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Rhetorical Questions in the *Daodejing*: Argument Construction, Dialogical Insertion, and Sentimental Expression

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Abstract: This paper provides a typology of rhetorical questions in the *Daodejing* and examines their functions on rhetorical effects and argumentative construction. This paper argues against a reading of rhetorical questions that translates them directly into propositional statements. Instead, the fact that rhetorical questions appear in one version of the text but not in others shows us the unique subtleties of meaning that rhetorical questions deliver. An awareness of the performative and dialogical functions elicited through rhetorical questions deepens our understanding of the persuasive power of the *Daodejing*. Furthermore, emotional sentiments within the text can be detected through the use of rhetorical questions which function to impress the readers/listeners while urging a point. A study of rhetorical questions in the *Daodejing* reveals textual differences across versions that transcend their wording, all the while motivating a new understanding of rhetorical questions based on classical Chinese texts enriches current definitions proposed in the field at large.

Keywords: rhetorical questions; *Daodejing*; meaning constructions; parallel texts; rhetorical effects

"If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?

If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

(William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*) (Greenblatt et al. 2016, pp. 467–521)

1. Introduction: Rhetorical Questions, and What Is New?

The famous opening phrase of the first chapter of the *Analects* has Confucius utter three rhetorical questions:

"學而時習之，不亦說乎？有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎？人不知而不慍，不亦君子乎？"

"Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application? Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters? Is he not a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him?". (Cheng [1990] 2008, pp. 1–8)

In the "Fu賦" chapter of the *Xunzi*, the text presents a series of conversations possibly between a minister and king, or a teacher and disciple, or a questioner and shaman, to whom the second speaker consistently replies with series of rhetorical questions (Lewis 1999, p. 180). In the Wang Bi version of the *Daodejing*, I estimate that 18% of chapters (a total of 16 chapters: 5, 7, 10, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23, 26, 44, 50, 58, 62, 73, 77, and 79) use rhetorical questions either individually, consecutively, or in a string (Lou 2016, pp. 14, 19, 23, 29, 33, 46, 53, 58, 69, 121, 134, 151, 161, 181, 186, and 188).[1]

The prevalence of rhetorical questions in classical literature raises the question, why are they used at all? Does it make a difference? If so, how? This paper explores these questions, focusing on the parallel texts of the *Daodejing*. This paper argues against reading rhetorical questions as propositional statements. Instead, this paper examines their rhetorical effects and use in argument construction.

First, a few words on the definition of "rhetorical" questions. In English literature, the discussion of what defines a rhetorical question has been controversial. A rhetorical

question (RQ) has the syntactic form of a question but the semantic value of a declarative statement (Sadock 1971; Han 2002). On the one hand, scholars such as Džemal Špago show us that in modern English literature, there are syntactic and semantic elements that are more likely to be identified as rhetorical questions (Špago 2016), arguing not only for a rhetorical use of questions, but for a distinct form of rhetorical questions. On the other hand, others insist that the co-occurrence of interrogative pronouns or adverbs and sentence-final particles does not conclusively indicate a rhetorical reading since genuine information-seeking questions can share the same features (Xiang et al. 2021, p. 6). This means that RQs are not a special category of questions with a distinct form, nor are they bound to any particular language or linguistic structure. This has directed scholars' attention to the special use that defines rhetorical questions (Jung and Schrott 2003). Unlike ordinary information-seeking questions, RQs do not expect answers from the addressees (Xiang et al. 2021, p. 2).[2] They are "meant to be heard as questions and understood as statements" (Ilie 1994, p. 130). This is also why RQs are different from standard questions that mainly seek information.[3] To what extent RQs center on the function of making a statement in the *Daodejing* will be evaluated in the conclusion of this paper.

Research on RQs covers the processes and mechanisms through which they exercise their cognitive pragmatic force (Wang 2014), their varying persuasive effects (Blankenship and Craig 2006),[4] and how their recipients are expected to respond within the circle of debate (Cacioppo et al. 1981).[5] The study of RQs has moved into philosophical, political, and theological literature in recent years. For example, Cornelia Ilie has examined the complex and loaded RQs during parliamentary question periods and other political speech (Ilie 2010). Christine Padesky describes the process of Socratic questioning in psychological and cognitive therapy as a guide to discovery rather than an attempt at changing others' minds (Padesky 1993). Stephen Salkever discusses the wide use of RQs and questioning in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* (Salkever 2007). Douglas Estes examines the questions and the questioning of the Bible's New Testament in the original Greek and alerts readers that we might be only looking at 15% of the text (Estes 2017, p. 22). Furthermore, Jim Adams shows us the performative nature of RQs in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament from the perspective of "indirect speech acts" and how they facilitate active self-involvement (Adams 2020).

To locate literature reviews of RQs in early Chinese studies is not an easy task, mostly because it is not yet a distinctive research topic that has received due attention. Another possible reason is that it has long been categorized as a linguistic "problem". Previously, RQs in Chinese scholarship have mostly been studied from a linguistic and grammatical perspective. In his *Categorical Dictionary of Old Chinese (Interrogatives)*, Wang Haifen 王海棻 not only lists more than 170 terms for RQs (in Chinese, *fanjie yiwen* 反詰疑問) but also categorizes them into three types, focusing on the underlying statements they express (Wang 2015, pp. 368–437).[6] Yang Bojun楊伯峻and He Leshi何樂士 also point out four features and grammatical indicators of RQs in classical Chinese (Yang and He 1992, vol. 2, pp. 889–93).[7] Many other contributions collect and classify sets of RQs in a variety of classical Chinese literature (Li 2003).

