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## The Pattern of the Way: Reflections on the Argumentation of the *Wenzi* \*

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The present study aims to demonstrate how certain argumentative features of a text that exists only in a fragmentary fashion can be used to gain a fuller picture of its original content and structure. The Daoist treatise *Wenzi* 文子 is particularly suitable for this study, for it is available in two different but similarly distorted and fragmented versions: the received text as well as some Western Han 西漢 (206 B.C.–A.D. 6) fragments obtained at the archeological site of Dingzhou 定州 (1973). The study first deals with the numerous parallels between the *Wenzi* and other early Chinese manuscripts. In addition to demonstrating the major influence of *Laozi* 老子 and *Xunzi* 荀子 and adducing circumstantial evidence for the time of the text's creation, the intertextual parallels also point to the importance of specific argumentative features. Among them, "antithetical parallelism" appears to be one of the most salient. The focus of the study is the reconstruction of a text sequence using this rhetorical figure. Furthermore, it argues that despite the widespread usage of "antithetical parallelism" in early Chinese texts, including the *Laozi*, there is some evidence to identify the source of the *Wenzi*'s inspiration for this particular argument as the *Xunzi*. In the latter, "antithesis" was one of the important constituents of the "patterned" discourse (*wen*) meant to reflect the theme of *wen*, the cultural legacy of the early Zhou Kings. Given the often neglected importance of the notion *wen* in the *Wenzi*, signifying the complete realization of the central Daoist notion, the Way (*dao* 道), the study concludes with the claim that, just like the *Xunzi*, the *Wenzi* also attempted to establish a connection between the content of its philosophical teaching and its formal, textual representation.

**Keywords:** *Wenzi*, intertextuality, antithesis, *Xunzi*, *Laozi*

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\* Parts of this article are based on my doctoral dissertation, which was published in 2012. See Andrej Fech, *Das Bambus-Wenzi: Versuch der Rekonstruktion des philosophischen Standpunktes eines daoistischen Textes der Frühen Han-Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012).

## Introduction

In the present paper I aim to reconstruct some of the argumentative features of the bamboo manuscript *Wenzi* (hereafter referred to as the Bamboo-*Wenzi*) excavated in the tomb of an aristocrat from the Western Han (206 B.C.–A.D. 6) in Dingxian 定縣 (after 1986: Dingzhou 定州) in 1973.<sup>1</sup> During the Han dynasty the text was regarded as an important representative of the Daoist school of thought as a work of Master Wen, who, at that time, was considered the closest disciple of Laozi.<sup>2</sup> Reconstructing and analyzing the argumentative structure of the *Wenzi* is, thus, important in several respects. The most obvious benefit is that, as it is recognized more and more clearly today, the analysis of the argumentative strategy and the formal structure of a text give us the possibility of understanding its intention and meaning more fully.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, such an analysis can show in what ways, if at all, the techniques of persuasion as developed by this early proponent of Daoism were congruent with the *Laozi*, which exemplifies its central notion, the ineffable Way (*dao* 道),

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- 1 For more information on this discovery, see Dingzhou Hanjian zhengli xiaozu 定州漢簡整理小組, “Dingxian 40 hao Han mu chutu zhujian jianjie” 定縣 40 號漢墓出土竹簡簡介, *Wenwu* 1981.8: 11–13.
  - 2 Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) compared the relation between Laozi and Master Wen to that of Confucius and his favorite disciple Yan Hui 顏回 (521–481 B.C.): “Although Confucius was like a prince, and Yan Yuan like a minister, he could not make up his mind to reprimand Yan Yuan, how much less would Laozi have been able to do so, if we consider him as a prince and Master Wen as his minister? Laozi and Master Wen were like Heaven and Earth” 以孔子為君，顏淵為臣，尚不能譴告，況以老子為君，文子為臣乎！老子、文子，似天地者也。In Huang Hui 暉, ed., *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 783. Translation adapted from Alfred Forke, *Lun-Heng. Part I. Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch'ung* (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962), 100.
  - 3 Dirk Meyer argues that: “It is clear that the formal structure of a text [...] was a vital element for generating meaning beyond the level of the lexicon,” see Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and Production of Meaning in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 50. Joachim Gentz claims that: “In many cases the argumentative line of a text can only be reconstructed in an unambiguous way through the reconstruction of its literary arrangements, which embody and encode the argument as a whole,” see Gentz, “Defining Boundaries and Relations of Textual Units,” in *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*, eds. Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 133.