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Encircle the Pole Star and Encompass Taiyi: On the Astronomical Vision of Politics in the *Laozi*

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Abstract: The sentence from the tenth chapter of the *Laozi*, wherein the character "zai" is the last character of the preceding chapter, "po" denotes the ancient polar star Kaiyang, and "yi" signifies the celestial pole Taiyi, finds its roots in ancient Chinese astronomy. "yingpo" conveys the meaning of "encircling the polar star", whereas "baoyi" signifies "encompassing Taiyi", thereby metaphorically representing a framework of harmonious order. The depiction of the universe by the author of the *Laozi*, rooted in ancient astronomical understanding, serves as a political guide for rulers. It suggests that rulers should value the movement pattern of Taiyi, refrain from intervention, and prioritize the inherent qualities of their subjects, thus facilitating their natural development. The entire tenth chapter is centered around this central thesis.

Keywords: *Laozi*; polar star; Taiyi; political guide

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1. Introduction

Throughout the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the practical applications of astronomy diversified significantly. Its utility extended from providing guidance for agricultural policies to aiding in divination predictions, and from serving as a metaphor in politics to enlightening philosophical discourse. Consequently, people's comprehension of astronomy deepened and broadened considerably during this era. As scholars have noted, "there was a widespread familiarity with astronomy before the Three Dynasties" (三代以上，人人皆知天文; *Rizhilu jishi* 1996, p. 1049). Astronomy, a widely acknowledged knowledge system, can offer a straightforward reference framework for elucidating specific political or philosophical ideas.

The various schools in the pre-Qin period exhibit varying degrees of connection to astronomy, with the Taoist school, epitomized by the *Laozi*, displaying the most profound and intricate relationship. This interrelationship is not merely incidental but forms a foundational basis for the creation and development of the *Laozi*. For decades, scholars have reached a consensus that ancient Chinese astronomy significantly influenced the philosophical underpinnings of the *Laozi*. In 1959, Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 posited that:

> Perhaps some may argue that the phenomena described in Laozi's works merely illustrate that his philosophical language and terminology were influenced by the astronomical knowledge in the Spring and Autumn period, but is Laozi's materialism also influenced by astronomy? This question is not difficult to answer… The fundamental concept of Laozi's philosophy, the Dao, undeniably originates from the "Way of Heaven". (Ren 1959, p. 15)

Ren Jiyu's assertion reflects the integration of astronomical knowledge into the core of Taoist philosophy, highlighting the interdependence between the empirical study of the cosmos and the development of philosophical concepts. By examining chapters 6, 10, 16, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 39, 40, and 65 of the *Laozi*, Ren illustrated how the references to celestial

phenomena were not merely metaphorical but were grounded in the empirical observations of the heavens during the Spring and Autumn period. His groundbreaking interpretation of "shi 式" reveals a sophisticated understanding of how ancient astronomical knowledge informed the philosophical constructs in the *Laozi*. He takes the term "shi", which appears multiple times in the *Laozi*, as a starting point for his exploration. While previous scholars, such as Wang Zhenduo 王振鐸 and Yan Dunjie 嚴敦傑, discussed the nature and dating of "shi" based on archeological findings (Z. Wang 1948, pp. 210–33; Yan 1958, pp. 20–23), Ren Jiyu interpreted "shi" as evidence of the astronomical origin of the *Laozi*'s ideas.

Later scholars such as Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, Sarah Allan, David Pankenier, Jia Jinhua 賈晉華, and other contemporary academics also support the view that the term "shi", which is repeatedly mentioned in the *Laozi*, serves as evidence of the astronomical origin of this work. They have further refined and expanded the interpretation of the *Laozi*'s philosophy through an astronomical lens.

When interpreting Chapter 22, Ge Zhaoguang argues that the "yi" embraced by the sage undoubtedly refers to the Taiyi in the astronomical sense, symbolizing the center of "shi", which represents heaven and earth (Ge 1990, p. 57). It is worth noting that his argument was made before the discovery of bamboo slip manuscripts that could strongly support his view. Sarah Allan, in her analysis of Chapter 28, suggests that the term "shi" is "used figuratively", positing that black and white symbolize "shi", while the term "ultimate" (ji 極) refers to the center of the sky, which is the "Great One" (Allan 2003, p. 250). David Pankenier's observation highlights the preference for indirect, suggestive, and pragmatic imagery of the *Laozi* compared to the more direct style often found in Confucian texts. Both traditions, however, share a common thematic thread rooted in an astronomical concepts centered around the "visions of ultimate attainment in the mysterious operations of the formless pivot of the heavens" (Pankenier 2004, p. 220). Additionally, Jia Jinhua explored the basis of the cosmology involving "shi" and Taiyi, asserting that the origin of the Taiyi cosmology is necessarily linked to the ancient Chinese observation and understanding of the North Star. Jia posits that the "shi" centered around the North Star should also be based on the same observations and knowledge (Jia 2009, p. 462).

Together, these scholarly perspectives illuminate the intricate relationship between the philosophy of the *Laozi* and the astronomical knowledge of the Spring and Autumn period. They collectively argue that the philosophical constructs of the *Laozi* were not only metaphorically but also materially grounded in the celestial observations and cosmological understandings of that time. According to the prevailing consensus within academic circles, it is both reasonable and necessary to analyze certain chapters, particularly those with conspicuous astronomical implications, through the lens of ancient Chinese astronomy. This approach not only aligns with contemporary scholarly methodologies but also facilitates a deeper understanding of the text's historical and cultural context. By examining these chapters through the perspective of ancient Chinese astronomical knowledge, we can uncover nuanced interpretations that might otherwise remain obscured.

In the *Laozi*'s discourse, the concept of "the way of Heaven"[1] is consistently associated with the behavior of the "sage", suggesting that the *Laozi* employs astronomy as a metaphorical framework to elucidate political concepts. While the chapter 10 of the *Laozi* exemplifies this characteristic, it is frequently perceived as lacking core narrative elements:

> 載營魄抱一，能無離乎？專氣致柔，能嬰兒乎？滌除玄覽，能無疵乎愛民治國，
> 能無知乎？天門開闔，能無雌乎？明白四達，能無為乎？生之、畜之，生而不有，
> 為而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德。(*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, pp. 22–24)[2]

Despite scholars' extensive explanations and explorations of this chapter over thousands of years, it must be acknowledged that certain sentences in this chapter still require a more logical and cohesive interpretation, with the phrase "zai yingpo baoyi 載營魄抱一" sparking the most controversy. The majority of interpretations offered by both ancient and contemporary scholars tend to mysticism and diverge from the historical context-

based line of thought, thereby complicating the comprehension of the original meaning of this sentence.

For a more comprehensive understanding of the phrase "zai yingpo baoyi" and even the entire chapter, it is imperative to reevaluate the sentence from three distinct perspectives. Firstly, it is crucial to reconsider the prevailing sentence-parsing approach to identify potential avenues for enhancing this chapter's literary and scientific interpretation. Secondly, to elucidate the meaning of "yingpo", a thorough examination of its textual usage and historical context is essential. Lastly, a comprehensive analysis of the term "baoyi" through various literary sources is necessary to provide a reasoned and coherent exposition of the overall meaning of this passage.

2. Reevaluation of the Conventional Method of Parsing Sentences

The chapter containing the phrase "zai yingpo baoyi" is absent from the Guodian 郭店 version of the *Laozi*, and the sole early unearthed literary source available for reference is the silk manuscript discovered in the Han 漢 tomb in Mawangdui 馬王堆, Changsha. This chapter is extensively damaged in the silk manuscript *Laozi* A, whereas in *Laozi* B, it is relatively intact. Following the sentence "Upon completion of the work, it is the moment for the individual to depart, as this follows the course of heaven 功遂身退，天之道也" in the preceding chapter, there is no distinct chapter marker in between. In *Laozi* B, this sentence is written as "戴營柏抱一", and the character "戴" should be interpreted as "載", which is unquestionable (Liu 2006, p. 160).

Scholars have consistently held two interpretations of the character "zai" in this sentence, with one perspective asserting that it should be regarded as a substantive word conveying the meaning of "bearing",[3] which represents the predominant view within ancient and contemporary academic and religious circles, while another viewpoint contends that the word "zai" lacks practical significance. The latter perspective is further divided into two viewpoints, with the first suggesting that "zai" functions as the introductory word at the beginning of this sentence and the second arguing that "zai" belongs to the preceding chapter and serves as the mood auxiliary word at the end of the sentence "天之道也", thus it should be "哉". While the interpretation method of "substantive word" is widely accepted among scholars and religious practitioners, its prevalence does not preclude the possibility of further exploration, as the "theory of functional word" appears to hold potential merit when referencing unearthed relics such as bamboo and silk manuscripts. The mainstream interpretation methods of "substantive word" face two primary challenges: firstly, determining the object "yingpo" that is being borne, and secondly, explaining why the initial sentence is five characters long while the subsequent verses adhere to a four-character format.