Research involving the *Daodejing*, the *Analects*, and *Zhuangzi* has discussed the relevance of RQs for effective persuasion and to construct meaning. First, Mark Lewis insightfully suggested that RQs employed amidst riddles, prose, and paradoxes are used as argumentative features of proto-Daoist texts to express an "individual and poetic voice" and demonstrate the breakdown of ritual communication. He argues that RQs in the *Daodejing*, on the one hand, challenge existing ideas, a common practice used by theoreticians of arguments, which are also found in *Zhuangzi*. On the other hand, RQs in the *Daodejing* indicate what one ought to do; for example, a series of RQs in Chapter 10 provides a detailed account for the procedure of meditation (Lewis 1999, p. 180).

While Lewis clearly and rightly points out the argumentative functions of RQs, Christoph Harbsmeier reminds us of the expressive power of RQs in the *Analects* (Harbsmeier 1990), which I argue can also be found in the *Daodejing*. While illuminating the

humor in the *Analects*, he points out a perspective on the informal tone and expletive particles including the colloquial RQ "Isn't that X?" (original text: *bu yi X hu* 不亦X乎？) and the use of sentence-final particle "*fu*夫", all of which are used to elicit an impulsive and sarcastic reading of the texts (Harbsmeier 1990, p. 141). Harbsmeier believes that Confucius's famous claim "You don't yet understand even life. How can you understand death?" (the *Analects* 11.12) is argumentative and emotive, namely "a straightforward witticism and an expression of irritation" (Harbsmeier 1990, pp. 143–44). Another use of RQs in the *Analects* shown by Harbsmeier gives us a closer look at the spontaneous and personal comments on excessive emotions expressed by RQs. In the *Analects* 11.10, when being accused of "showing excessive emotions" (*tong*慟) while facing the death of his beloved disciple Yan Yuan, Confucius replies with rhetorical anger: "So, I'm showing excessive emotion?! But if I'm not to show excessive emotion for this person, whom should I show it for?" (Harbsmeier 1990, p. 145).

Mingjian Xiang and Esther Pascual take RQs in *Zhuangzi* as "situated face-to-face interaction". Applying Pascual's communication framework of "fictive interaction blends", they discuss the use of such RQs as providing a conceptual integration for mental space that cannot be clearly observed in a communicative situation while highlighting the turn-taking structure between participants. (Xiang and Pascual 2016).[8]

Building upon previous scholarship, this paper further explores the argumentative and rhetorical functions in the *Daodejing*. I argue that, first, RQs not only facilitate argument construction to serve the coherency of the chapter but also illuminate changing compositional motivations in "parallel texts" of different versions beyond differences in mere wording. This can be shown in comparing the received Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 C.E.) version with the Guodian 郭店 *Laozi* bamboo-slip manuscripts excavated from a late fourth-century B.C. Chu-state tomb at Guodian, Hubei, in 1993, and the Mawangdui 馬王堆 *Laozi* silk manuscripts which were discovered at the Mawangdui site in Changsha, Hunan, in 1973.[9]

While Lewis points to the use of RQs for expressing an individual voice as opposed to communal ritual performance, a focus on the persuasive and communicative functions of RQs can further facilitate our understanding of the "dialogical" characteristic of the text, highlighting the self-reflective and self-discovery features of the teachings of the *Daodejing*.[10] Such a focus on self-discovery also differs from the "authoritative" sayings used in later receptions such as in the "response to the way" chapter of the *Huainanzi*, wherein citations of *Daodejing* texts are introduced with the formula "therefore *Daodejing* says" (*gu Laozi yue* 故老子曰) (Queen 2008). Furthermore, in agreement with William Baxter's observation that the *Daodejing* is a text with a "lack of narration" and no anchor to a particular person, time, or event (Baxter 1998, p. 240), RQs however evoke a sense of conversation between the text and the audience, and therefore presents the text as "dialogical" and reflective.

RQs can express a sense of urgency, anger, and ridicule. Consecutive and strings of RQs draw on performative and dramatic elements of language, revealing the relationship between tone of voice and linguistic force beyond conceptual and grammatical concerns. A string of RQs may be used to hammer down a point by adding emotive force. They can provide criticism and imply anger and ridiculousness; they may repeat an argument by suggesting universal validity and an unacceptable doubt; and they can set the stage for an audience before providing the conclusion.

In this paper, I firstly situate RQs in the received Wang Bi version within parallel texts to compare their use in meaning construction and their compositional motivations. Next, I examine the self-discovery dialogical features of RQs in the *Daodejing*. Thirdly, I speculate about the feelings expressed by the *Daodejing*, focusing on its various "body" (*shen*身) related RQs. Lastly, I discuss how RQs reveal the differences between the *Daodejing* versions beyond mere wording, and how their use of RQs further enriches current definitions of the concept.

