

Oneness: reading the “All things are flowing in form (*Fan Wu Liu Xing*) 凡物流形” (with a translation)

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Abstract Ancient Chinese philosophers have persistently engaged in strenuous negotiations (and re-negotiations) of the boundaries between the metaphysical and the concrete. Their worldview reflects the fact that their understanding of the nature of the universe has conditioned their sense of the place and the role of human beings within the natural order; they reflect on what is the ‘given’ in the cosmos and determine what needs to be constructed by the minds and actions of humans. *Fan Wu Liu Xing* 凡物流形 (All things are flowing in form, hereafter FWLX) in the Chu Bamboo Manuscripts of the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), housed in the Shanghai Museum (*Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國竹書) is a pre-Qin example of the synthesis of political theory and cosmology. Without any received counterpart in the textual tradition, the primary concern of the FWLX is to establish a unified, well-regulated state with emphasis on the ruler’s understanding and imitation of the heavenly pattern, advocating the efficiency of kingship with the recognition of the fundamental principle of *yi* — (one, oneness) as a precondition for governing and unifying a state.

Keywords The Shanghai Museum collection of the Warring States bamboo manuscripts · Chinese ancient texts · Chinese philosophy · Chinese political culture · The *Fan Wu Liu Xing* text 凡物流形 · Oneness

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Introduction

This preliminary reading of the text of “Fan Wu Liu Xing 凡物流形” (All things are flowing in form, hereafter FWLX) in the Chu Bamboo Manuscripts of the Warring States Period housed in the Shanghai Museum (*Shanghai Bowuguan cang Zhanguo Zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國竹書) will introduce the key concepts of cosmic patterns, principles and the fundamental force of creation underlying all existence as presented in the text.

As an example of the pre-Qin synthesis of political theory and cosmology, FWLX reflects on, discusses and develops the key themes of cosmology and how the understanding of the cosmic order and its manifestations should be translated into proper guidelines and principles for managing the human world—concepts that emerged from intellectual discourses during the Warring States period. The cosmic idea during this period is not a singular or stagnant model, but rather a dynamic discourse in which are embedded various ideas and concepts of rulership and statecraft, reflecting the socio-political reality and concerns of early Chinese philosophers and political players. We will see that the FWLX text espouses this basic outlook, formulating its premises and conclusions on the various spheres of the cosmological and human realms. The text reflects the synthesis of the ancient schools of Chinese philosophy, integrating a Confucian progressive treatise of self-cultivation with a fundamentally Daoist view of cosmology.¹

¹ This article was submitted with the title of “Oneness: Reading the ‘All things are flowing in form’ (Fan Wu Liu Xing 凡物流形)” to another journal in 2013 and was scheduled to be published in its 2014’s special issue. Unfortunately the publication was not eventuated and might have caused some confusion in citations by other scholars. My apologies for any confusion this may have caused. In the year following the disentanglement of the Guodian bamboo manuscripts in Hubei province, a similar set of texts was found in a Hong Kong antiquities market in the spring of 1994. The corpus, comprising some 1200 bamboo slips, which appeared to be of the same age and probably from the same area as the Guodian texts, were subsequently purchased by the Shanghai Museum. Radiocarbon and other scientific analysis conducted by the Shanghai Museum and the Chinese Academy of Sciences on the bamboo slips confirmed that they are dateable to the late Warring States period. It took the Shanghai Museum three years to restore and preserve the corpus before textual studies could begin in 1997. Researchers have identified over 100 manuscripts from some 35,000 graphs written on the slips in 10 calligraphic styles, categorizing them by theme into historical, philosophical, religious, literature, musical, philological, military and other discourses, with ninety per cent of which have no parallel transmitted texts (Chen, Xiejun 陈燮君, 2001, 2; Ma, Chengyuan 马承源, 2001, 3, in Ma, Chengyuan, ed. 2001). The Fan Wu Liu Xing has two versions, namely, A and B. A appears to be complete with 846 characters inscribed on 30 bamboo slips, a few of which show slight damage at the tips; B has 21 slips with 601 characters. They provide textual complementarity. See, Ma, Chengyuan, ed. (2001), *Shanghai Bowuguan Cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* (1), Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe. The transcribed text used in this paper is based on vol. 7 of the same edited series by Ma Chengyuan (2008). Scholars have a few different suggestions for how some of the slips should be arranged in different order. In this article, I adopted Zhang Chongli’s version. See Zhang, Chongli, “Fan Wu Liu Xing” Xinbian Shiwen.” Rather than identifying precisely the authorship or scholastic lineage of the text, this paper will focus on the philosophical reading and textual analysis. In this context I use the terms Daoist and Confucian in a broader sense for the sake of convenience to describe the text, referring to their elemental ideas and schemata (e.g., the core values as they appear in the representative texts of the different schools) that have been traditionally attributed to the different “schools” as particular intellectual camps. The term “schools” or *jia* 家 in Chinese may come much later than the intellectual discourses themselves. In due course, some scholars may continue to debate on the usage of the term of “schools” or “*jia*” such as Confucianism or Rujia in the pre-Qin period. Until we can settle on a better term I am afraid we have to continue to use the term Daoist or Confucian to

