrases.

7. In the second and third centuries the *Laozi* became one of the «classics». Numerous commentaries were written, it was used as a political weapon in the peasant upheavals marking the end of the Han, and the struggle for the integration of this authoritative text into the traditions of either Confucianism or Taoism was going on.<sup>40</sup> Wang Bi's commentary is part of this struggle. The new intellectual «school» which developed mainly in Wei during the *San-guo* period and which by some is called the school of «Dark Learning»<sup>41</sup> was oriented very strongly towards the *Laozi*,

39 *Xiao jing* 孝經, ed. *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要, zhang 17 p. 2a. The passage runs

子曰君子之事上也進思盡忠  
退思補過  
物順其美  
匡救其惡

The line 匡救其惡 is commented upon with the words 君有惡過則正而止之, indicating through 免過 that the passages 退思補過 and 匡救其惡 belong to the same 'family' b.

40 The aspect will be dealt with in another chapter of my work.

41 E.g. D. Holzman, E. Balasz and others; I think this translation of *Xuanxue* does not take into account the fact that *xuan* is a philosophical term – as a noun; it is the object of much thinking of mediaeval chinese thinkers trying to find out the characteristics of «that by which» the ten thousand things are. They took up this term from the *Laozi*. The term *xuanxue* must be translated «Science concerning the dark» or «Learning about the dark».



much more than it was towards the *Zhuangzi* which gained favour only after the «founding» of the Jin-Dynasty. Many authors of the Wei-dynasty copied wholly or in part the stylistic features of the *Laozi*. The most prominent among those copyists was Wang Bi himself, who developed the logics and dialectics of interlocking parallel style into a full system dominating all of his prose-writings and most of his commentaries. Although his writings are composed in this style this fact has not received proper attention by scholars dealing with Wang Bi.<sup>42</sup> All of them – as far as I can see – have started from the assumption that parallelism basically means to say the same thing twice – and have translated accordingly. The result is not only that the translations are «wrong» in that they do not render the argument of the text, but that the rich interplay between formal structure and philosophical theory, political argument and scholarly interpretation (in the commentaries) is completely lost. I think this formal argument – which I do not consider to be formal at all – allows us to say that, the works and notes of Petrov, Wilhelm and a number of Japanese scholars notwithstanding, the study of Wang Bi is just beginning.

I have very little interest in stylistic questions by themselves, but I was forced into recognizing that without a stylistic and formal understanding of the pattern of argument of Wang Bi (and *Laozi* and his interpretation of the *Laozi*) a scholarly analysis of his political philosophy was impossible.

The key text of Wang Bi, the *Laozi zhilue*, «Short Conspectus of the *Laozi*», was unearthed from the *Daozang* only in the late 1950's by Yan Lingfeng.<sup>43</sup> The first passage I will quote is the introduction of this text:

42 Cf. H. Wilhelm, *Die Wandlung, I. Ging*, Zürich 1958, p. 87ff.; (in the ed. of Peking 1944, p. 130ff.); A.A. Petrov, *Van Bi*, Moskau 1936; Chan, *Source book*, p. 318ff., Liebenthal, trl. T'ang Yung-tung, *Wang Pi's new interpretation of the I Ching and Lun-yü*, *HJAS* 10, 1947, p. 124 sqq.

43 I quote the text from the excellent edition by Hou Wailu and others «Texts from the history of chinese philosophy» (中國歷代哲學文選), Peking 1963. The original edition is in Yan Ling-feng 嚴靈峯, *老子微旨例略*, Taipeh 1956.

夫物之所以生  
 功之所由成  
 必生乎無形  
 由乎無名  
 無形無名者萬物之宗也  
 不溫不涼  
 不宮不高  
 聲之不可得而聞  
 視之不可得而彰  
 體之不可得而知  
 味之不可得而嘗  
 故其為物也則混成  
     為象也則無形  
     為音也則希聲  
     為味也則無呈  
 故能為品物之宗主苞通天地靡使不經也

A first and unstructured translation would run:

- 1 That by which things are produced and
- 2 that by which efforts are achieved
- 3 necessarily they are produced from the formless
- 4                   they are based on the nameless.
- 5 The formless and nameless is the forefather of the ten thousand things.
- 6 It is neither warm nor cold
- 7 it is neither do nor re
- 8 listening for it one is unable to hear it
- 9 gazing for it one cannot figure it out

- 10 touching it one cannot feel it  
 11 tasting it one is unable to get its specific taste.  
 12 therefore as a thing it is made out of the muddy  
 13               as an image it is formless  
 14               as a sound it is hard to hear  
 15               as a taste it is without taste.  
 16 Therefore it can be the principal of all kinds of things, encompasses  
 and penetrates heaven and earth and there is nothing which it does not  
 reach.