The term "yingpo" does not appear in other pre-Qin documents, and if we consider "yingpo" as a noun term, it is indeed imperative to locate similar instances in the pre-Qin corpus, as such findings would significantly aid in formulating interpretation methods for understanding "yingpo" as a substantive word. However, it is regrettable that the supporting materials cited by scholars studying the *Laozi* appear to originate after the *Laozi*'s time[4], as several documents referenced by scholars include *Fayan* 法言, *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經, *Yuanyou* 遠遊, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子. Indeed, the term "yingpo" as a noun does appear in *Yuanyou*, commonly interpreted as "soul"; however, the exact date of composition for *Yuanyou* remains inconclusive. The academic attention and resonance generated by the assertion that "*Yuanyou* was written in the Han Dynasty"[5] cannot be disregarded. Before delivering a definitive response to this inquiry, it appears overly hasty to presume that the "yingpo" in the *Laozi* is equivalent to the "soul" referenced in *Yuanyou*. Regarding other documents from the Han Dynasty, their composition significantly postdates the creation of the *Laozi*. Therefore, the extent to which explanations of "ying 營" or "ying 熒" can aid in understanding "zai yingpo baoyi" remains a question deserving of further reflection.

The crux of this reflection lies in the absence of material evidence to definitively dismiss the possibility that scholars who transcribed and interpreted the *Laozi* from the War-

ring States to the Han Dynasty superimposed prevalent medical or health-preserving ideas onto the original text, thus creatively constructing the term "yingpo". It appears reasonable to interpret "yingpo" as the soul in an era marked by the emergence of health-preserving ideologies, although the potential risks associated with using post-*Laozi* literature to elucidate terms found within the *Laozi* may be temporarily overlooked. It is undeniable that there is content related to health preservation in the *Laozi*. However, certain scholars who interpreted and transcribed the *Laozi* during the Han Dynasty appeared to exaggerate the significance of health-preserving elements, treating it as a comprehensive explanatory framework and endeavoring to infuse most topics with the theme of health preservation. For instance, in chapter 72 of the *Laozi*, which primarily discusses political matters, the *Laozi heshanggong zhu* 老子河上公注 posits that "prestige should be interpreted as a calamity. When individuals are not apprehensive of minor calamities, major calamities ensue. These significant harms lead to death. Those who fear calamities should treasure jing and shen and align with the will of Heaven and Earth" (威，害也。人不畏小害則大害至。大害者，謂死亡也。畏之者當愛精神，承天順地也; *Laozi daodejing heshanggong zhangju* 1993, p. 279). During the Han Dynasty, scholars exhibited a trend of interpreting political theory through the lens of health preservation, highlighting the need for caution when dealing with sentences related to health preservation during the interpretation of the *Laozi*.

If scholars maintain that "yingpo" in the *Laozi* holds health-preserving significance, then the inconsistency between this brief sentence and the subsequent sentences presents a challenging issue that scholars who view "yingpo" as a substantive word urgently need to resolve. The possibility exists that the standard for the number of characters in each sentence in the early version of the *Laozi* was more flexible, as evidenced by the mixed use of four and five characters in the latter part of each group of rhetorical questions in this chapter in the silk manuscript *Laozi* B and Fu Yi version. In the Wang Bi version, the second half of each rhetorical question is condensed into a concise four-character sentence, suggesting a pattern of deletion where the first half of each group should also be transformed into a four-character sentence. Consequently, placing the five-character sentence "zai yingpo baoyi" within another four-character sentence appears discordant.

During the same period as Wang Bi 王弼 (227–249), Zhong Hui 鐘會 (225–264) observed this issue and proposed that "zai could be interpreted as ci 辭" (載，辭也; *Wenxuan* 1986, p. 1147), considering the term "zai" as a functional word devoid of practical meaning; similarly, Lu Xisheng 陸希聲 (828–896) from the Tang Dynasty shared a similar perspective, suggesting that "zai, like the word fu 夫, functions as a functional word at the beginning of a sentence" (載，猶夫也，發語之端也; *Daode zhenjing zhu*, p. 118). Lu's viewpoint has garnered support from Zhang Mosheng 張默生 (Zhang 1988, p. 12) and Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (G. Chen 2006, p. 108). Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (685–762) also endorsed the interpretation of "zai" as a functional word, decreeing that "the character 載 in Daodejing 道德經 be amended to 哉, following the preceding sentence" (頃改《道德經》載字為哉，仍隸屬上句; *Cefu yuangui* 2006, p. 431), a reform deemed correct by scholars of that era and believed by Chu Boxiu褚伯秀 of the Southern Song Dynasty to "resolve doubts that had lingered for thousands of years" (可去千載之惑; *Daode zhenjing jiyi*, p. 290). Nevertheless, some scholars continue to cite unearthed literature to critique the efficacy of this change.[6]

Although absent in the Guodian version, the "chieryingzhi 持而盈之" chapter, traditionally positioned before the "zai yingpo baoyi" chapter, which is regarded as the ninth chapter in the current version, is included in the Wang Bi version. In the Guodian version, the chapter concludes with "天之道也" and includes symbols to demarcate the text, leading to the belief that no further characters follow these characters in this context.

This inference is not beyond dispute, given the significant divergence in the order present in the Guodian version compared to other editions, suggesting that the scribes of the Guodian version may have extracted this chapter according to their understanding of sentence parsing and transcribed it onto bamboo slips, inadvertently leaving the character "哉" or "載" at the beginning of other chapters. Certainly, the circumstantial discussion regarding the potential clerical error of the scribe can only be regarded as auxiliary context

rather than the essential driving factor of the argument in this article, the crux of which lies in uncovering a more original and reasonable explanation of the term "yingpo baoyi", pivotal in elucidating the broader thematic and conceptual significance within the context of the discourse under examination. Due to the lack of substantial evidence to discredit Tang Xuanzong's revision method and considering that his sentence-breaking technique effectively ensures coherence and fluidity within the text, this paper, pending the discovery of additional literature, tentatively adopts Tang Xuanzong's approach, interpreting "載" as "哉", serving as the concluding word of the preceding chapter, and regarding "營魄抱一" as the outset of chapter 10.

3. The Ancient Pole Star: Exploring the Initial Meaning of Po

If the word "zai" is construed as a functional word, then "yingpo" and "baoyi" should be interpreted as two verb–object phrases with a structure akin to that of "aimin zhiguo 愛民治國" in the subsequent text. The original meaning of the character "ying" denotes encirclement, a concept that is juxtaposed with the word "bao", signifying "to surround with one's hands". The critical aspect in interpreting this sentence, given that "ying" is understood as encircling, lies in identifying the specific nature of the entity or concept being enclosed, denoted by the term "po".

Reflecting on the silk manuscript *Laozi* B, it is noteworthy that "yingpo" is written as "營袹" and contemporary scholars widely agree that "袹" should be interpreted as "魄". Takada Tadachika 高田忠周 proposes that interpreting "po" as the spirit of yin (魄，陰神也) in *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 reflects a relatively late ideological development, arguing that "initially, hun 魂 and po 魄 were only, respectively, represented by the characters yun 云 and bai 白" (其初唯以云、白為魂、魄, Takada 1982, p. 1034).[7] The term "bai 白" originally denotes the dim part of the moon,[8] also known as "yuezhi 月質", "ba 霸" or "po 魄". Indeed, while interpreting "yingpo" as "encircling the dark part of the moon" offers a seemingly plausible explanation, it is important to recognize that in practical character usage, Chinese characters like "bai" or "po" possess extended meanings beyond their literal definitions, necessitating further analysis to potentially restore the original connotation of "yingpo".

According to Hong Jiayi 洪家義's research, "the moon on the second and third day of each month presents two distinct parts: one depicting the newly formed crescent moon, characterized by its smaller size and brightness, and the other encompassing the larger and dimmer area of the moon, with the former emphasizing clarity and brightness, while the latter emphasizes its expansive size (pangbo 磅礴)" (Hong 1982, p. 60). Within specific contexts, the characters "bai 白", "ba 霸", and "po 魄" can all convey the notion of "greatness", as evidenced by examples such as in the *Xunzi* 荀子, where the term "pangpo 旁魄"is interpreted as "large and broad". While instances of the character "po" being interpreted as "great" in historical documents are scarce, within the specific linguistic usage of the pre-Qin period, esteemed or elder individuals were commonly referred to as "bo 伯", while powerful and influential princes were denoted as "ba 霸", both conveying connotations of greatness and nobility. After tracing the origins of the character "po", a pertinent question arises when revisiting the usage of "袹" in the *Laozi*: Could the character "bai 白", signifying "great", when combined with the radical "礻", representing "the heavens revealing signs to humanity", possibly denote celestial bodies that are revered and great?