2. Receptions of RQs in *Daodejing* Parallel Texts

In this section, I show three case studies that reveal different uses of RQs in the parallel texts. While the textual parallels are similar in vocabulary and concepts, the internal logic and philosophical differences marked by changes in particles, adverbs, and sentence initials are nonetheless clear. These differences serve their respective contexts and indicate the different ways meaning can be constructed.[11]

First, let us compare Chapter 15 of the Wang Bi version with its parallel text in the excavated Guodian version.[12] The Wang Bi version Chapter 15 reads:

"古之善為士者，微妙玄通,深不可識。夫唯不可識，故強為之容。豫兮若冬涉川；猶兮若畏四鄰；儼兮其若容；渙兮若冰之將釋；敦兮其若樸；曠兮其若谷；混兮其若濁；孰能濁以靜之徐清？！孰能安以久動之徐生？！[13] 保此道者，不欲盈。夫唯不盈，故能蔽不新成。" (Lou 2016, p. 33)

"Of old he who was well versed in the way, was minutely subtle, mysteriously comprehending, and too profound to be known. It is because he could not be known, that he can only be given a description by compromise. Tentative, as if fording a river in winter, hesitant, as if in fear of his neighbours; formal like a guest; falling apart like thawing ice; thick like the uncarved block; vacant like a valley; murky like muddy water. Who can be muddy and with tranquility, slowly become clear? Who can be at rest yet stirring, slowly come to life? he who holds fast to this way, desires not to be overfill. It is because he is overfilled, that he can be worn and yet newly made." (Lau 2001, p. 34)

In the Wang Bi version, the text clearly shows an unwillingness to manipulate language and an uncertainty towards how language might be representing reality in the text. Similar to the point made at the beginning of the chapter, language is considered a forced compromise (*qiang wei zhi* 強為之) to describe the profound and imperceptible sage, so RQs function to make a statement without directly telling people what to do.

Accordingly, two RQs marked by "who can" (*shu neng* 孰) in the text discuss the importance and difficulty to "be muddy yet with tranquility . . . rest yet stirring" without explicitly issuing commands or giving prescriptions. They describe a natural result of "slowly becoming clear and slowly coming to life" without making promises or predictions. RQs can be used to suspend propositional arguments and may feature a didactive, decisive tone. They open up room for describing the imperceptible and paradoxical. Presenting ideas in an interrogative form further strengthens the non-prescriptive tone of teaching.

The parallel RQs in the Guodian slips instead read as conditional sentences, which supports the directive tone expressed throughout the Guodian text. This is a stark difference from the Wang Bi version, which discusses language as a forced choice when describing someone unknowable and imperceptible. The Guodian slips read:

"古之善為士者，必微妙玄達，深不可識，是以為之容。 豫乎若冬涉川，猶乎其若畏四鄰，敢乎其若客，渙乎其若釋，屯乎其若樸，沌乎其若濁。孰能濁以靜者將徐清。孰能牝以主者將徐生。保此道者不欲尚湼。"

"Of old he who was well versed in the way, they must be minutely subtle, mysteriously comprehending, and too profound to be known. It is because he could not be known, that he can only be given a makeshift description. Tentative, as if fording a river in winter, hesitant, as if in fear of his neighbours; formal like a guest; falling apart like thawing ice; thick like the uncarved block; vacant like a valley; murky like muddy water. Whoever can be muddy with tranquility will slowly become clear; whoever can be at rest yet stirring will slowly come to life. Those who preserve this way desire not to overfill. He who holds fast to this way, desires not to be overfill.". (Revised from Cook 2013, p. 241)

Similar to the adverb "necessarily" (*bi* 必), which indicates a "deduction of an inevitable consequence flowing from the principle enunciated earlier" (Wagner 2015, p. 63), the Guodian version makes unknowability and imperceptibly a necessary condition for those

who have embraced this version, instead of a general description in the previously stated Wang Bi version. "Who can?" (*shu neng* 孰能) types of RQs within the Guodian context constitute a conditional sentence clearly marked by "will" (*jiang* 將), promising a future of clarity and vitality, both of which deliver a sense of certainty towards the features of the sage and their power.

The second case appears in Chapter 5 of the Wang Bi version and its parallel text in the Guodian version. The use of RQs in Wang Bi version gives a clearly contextualized argument. The Guodian text provides a description of heaven and earth using "bellow" (*tuo yue* 橐龠) presented with RQs. The Guodian *Laozi A* reads:

"天地之間，其猶橐龠與？虛而不屈，衝而愈出。"

"The space between Heaven and Earth, is it not like a bellow?! Emptied, it is not in exhaustion; set in motion, it produces even more.". (Revised from Cook 2013, pp. 261–62)

Donald Harper insightfully argues that the *Yinshu* 引書 (a medical text found at the Zhangjiashan 張家山 tomb) also uses the bellows analogy to describe a macrobiotic technique (Harper 1995). It reads:

"治身欲與天地相求猶橐籥也虛而不屈動而俞（：愈）出閉玄府繆門闔（？/達？）九竅利闔（膝）理此利身之道也。". (Harper 1995, p. 382)

"When cultivating the body you want to seek conformity with heaven and earth. It is like the bellows bag and tube: when empty not expended; when moved, emitting even more. Close the dark cavity, open the winding gate, shut the five depots, penetrate(?) the nine apertures. Benefit opening and shutting in the skins' webbed pattern-this is the way to benefit the body.". (Harper 1995, p. 382)

Furthermore, while the *Yinshu* text uses this metaphor of the bellows bag to talk about the precise technique to benefit the body, the Wang Bi *Daodejing* does not use it to talk about the physiology of the body, but to argue against the intellectual exhaustion arising from "much speech" (*duo yan* 多言), as shown:

"天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗; 聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。天地之間，其猶橐籥乎？虛而不屈，動而愈出。多言數窮，不如守中。". (Lou 2016, p. 14)

"Heaven and earth are not humane, they treat the myriad things as straw dogs. The sage is not humane, he treats the people as straw dogs. Is not the space between Heaven and Earth like bellows? It is empty without being exhausted; the more it sets in motion the more comes out. Much speech leads inevitably to exhaustion. Better to hold the void inside.". (Revised from Lau 2001, p. 9)

In the Wang Bi *Daodejing*, the metaphor is presented in the form of a RQ to suggest a protection of the inner emptiness of the body and a source of vitality (Harper 1995, pp. 382–83), which differs from the descriptive nature of the Guodian parallel text.