In its description of the cosmic world, the FWLX text introduces binary pairs: life (*sheng* 生) and death (*si* 死), retain (*de* 得) and loss (*shi* 失), *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, water (*shui* 水) and fire (*huo* 火), left (*zuo* 左) and right (*you* 右), the end (*zhong* 終) and the beginning (*shi* 始). Also evident is the belief that the world is a cyclical continuity and a reversible process (e.g. the waxing and waning of the moon). The text suggests, for all these, there is an underlying Way, in which the world is a manifestation; and most importantly, it accepts one major unifying principle of derivation and development governing the various forces coming together and explaining all phenomena and existence, namely, the one and oneness (*yi* 一). While there are paragraphs that are reminiscent of the *Laozi*, the primary concern is to establish a well-regulated state with emphasis on the ruler's understanding and imitation of the heavenly pattern; the text does not denounce government affairs but advocates the efficiency of kingship, tracing the process of cultivation step by step back to the foundation upon which all depend, with the recognition of *yi* 一 as a precondition for governing and unifying a state in the human realm.

My paper will begin by providing a translation of the text, followed by discussion of cosmology and its philosophical implications for the human world as intended by the text, in particular the concept of *yi* in relation to rulership and statecraft.² The numbers denoting sliporder are provided at the end of the sentence and will be referred to in my discussion.

Footnote 1 continued

refer to what we think is sharing a similar idea in their representative texts and so on. The text of FWLX does not reveal the manuscript's authorial identity of a particular school. It contains a political theory with the combination of self-cultivation and Daoist outlook that may make the manuscript look like one with a Huang Lao origin. Readers can at the same time detect passages similar to those from the *Guanzi* (for example, FWLX shares a similar discussion of the art of the heart/mind and promotes the cultivation of the heart/mind as the important governing organ, as in the *Neiye* and *Xinshu* chapters of the *Guanzi*), *Huai Nan Zi*, *Laozi* or even the *Zhuangzi*, where the concept of *yi*—has been discussed—it is, however, beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed comparative study of these early texts—this should be taken up as future projects). The FWLX text can be considered as an example of syncretic writings that are evident by the late third century BC when Chinese philosophy had already entered its richest period of cross-fertilization, producing new, hybrid schools of thought with textual examples such as the Daoist Huang-Lao writing and the *Guanzi*. Along this line, it is unsurprising that meanings and conception of the key words such as *yi* (one or oneness) are enriched, transformed, restructured and reinvented by the author (s) in the textual processing in this kind of syncretic writing.

² The translation of FWLX is mine. I have relied on James Legge and D.C. Lau for translations of other early texts, unless stated otherwise. I would like to thank Professor John Makeham for inviting me to attend the Early China workshop organized by the Department of Chinese Studies, the Australian National University in June 2013, in which I benefit from discussions with participants of the workshop including Professor Michael Nylan, Drs Duncan Campbell, Benjamin Penny and Nathan Woolley. I would like to thank the following for their helpful and insightful comments on my translation when my paper was presented at the 18th ISCP Conference held at the State University of New York at Buffalo on the 22–24 July 2013: Professors Chan Wing-cheuk, Richard King, Jung-yeup Kim, James Sellmann and Anne Pang White. I also thank Eric Nelson, Lance Eccles and Daniel Lee who spent time on reading my draft and offered critique. All mistakes and flaws, however, remain to be mine. I also thank the reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

Translation

凡物流形，奚得而成？流形成體，奚得而不死？既成既生，奚寡而鳴？既本既根，奚後【1】之奚先？陰陽之處，奚得而固？水火之和，奚得而不危？How can things in general attain their completion (that is, come into existence as a complete body) if they are flowing in form? Since their flowing form has turned into a complete body, how can they not perish? Since they have now attained completion and have come to life, how can they voice [their existence] in solitude? What comes first and what comes after when there is source and origin? How can stability be accomplished where *yin* and *yang* meet? How can danger be averted where water and fire converge?

問之曰：民人流形，奚得而生？【2】流形成體，奚失而死？有得而成，未知左右之情，天地立終立始：天降五度，³吾奚【3】衡奚縱？五氣竝至，吾奚異奚同？五言在人，孰為之公？九囿出誨，孰為之封？吾既長而【4】或老，孰為薦奉？鬼生於人，奚故神明？骨肉之既靡，其智愈彰，其訣奚適，孰知【5】其疆？鬼生於人，吾奚故事之？骨肉之既靡，身體不見，吾奚自食之？其來無度，【6】吾奚時之？宰祭員奚登？吾如之何使飽？順天之道，吾奚以為首？吾欲得【7】百姓之和，吾奚事之？敬天之明奚得？鬼之神奚食？先王之智奚備？It is asked: how can the mass of humankind come into life if they [originally] flow in corporeal forms? How come they disappear and die after a flowing form becomes a body? In attainment there is completion; without knowing the realities of the left and right, Heaven and Earth establish the end and the beginning. Heaven sends down the Five Measurements, which do I make horizontal or vertical? The Five *Qi* come together, how do I differentiate or unite them? The Five Words are among men, which one rules all? The Nine parks are X, what marks their boundaries? Since I will grow and may become old, who will present offerings to me? The ghost comes forth from man, how can it attain perspicacity or divine brilliance? Bones and flesh have decayed, yet its (i.e. the ghost's) intelligence displays more (retributive power); when it has departed and gone, who will know about its power? The spirit comes from a human, for what reason should I serve it? Bones and flesh have decayed and the body has disappeared, how can I be self-sufficient? There is no rule for its arrival, when should I wait on it? How are those who offer sacrifice to be raised? How would I make them full? In conforming to the way of Heaven, to what should I assign priority? In desiring to attain harmony among the hundred names, how should I serve them? How should I revere the brilliance of Heaven? How can the spirit of the ghost be nourished? How (can I) equal the wisdom of the ancient kings?