If historical language data lack examples of the character "po 魄" representing nobility and greatness, then exploring its variant characters could indeed be a prudent choice. As Takada mentioned, a Chinese character "〖父鬼〗" is also a variant of "po", with a similar pronunciation and meaning to "pu 溥". The term "pangpu 旁溥", as recorded in *Shuowen jiezi*, is written as "pangpo 旁魄" in the *Wudu fu* 吳都賦, reflecting the similarity in pronunciation between "bai 白" and "fu 父" in ancient times. It is possible that the pronunciation of "pu 溥" originated from the character "fu 甫", which in turn derived its pronunciation from "fu 甫", and the pronunciation of "甫" originated from "fu 父". The variant character of this character should be written as "〖甫鬼〗"[9] while writing it as "〖父鬼〗" is a

form of abbreviation. "Fu 魈", as recorded in *Jiyun* 集韵, is likely the name of a star, which is also a variant of the character "〖父鬼〗", that is, "po 魄" (Takada 1982, p. 1034). In Taoist scriptures, "fu 魈" refers to the sixth star, "Kaiyang 開陽" (Ursa Major ζ), in the Big Dipper constellation. For instance, in *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義, it references the content of the *Dunjiajing* 遁甲經, stating, "the name of the sixth star (of the Big Dipper) is Fujixing 魈紀星" (*Wuxing dayi* 2001, p. 98). Similarly, in the *Taishang yuanshitianzun shuo beidi fumo shenzhou miaojing* 太上元始天尊說北帝伏魔神咒妙經, it is recorded that "the sixth star (of the Big Dipper) is called Fu 魈" (*Taishang yuanshitianzun shuo beidi fumo shenzhou miaojing*, p. 431).

Within Taoist beliefs, the names of the stars in the Big Dipper can be obscure and challenging to interpret. However, the sixth star, Kaiyang, holds a particularly unique position due to its historical role as the pole star used to mark the North Celestial Pole (beitianji 北天極), a role now fulfilled by Ursa Minor α, highlighting the significance of Kaiyang as a celestial marker in ancient times and suggesting that analyzing its uniqueness may offer valuable insight into understanding characters such as "fu 魈" or even "po". In Taoist scriptures, the star Kaiyang is consistently associated with the North Celestial Pole. For instance, in the *Shangqing hetu neixuanjing* 上清河圖內玄經, it is stated that "the sixth star is the North Pole Star, also known as Yuhuang Beichen Feihuajun 玉皇北晨飛華君. It is Kaiyang, the spirit of "po" of the North Pole, corresponding to the North Gate of the North Pole" (第六北極星，玉皇北晨飛華君。閶（開）陽星，此北極魄靈也，對北極北門; Shangqing hetu neixuanjing, p. 819). Similarly, the *Taishang xuanling beidou benming yanshengjing* 太上玄靈北斗本命延生真經 also asserts that "the sixth star of the Big Dipper is Wuqu Jixingjun 武曲紀星君 of the North Pole" (北斗第六北極武曲紀星君; *Taishang xuanling beidou benming yanshengjing*, p. 347). The naming conventions mentioned are not mere products of religious imagination; rather, they are deeply rooted in the astronomical consensus familiar to ancient Chinese people.

Before delving further into the discussion, it is essential to provide a brief explanation of the dynamic relationship between the celestial poles and the polar stars. The Earth rotates on its axis from west to east, a motion that gives rise to the apparent rotation of the stars around a fixed point when observed from the northern hemisphere. This fixed point is known as the celestial pole or the North Pole, which corresponds to the Earth's axis of rotation. As the Earth spins, the stars appear to revolve around the celestial pole, creating the illusion of a rotating sky. Historically, due to the abstract nature of the celestial pole as an empty point in the sky, people have relied on a bright star located near the celestial pole for ease of observation, commonly referred to as the Pole Star or beichen 北辰. While ancient people believed that the Earth's axis of rotation remained stationary, modern understanding reveals that gravitational forces from celestial bodies exert influence on the Earth's axis, causing it to undergo a slow, circular movement. Over thousands of years, observers relatively stationary with respect to the Earth's axis of rotation have noted a phenomenon wherein the designated pole star gradually shifts away from the celestial pole, leading to the selection of bright stars situated in proximity to the celestial pole during different epochs as new pole stars.

This viewpoint finds theoretical support among scholars. For instance, Feng Shi 馮時 proposed that in ancient times, one of the stars in the Big Dipper served as the pole star. He stated, "calculations show that around 3000 BCE, the star Ursa Major ζ in the Big Dipper was about 10 degrees away from the celestial pole… Clearly, the Big Dipper, as a complete constellation, was very close to the true celestial pole at that time. This suggests that not only did the stars in the Big Dipper have every reason to serve as the pole star at that time, but they were also the only ones qualified to do so" (S. Feng 2001, p. 96). Yi Shitong 伊世同's research offers more specific details, suggesting that "approximately five thousand years ago, Ursa Major ζ was closest to the celestial pole, with an angular distance of about 10°, making it a candidate for the pole star at that time" (Yi 1996, p. 27).

A corollary might suggest that in the early stages of Chinese civilization, ancient people regarded Kaiyang as the pole star, utilizing it as a celestial marker for the celestial

pole. The second-magnitude star Kaiyang, characterized by exceptional brightness and a stable position at the center of the sky, was perceived by ancient observers as the focal point around which all other stars revolved, occupying the highest celestial position and inspiring awe and reverence, leading them to describe it with terms like "bai 白", "bo 伯", or "fu 甫" to convey its nobility and greatness. However, due to the phenomenon of axial precession, Kaiyang gradually drifted away from its position as the celestial pole, eventually losing its status as a reliable marker of the celestial pole, which prompted people to search for a new pole star to guide their daily lives and activities. It is conceivable that certain individuals, possessing expertise in astronomy, continued to transmit the ancient knowledge of Kaiyang being the pole star across generations, with these custodians of knowledge possibly being Daoist scholars well-versed in historiography. Employing the character "fu 魖", which gradually evolved into "po 魄", to designate the former pole star might have served to underscore its esteemed and significant status among the stars, while also emphasizing its intrinsic connection with the celestial pole.

During the Han Dynasty, the pole star was described as a deity with personality attributes. For instance, the *Chunqiu hechengtu* 春秋合誠圖 contains records stating, "Great Monarch of Celestial Emperor (Tianhuang dadi天皇大帝) is the Beichen Star… He resides in the Purple Palace, ruling over the four directions" (天皇大帝，北辰星也……居紫宮中，制禦四方; *Isho shusei* 1994, p. 767). The name of the Celestial Emperor is "Yaopobao 耀魄寶", as recorded in the *Chunqiu zuozhuqi* 春秋佐助期. It states, "The Purple Palace is the place governed by the Celestial Emperor Yaopobao" (紫宮，天皇曜（耀）魄寶之所理也; *Isho Shusei* 1994, p. 819). This appellation can be seen as an intuitive description by observers of the Pole Star: dazzling, esteemed, and noble. In Tang Dynasty, Wang Jing 王涇's interpretation of the name "Yaopobao" closely aligns with the speculation regarding the significance of the Pole Star. According to Wang Jing 王涇, "the term Yao conveys the moral and educational prowess, shining forth like light in all directions. Meanwhile, "po" denotes his central position in the sky, symbolizing grandeur and stability. Finally, Bao signifies his supremely noble status" (言耀者，德化光照四方，魄者，居中魄然安定，寶者，言其貴重位，大至極也; *Datang kaiyuan li* 2000, p. 754). During the Han Dynasty, people used the character "po" when naming the polar star of their time. This logic parallels the rationale behind naming the Kaiyang star as fu魖, both of which aimed to depict the polar star as a celestial authority, demonstrated by its "occupying its own place, around which all other stars revolve" (居其所而眾星共之; *Lunyu jishi* 1990, p. 61).

Reflecting on the speculation surrounding the "po 袹" character in the silk manuscript *Laozi B*, it is plausible to consider its association with the revered Pole Star Kaiyang from ancient times. The character "po 袹" or "po 魄" may not necessarily signify the Pole Star observable during the text's composition, but rather the ancient Pole Star Kaiyang documented in ancient texts. This interpretation aligns with the broader thematic context of the *Laozi*, as exemplified by the statement "one can see the way of heaven without looking out of the window" (不窺牖，見天道; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 126). Irrespective of the era, the Pole Star embodies the characteristics attributed to "po", such as being esteemed, great, noble, and shining brightly at the center. If we accept the validity of the aforementioned speculation, then interpreting the term "yingpo" as "encircling the Pole Star" becomes compelling. This interpretation carries political–theological implications and aligns more closely with the Daoist doctrine of "ruling people and becoming a south-facing lord (君人南面之術)". Regarding the specific connotation of "yingpo", the article will offer a more comprehensive explanation subsequent to analyzing the term "baoyi".