Phrase 3 explicitly takes up the term *sheng* 生 from phrase 1, phrase 4 implicitly with *you* 有 the *suoyi cheng* of phrase 2. With «formless» and «nameless» the two key terms of 3 and 4 are taken up in phrase 5 which stand without parallel alone and binds both strains of thought together, giving the series 1a 2b 3a 4b 5c. The attributes «cold» and «warm» obviously belong to «things» and their «form», while musical sounds are pertinent to the «name» complex later taken up in the terms «listening» and «tasting» (the words).<sup>45</sup> Phrases 6 and 7 follow with a and b. Phrases 8–11 seem to form a series of 4 parallels, but actually they are related to the two a and b strains. Phrase 8 refers with the term «listening» to the «name» series, i.e. b, phrase 9 with «gazing» to the «form» of «things» i.e. to a, phrase 10 does the same as names cannot be touched, and phrase 11 refers to «names» by reference to *Laozi* 35. The next block of four parallel phrases substantiates the argument brought forth before by quoting directly from *Laozi* texts and reveals itself as a «short exposé» of this text, trying to systematize the scattered contents. Again in line 12 the *wu* refers to «things» as much as the next phrase about *xiang*, while phrases 14 and 15 both refer to the «names» block. Without starting an analysis of the contents of this passage here, it should be mentioned that Wang Bi differentiates all being into two sections, namely «things» with their «forms», and «efforts» (or achievements, social activity) with their «names», so that both categories which have some correlation with the moral vs. material aspects of society, are to be understood as extremely broad philosophical categories.

Phrase 16 again is without parallel and refers to both a and b without taking up the key terms. What seems to be a fairly redundant text turns out to be a very intricate web of structural and theoretical information, where quite a number of the key theoretical arguments are brought forth in the form of stylistic arrangement and not by explicit verbiage.

45 See further down this page.

In structural writing the passage reads:

- 1a That by which things are produced  
(and)
- 2b that by which efforts are achieved
- 3a necessarily they are produced from the  
formless.
- 4b (necessarily) they are based on the  
nameless.
- 5c The  
formless and nameless  
is the forefather of the  
ten thousand things.
- 6a It is neither warm nor cold.
- 7b It is neither do nor re.
- 8b Listening for it one is unable to hear it.
- 9a Gazing for it one cannot figure it out.
- 10a Touching it one cannot feel it.
- 11b Tasting it one is unable to get its specific  
taste.
- Therefore
- 12a as a thing it is «made from the muddy»,
- 13a as an image it is formless.
- 14b as a sound it is «hard to hear»
- 15b as a taste it is without taste.
- 16 Therefore it can be the principal of all  
kinds of things, encompasses and penetrates  
heaven and earth and there is nothing which  
it does not reach.

The text goes on with the same binary construction. It should be pointed out that this structural analysis enables us to grasp the constantly changing subject of the phrases. There are some differences between the interlocking parallel style in this text and the corresponding passages in the *Laozi*, namely that the passages in the *Laozi* are fairly short, while here a complete treatise is built up on this principle, the coherent passages have become longer and the «philosophy of interlocking parallel style» has become more conscious and explicit. A passage from one of his commentaries to the *Laozi* will show that the same stylistic pattern is used both for his own writing and for the elucidation of the structure of passages from the *Laozi*.

In *zhang* 3 of the *Laozi* it is said:

不尚賢使民不爭  
 下貴難得之貨使民不為盜  
 不見可欲使民心不亂

Wang Bi's commentary runs:

賢猶能也尚者嘉之名也  
 貴者隆之稱也  
 唯能是任尚也易為  
 唯用是施貴之何為  
 尚賢過其任下者競奔校能相射作為而爭  
 貴貨過其用貪者競趨穿窬探篋沒命而盜  
 故可欲不見則心無所亂也

In a translation:

1a If qualification is not considered highly,  
 the people will be induced not to  
 struggle.

2b If goods which are hard to come by are  
 not liked, people will be induced not to  
 become robbers.

3c (Generally spoken) if nothing is shown  
 which it could wish, the heart of people  
 is induced not to get into turmoil.

Commentary:

1a 'Qualification' is like 'capacity'. 'Con-  
 sider highly' is a term for 'value highly'.

2b 'liked' is a designation for 'preferred'.

3a Someone only qualified for a specific  
 field – who would consider him highly?

4b Who would like something only useful  
 for this specific purpose?

5a When the consideration of a qualification exceeds the specific field (for which it is good) those below will push forward, compete with their capacities and surpass each other, and will struggle in their work.

6b When goods are liked more than they are deserving for their utility, the craving ones will grasp them, they will break walls, break open treasure vaults and rob without fearing death.

7c Therefore: If there is nothing one could wish, there will be nothing bringing turmoil to their (i.e. the people's) heart.