聞之曰：登【8】高從埤，至遠從邇。十圍之木，其始生如蘗。足將至千里，必從寸始。日之有【9】珥，將何聽？月之有暈，將何正？水之東流，將何盈？日之始出，何故大而不訾？其入【10】中，奚故小封暉誅？問天孰高，與地孰遠歟？孰為天？孰為地？孰為雷【11】神？孰為帝？土奚得而平？水奚得而清？草木奚得而生？【12A】禽獸奚得而鳴？【13B】夫雨之至，孰唾津之？夫風之至，孰噓吸而迸之？It is heard: ascending the heights begins from the low fence; traversing far distances starts from a nearby place. The woods of ten circles begin their growth

³ The word “wudu” (五度) also appears in the 《鶡冠子》: 制以五行，左木右金前火後水中土，營軍陳，士不失其宜，五度既正，無事不舉。

as sprouts, the feet walking one thousand *li* start [their journey] by inching forward a step. The sun has a halo, what does it hear with? The moon has an aureole, what does it correct with? The water flows East, with what is it replenished? The sun is about to rise, but why is it big and yet not XX; when it reaches mid-day, why is it bound to get smaller and stop rising higher? One asks of Heaven, what is it that makes it high, and of Earth, what is it that makes it far? What is Heaven made of? What is Earth made of? What is the Spirit of Thunder? What is God? Why is the Earth flat? Why is water clear? Why do grass and the woods grow? Why do the beasts and birds cry? When the rain comes who is spitting? When the wind blows who is inhaling and exhaling?

聞之曰：察道，坐不下席 端文【14】書，不與事，先知四海，至聽千里，達見百里。是故聖人處於其所，邦家之【16】危安存亡，賊盜之作，可先知。It is heard: To observe the *dao*, you sit without leaving the mat/seat; you hold the documents without involving yourself in affairs. You will in advance know the Four Seas, hear news from one thousand *li* and see to a distance of one hundred *li*. Thus a sage by staying in his own place will be the first to know whether the state or family is in danger or in safety, will survive or perish; and whether there are thieves or robbers.

聞之曰：心不勝心，六亂乃作；心如能勝心，【26】是謂小徹。奚謂小徹？人白為察。奚以知其白？終身自若。能寡言，吾能一【18】吾，夫此之謂小成 曰：百姓之所貴唯君，君之所貴唯心，心之所貴唯一 得而解之，上【28】賓於天，下播於淵。坐而思之，謀於千里；起而用之，申於四海。It is heard: when your heart-mind does not overcome the heart-mind, the six perplexities will arise; if the heart-mind (that is, the heart-mind of the proper course) can overcome the heart-mind, this is called a minor (or basic) enlightenment. What is a minor enlightenment? It can be discerned when one is pure (in heart). How can it be known if one is pure (in heart)? It is he who remains at ease for his whole life. [He who] is reticent and [he who] can bring oneness into the self (i.e. unify the self)—this is called a minor achievement. It is said: what the hundred names esteem alone is the ruler; what the ruler esteems alone is the heart-mind; what the heart-mind esteems alone is oneness. Attaining it (that is, oneness) so that he will be able to comprehend it, [he] will serve Heaven above and nurture it [as low as] in the deep waters below. Pondering it without leaving one's seat, he will be able to organize things at one thousand *li*; going about and using it, he will be able to extend its application to the four seas.

聞之曰：至情而知，⁴【15】察知而神，察神而同，[察同]而僉，察僉而困，察困而復。是故陳為新，人死復為人，水復【24】於天。凡百物不死如月，出則或入，終則或始，至則或反。察此言，起於一端。【25】It is heard: having the essential qualities will lead to understanding consciousness; examining consciousness will raise divine intelligence; examining divine intelligence will lead to conformity; [examining conformity] will lead to excessiveness; examining excessiveness will lead to perplexity; examining perplexity will lead to restoration. Therefore, the old

⁴ Liao Mingchun suggests an alternative reading of *qing* as *jing* 靜 (tranquility) which is also legible. 廖名春，〈《凡物流形》校讀零割(一)〉，《孔子2000》網站，2008.12.31，<http://www.confucius2000.com/qhjb/fw1x3.htm>.; 〈《凡物流形》校讀零割(二)〉。<http://www.confucius2000.com/qhjb/fw1x4.htm>.

should turn into the new; man after death should return to being a man; water should return again to Heaven. In general, the hundred things do not perish, like the moon; having gone out they will come back again; having ended they will start again; having just arrived they will return. Examining these words [he will realize that all things] generate from one source.