4. Cosmograph, Taiyi, and the Tethering-Axial Rotation Metaphor: A Detailed Explanation of Baoyi

In contrast to "yingpo", the term "baoyi" exhibits a clearer semantic understanding and can be interpreted as "encompassing Taiyi".

In the received version of the *Laozi*, the term baoyi appears twice: apart from its occurrence in chapter 10, it also appears in chapter 22: "The sage embraces the One, thereby

embodying the role of the World Cosmograph" (聖人抱一, 為天下式; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 56). The context of "Cosmograph of the world (tianxiashi 天下式)" or simply "Cosmograph (shi 式)" holds significant importance in interpreting "baoyi", and further analysis of the term "tianxiashi" has the potential to unveil a coherent pathway of interpretation, thereby facilitating a more intuitive understanding of "baoyi". It is noteworthy that the term "cosmograph" was coined by Stephen Field, and Sarah Allan's examination of cosmographs offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis of this topic, shedding light on its historical evolution, cultural significance, and philosophical implications (Allan 2003, pp. 246–53). "Tianxiashi" emerges as an apt metaphor for a sage, resonating deeply with the themes of De 德 and political wisdom expounded upon in chapter 28:

> If one knows the white yet abides by the principle of black, then one can become the World Cosmograph. Should a person attain the status of the World Cosmograph, the eternal De will be errorless and will return to the pole of nothingness.
>
> 知其白, 守其黑, 為天下式。為天下式, 常德不忒, 復歸於無極。 (*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, pp. 73–74)

Similarly, the Cosmograph appears as a reference ideal for political guidance in chapter 65 as well:

> Ruling a state with cunning schemes inevitably harms it; it is only by governing without such cunning that the state finds happiness. Understanding these two governance approaches is analogous to consulting the Cosmograph. The comprehension of eternal principles and referring to the Cosmograph is what constitutes Dark De.
>
> 故以智治國，國之賊；不以智治國，國之福。知此兩者，亦稽式。常知稽式，是謂玄德。 (*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 168)

This chapter seeks to illustrate the concept that comprehending both advantageous and disadvantageous political strategies is akin to consulting the "shi" Cosmograph. The "shi 式", alternatively known as "shi 栻", serves as an instrument utilized in astronomical divination. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) elucidated that "The Great Functionary is entrusted with the task of holding the "shi" in arms to discern the timing of celestial movements, consequently discerning auspicious and inauspicious omens" (太史主抱式以知天時, 主吉兇; *Zhouli zhushu* 1999, p. 697).

The examination of various "shi" unearthed to date consistently reveals a common feature: the central part of "shi" typically bears engravings depicting the Big Dipper constellation. This archeological finding lends credence to the historical account documented in the Hanshu 漢書:

> The official in charge of astronomy placed the "shi" on the table, indicating the hour by the position of the Big Dipper stars, upon which Wang Mang adjusted his seat to align with the direction indicated by the Dipper's handle. He said, "With the De bestowed upon me by the Heaven, what can the Han army do to me?"
>
> 天文郎案栻於前，曰時加某，莽旋席隨斗柄而坐，曰：'天生德於予，漢兵其如予何！ (*Hanshu* 1964, p. 4190)

In the "shi" cosmological model, the clear and visible aspect is represented by the Big Dipper, while the void of the celestial pole is dark and intangible. Understanding the shifting and changing of the stars, one can grasp the eternal "unmoving" celestial pole, much like referencing the cosmograph, to guide people in the pursuit of auspiciousness and avoidance of adversity. The sage, through emulation of this dynamic cosmic movement, endeavors to uphold their eternal nature without undergoing change. This is akin to returning to the void of the celestial pole, as described in the *Laozi*: "If one knows the white yet abides by the principle of black, then one can become the World Cosmograph". The cosmic dynamic encapsulated in chapter 22 as "baoyi", despite later interpretations emphasizing health-preserving aspects or theories of the mind, fundamentally pertains to the celestial pole, serving as the focal center around which all cosmic phenomena revolve.

Within the cosmic panorama depicted by the "shi" Cosmograph, which includes the Big Dipper, all celestial entities revolve around the singular celestial pole. In a specific context, "shengrenbaoyi 聖人抱一" denotes the sage embracing the operational essence of the celestial pole within their heart. In Chinese, the use of "懷", typically connoting the chest area or the heart, carries a nuanced meaning akin to holding or embracing certain ideals or beliefs, akin to the character "抱", which signifies enclosing something with both arms and holding it close to the chest. In this context, the sage metaphorically resides at the center of the universe, akin to the celestial pole itself which is pure, empty, and characterized by minimal action. By aligning with the operational essence of the celestial pole, the sage enables the autonomous flourishing of myriad things (萬物將自化; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 91).

Scholars have long focused on this theoretical framework containing political philosophy. For instance, within *Zhuangzi* 莊子's Tianxia 天下 chapter, the suggestion is made that Guan Yin 關尹 and Lao Dan 老聃 "formulated their doctrines by espousing the concepts of eternity in both being and non-being, with Taiyi serving as a pivotal axis within their philosophy" (建之以常無有，主之以太一; *Zhuangzi jishi* 1961, p. 1093).[10] While the term "Taiyi 太一" does not currently feature in various versions of the *Laozi*, this assertion serves as an inspiration for delving into the ideological structure of the *Laozi*.

The term "tai" of Taiyi is imbued with the connotation of "great", and the assessment of whether the descriptor "great" appropriately characterizes the "yi" within the *Laozi* can be elucidated by referring to chapter 14:

> The unseen attribute is called colorless, the unheard attribute is called soundless, and the intangible attribute is called formless. These three attributes are difficult to investigate individually, so they are mixed together and called "yi 一"… By apprehending the ancient Dao and applying it to the governance of contemporary beings, one can gain insight into the origins of all things from antiquity. This is referred to as the head of thread-like Dao.
>
> 視之不見名曰夷，聽之不聞名曰希，搏之不得名曰微。此三者不可致詰，故混而為一……執古之道，以禦今之有，能知古始，是謂道紀。(*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, pp. 31–32)

Yi is expounded upon as an entity transcending the confines of empirical reality, devoid of color, sound, and form, delineated as daoji 道紀, a convergence point of diverse Dao. The centrality of Dao in the philosophy of the *Laozi* requires minimal elucidation, as chapter 25 explicitly asserts the greatness of Dao with the statement "Dao is great 道大", while the characterization of "yi" as the head of thread-like Dao underscores its overarching significance, endowed with universality and transcendence. From an astronomical vantage point, the concept of the "great one" manifests as a deeply abstract expression of the celestial pole. In ancient cosmological paradigms, wherein the depiction of the sky often paralleled a dome, the term "ji 極" symbolically denoted the apex and focal point of the celestial expanse. By extrapolating from this metaphorical framework, the solitary and unchanging locus at the zenith of the celestial sphere epitomizes the essence of yi, or "One".

Notably, in Chapter 42 of the *Laozi*, the text, "Dao gives rise to One, One gives rise to Two, Two gives rise to Three, and Three gives rise to all things", (道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 117) establishes a foundational sequence that outlines the process of creation. The *Laozi* introduces a progressive schema where the Dao, as the ultimate source, initiates a sequence of emanation leading to the multiplicity of existence. This sequence—Dao, One, Two, Three, all things—serves as a structural framework for understanding how the Dao engenders the diverse forms of the universe. The *Laozi* does not elaborate on the precise mechanism by which the Dao generates these stages or how these stages further give rise to all things. Such an omission creates a broad interpretative space for subsequent scholars to explore and expand upon the generative process.

The open nature of this progression allows for various interpretations, accommodating both ontological and generative perspectives.

Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, in his analysis of Chapter 42, recognizes that the passage can be approached from both angles (Y. Feng 1998, pp. 335–36). The generative interpretation assigns specific meanings to the terms One, Two, and Three, viewing them as distinct stages or principles in the process of creation. In contrast, the ontological interpretation emphasizes the ontological significance of the Dao and its capacity to manifest reality without necessarily specifying the exact nature or process of this manifestation. Ancient Chinese philosophers like Wang Bi engaged with Chapter 42 from an ontological perspective, offering interpretations that have withstood philosophical scrutiny over time. According to Wang Bi,

> All things exhibit myriad forms, yet they must ultimately return to the One. How is this One attained? Through nothingness. If the One is reached through nothingness, can the One truly be unspeakable? Given that it is already referred to as the One, how can it be deemed unspeakable? With speech and One both existing, what else could it be if not Two? The existence of One and Two thus gives rise to Three.
>
> 萬物萬形，其歸一也。何由致一，由於無也。由無乃一，一可無言？已謂之一，豈得無言乎？有言有一，非二如何？有一有二，遂生乎三。(*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 117)

The notion that all things achieve unity through absolute negation is compellingly articulated by the term One. In Wang Bi's framework, the concept of One is woven into the Taiyi metaphor, underscoring its fundamental role in his philosophical system. Wang Bi asserts that "One is the beginning of numbers and the pole of all things", (一，數之始而物之極也; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 106) a statement that not only positions One at the origin of all numerical constructs but also anchors it as the central pole around which all things develop. This positioning is far from coincidental, as it reflects a profound alignment between the concept of One and the symbolism associated with the celestial pole. The dark region of the celestial pole serves as a potent symbol of negation—a space where all sensory experiences are effectively nullified. It is this absolute oneness that justifiably leads philosophers to refer to it as Taiyi, the Great One.