Even if the emendation of phrases 5 and 6 of the commentary, which I partly base on the *Jizhu* 集注<sup>46</sup> should not be accepted, the basic form of argument in the commentary of Wang Bi can be seen in other commentaries of his as well.<sup>47</sup>

A text of Han Kang-bo commenting the *Xi ci* 繫辭 is written in this style as well;<sup>48</sup> Buddhist authors like Shi Dao-an and Shi Hui-yuan are writing passages in it.<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that very frequently this style is used for specific contents, and it is an outline of these contents which I will try to give in the following paragraph.

46 My conjecture for 尚賢顯名榮過其任為而常 校能相射  
is 尚賢 過其任下者競奔校能相射 作為而爭

I follow here the reading of the *Daode shenjing jizhu zashuo* 道德真經集注雜說 by Peng Si 彭紹 of the Sung dynasty; a critical edition of the various readings and emendations has been compiled by Hatano Taro: *Rōshi Oshu kyosei, Yokohama shiritsu daigaku kiyo* 1953, No. 14–16. The present emendation on p. 14.52. The reading of Peng Si is: 榮過其任下奔而競效能相射. Most commentators of the Wang Bi commentary agree that the text here has to be corrected.

47 See the example *Laozi* 9 quoted above with Wang Bi's commentary.

48 Cf. Zhou yi, ed. *Si-bu beiyao*, ch. 7, p. 8b, commentary to 陰陽不測之謂神. For this passage cf. R. Wagner, *Die Fragen Hui-yuan's an Kumārajiva*, Diss. 1969 München, p. 165f. I would think that the attempt made there to structure this intricate passage still contains mistakes. This short treatise was noted by Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, Leiden 1972, III. note 335 as a step in the development of the theory of the *shen*.

49 For Shi Dao-an cf. Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 196, the original place where it appears is the *Ren ben yu sheng jing* 人本欲生經 in T. 55.45.a 21f.; a passage by Hui-yuan has been commented in Wagner, *op. cit.*, 187, and taken from *Eon Kenkyu* 慧遠研究, ed. Kimura Eiichi, Kyoto 1960, II. 86 col. 12.



8. In practically all passages where I found the usage of this interlocking parallel style it was used to describe the relationship of a given whole composed of two parts. If Han Fei argues that «to lead and control his ministers» the enlightened ruler has «two handles», this is to say that the whole of this influence exerted by the ruler on his ministers consists of «two handles», rewards and punishments.<sup>50</sup> The «two handles» are opposed to each other and it is this antagonism which makes them a complete set of «handles». The analysis of their use and dialectical relationship can be – and is – given in interlocking parallel style. If the *Laozi* talks about «Heaven» and «Earth»<sup>51</sup>, about material wealth and fame,<sup>52</sup> about subjective and material factors in warfare<sup>53</sup> and if Wang Bi talks about «things» and «efforts» forming together the «ten thousand things» and Shi Dao-an about men and things,<sup>54</sup> if in other passages there is talk about «words and deeds»<sup>55</sup> interlocking parallel style presupposes an argument where there can be parallel talk on two opposite objects, together forming a whole. In philosophical texts there is an additional implication. Wang Bi is trying to find out «that by which» the ten thousand things are, presupposing that this must be «one». The structure of real things and processes being that they are different, the differences are at their utmost in the form of opposites. That which is able to produce things opposite to each other cannot itself have any of the specific characteristics the things it produces have, because «would it be cold it could not cool».<sup>56</sup> Language however is fixed to specific characteristics, it cannot describe that which is unspecific by definition. Therefore Wang Bi interprets – an argument which will be elaborated in another context – the short *zhang* of the *Laozi* as well as the structure of interlocking parallel style in an attempt to arrive at insights concerning «that by which» by hinting at the common elements in the constituent factors of being, which are always two and opposed to each other. The «philosophical character of the c-phrase» – to put it that way – is accordingly to hint at «that by which» the a and b are. Wang Bi has pushed this thought far enough to enable us to understand from his philosophy of language the purpose which in his eyes interlocking parallel style had to serve. For him – and in his understanding of Laozi

50 Cf. note 37.

51 Cf. *Laozi* 7.

52 Cf. *Laozi* 44 and other *zhang*.

53 Cf. *Laozi* 26.

54 Cf. note 49.

55 Cf. *Laozi* 70.

56 Wang Bi, *Laozi zhilue*, ed. cit., p. 308, line 4 of the text.

– it was the expression of a dialectical analysis of being; the basis of being however in their interpretation was immaterial, it was in the new philosophical term coined by Wang Bi «negativity». Both in philosophical and in political terms interlocking parallel style in *Laozi* and Wang Bi reflects an idealist attitude.

The finesse of this style however should not be overlooked. This style provides a very rigid network for the context-definition of the terms occurring within the text; they are defined by the strains they are used in and by opposition to their counterparts. The stylistic rigidity implies a number of arguments in the text which do not have to be made explicit, thus increasing the «density» and refinement of the text as opposed to the broad verbiage of legalist writers of the time.