聞之曰：一生兩，兩生參，參生女，女成結 是故有一，天下無不有；無一，天下亦無一有。無【21】[?] 而知名，無耳而聞聲。草木得之以生，禽獸得之以鳴。遠之矢【13A】天，近之矢人，是故【12B】察道，所以修身而治邦家。It is heard: one generates two; two generates three; three generates female/the feminine aspect; female/the feminine aspect becomes binding. Therefore when there is oneness/the one, there is nothing that cannot come to existence under Heaven; (if) there is no oneness, there is nothing that can exist under Heaven. Without X ... the name is known; without ears the sound is heard. Grass and woods can survive because of it; birds and animals can call because of it. From afar Heaven is known; more intimately, man is known. Therefore by observing the *dao*, he will cultivate himself to regulate his family and to rule the state.

聞之曰：能察一，則百物不失；如不能察一，則【22】百物具失。如欲察一，仰而視之，俯而揆之，毋遠求度，於身稽之。得一[而]【23】圖之，如并天下而担之；得一而思之，若并天下而治之。守一以為天地旨。【17】是故一，咀之有味，嗅[之有臭]，鼓之有聲，近之可見，操之可操，握之則失，敗之則【19】槁，賊之則滅。察此言，起於一端。It is heard: he who is able to examine the [principle of] oneness will not lose any of the hundred things; he who is not able to examine the [principle of] oneness will lose them all. When he desires to examine the principle of oneness, he will be able to see it when looking up; he will be able to conceive it when stooping down. Do not seek far for the guidelines but examine it (oneness) within (yourself). Attain oneness and plan with it as if unifying all under Heaven and governing it; attain oneness and ponder on it as if unifying all under Heaven and regulating it. Guard oneness as the decree of Heaven and Earth. Therefore, the one can be tasted when chewed; its scent can be perceived when smelled; it makes sound when clapped; it can be seen when approached; it can be managed when an attempt is made to manage it. It will be lost if an attempt is made to dominate it; it will wither if overcome; it will be extinguished if opposed. If one examines these words, [he will realize that all things] generate from one source.

聞之曰：一言而終不窮，一言而有衆；【20】一言而萬民之利，一言而為天地旨。握之不盈握，敷之無所容。大【29】之以知天下，小之以治邦。【30】It is heard: one word remains unexhausted even to the end; one word attracts a mass of people; it benefits the multitude; one word represents the purpose of Heaven and Earth; grasp it and it is less than a handful; spread it out and it cannot be contained; enlarge it so that it can rule all under Heaven, reduce it so that it can regulate the state.

Cosmogony and cosmology

Beginning with a series of interrogations as to what makes possible the process of 'becoming' of the cosmos and manifestations of the material and spiritual worlds, the text gives a general description of the nature of the cosmos. The key words *liu*

流 (flow, flowing) and *xing* 形 (with the actual written character of 型 in the manuscript, meaning form, to form, to substantiate) are used to depict constant movement, transformation and formation of all things in general. With the radical of water (水) *liu* is related to the flowing of water (See the *Shuowen* 《說文解字》: 「流, 篆文, 从水。」 「流, 水行也。从沝。») ⁵ The character is extended to mean transformation as in the *Guangya* (《廣雅·釋詁》: *liu* denotes transformation. 「流, 化也。») ⁶ Indeed the character *liu* has been frequently used in other early texts to describe the universal and continuing process of flowing differentiation, transformation and integration. For example, in the *Zhou Yi* 《周易·乾·彖傳》, “Vast is the ‘great and originating (power)’ indicated by Qian! All things owe to it their beginning—it contains all the meaning belonging to (the name) Heaven. The clouds move and the rain is distributed; the various things appear in their developed forms.” 「大哉乾元! 萬物資始, 乃統天。雲行雨施, 品物流形」; ⁷ and in the *Liji* 《禮記·孔子閒居》: “Earth contains the mysterious energy (of nature). That mysterious energy (produces) the wind and thunder-clap. By the wind and thunder-clap the (seeds of) forms are carried abroad, and the various things show the appearance of life—in all and each of these things there is a lesson.” 「地載神氣, 神氣風霆, 風霆流形, 庶物露生, 無非教也」; ⁸ even humans are described as originating from the flowing *qi* and water: 「人, 水也。男女精氣合, 而水流形。」 ⁹ As for the character *xing*, according to the *Shuowen Jiezi* 《說文解字》: “*Xing* means form.” 「形, 象也。」 This section of the FWLX text describes a cosmic process beginning in formless changing, going through a process of transformation and formation—flowing from the quasi-form and fluidity (*liuxing* 流形) to complete body (*ti* 成體), to life (*sheng* 生), stability (*gu* 固) and harmonious integration (和)—with an underlying force it makes possible the contending energies to interact, to integrate and to attain and complete the world-as-it-appears. The passages in the beginning of the text demonstrate that all things, including the mass of people are in constant movement until they come to a stage of formation and transformation, including being unified. *Xing* 形, does not appear as a fixed form but denotes the manifestation of things in the different phases of transformation as irreducible attributes of the world. The words of *liu* and *xing* are used to imply the characteristic and concrete manifestation of the fundamental material of all things, *qi* 氣. ¹⁰ The

⁵ 漢·許慎著, 清·段玉裁注, 《說文解字注》(臺北: 黎明文化事業公司, 1978), 卷 22, 頁 573.