The recurring presence of "yi" in the *Laozi*, as well as the depiction of Taiyi in the *Zhuangzi*, serve as archetypal representations of astronomical constructs, particularly evoking the celestial pole. Concurrently, the utilization of "baoyi" as a methodological framework alludes to the cosmic operation pattern revolving around the celestial pole. In *Tianwen* 天問, Qu Yuan 屈原 (340BC–278BC) raises the question: "Where should the handle of the dipper be tethered as it rotates? To what extent does the Celestial Pole extend?" (斡維焉繫, 天極焉加; *Chuci buzhu* 1983, p. 86). Within Qu Yuan's conceptualization, the Big Dipper assumes the semblance of a revolving ladle, seemingly linked to Taiyi or the celestial pole by an ethereal thread. However, Taiyi is depicted as devoid of tangible substance and form, rendering the line connecting the perpetually shifting Big Dipper to Taiyi imperceptible to observation. The Big Dipper, alongside all celestial bodies and myriad phenomena, exemplifies this interconnectedness. Connected by the abstract thread, all entities engage in perpetual motion. Qu Yuan elucidates this connection as the "wei 維", wherein the threads of existence converge at a singular nexus, termed the "ji 紀", while the governing principle dictating the laws of all phenomena is denoted as the "daoji". Astronomically, this corresponds to the celestial pole or Taiyi, whereas within the framework of the *Laozi*, it resonates with the concept of yi, encapsulated by the encompassing presence of all things.

Names like "Fujixing 魁紀星" and "Wuqu Jixingjun 武曲紀星君" possibly originate from this metaphor, as in ancient times, Kaiyang served as the pole star, symbolizing the celestial pole around which all celestial phenomena orbited, thus making it the figurative ji 紀 or "head of lines" that tethered together all stars. The conceptualization of the uni-

verse as a cohesive system, wherein all phenomena are intricately interconnected to a singular point at the Celestial Pole through metaphorical threads, recurs throughout various pre-Qin texts. The motif, articulated through terms like "ji 紀", "gang 綱", "wei 維", "xi 繫", and "mian 綿", referred to as the "Tethering Metaphor", holds an important position within Chinese philosophy.

Within the "Tethering Metaphor" articulated in the *Laozi*, the focal point lies in accentuating the linkage between the celestial pole and the universe, furnishing a tangible conceptual scaffold for the cosmological discourse conveyed within the text. Concurrently, the notion of "Axial Rotation" emerges as a pivotal mode of motion within this framework. In the *Laozi*, the metaphor of opening and closing doors serves as a vivid illustration of the rotational motion of the universe around Taiyi. This conceptualization is exemplified in chapter 6:

> The void akin to a valley, the mysteriousness, and the eternal essence, may be called the dark and obscure femininess. The door of such dark and obscure femininess can be called the the root of Heaven and Earth. The linkage [between such a root and the universe] is as intricate as strands of silk. These silk strands, as though truly existing, enable the effortless demonstration of all phenomena.
>
> 谷神不死, 是謂玄牝。玄牝之門, 是謂天地根。緜緜若存, 用之不勤。 (*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 16)

Much like how "thread" embodies the essence of the tethering metaphor, the term "hinge (shu 樞)" serves as the symbol representing the "door metaphor" or axial rotation mode, employed to signify the celestial pole. As Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) concluded upon observing the celestial pole, "hinge (shu 樞)" "denotes the celestial expanse devoid of other stars. It maintains an unwavering and stationary position, serving as the celestial pivot and nexus" (北辰是那中間無星處, 這些子不動，是天之樞紐; *Zhuzi yulei* 1986, p. 534). Historically, stars such as Σ 1694 have held the position of the pole star, revered by Chinese people as the "Hinge of Heaven (tianshu 天樞)". Likewise, stars like ι Draconis, in proximity to the celestial pole, were designated the "Left Hinge (zuoshu 左樞)", while α Draconis assumed the title of the "Right Hinge (youshu 右樞)", implying that the celestial pole is the fixed hinge of the universe, while the myriad stars representing the universe revolve like a door around its hinge.

The axial rotation mode centered on Taiyi or the "Great One" finds a striking and perhaps unintended parallel in its following chapter in the depiction of an ordinary object—the "wheel". The metaphor of the wheel, as it is presented, captures the essence of this model. The text states, "Thirty spokes collectively surround a single hub; it is the nothingness (within the hub) that makes the cart functional." (三十輻共一轂, 當其無，有車之用; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 26). Here, the emphasis is on the hollow hub at the wheel's center, which serves as the key for the wheel's operation. This seemingly simple description carries philosophical implications that resonate with the cosmological themes explored within the text.

As it can be seen in the *Daode zhenjing jiyi* 道德真經集義, scholars of the *Laozi* have long engaged with this metaphor, offering interpretations that have enriched the understanding of the spokes and the hub. However, these interpretations, while valuable, have largely focused on the static elements of the metaphor—the spokes and the hub—overlooking the dynamic aspect encapsulated by the transitive verb "gong 共", or "to surround". Ma Xulun 馬敘倫's interpretation of the character gong offers an insight into the interplay between multiple entities and a singular object, suggesting a dynamic of interaction and elevation. According to Ma, the original form of the character gong "symbolizes four hands lifting an object above, denoting the cooperative effort of two people jointly raising a single item." (有物在上而四手從下扛之，四手則兩人，明二人同舉一物也; Ma 1985, p. 150). This imagery, in essence, captures the notion of multiple forces working together to elevate the status of a central entity. When employed as a verb, the single character gong thus

conveys not just physical action but also the metaphoric elevation or enhancement of the significance of the object in question.

This interpretation finds an application in the *Laozi* Chapter 11, where thirty spokes collectively encircle the hub, bestowing upon the empty hub its central significance. This conceptualization of "gong-surround" resonates with a nearly identical metaphor found in the *Lunyu* 論語: "Rulers who administrate by the principle of 'virtue' are like the Pole Star, occupying its place, around which all other stars revolve." (為政以德,譬如北辰, 居其所而眾星共之; *Lunyu jishi* 1990, p. 61). In this metaphor, the Pole Star occupies a fixed position, much like the hub, while the surrounding stars, akin to the outer edge of a wheel, revolve around it. The act of surrounding in this context imbues the Pole Star with its central significance, elevating it as the fixed point of reference for the entire celestial order. Just as the hub is rendered central by the spokes, the Pole Star is granted its preeminence by the surrounding stars.

A comparative analysis of these two metaphors reveals a shared focus on centrality, as both the empty hub in the *Laozi* and the Pole Star in the *Lunyu* symbolize a central void or axis around which order is structured. The difference lies in the fact that, in the *Lunyu*, the Pole Star is surrounded by scattered stars, while in contrast, the *Laozi* presents a more intricate metaphor with the hub of a wheel encircled by thirty slender spokes. This wheel-shaped model offers a two-dimensional representation of the Tethering-Axial Rotation Metaphor in question, where the spokes serve as connections between the central hub and the outer rim of the wheel. This metaphor extends beyond the physical structure of a wheel, suggesting a cosmological model in which the hub represents the void center of the universe, and the spokes function as invisible threads linking this central void to all things that make up the universe.

In subsequent sections, a comprehensive examination of how the Tethering-Axial Rotation Metaphor operates within the *Laozi* will be presented. However, the primary emphasis of this chapter is to provide a detailed exploration of "baoyi", aiming to facilitate a profound and intuitive understanding, thus enriching the articulate depiction of the core concept embodied by "yingpobaoyi". "Po" symbolizes the pole star, acting as a radiant marker to designate the celestial pole. Its significance in certain contexts mirrors that of the celestial pole itself, while "yi" embodies the celestial pole. As such, "yingpo" and "baoyi" serve not only as descriptors of cosmic order but also as exemplary models for effective governance. Rulers are urged to internalize the operational framework represented by Taiyi and embody its essence. When a ruler refrains from excessive intervention in the affairs of both the nobility and the ordinary people, these societal strata naturally align themselves around the ruler, akin to stars orbiting Taiyi or the pole star. This harmonious alignment facilitates the smooth functioning and development of society, allowing individuals to flourish unhindered. This state of harmonious ease can aptly be described as "effortlessness (buqin 不勤)", wherein the ruler's emulation of Taiyi's political principles embodies the concept of wuwei 無為 or non-action.