Unlike the *Yinshu* text, which introduces the bellows metaphor with clear statements marked by "*ye* 也", the Wang Bi and Guodian texts use RQs. One possible reason may be that RQs assume an audience's familiarity with the argument. As Harper argues, the bellows analogy might have originated from medical literature, such as the *Yinshu* text, and gradually found its way into *Daodejing*-related narratives (Harper 1995, p. 384). If so, the use of RQs may be a way of signaling a distinctive use of the bellows in *Daodejing* texts, which differed from the, at the time, common understanding of the bellow metaphor for macrobiotic techniques. RQs may, therefore, be used to draw the audience's attention to a new usage of the metaphor.

The third case appears in Chapter 66 of the Wang Bi version, as compared to the Mawangdui parallel texts.[14] The Wang Bi text presents a logical chain of argument, marked by a consecutive use of "that by which" (*suo yi* 所以), "therefore" (*gu* 故), and "that is why" (*shi yi* 是以).[15]

Wang Bi *Daodejing* Chapter 66:

"江海所以能為百谷王者，以其善下之，故能為百谷王。是以聖人欲上民，必以言下之；欲先民，必以身後之。是以聖人處上而民不重，處前而民不害。是以天下樂推而不厭。以其不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。". (Lou 2016, p. 169)

"The reason why the river and the sea are able to be king of the hundred valleys is that they excel in taking the lower position. Therefore they are able to be king of the hundred valleys. That is why desiring to rule over the people, one must in one's words humble oneself before them; and, desiring to lead the people, one must in one's person follow behind them. That is why the sage takes his place over the people yet is no burden; takes his place ahead of the people yet the people causes no obstruction. That is why the empire supports him joyfully and never tires of doing so. It is because he does not contend that no one in the empire is in a position to contend with them". (Lau 2001, p. 99)

The negation of the "contention" (*bu zheng*不爭) in the Wang Bi version is understood as the reason to justify the effective political power of the sage's rule by non-contention. The negative verb "*bu* 不" also shows the focus of negation on the action "*zheng* 爭" that coincides with the intended actions of people "to attach no great importance to it" (*bu zhong* 不重), "to cause no danger" (*bu hai* 不害), and "to not get tired of it" (*bu yan* 不厭), all focusing on the negation of actions.

From the perspective of literary form, Joachim Gentz analyses the parallel texts of Wang Bi *Daodejing* Chapter 66 and argues that both Mawangdui versions are closer to the Wang Bi and Beida versions, as compared to the Guodian version. This is due to the parallel Guodian text A2 construction as a textual unit, as it mainly relies on the parallelisms that combine two parts, each expressing a particular idea (e.g., one on how to posit oneself and the other about the fact that no one wants to harm but to support the ruler), into one textual unit. However, the Beida and Wang Bi versions form a contextual unit that instead relies on explicit logical markers, such as in the use of "*shi yi* 是以", which "translates the connective literary form of a parallelism into a logical connector on a linguistic level" (Gentz 2015, p. 121). However, if we direct our attention to RQs and the focus of the discussion expressed by the meaning of it, we find further differences between the Wang Bi and Mawangdui versions.

The Mawangdui version A proposes the idea of a state of "non-contention" (*wu zheng*無爭) with RQs marked by the question particle "*yu* 與 (歟)" at the end of the text: "Is not it because he is with no contention?" ("*fei yi qi wu zheng yu* 非以其無爭與？").[16]

Mawangdui A:

"海之所以能為百浴王者，以其善下之，是以能為百浴王。是以聖人之欲上民也，必以其言下之；其欲先民也以必以其身後之。故居前而民弗害也，居上而民弗重也。天下樂隼而弗猒也。非以其無諍與？！故天下莫能与之諍."

"The reason why rivers and oceans are able to be the kings of the one hundred valleys is that they are good at being below them. For this reason they are able to be the kings of the one hundred valleys. Therefore in the sage's desire to be above the people, he must in his speech be below them. And in his desire to be at the front of the people, he must in his person be behind them. Thus he dwells above, yet the people do not regard him as heavy; and he dwells in front, yet the people do not see him as posing a threat. The whole world delights in his praise and never tires of him. Is it not because he is not contentious, that, as a result, no one in the world can contend with him?!". (Henricks 1992, p. 35)

The use of an RQ in this Mawangdui version differs from the statement shown in the Wang Bi version since it describes "not contentious" as an ideal state of being, which coincides with the description of "people being at the state of causing no danger" (*min fu hai ye* 民弗害也) and "people giving no weight (to the sage)" (*min fu zhong ye* 民弗重也), and is nominalized by the final particle "*ye* 也". In the Wang Bi version, the negation of action is expressed by the negative "*bu* 不". Furthermore, the use of RQs in the Mawangdui

A text also gives "not contentious" a universal touch, presenting it as if it were a well-acknowledged reason and in line with its general description of no contention being a state beyond a justifying reason or an issue of action.

The use of RQs further shows a different perception of textual composition, as compared to the Beida version. The Mawangdui A text relates "*gu* ... *ye* ... *ye* ... *ye* 故 ... 也 ... 也 ... " as a textual unit governed by the explicit logical marker "thus" (*gu* 故), followed by an RQ "Is it not because he is not contentious?!" (*fei yi qi wu zheng yu* 非以其無諍與?), highlighting the ideal consequences achieved by maintaining the state of non-contention. On the other hand, the Beida version, as Gentz suggests, marks the textual unit by "*shi yi* 是以", thus directly relating the RQ as the reason to justify only the very last stanza, namely "all under Heaven enjoy pushing him forward without getting tired of it" (*tian xia le tui er fu yan ye* 天下樂推而弗厭也). That is to say, from the perspective of textual composition, the Mawangdui versions have a stronger focus on the idea of "not being contentious".