⁶ 魏·張揖, 清·王念孫疏證, 《廣雅疏證(一)》(濟南: 山東友誼書社), 卷 3 上, 頁 330.

⁷ 魏·王弼、韓康伯注, 唐·孔穎達等正義, 《周易正義》(臺北: 藝文印書館, 1993, 十三經注疏本), 卷 1, 頁 10. Legge’s translation.

⁸ Kong Yingda et al. 孔穎達等, 《禮記正義》漢·鄭玄注.(臺北: 藝文印書館, 1993, 十三經注疏本), 卷 29, 頁 862. Legge’s translation.

⁹ Guan Zhong 管仲, 《管子·水地》; 《管子》上冊(臺北: 黎明文化事業公司, 1996, 《百子全書》本), 卷 14, 頁 3090.

¹⁰ In the text another form of *qi* seems to be the ghost-spirit of the ancestor. Ancestral worship appears to pivotally connect this world and the afterlife. While a man’s physical body has disappeared after his death, the ghost of the dead continues to influence this world through his illuminating spirituality, 一鬼生於人, 奚故神明? 骨肉之既靡, 其智愈彰—the deceased therefore, without its physical form, continues its existence not only through being nurtured by sacrificial offerings or ritual feedings, but more significantly through the successor’s illumination of his wisdom. Observing the way of the former king and harmonizing the people is not only a way to serve the ancestor but also Heaven. This is consistent

word *qi* appears in the above passage, as in *wuqi* 五氣, though it is not exactly clear what the five *qi* are. In other early texts, the *wuqi* (sometimes *liuqi*) refers to the operation of the energy flow in nature and in the human body.¹¹ For the former it may appear in the form of air, wind, fire, water etc., and for the latter, the five sentiments,¹² and the five conducts.¹³ Therefore *qi* is a multi-dimensional term that refers to the operation of the moving energy at both the micro and macro levels of the universe. The different integration and transformations of *qi* constitute all things in the universe, which could generally be referred to as either *yin* or *yang*, and which then can be further categorized into the five different elements—metal (*jin* 金), wood (*mu* 木), water (*shui* 水), fire (*huo* 火) and earth (*tu* 土), according to their subsequent generative phenomena.¹⁴ The *qi* are the basic constituents of objects; *qi* (and sometimes water) has the characteristics of flowing change and manifestation. Furthermore, when objects are composed of the different *qi* elements, those elements do not disappear with the production of the object. The *qi* and their generative components take part in the successive stages and form part of the next phase of transformation. As will be discussed later, this kind of generative process has been depicted in the *Taiyi Shengshui* 《太一生水》 as well as in the *Laozi* 《老子》.

In the FWLX, the constant changes and transformation with the repeated regular pattern in the fashion of cycles and reversals (*fu* 復 and *fan* 反) of all things in different forms, processes and phenomena are manifested in both human and natural worlds as well as the material and spiritual realms as in slips 24 and 25. The passage further affirms that all things are a part of a reverse cyclical process and that they all come from one source: 起於一端, indicating that there is a basic source from which all things derive.

Continuing in the next section is another series of questions about the natural law. It illustrates a Daoist paradoxical relativism (e.g. small and large, close and far) but also points to the view that all things start small and have their origin: the most basic is also the source of all things. While all things are described as being in a course of progression, it suggests that the cosmic process is one of endless reversal within a closed circle rather than of linear progression with infinite forward movement, as exemplified in the different phases of the moon and the sun (e.g. waning moon, new moon, waxing moon and full moon and back to the cycle again) (slips 9 and 10).

Moreover, all things have their own inherent characters and features as they also form the various components of the universe: from the sky and earth, land and water, to the plants, birds and beasts (slips 11, 12A and 13B). The natural world is conceived as rule-governed with an underlying pattern, and with the various beings

Footnote 10 continued

with the Zhou belief that to follow the commands of Heaven to live up to the words and deeds of the sage kings of the past.

¹¹ 《陰陽應象大論》：天有四時五行，以生長收藏，以生寒暑燥濕風。人有五藏，化五氣，以生喜怒悲憂恐。and, in the 《六節藏象論》：天食人以五氣，地食人以五味。五氣入鼻，藏於心肺，上使五色脣明，音聲能彰。五味入口，藏於腸胃，味有所藏，以養五氣，氣和而生津液相成，神乃自生。

¹² 《逸周書官人解》：民有五氣，喜、怒、欲、懼、憂。

¹³ One of the examples is the *Wuxing* 五行 text.

¹⁴ This can be seen from narratives in the 《天元紀大論》 in the Huangdi Neijing 黃帝內經。

produced as they are, big and small, high and low, each in its own proper sphere. In other words, this universe, which is the same for all, may or may not have been made by any divine power of god or man,¹⁵ but it always has been, is, and will be an ever-transforming entity, kindling and going out by itself. To discover this underlying scheme of the constant natural pattern, to structure and to effect and reinforce the social order in the human realm accordingly is what a ruler of a state should do. This means he will need to understand the underlying force that enables the continuing existence and operation of the cosmos, which is expected to have the same implications in the human society.