5. Reinterpreting the Context of Yingpobaoyi

The Tethering-Axial Rotation Metaphor serves as a contextual lens through which the political philosophy of the *Laozi* can be comprehensively examined, facilitating a profound and reasoned reflection on this ideology. At this pivotal juncture, it bears emphasizing incessantly that the cornerstone of this metaphorical framework lies in the concept of the celestial pole, also referred to as "yi" or Taiyi. Across different historical epochs, the elusive nature of the celestial pole led ancient civilizations to designate the brightest star near Taiyi as the Pole Star, which, in certain contexts, symbolically represents Taiyi itself. The visual narrative of "yingpobaoyi", or "encircle the Pole Star and encompass Taiyi", not only illuminates the cosmological landscape of Taoist philosophy as encapsulated within the *Laozi* but also serves as a methodological framework replete with instructive implications for princes of the era in matters of governance.

While scholars have proffered diverse interpretations of chapter 10 of the *Laozi* from myriad perspectives, the lexical analysis this article provided may furnish additional insights to elucidate the influence of the cosmological model depicted in chapter 10. The main part of chapter 10 lies in its exposition through six series of rhetorical inquiries. While the interrelation among these interrogations might appear divergent at first glance, together, they coalesce around a central motif: rulers ought to ensure that the "De" or attribute of all things follows the principle of Taiyi for their natural development.

Chapter 10 of the *Laozi* portrays the movement pattern that all phenomena must adhere to the rotation around the Pole Star or Taiyi. The opening of this chapter underscores that rulers can only attain a state of "non-separation", or "wuli 無離", by adhering steadfastly to the principle of Taiyi's movement. Just as stars orbit in the model of Tethering-Axial Rotation to maintain their true qualities, so too must all things move in alignment with these cosmic principles. In the specific context of the *Laozi*, these qualities are referred to as "De". Should the "De" of all things remain unaltered, they would manifest a state akin to the pristine innocence of infancy, as mentioned in the *Laozi*, where "one can keep the eternal De from deviation, he can return to a state akin to that of an infant" (常德不離，復歸於嬰兒; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 73).

The *Laozi* suggests that the state of infancy in all things embodies the most profound "De", as expressed in the text: "One who has the profound De resemble naked newborn infants" (含德之厚，比於赤子; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 145). Infants, devoid of articulate speech or extensive actions, epitomize the profound "De"; however, the *Laozi* notes that as individuals mature and acquire language and actions, their essential attributes often become obscured or diluted, a concept embodied in the aphorism, "Excessive speech hastens exhaustion" (多言數窮; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 14). Infants exemplify the state of wuwei, characterized by a natural, effortless state of being, which is inherently soft yet possesses power and efficacy. This is what the *Laozi* meant by "The softest thing in the world overcomes the hardest thing in the world" (天下之至柔，馳騁天下之至堅; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 120). The method to achieve such a softest state involves gathering qi (tuanqi 摶氣), as described in chapter 10 as "Gather qi to achieve the soft state" (專（摶）氣致柔; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 22). As stated in the *Guanzi* 管子, "If all things gather qi together, making it akin to their own spirit, then all things will be perfect" (摶氣如神，萬物備存; *Guanzi jiaozhu* 2004, p. 493). It is evident that gathering qi can bring about a state of perfection for all things, a state metaphorically described in the *Laozi* as possessing the profound "De" of an infant.

In the subsequent sentence, the term "xuanlan 玄覽" should be construed as "xuanjian 玄鑒", denoting the concept of a "dark mirror", as delineated in the excavated silk manuscript *Laozi* B. Perhaps influenced by the implications and guidance of the Heshanggong 河上公 version, numerous scholars have commonly regarded xuanjian as a metaphor for the heart. It is imperative to acknowledge that this interpretation has played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Chinese philosophy and religion. However, it remains essential to undertake a comprehensive exploration of the original meaning of this term within its specific context.[11]

During the pre-Qin period, bronze mirrors served not only as tools for reflecting one's appearance but also held profound connections with astronomy. As early as the Shang Dynasty, the intricate designs adorning the backs of bronze mirrors conveyed the concept of "canopy heaven (gaitian 蓋天)", symbolizing the celestial sphere. This tradition persisted throughout the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, underscoring the enduring significance of circular bronze mirrors as emblematic representations of the celestial realm (Y. Wang 2014, p. 59). A square bronze mirror unearthed from the No. 36 Warring States tomb in Shibancun 石板村, Cili 慈利, Hunan, features a pattern resembling a cross grid, prompting speculation that it may represent a Cosmograph (Li 2000, pp. 54–57). This perspective gains credibility when considering the two versions of *Shiluotu* 視羅圖 from the bamboo slips discovered at Shuihudi 睡虎地, the *Yuzangtu* 禹藏圖 from the Mawangdui silk manuscripts, and an array of "shi" Cosmographs unearthed from

archeological sites. The interconnection between the Cosmograph and "baoyi", alongside their importance in the *Laozi*, has been previously explored. It is worth reaffirming that when the sage governs in strict alignment with the model of Taiyi, they assume the role of the people's Cosmograph, steering them toward lives imbued with auspiciousness while steering clear of inauspicious circumstances. The potential multifaceted significance of xuanjian, encompassing both astronomical and political–theological dimensions, suggests its conceivable role as an alternate representation of the Cosmograph. This observation underscores the importance for rulers to cultivate a comprehensive comprehension of the principle of Taiyi and to craft their administrative strategies with unequivocal clarity concerning this principle. The ensuing elucidation will further expound upon the specific criteria necessitated to fulfill these imperatives, thereby fostering a more profound understanding of their implications for governance.

The statement "Cherish the people, govern the country, can it be achieved without resorting to clever schemes" (愛民治國，能無知乎; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 23) serves to underscore the importance of governing without relying on cunning tactics. In chapter 65, a critical perspective towards the cunning administrative approach is articulated: "Ruling a state with cunning schemes inevitably harms it" (以智治國，國之賊; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 168). The text advocates for governance devoid of cunning, implying a stance against manipulating the livelihoods and development of both the nobility and commoners through deceitful tactics, instead suggesting allowing them to remain in a state of "simplicity" or "foolishness (yu 愚)". In chapter 20, simplicity is depicted as a state contrasted with cleverness (zhi 智), wherein "the foolish" and "the infant" symbolize analogous states characterized by simplicity and naturalness through a series of parallel sentences. Therefore, the significance of foolishness lies in the concept that individuals need not adorn themselves with cunning, as it may diminish their inherent "De", akin to the purity observed in infants. By permitting people to develop organically in accordance with their innate attributes, rulers can formulate transparent and unequivocal administrative policies, akin to consulting the Cosmograph centered around Taiyi.

The subsequent phrase after "The Heaven Door opens and closes (tianmen kaihe 天門開闔)" in all versions except Wang Bi's is "Can it manifest the femininess (neng weicihu 能為雌乎)". The phrase suggests that the cyclic movement of the Heaven Door can embody the quality of femininess. The fusion of femininess with the notion of the door constitutes a unique metaphor in the *Laozi*, reminiscent of the interpretation elucidated in chapter 6's reference to "the door of dark and obscure femininess (xuanpinzhimen 玄牝之門)". From a cosmological standpoint, Taiyi assumes the role of the Heaven Door's axis, around which the stars are intricately connected through imperceptible threads, akin to a revolving door pivoting around its hinge. This Heaven Door, also known as the "root of heaven and earth (tiandigen 天地根)", serves as the primordial source from which all phenomena in the universe emanate. While the *Laozi* does not offer elaborate explanations on the genesis of all phenomena from this root, the *Taiyishengshui* 太一生水 text discovered in the Guodian provides a comprehensive exposition:

> Taiyi engenders Water, and Water, in turn, delimits Taiyi. Thus, Heaven is formed in this manner. Heaven, in turn, delimits Taiyi. Thus, Earth is formed in this manner.
>
> 太一生水, 水反輔太一, 是以成天。天反輔太一, 是以成地。 (Li 2007, p. 41)

While scholars have offered various interpretations of the cosmogony delineated in *Taiyishengshui*, there exists a fundamental consensus that Taiyi serves as the primordial source from which all things between Heaven and Earth originate. More precisely, the genesis of all things emanates from the voidness (gu 谷) and the enigmatic creative potency (shen 神) inherent within Taiyi, wherein the nurturing attribute, termed as "ci 雌" or "pin 牝". This assertion aims to underscore the importance of "yingpobaoyi": all things revolve around the pole star or celestial pole, thus giving rise to existence.[12] If rulers can "preserve femininess 守其雌" by adhering to the principle of Taiyi as the progenitor of

all things, they can "become the world's vale 為天下谿", ensuring that the populace and all living beings "keep the eternal De from deviation, he can return to a state akin to that of an infant ".