Previous case studies have shown that RQs indicate differences in meaning constructions beyond simple wording. A comparison of RQs in parallel texts of the *Daodejing* reveals different compositional motivations. The different uses of RQs further indicate the tendency towards a contextualized use of RQs. A slight change of wording may also reveal a different emphasis on either actions or a state of being. In the next section, I focus on the insertion of questions and answers in the Wang Bi version and examine these RQs against the arguments of William Baxter and Mark Edward Lewis on the rhetorical characteristics of the *Daodejing*. I argue for an emphasis in the text on self-reflection and self-discovery by means of RQs.

3. Dialogical Features in the *Daodejing*

In the Wang Bi *Daodejing*, five chapters (13, 21, 50, 54 and 57) show seven instances of an insertion of a question and answer. Such an insertion of RQs includes "asking for justifications" (*fu he gu* 夫何故) following empirical observations; "asking to assert trustworthiness of statements" (*wu he yi zhi* 吾何以知) after making prescriptions; and "asking to clarify a statement" (*he wei* 何謂) to questions intended to be argumentative, trustworthy, and conceptual.

Chapter 21 stands out by proposing questions regarding the credibility of one's previous statement (*he yi zhi* 何以知), at the very end of the text.

> "孔德之容，唯道是從。道之為物，唯恍唯惚。忽兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮忽兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有精；其精甚真，其中有信。自古及今，其名不去，以閱甫。吾何以知甫之狀哉？以此。". ([Lou 2016], p. 52)

> "In his every movement a man of great virtue follows the way of the way only. As a thing the way is shadowy, indistinct. Indistinct and shadowy, yet within it is an image; Indistinct and shadowy, yet within it is a substance. Dim and dark, yet within it is an essence. This essence is quite genuine, and within it is something that can be tested. From the present back to antiquity its name never deserted it. It serves as a means for inspecting the origins of the multitude. How do I know the origins of the multitude? By means of this". (Revised from [Lau 2001], p. 33)

A reading of self-justification is less likely here since the *Daodejing* has derided the concept of claiming a universal truth (Chapter 2) and frequently advocates not-knowing (Chapters 3 and 10). As Christoph Harbsmeier has suggested, early Daoist texts show a strong negative attitude towards sophist debates and the kind of "intellectual excellence" and "scientific knowledge", or knowledge that resembles "academic knowledgeableness" ([Harbsmeier 1993], p. 21). Such a definite claim to knowing is also at odds with the Daoist skeptical use of language for absolute distinctions based on names (*ming* 名) and disputations, as noted by Lisa [Raphals] ([1992], pp. 75–82).[17]

From the perspective of communication and effective persuasion, RQs create the effect of a dialogue and invite the audience's participation in the argument without losing their interest, attention, and trust, as opposed to a monologue. The authority and the trustwor-

thiness of the statement are delivered through a question and an answer, suggesting a process of teaching through self-reflection and self-discovery, which differs from passing down existing knowledge and appealing to authority or experience.[18] It is about enabling one's self-awareness. In Chapter 21, discussed above, the answer of "it is by means of this" (*yi ci* 以此) serves the function of evoking a Dao experience and the self-discovery of its essence and trustworthiness, as opposed to only making verbal claims.

　　Moreover, in the Wang Bi version of Chapter 57, the text reflects on "How do I know that what I have just said is so?" (*wu he yi zhi qi ran zai* 吾何以知其然哉？), and the text continues the argument by providing an answer:

> "以正治國，以奇用兵，以無事取天下。吾何以知其然哉？以此 … ". (Lou 2016, p. 149)

> "Manage the state with straitforward means, employ soldiers with extraordinary ones, [but] capture the world with absence of intent. How do I know that this is so? It is because this … ". (Lau 2001, p. 83)

> The Guodian A version reads:

> "以正之邦，以奇用兵，以亡事取天下。吾何以知其然也? 夫 … 是以聖人之言曰 … ."

> "Manage the state with straightforward means, employ soldiers with extraordinary ones, [but] capture the world with absence of intent. How do I know that this is so? It is argued that … This is why the sage says that … ". (Revised from Cook 2013, p. 274)

　　The "dialogical" effect of the rhetorical question and answer can be compared with what Lewis calls the "individual" voice of the *Daodejing* and proto-Daoist texts. In comparison to the Zhou odes, which "through [a] shared recognition of phrases formed and empowered a distinctive group," Lewis suggests that the *Daodejing* presents an individual voice using paradoxes, new images that confound traditional values, and evocative sounds (Lewis 1999, p. 180). This insightful argument can be further clarified if we take RQs into account and how they invite audiences into a dialogue. RQs invite audiences to participate in the thought process of the author, presenting a reflective attitude instead of presenting authority through legitimate "old sayings" (*gu yue* 古曰) or from a universally recognized argument marked by "*fu* 夫" (Wagner 2015, p. 38).[19] In the Wang Bi version, RQs invite readers to think for themselves while the answers to the questions position audiences to consider new values along with the author, thus forming a different knowledge community based neither on universal truth nor on ancient authorities, but on self-reflection.