One and oneness and the human way

The earlier sections of the text outline the essence of Nature and the natural law by asking the reasons for the world-as-it-is: the constant flowing and changes, the interaction of the binary pairs and the cycle reversing the process of transformation of all things. The question remains: what makes it possible that the flowing (e.g. *qi*) forms the visible universe and that the binary opposite elements (e.g. *yin* and *yang*, water and fire) interact and merge to form the world as it is; what brings the continuing changes to completion and stability? After all, what is that single basic source and origin of all things? Instead of giving a direct answer to the formation of the natural world, it suggests that there is the same unifying principle or intrinsic Way in the human world as there is in the universe. Humans, when they discover the implicate way inherent in the cosmic world, should regulate human society accordingly. The text therefore, without directly responding to the question of what is the nature of the physical substance in a material world, proposes that it has the same principal implications in the human world, and the text shifts its focus in the following sections to the human world and more specifically, to the way in which the ruler regulates the state. Here, the concept of *yi*—deserves particular attention.

According to the early texts, the character *yi* has the meanings of “one,” “unity, oneness,” (先聖後聖。其揆一也。《孟子》) “unification,” (定於一。《孟子》) “pure,” (惟精惟一。《尚書》) and even “wholeheartedness and sincerity” (欲一以窮之。《禮運》). We will see that *yi* in the FWLX is sharing these multifaceted notions.

First we need to look at a reminiscent passage of the *Dao De Jing* 《道德經》 in the FWLX where *yi* appears to be the beginning of the process of generation. In the *Dao De Jing*, the *Dao* is the starting point and the source of the myriad things and *One* comes from the *Dao*. (道生一、一生二、二生三、三生萬物。From the *Dao* comes one, from one comes two, from two comes three, and from three comes the ten thousand things.) The *Dao De Jing*’s progression of *yi* owes its origin to the *dao*, whereas in the FWLX, without mentioning the word *dao*, “One” is the first being and the source of all things, generating the multitude. The FWLX does not deny the eternity or existence of the *Dao*, but seems to emphasize the derivation and

¹⁵ The queries about “Di 帝” (or god) and *shen* 神 (human spirit) in this passage means the text does not exclude the power of divinity over natural phenomena and the human world.

actualization of all things through the profound One and oneness. The FWLX claims that One is the primary being of all things:

聞之曰：一生兩，兩生參，參生女，女成結。是故有一，天下無不有；無一，天下亦無一有。It is heard: One generates two; two generates three; three generates female/the feminine aspect; female/the feminine aspect becomes joined. Therefore when there is oneness, there is nothing that cannot come to existence under Heaven.

The generation of the numbers relates to the cosmogony culminating in the basic and fundamental One from which the universe is formed. *Yi* is not only the source of all things but what sustain all things in the universe. It is described in the *Dao De Jing*:

It is the One that makes these things what they are;
Without what makes it limpid Heaven might split;
Without what makes it settled, Earth might sink;
Without what gives them potencies gods might spend themselves;
Without what makes it full the valley might run dry;
Without what keeps them alive the myriad creatures might perish;
Without what makes them leaders lords and princes might fall;
Hence the superior must have the inferior as roots;
The high must have the low as base...
Turning back is how the way moves.¹⁶

Yi also appears in the text of “The Great [Ultimate] One Generates Water” (*Taiyi Sheng Shui* 太一生水) in the Guodian manuscript in which the Great One has been considered as the mother/source of all things in the universe (以己為萬物母), including Heaven and Earth, *yin* and *yang* which then interact to take the next generative process. It is said the Great One pervades all things and exists as their guiding principle (以己為萬物經):

The Great One generates water,
Water returned and supplemented/assisted the Great One,
In this way developing Heaven,
Heaven returned and assisted the Great one,
In this way developing the Earth,
Heaven and Earth repeatedly assist each other,
In this way developing the spirit and the illuminated...
This being so, the Great One is concealed in water,
And moves with the four seasons.
It completes a cycle, but just
(to start thereby to make itself)
The mother of the ten thousand things;
First it is depleted, then it is full;
So to make [oneness] as the guiding principle of the “ten thousand things.”

¹⁶ Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching*. II, 39. Lau, D.C (transl). Baltimore. Md.: Penguin Books. 1963.

This is something that Heaven cannot destroy,
 Something that the Earth cannot conceal,
 That *yin* and *yang* cannot accomplish.

There is an inherent generative process initiated by the Great One, that provides the source (*mu* 母) and the guiding principle (*jing* 經) for the myriad things. In the generative process, unity and diversity, oneness and multiplicity are the same thing in essence. *Yi* in the above passages cited in the *Dao De Jing* and the FWLX could well be translated as “one.” Nevertheless the character could contain both the notions of “One” and “oneness,” showing *yi* as an encompassing word indicating both the origin and the way or principle of producing the multitude. Despite the many manifestations, things are unified and emanate from the One.