The interpretation of the next phrase "明白四達，能無為乎" varies across different versions, including the Fu Yi version, Heshanggong version, silk version, and Wang Bi version. However, Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 posits that the explanation found in the Wang Bi version is the most reasonable (Liu 2006, p. 163). This phrase encapsulates the essence of governance in accordance with the principle of Taiyi, labeling this state as non-action. Following the logical progression of the verses, the foundation for non-action should be a clear understanding of information from all four directions, indicating that rulers must possess adequate insight and comprehension. Regarding the attainment of such clarity and insight, chapter 16 delineates:

> Returning to Root can be called stillness, which is returning to fate. By returning to fate, one attains an eternal state. Understanding this eternal state is wisdom; not understanding it leads to reckless actions, which are inauspicious.
>
> 歸根曰靜，是謂復命。復命曰常，知常曰明，不知常，妄作，兇。(*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, pp. 35–36)

The term "root" denotes the cosmic rotation pattern with Taiyi at its nucleus, recognized as xuanpinzhimen, or the root of Heaven and Earth. This intricate pattern finds more vivid expression in the Guodian *Laozi* manuscript:

> The most void entity is the Pole, which accretes substantial significance by maintaining centrality. All phenomena originate from the periphery and eventually revert through passive waiting in tranquility. The celestial movements adhere to a cyclical trajectory, leading all entities back to their source.
>
> 致虛，極也；守中，篤也。萬物旁作，居以須復也。天道員員，各復其根。(Li 2007, p. 4)[13]

When rulers grasp the principle that all things and individuals should exist and evolve in accordance with their inherent attributes, they exemplify the concept of "mingbaisida 明白四達". By adopting such a perspective, rulers abstain from reckless actions toward their people, embodying the policy strategy of wuwei.

Some scholars argue that the final sentence of chapter 10 exhibits significant repetition with chapter 51 and bears little connection with the preceding text, leading to suggestions for its removal. Upon closer examination of this chapter's coherent theme, it becomes apparent that the final sentence serves as a highly concise summary of the attributes associated with "po" or "yi". The dynamic motion pattern of Taiyi has the capacity to give rise to all things and endow them with their inherent attributes. Such a trajectory of "circular motion without end 周行而不殆" is "designated as Dao 字之曰道" (*Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 63). This concept forms the basis for the reiterated emphasis in the *Laozi* that "The Dao brings forth the universe, whereas the De sustains it" (道生之，德蓄之; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*, p. 136). All things emanate from Taiyi, yet Taiyi itself embodies a state of void and formlessness; it serves as the pivotal axis around which the entire cosmos revolves, yet it abstains from proclaiming its eminence. Taiyi occupies the supreme position within the universe, yet it refrains from direct intervention in the affairs of all things. This enigmatic attribute, beyond the grasp of sensory perception, is termed as "Dark De (xuande 玄德)"; it represents the quality that the author aspires rulers to embody. It is noteworthy that xuande operates in a manner that embodies a subtlety and inconspicuousness that contrasts sharply with the overt nature of Illustrious De (mingde 明德), extolled in the Confucian classic *Daxue* 大學. The concept of xuande aligns with the Daoist philosophy as articulated in the *Laozi*, where "De" is most effective when it is not flaunted, and where the influence of the ruler or sage is most profound when it is imperceptible. This is encapsulated in Chapter 17 of the *Laozi*, which delineates a rank of rulers based on how they are perceived by the people: "The best rulers are those whom the people are simply aware of; the next best are those whom the people love and praise;

after that are those whom the people fear; and the worst are those whom the people despise." (太上，下知有之；其次，親而譽之；其次，畏之；其次，侮之; *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi*,
p. 40). The *Laozi* advocates for a mode of governance that operates with such subtlety that its influence becomes almost imperceptible to those governed. The effectiveness of a ruler is not judged by visible acts of governance or by the ruler's acclaim, but rather by the absence of perceptible administrative measures. In this framework, the ruler's influence is akin to the celestial pole or Taiyi, which are central to the structure and movement of heaven, yet remain unseen.

6. Conclusions and Further Discussion

Upon reevaluation, the phrase "zai yingpo baoyi" underwent a comprehensive analysis regarding its punctuation nuances, alongside an exploration into the etymological roots of "yingpo" and "baoyi", integrating textual and practical methodologies. Through the exclusion of any substantive connotation associated with the character "zai", a discernible pattern emerged elucidating the astronomical provenance of both "po" and "yi". In particular, "po" denotes the historical significance of the ancient pole star, conventionally employed as a celestial marker indicating the celestial pole, while "yi" symbolically represents Taiyi, epitomizing the concept of the vacant celestial pole. The phrase "yingpobaoyi" serves a dual purpose: it vividly illustrates the celestial panorama characterized by a multitude of stars encircling the northern celestial pole, while concurrently asserting a crucial political proposition, urging rulers to remain cognizant of the operational tenets delineated by Taiyi. Positioned strategically as the inaugural statement of this chapter, "yingpobaoyi" not only establishes a thematic precedent that resonates throughout the subsequent discourse but also underscores its centrality in shaping the overarching narrative trajectory. As the chapter unfolds, successive passages delve into multifaceted examinations of this foundational principle, elucidating its significance and ramifications from diverse perspectives.

The phrase "zai yingpo baoyi", appearing at the beginning of chapter 10, has perplexed scholars for thousands of years, chiefly due to three factors. Firstly, in history, a group of scribes translocated the character "zai", originally attributed to the antecedent chapter, to the onset of the subsequent chapter, thereby engendering diverse conjectures regarding the syntactical conventions prevalent within this chapter. Secondly, the extant *Laozi* versions prevalent in contemporary discourse exhibit a discernible authoritative inertia engendering implicit paradigms of interpretation that have permeated through myriad domains, exerting a pervasive and profound influence. Lastly, the erosion of ancient astronomical cognizance, the semantic evolution of the character "po", and the gradual perturbation of the celestial pole over the course of millennia have collectively contributed to the gradual obfuscation of the astronomical import encapsulated within this particular textual excerpt. Undoubtedly, the multifarious trajectories of interpretation and the proliferation of exemplary annotated renditions have infused fresh vigor into Daoist philosophy and religion, endowing this pre-Qin philosophical tradition with a distinct luster within the political and cultural milieu following the Qin and Han dynasties. Nevertheless, such dynamism does not signify the diminution of the pertinence accorded to the exploration of the meaning inherent within this sentence and chapter. Conversely, such an inquiry stands poised to furnish insights into the realms of ancient Chinese astronomy and the ethical underpinnings of Daoist political thought.

The comprehensive analysis conducted reveals a significant interrelation among the six sets of rhymes presented in chapter 10, indicating a discernible and coherent narrative continuum. These poetic compositions are intricately woven with the explicit intention of providing guidance to rulers, encouraging them to embrace the principle of Taiyi and pursue governance characterized by "wuwei", thus offering a strategic framework within the political domain. The clue in this chapter lies in the opening phrase "yingpobaoyi". The sentence in question ingeniously employs the rhetorical device of "interlacement (huwen

互文)", where the meaning of a single sentence is conveyed through the intricate weaving of two separate sentences. Through this artful construction, an implication emerges, namely, the cosmic centrality wherein all entities are depicted as revolving around the celestial pole. The authors of the *Laozi* assert that the mode of movement delineated therein is amenable to interpretation from a multitude of vantage points. These include the intrinsic attributes characteristic of all entities, the guiding principles deemed essential for rulers to uphold, strategies to circumvent pitfalls in administration, the paramount significance attributed to the Taiyi model, and the conceptualization of an aspirational political framework. The authors adeptly articulate their political ideologies by leveraging the potency of rhyme and metaphorical rhetoric, deftly harnessing these literary devices as conduits for the transmission of their conceptual frameworks. In the concluding remarks, they masterfully employ the concept of Dark De to ambiguously encapsulate the defining attributes of Taiyi and the archetype of an exemplary ruler.

Failing to delve into the astronomical origins of the concept of Taiyi and to grasp the significance of the *Zhuangzi*'s assertion regarding its pivotal axis role would lead to a loss of the fundamental clue embedded within this chapter. Consequently, there is a potential for misinterpretation, where these rhymes may be erroneously perceived as loosely related, disordered sentences lacking inherent sequence, ostensibly addressing themes of cultivation, theories of cognition, medicinal practices, and mysticism. The authors of the *Laozi* likely included a group of learned historiographers with a deep understanding of astronomy. Confronted by an era characterized by societal turmoil, they skillfully utilized their expertise in astronomy to create rhymed political aphorisms intended to offer guidance to the rulers of their time, guiding them through the tumultuous throes of societal disarray. Through an exploration of the historical context and cultural backdrop surrounding the genesis of the *Laozi*, coupled with an inquiry into the origins and implications of particular imagery, a discernible insight comes to light. While the *Laozi* undeniably constitutes a multifaceted compendium spanning diverse subjects, a focused examination of chapter 10 suggests a nuanced perspective. When contextualized within its contemporary socio-political landscape, this chapter does not appear fragmented but rather emerges as a cohesive political guide.