　　The dialogical feature of RQs can also be compared with what Baxter called a "lack of narration" in the *Daodejing* that has separated this text from other philosophical discourses in early China. According to William Baxter, if we compare the text of the *Daodejing* with that of the *Mencius* and *Zhuangzi,* which present conversations involving particular personas, times, locations, and contexts, the *Daodejing* presents statements that are general and not anchored to any particular situation or personas (Baxter 1998, p. 240). Rhetorical questions, however, show that the text still intends to present a feeling of dialogue, although without a particular conversational context, and thus sets itself apart from preaching values via monologues. Instead, the insertion of questions and answers in the *Daodejing* creates an effect of having a "conversation."

　　When the *Daodejing* proposes the question "how do I know this is so?", it seems that we are transported back to the personal teaching moment between Confucius and his four disciples when the master says:

> "以吾一日長乎爾，毋吾以也。居則曰：「不吾知也！'如或知爾，則何以哉？". (Cheng [1990] 2008, pp. 797–806)

> "Though I am a day or so older than you, do not think of that. From day to day you are saying 'We are not known.' If some rulers were to know you, how would you like to do?"

Confucius did not directly teach what his disciples should have done or thought, neither did he criticize what he obviously disagreed with but only responded with a smile (*shai* 曬). The questions proposed by Confucius were intended to inspire self-realization, as in the *Daodejing*. When Confucius comments, "I give my approval to Dian!" (*wu yu Dian ye* 吾與點也！), it certainly should have pushed for deeper self-reflection in the disciples themselves. The *Hanfeizi* also imposes a self-reflective attitude by saying "how do I know this is so?" (*he yi zhi qi ran ye* 何以知其然也？) (Wang [1998] 2021, p. 11). Equally without a clear context, time, and location, *Hanfeizi* presents itself as if a minister were having a private meeting with his ruler, as the beginning of the text indicates: "as what I have heard that" (*qie chen wen zhi yue* 且臣聞之曰) (Wang [1998] 2021, p. 11).

4. Expression of Feelings through RQs

When Christoph Harbsmeier points out the use of RQs to express anger, sarcasm, or a sense of spontaneity in the *Analects* (Harbsmeier 1990), he draws our attention to the relationship between the tone of voice and the force of language, beyond conceptual and grammatical concerns.[20] One distinctive example is the use of RQs in relation to misconceptions and misbehaviors towards one's body or self (*shen* 身), a central topic in the *Daodejing*. The criticism of the inattention towards the body/self in Chapter 26 expresses a sense of anger:

"重為輕根，靜為躁君。是以聖人終日行不離輜重。雖有榮觀，燕處超然。奈何萬乘之主，而以身輕天下! 輕則失本，躁則失君。". (Lou 2016, p. 69)

"The heavy is the root of the light; The still is the lord of the restless. Therefore the gentleman when travelling all day never lets the heavily laden carts out of his sight. It is only when he is safely behind walls and watch-towers that he rests peacefully and is above worries. How could a ruler of ten thousand chariots make light of his own person towards things under Heaven! If light, then the root is lost; If restless, then the lord will lose his position". (Revised from Lau 2001, p. 39)

The text expresses the ridiculousness of a ruler's taking light of his own person towards things under Heaven. The anger towards such an irresponsibility can also be detected, not only due to how nonchalant the ruler acts towards the general rule and sets himself as opposite to the sage, but also from the final warnings given to the ruler that challenge the legitimacy of the rulership ("losing his position" *shi jun* 失君), which was an uncompromised criticism no longer seen by advisors in the Xunzi or Li Si's 李斯 memorials (Pines 2013).

In addition, a string of RQs elicits the sense of urgency to correct the common intention towards one's body and self while setting a common ground between the audiences of the texts. Chapter 44 discusses the importance of the body using RQs:

"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。"

"Your name or your body, which is dearer?! Your body or your possessions, which is more considerable thereby can you long endure?! Gain or loss, which is more debilitating?! Therefore, Extreme cherishing inevitably leads to great expense; Profuse hoarding inevitably leads to considerable loss. If you know your limits, you will meet with no peril; Thereby can you long endure". (Revised from Cook 2013, p. 281)

Three series of RQs indicate a sense of seriousness and urgency towards dealing with the body. Scholarly interpretations are varied regarding the answers to the three RQs. Liu Xiaogan interprets these RQs as indicating what one ought to think and thus consistently providing the readings of self/body as answers (Liu 2006, p. 456).[21] In comparison, Rudolf Wagner understands "*yu* 與" as "joined to" and sees the RQs as descriptive and thus providing the answers with names, goods, and gains (Wagner 2000, p. 270).[22]

There is yet a third reading of these RQs when focusing on the implications of self-reflections and self-discovery. The RQs function to raise our awareness of our whole being, and how it has been compared to that of others for the sake of getting more, or perhaps it should be considered "dearer", all of which lead to contradictory consequences. As such, the responses these RQs inspire in readers are not necessarily the ultimate answers to the questions. Instead, they may only be temporary answers, which the author warns against and reminds the audience that whatever they hold dear could very well lead to considerable loss in the end, including their own body. What is more important is the ability to reflect on our attitudes towards attaching absolute values to objects. In this sense, neither the perspectives of Liu nor Wagner will influence the argument's "therefore" (*shi gu* 是故) segment, upon which it is built. What matters is the process of self-discovery and the consciousness of self-reflection that is elicited by the RQs.

Chapter 13 also uses a series of RQs to warn readers against prioritizing oneself and causing harm. In this case, the RQs clarify the argument while lending it a universal perspective and showing a sense of certainty.