The text stresses that One is the base and fundamentality of all things just as the low is the base of the high and a short distance is the starting point of a long journey. The reversal to the basic and ultimate one is an analogue of tracing the origin and principle of all things. This principle not only applies to the natural but also the human world by way of cultivation and statecraft. Similar to the natural world, a reduction process applies in human society: what is most important to the people is the ruler; what is most important to the ruler is the heart-mind and the oneness is what the heart-mind should focus on. This seeking ‘the one’ as the original source echoes the virtue of being basic and simple in the paradoxical relativism mentioned in the earlier section. In a state, actualization of oneness begins with the ruler; for a person, the source of oneness starts with introspection, that is, within the heart. In microcosm, the individual or the ruler engages in seeking oneness. Being one in heart results from the individual being pure and at ease; it is the original and ultimate source and foundation of building the ability to cultivate oneself, to regulate a state and eventually to rule all under Heaven.

The text states that observing “oneness” starts with ordering and stabilizing the heart as though by another heart (心如能勝心). Rather than taking its surface meaning of one heart overcoming another, it refers to a state of mind with consistent attention (or single-mindedness)¹⁷ and the awakening of the consciousness that exists within until the person gains perspicacity and reaches spiritual conformity (察知而神, 察神而同): this is the pure reflection of oneness. In this sense, oneness or being pure in heart can be understood as sincerity and wholeheartedness. Just as human intelligence is needed to create anything purposeful and consciousness needs intelligence for matters to evolve, being one means the individual is completely engaged and have full commitment until it (the consciousness) reaches a state that can be described as un-differentiated, or indivisible. Oneness is a state of mind, an initial decision, a point of view that can be expanded to a state of being in the individual as a whole; being able to attain “oneness” within is further measured by the individual’s ability to unify himself as a whole as expressed in the words 吾能一

¹⁷ Indeed, being focused and fixing one’s mind has been discussed in such texts as the “*Xing Zi Ming Chu*” 性自命出 where it is said that though humans have inborn nature their heart-minds (are not born with) a fixed attention. Cultivation therefore is about training the heart-mind to concentrate all attention and commitment (*zhi* 志) on a particular goal.

吾 (be able to unify one by oneself),¹⁸ which may be taken to mean unifying the outer and inner person so that there is no conflict between the internal and external, mind and body, but a harmonious integration of the two.

This unifying principle is a basic and yet profound force behind the existence and formation of all things, bringing together the seemingly different or opposite elements for the completion and stability of the world. The FWLX asserts that a man will be able to rule a large area if he examines and complies with the principle of *yi* by taking himself as the starting point of the whole generative process. Oneness therefore, is more than a state of mind—oneness is a universal, cosmic principle to be practised (as it is in the original words, the Principle of Heaven and Earth 天地旨). That is how the text confirms there are different levels of achievement regarding to the attainment of *yi*: being able to actualize oneness in self is termed “minor achievement” (小成); an ideal ruler would be the one who can attain a larger One and extend its application to the four seas. That is, the ruler should consciously evolve to higher levels of engagement by translating his perception of *yi* into the ability to unify the world and all people until its influence pervades the four directions. (Slips 26, 18 and 28)

When the ruler chooses the larger Self as his own self, and when he is able to practise being one in regulating the state and unifying all under Heaven, *yi* then is a progressive and multifaceted self-generative and creative process similar to the Confucian framework depicted in the *Great Learning*. This larger scale of oneness, which progresses from “*cha yi* 察一” (examining the principle of oneness), to “*de yi* 得一” (attaining the principle of oneness), and finally to “*shou yi* 守一” (guarding the principle of oneness) is described as a parallel with the progressive procedures of self-cultivation, regulating the state and unifying all under Heaven (Slip 17). The very familiar successive levels of self, family, state and the world are unified by the very same force of *yi*, through the conscious effort of the one, that is, the ruler.¹⁹ The oneness is both the quality and principle that the ruler should embody as he is acting as the creative and generative source of founding a unified state. The phrase “起於一端” (slips 19, 20) in this passage confirms that all things come from one source: the one, and in this case, the ruler himself. The passage suggests that it is only through oneness that all things can be attained, and that the ruler should initiate the process of observing and practising the principle of oneness. Therefore it is not going too far to suggest that the ruler is the one source and that it is only through the ruler’s practice of oneness, that all come to existence and completion.

Therefore when *yi* is taken as One and oneness it is both the source and discourse; the way and the goal. Compared to the *dao* in the *Dao De Jing*, which is formless

¹⁸ Here there are different ways of arranging the slips. I tend to take the reading of “吾能一吾” with slip 18 followed by slip 28 and as “being able to bring oneness into self by one’s self.” This reading is comparable to Guanzi’s discussion of the art of the heart/mind with an emphasis on focused attention when cultivating heart/mind. For example, see *Guanzi’s Neiye* and *Xinshu* chapters.