Finally, while efforts continue in scholarly circles to unearth and analyze additional pre-Qin documents, the present discourse operates within the confines of existing evidential boundaries. Simultaneously, it is imperative to recognize that the constraints of length and relevance inherent in scholarly discourse may necessitate the omission of certain nascent ideas and unresolved uncertainties from the main body of the text. The decision to refrain from articulating these thoughts in full may stem from a pragmatic consideration of maintaining the scholarly integrity and coherence of the argument presented. For example, one may inquire whether "mingbaisida" could plausibly accommodate alternative interpretations, particularly considering the scarcity of pre-Qin evidence explicitly suggesting that "mingbai" should be construed as "understanding". Furthermore, it is worth considering, for instance, the variations observed in certain characters when comparing the silk manuscript version with other textual sources, notably the utilization of different radicals. This discrepancy prompts inquiry into whether such alterations are indicative of a systematic revision or if they signify adherence to a distinct ideological trend. Indeed, while the nuances surrounding the sources may provoke scholarly inquiry, they do not diminish the overarching theme of this article, which highlights the prominence and relevance of ancient Chinese astronomy within the broader framework of Daoist philosophy.

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Notes

1 The relationship between Dao and Heaven as presented in the *Laozi* is nuanced, reflecting a understanding in which Dao is the ultimate source and governing principle, while Heaven serves as its most visible and influential agent. In the opening lines of the *Laozi*, Heaven and Earth are depicted as subordinate to Dao, described metaphorically as a maternal figure that gives birth to all existence. This portrayal underscores the primacy of Dao as the creator and sustainer of all things, with Heaven and Earth being its agents. Thus, the *Laozi* establishes a clear distinction between the ontological Dao and Heaven, which is not equivalent to Dao itself. However, the text also suggests that Heaven, while not identical to Dao, is deeply aligned with it and serves as the most immediate and observable manifestation of Dao's principles. The *Laozi* states, "Human takes Earth as his law; Earth takes Heaven as its law; Heaven takes Dao as its law", (人法地，地法天，天法道) which indicates a chain of alignment where the way of Heaven is directly informed by Dao. Furthermore, the assertion that "conforming to the laws of Heaven is to align with the principles of Dao" (天乃道) emphasizes that Heaven's operations are a reflection of Dao, making the observation of Heaven a crucial step in understanding and following Dao. Although the Way of Heaven does not carry the same ontological weight as Dao, it is considered the most essential and observable phenomenon that approximates Dao. It provides a tangible reference for those seeking to comprehend Dao's abstract principles. Therefore, in certain specific instances within this article, discussions of the Way of Heaven can be interpreted as discussions of Dao itself, particularly when the focus is on the practical application of Dao's principles in the empirical world. Heaven's role as the most fully embodied manifestation of Dao in the natural order allows it to serve as a guide for understanding and implementing Dao in human affairs.

2 Unless explicitly stated otherwise, the quoted passages and corresponding chapters from the *Laozi* in this text are sourced from the Wang Bi version (王弼本; cf. *Laozi daodejing zhujiaoshi* 2008), commonly referred to as the received version. While acknowledging the contributions of existing translations, it is imperative to recognize that divergent interpretations and nuanced understandings may arise due to differing hermeneutical approaches and linguistic complexities. Therefore, in pursuit of a more direct engagement with the original text, an independent translation has been conducted, grounded in a meticulous interpretation of the source material.

3 For instance, during the Ming Dynasty, Lu Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1606) perceptively noted that "'zaiyingpobaoyi', these five characters coalesce to form a phrase of significance, wherein 'zai' conveys the connotation of 'bearing'" (載營魄抱一五字成義。載，承載也; *Laozi daodejing xuanlan*, p. 223). Despite the divergence from interpreting "zai" as "bearing", prevalent contemporary scholarship predominantly categorizes this term as a verb. Notably, Thomas Michael opted to translate this character as "keeping", (Michael 2020, p. 476) whereas Franciscus Verellen inclined towards rendering "zai" as "harbor" (Verellen 2016, p. 199) in citations of pertinent texts.

4 The discourse regarding the temporal origins of the *Laozi* has perennially commanded attention within scholarly spheres. Presently, the precise dating of its composition continues to elude definitive determination, and owing to constraints of brevity, this article abstains from expounding upon the current expanse of research within this domain. Nevertheless, examinations of foundational archeological findings intimate that by the midpoint of the Warring States era, the *Laozi* had already assumed an important role in the life of the Chu nobility, thus engendering a plausible conjecture that its composition likely predates the onset of the early Warring States period. Furthermore, according to Franklin Perkins (Perkins 2016, p. 2), the analysis of the *Laozi* text alongside other contemporaneous texts like the Fanwu liuxing 凡物流形 shows a philosophical shift occurring by the late 4th century BCE, suggesting that the *Laozi* was part of this intellectual movement.

5 The composition date of *Yuanyou* continues to be a subject of scholarly contention and debate. Despite ongoing efforts and extensive research, consensus regarding its precise dating remains elusive within academic circles (Wu 2022, pp. 53–62).

6 Certain scholars' rebuttals against Tang Xuanzong may be deemed lacking in robust evidence, as the documentary sources they reference exhibit flaws and are subject to ongoing debate within academic discourse (S. Wang 2018, p. 44).

7 It is noteworthy that in silk manuscript chapter 16, the phrase "天物𥘅𥘅" emerges. Scholarly interpretations suggest that the character "𥘅" could potentially be construed as the character "魂" (Qiu 2014, p. 206). However, a notable point of reference arises from the Zhouyi Jingzhuan 周易經傳, a silk manuscript contemporaneous with the silk manuscript version of the *Laozi*, wherein the character "魂" is present in a form consistent with contemporary usage. This observation adds a layer of complexity to the scholarly discourse surrounding the interpretation of the character "𥘅" in chapter 16, suggesting the need for further examination and contextual analysis to elucidate its intended meaning. This scenario prompts consideration that within the character system utilized by these scribes, the utilization of either "礻" or "鬼" as radicals for the same character may imply distinct connotations.

8 This conclusion finds substantial support in linguistic research, as scholars have discerned through comparative analysis between Chinese and Tibeto-Burman languages that the character "bai" was initially linked with the concept of the moon (Jin 2001, p. 22; Q. Chen 1996, p. 32).

[9] Regarding the uncommon characters〖尃鬼〗and subsequent〖父鬼〗, it is noteworthy that computer systems or input method software may not incorporate these Chinese characters. Consequently, this text is limited to presenting these two left-right structured characters in their current form.

[10] The translation of the phrase "常無有" as "eternity of being and non-being", aligning with the widely accepted interpretation, has proven to be rather perplexing. Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 proposes an alternative understanding, suggesting that this phrase should be construed as "there was no being before the pole 極先無有". Moreover, Qiu posits that the character "亙" should actually be "ji 極", rather than "heng 恆". Additionally, it is suggested that the bamboo slip document "亙先" should be interpreted as "極先" An examination of the cited passage through the lens of this perspective appears to lend greater persuasiveness to the argument presented in this article (Qiu 2009, pp. 1–3).

[11] Utilizing a mirror as a metaphor for the mind indeed embodies a quintessential metaphorical device within Daoist philosophy. For instance, in *Zhuangzi*'s Yingdiwang 應帝王 chapter, it is articulated that "The perfect person employs their mind just as one utilizes a mirror (至人之用心若鏡; *Zhuangzi jishi* 1961, p. 307)". However, while this metaphor may have gained prominence during the composition of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, its prevalence in earlier periods remains open to scrutiny. Hence, it becomes imperative to revisit the "jian" itself to deeply contemplate the significance of "dichuxuanjian" within the context of the *Laozi*.

[12] For comprehensive insights into the pivotal role of Taiyi within the cosmological dimensions of the *Laozi*, readers are encouraged to consult the published article titled "Taiyi: The Axis of Philosophy of the *Laozi*" (Huang and Li 2023).

[13] First and foremost, it is notable that the character "ji 極" in the original bamboo slip text is written as "亙", but Li Ling argues that it should be interpreted as "ji" (Li 2007, p. 8). Secondly, it is important to note that the Guodian version deviates significantly from other versions in terms of the structure of this passage. The latter includes an additional section of text resembling commentary, unlike the former. Lastly, in other versions where similar passages can be found, there are variations in the choice of certain words compared with the Guodian version. While the expression in the Guodian version offers a more intuitive portrayal of the cosmic movement within this philosophy, these differences have minimal impact on the presentation of the philosophy of the *Laozi*.

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