> "寵辱若驚，貴大患若身。何謂寵辱若驚？寵為下，得之若驚，失之若驚，是謂寵辱若驚。何謂貴大患若身？吾所以有大患者，為吾有身，及吾無身，吾有何患?! 故貴以身為天下，若可寄天下；愛以身為天下，若可托天下。" (Lou 2016, p. 28)

> "Favour and disgrace are things that startle; high rank is like one's body, a source of great trouble. What is meant by saying that favour and disgrace are things that startle? Favour when it is bestowed on a subject serves to startle as much as when it is withdrawn. This is what is meant by saying that favour and disgrace are things that startle. What is meant by saying that high rank is like one's body, a source of great trouble? The reason I have trouble is that I have a body. When I no longer have a body, what trouble have I?! Hence he who values his body more than dominion over the empire can be entrusted with the empire. He who loves his body more than dominion over the empire can be given the custody of the empire". (Lau 2001, p. 18)

The first RQ on the body provides a definition of the general argument marked by "what does it mean by" (*he wei* 何謂). It is firstly answered by a statement illuminating the correlation between body/self and harm ("*shen* 身" and "*huan* 患", respectively), and closely followed by the repetition of the argument expressed from the opposite point of view: "when I no longer have a body of my own, what trouble have I?" (*ji wu shen, wu you he huan* 及吾無身，吾有何患？). If the first RQ aims at justifying the argument, the reaffirmation of the relationship between the body and harm expressed by a later RQ implicitly expresses the validity of the idea introduced by the RQ and thus giving it a touch of universal validity and a sense of certainty.

5. Conclusions

This paper examined the rhetorical functions, argument constructions, logic, effects, and generative functions of RQs. (1) Texts such as the *Daodejing* have been read in widely divergent ways; one key element underlying such variance in reception is a different understanding of RQs and the resulting divergence in understanding the argumentative logic of the text as a whole. (2) Different degrees of reliance on RQs in different versions of the *Daodejing* change the nature and meaning of individual segments across editions, as seen in the changing contexts surrounding the bellow metaphor. (3) RQs engage the audience by drawing on performative and dramatic elements of language. Proposing questions and answering them immediately creates a sense of conversation to enable self-discovery and self-reflection, supporting a dialogical function of the text. Such knowledge transmission differs dramatically from claiming authority through old sayings or by appeals to the sages. (4) Consecutive RQs are used to reinforce a point by adding emotive force while

providing a common understanding with audience. The urgency of an issue, anger towards misbehaviors, and the sense of universal validity can be communicated using RQs.

A focus on RQs further provides a different aspect from which to explore the subtle textual differences between versions. As Edward Shaughnessy points out, there is a widely acknowledged position regarding the source of the Guodian *Daodejing*, namely, "that the Guodian *Daodejing* manuscripts were anthologized from an already existing complete text of *Daodejing* and thus prove the antiquity of *Daodejing* in all (or most) of its particulars." This argument naturally leads to the comparison of versions of the *Daodejing* as "fundamentally identical" in contents but varied in wording and sequences (Shaughnessy 2005, p. 445). However, from the examples provided that focus on RQs and the tone of the argument, RQs mark textual differences beyond wording. A realization of the rhetorical uses of questions enriches the discussion regarding the nature of *Daodejing* texts, whether as individual, non-narrative, or dialogical. An investigation into the possible tones of voice expressed by RQs sensitizes us towards the feelings they express. By developing an awareness of the disparate textual constructions of RQs and their use for meaning construction, we are motivated to reflect on the assumption of comparing meaning constructions between the Guodian and Wang Bi versions of the *Daodejing*.

A final point for reflection is the application of existing definitions of RQs to the *Daodejing*. To be specific, in Cornelia Ilie's definition, a RQ "is a question used as a challenging statement to convey the addresser's commitment to its implicit answer, in order to include the addressees' mental recognition of its obviousness and the acceptance, verbalized or non-verbalized, of its validity" (Ilie 1994, p. 128). Such a definition of RQs focuses on using one statement to replace the other implicitly and effectively. Mark Lewis's analysis of the proto-Daoist use of RQs to challenge ideas and make new individual claims fits with this definition. This is definitely true for the *Daodejing*, but it is incomplete. The dialogical nature of a RQ proposed in this paper shows that an RQ serves to motivate audiences for self-discovery and personal experience, rather than replacing one statement with another. The *Daodejing* welcomes challenges to traditional and ritual social rules governed by social-cultural language while celebrating a new level of non-commitment, as proposed in the new reading of Chapter 44.

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Notes

[1] Several examples show rhetorical questions that start with markers, such as ten examples of "*shu* 孰" ("who" or "which"); seven examples end with the particle "*zai*哉"; nine examples end with the particle "*hu*乎"; and three examples are indicated by the particle "*qi*其 (豈)".

[2] There is a weaker argument suggesting that rhetorical questions evoke no answers from the hearer or the speaker. In addition, there is a stronger claim, arguing that under certain political social conventions, rhetorical questions should be prevented from being answered and thus minimizing the emphasis on information (Athanasiadou 1991, p. 109).

[3] For a general survey on questions and questioning, see (Ilie 2015).

[4] As pointed out, many scholars recognize the strong persuasive effects on communication, which may be mitigated depending on the relationship to participants. There is also an argument focusing on the effect of rhetorical questions causing resistance when participants are not involved.

5   Scholars further note that the persuasive effect of rhetorical questions are probably strong for those who are already in the circle of the argument: "When the message was of low personal relevance and recipients were not naturally processing the statement form of the message diligently, the use of rhetorical enhanced thinking: A message with strong arguments became more persuasive." (Athanasiadou 1991, pp. 107–22).