¹⁹ I find that this textual discourse bears a resemblance to the concept of *zhong* 中 expressed in the words “*qiuzhong*” (seeking *zhong*), “*dezhong*” (attaining *zhong*), “*jiazhong*” (enlarging *zhong*), and “*guizhong*” (returning to *zhong*), in the *Baoxun* (Instructions for Preservation) text of the Tsinghua collection of bamboo manuscripts. See, Chan, Shirley. *Zhong* and Ideal Rulership in the *Baoxun* (Instructions for Preservation) Text in the Tsinghua University Collection of the Warring States Bamboo Slip Manuscripts. *Dao: Journal of Comparative Philosophy*. Vol. 11, Issue 2. 2012. 129–145.

and unfathomable, the FWLX metaphorically describes “the one” as something that can be observed, can be felt, smelled and tasted; it is the underlying explanation of the aforementioned cosmic order. *Yi* is everywhere—it can be sought close by, and it exists in everything; it is within oneself if one seeks within; it forms and transforms things, and, after all, is the basic and yet ultimate principle by which a state is regulated and the universe harmonized; it is a process of actualization by bringing all to their wholeness. The metaphor that describes the one as something tangible should be taken as the realization of things as a result of following the principle of oneness: oneness is not simply the basic source for all things but is in itself immanent in the complete sequence of creative activity, beginning with the one but proceeding from there to generate all things. Humans are not simply passive objects in the cosmic world: with conscious effort, man, starting within himself as the one, participates in the ongoing process of generation and regeneration which bring things to transformation. Therefore, to be a ruler concerns being the one and generating the power of creating many as the larger One. If the cosmic order with an underlying pattern that generates all things can be considered as an operation of the principle of oneness as a “larger one” (source) at a macro level, the ruler can be taken as the one and the source and actualization of one at a micro level: he himself through the progressive self-generating process of cultivation and political engagement is the creative source of the one and many in the human world.

To be sure, it is difficult to determine conclusively whether or not the FWLX conceives oneness as emergent or predetermined, but the text suggests that oneness is the underlying force in the human world just as there is the same principle presiding over the cosmic order. If man is considered as part of the universe, it is logical that he should adhere to this same universal rule which is to be held fast to and kept. Each individual (the self) is a creator as well as a created as part of the larger One (the social-human world and the cosmos). So, oneness, the unity of all, signifies how parts are merged, formed and manifested in the world. In this sense, the contending elements such as *yin* and *yang*, fire and water (mentioned at the beginning of the texts) which are often perceived as a symbol of dualism, is actually meant to convey the notion that all apparent opposites are complementary parts of a unified whole: *yin* and *yang* meet to accomplish stability; water and fire converge and do not perish. The cosmos is ultimately a unified whole although this whole necessarily expresses itself in dualistic (or sometimes, pluralistic) terms. The essential unity is that of complementary polarities, which, while being opposed to in the realm of experience and perception, are co-substantial.

Finally, *yi* is such a broad term that it could even refer to the bringing together of all the territories (and people) under a single political entity. This is probably one of the most urgent desiderata after the many years of disintegration witnessed by the Warring States period when solidarity is wanted and unity is desired. Finding stability in the ever changing flux and bringing continuity to completion in the dynamic process is not only part of the cosmic process but what is required in the human world. We can probably take the repeated statement “as if unifying all under Heaven” (若並天下) as a signal of this political aspiration in the FWLX.

A final note

The above has focused on the interpretation of the concept of *yi*, (i.e. One and oneness) as presented in the text of the FWLX. I argued that One and oneness is a key philosophical ideology that has political implications: it refers to the basic source of all things driving the process of generation and regeneration; it is a unifying force and power that brings order in harmony and stability. This text relates not just to ideas expressed in philosophical works, but also to statecraft and reflect contemporary political reality in the Warring States period. Recent studies of political thought on the subject of unification such as Yuri Pines' *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy*, have attributed the enduring unity of the Chinese empire over two millennia to the ideological premises and their implementation and, how unity was and remains a central ideological tenet of Chinese political thought.²⁰ One might remain sceptical of how much of the buried manuscripts and the ideology contained in them have exerted influence on the polity. Nevertheless, the FWLX is significant at least in two aspects: it shows how the political ideology of unity and stability remained the central discussion of the elites during that time and that the text(s) and its ideas could probably have been shared by and shaped the minds of some of the major political actors that unity was the norm, and disunity simply an aberration.

Conclusion

Starting with a series of rhetorical questions, the FWLX presents a cosmic process characterized with flowing changes and moving with cyclical reversal; it is only with some kind of underlying force that cosmic formation and transformation is possible. Complying with the cosmic pattern and principle, the ruler should initiate the process of bringing all into completion and into one. The text provides a structured message about leadership and related political schema revolving around the concept of *yi*: *yi* as the source and origin of all and *yi* as the realization of the unifying of all things. *Yi* is the source, the Way and the principle for all coming to existence, completion, stability and harmony. It is a multi-dimensional term, not only explaining formation and solidarity in the influx in the cosmic process at the macro level, but also representing the pervasive principle in the socio-political realm that would qualify the ruler to be the one. In sum, as the most basic and the first number, *yi* is a holistic approach to what a ruler should seek in every aspect of political activity; it being within himself as introspection as wholeheartedness, and bringing unity and harmony to the different levels of the socio-political structure until the unification of the empire is realized. In this sense the FWLX showcases how philosophical concepts and ideological principles in ancient China are closely related to statecraft, polity and traditional Chinese political culture in particular.

²⁰ It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full discussion about political ideology in relation to the political culture in ancient China. Yuri Pine's work such as the *Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* gives a detailed account on this topic. I thank the reviewer for referring my discussion to Pine's book.

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