6   Wang categorizes rhetorical questions into three types. First are the general rhetorical questions making either positive or negative statements; second are the rhetorical questions delivering reinforced statements through a combination of negative and rhetorical terms, such as the expression in the *Zhuangzi*: "How could you go everywhere and not be liked"? This is similar to the use of the "do you know" phrase in rhetorical questions, which is used in capturing the interest of the listener and to give emphasis to a particular point (Wang 2015, p. 108). Third involves interrogative sentences, indicating a definite right or wrong answer.

7   Yang and He show markers to identify rhetorical questions. They claim that markers of rhetorical questions frequently appear at the end of a complex sentence or in the last part of the phrase. In addition, there are interrogative pronouns and adverbs as markers that express rhetorical questions, and they form relatively stable phrases with auxiliary adverbs and adjectives.

8   Differing from the focus on the blending of views using rhetorical questions, Lewis draws attention to how *Zhuangzi* uses rhetorical questions to argue against intellectual rivals by using their own narratives. Lewis also suggests that many questions in the "Tianwen 天問" ("Heavenly Questions") chapter should not and need not be answered so as to deny secure knowledge while presenting the cosmos with a set of impenetrable riddles (Lewis 1999, pp. 182–83).

9   Edward Shaughnessy's article draws our attention to the ongoing debate of the textual nature of the Laozi-related versions (Shaughnessy 2005). For the sake of examining the uses and arguments of rhetorical questions, I follow Harold Roth's example and temporarily reject models to compare and interpret versions of the *Daodejing*. Instead, I also use "parallel texts" that assume "hypothetical source(s)" from which the text transmits (Roth 2000, p. 80).

10   My discussion of "self-reflection" in the *Daodejing* assumes a sense of agency. For the explanation of agency in the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi,* see (Fech 2018, pp. 1–10 and 1–11; Virag 2017, chp. 3, pp. 1–29; Slingerland 2004, pp. 322–42).

11   At least for the cases we discussed later on, their differences are no less clear than in the parallel texts between the *Daodejing's* Chapter 26 and the quasi-quotation in the "Shenshi 慎" ("Being Mindful of Conditions") chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* that have been pointed out by Gu Jiegang, and as cited by Edward Shaughnessy (2005, p. 426).

12   For details about the Guodian manuscripts, see Jingzhou Shi Bowuguan (1998).

13   I change the punctuation to highlight the rhetorical effects.

14   For more details on the Mawangdui texts, see Guojia Wenwuju Guwenxian Yanjiushi (1980).

15   Christoph Harbsmeier argues that "there are forty-three chapters of the fairly non-argumentative text in the book *Daodejing* in which the word *gu* figures and often establishes a fairly vague semantic link between what precedes and what follows (. . .) [it is] needed to show an argumentative systematicity rather than a mere general coherence." (Harbsmeier 2015, p. 166). Hans Van Ess also shows the importance of explicit logical markers for the understanding of texts such as the *Huainanzi* (Van Ess 2005).

16   The Guodian version continues the statement nominalized by the final particle "*ye* 也", with: "Because he is someone who has been in no competition with others. Therefore in all under Heaven nobody is able to compete with him." (*yi qi bu zheng ye, gu tian xia mou neng yu zhi zheng* 以其不爭也，故天下莫能與之爭) (based on Cook 2013, p. 956).

17   Raphals argues for the Laozian metalanguage focused on the idea of "illuminations" (*ming*明), which requires a grasp of constancy that underlies phenomenal change, and such a metalanguage and metaknowledge certainly cannot be pinned down with the polarities and conventions of language (Raphals 1992, pp. 80–82).

18   Carine Defoort discusses the unique educational method employed by Zhuangzian masters as self-discovery that builds upon personal conversions. Such a feature shows great difference from modern public speech, which focuses on knowledge transmission. In other words, she points out the philosophical traditional in early China focusing on know-how and personal, self-discovery that go beyond know-what (Defoort 2012).

19   As pointed out by Rudolf Wagner, "*fu* 夫" should be read as a phrase status marker that expresses a general principle, or as an exception or a side comment that provides understanding for the "argumentative procedure" that constructs the text in line with its philosophical nature (Wagner 2015, p. 38).

20   Related ideas by Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer were summarized in the recent scholarly discussion on the marking of particles with argument construction (Gentz and Meyer 2015, p. 23, footnote 92). Yang Xiao, in his article "The Pragmatic Turn: Articulating Communicative Practices in the Analects," evokes a systematic study of the pragmatic aspects of communicative practices in classical Chinese texts through "commenting on the roles of particles and the tone of voice". He also shows us that ancient and modern scholars treat particles as a force that is pragmatic and the context-dependent features of utterances while cautiously reminding us that particles cannot be used as a specific force indicator since a particle can serve different pragmatic functions. This means that while grammatical mood and practical force should be considered together, their strict correlation cannot yet be concluded (Xiao 2005).

21   Liu argues that, "Throughout the text, the answer to the questions regarding which one of the two is dearer is '*shen*身' for sure. The *Daodejing* emphasizes on valuing life and valuing the body. The life and body refer to both physical, and social, cultural" (Liu 2006, p. 456).

[22]　　Wagner reads "*yu*與" as "joined to", and translates the whole segment as: "When fame is joined to the person, which [of the two]does [in fact] become dearer? [Fame of course] When the person is joined by goods, which [of the two]is [in fact] increased? [The goods, of course]" (Wagner 2000, p. 270).

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