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THE SOUNDSCAPE OF THE *HUAINANZI* 淮南子: POETRY, PERFORMANCE, PHILOSOPHY, AND PRAXIS IN EARLY CHINA

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Abstract

This article proposes that oral performance could be a philosophical activity in early China. The focus is on the *Huainanzi*, a densely rhymed philosophical treatise compiled by Liu An in the second century B.C.E. I show that the tome contains various sound-correlated poetic forms that are intended not only to enable textual performance but also, by means of aural mimesis, to encourage the intuitive understanding of its philosophical messages. Thus scholars of ancient poetry, philosophy, or intellectual history, despite being habituated to reading silently and observing disciplinary boundaries, should be attentive to these sonic patterns in order to do justice to the poetic-*cum*-philosophical richness and originality of this text. More importantly, I argue that these poetic forms enable readers and audiences to experience, embody, and, above all, enact the Way through textual performance. Thanks to the sound patterns of the *Huainanzi*, the somatic processes of aural reading and philosophical praxis can occur simultaneously. Vocalization becomes an actionable and repeatable spiritual exercise, which facilitates the intuitive understanding and internalization of philosophical values. In other words, the perennial knowing–doing gap is heroically closed by the *Huainanzi*.

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諸家書多才辭，莫過《淮南》也。讀之令人斷氣，方自知為陋爾。

The various texts of Masters Literature abound with ingenious literary expressions, but none can surpass the *Huainanzi*. Reading it aloud made me breathless, and only after this did I realize how trifling and narrow I was.
The *Kongcongzi* 孔叢子[1]

Introduction: Expressing the Inexpressible

The marriage between poetry and philosophy sometimes begs the question of why such a tremendous literary effort has to be expended when one simply wants to make philosophical arguments. In 54 B.C.E., Lucretius wrote his only surviving work, the epic poem *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), which lays out the key doctrines of Epicureanism. Lucretius says in Book 1 of the poem that he chose to circulate these philosophical lessons in verse in order to make his dense philosophical reasoning more palatable, as a doctor smears honey around the rim of a cup of bitter wormwood to trick a child into drinking it.[2] But in the case of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (The Master of Huainan; c. 139 B.C.E.), one of the most poetic and densely rhymed philosophical texts in ancient China,[3] its compiler Liu An 劉安 (c. 179–122 B.C.E.), king of Huainan, never explains why he crafted a poetic tome.

One possibility is that its poetic diction serves to facilitate textual performance. After analyzing the poetic language of the *Huainanzi*, Martin Kern argues that its postface, "A Summary of the Essentials" (Yao lüe 要略; chapter 21), is a *fu*-rhapsody 賦 that was performed at the imperial court when Liu An paid his state visit to his eighteen-year-old nephew, Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 B.C.E.), in 139 B.C.E. and presented him with the tome.[4] His finding has been widely accepted.[5] Michael Nylan goes further and suggests that "the *Huainanzi* chapters

1. Fu Yashu 傅亞庶, *Kongcongzi jiaoshi* 孔叢子校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), 455.

2. Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4, 39.

3. By far the most meticulous analysis of its rhyme schemes is D. C. Lau 劉殿爵, *Huainanzi yundu ji jiaokan* 淮南子韻讀及校勘 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013).

4. Martin Kern, "Creating a Book and Performing It: The 'Yaolüe' Chapter of *Huainanzi* as a Western Han *Fu*," in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, ed. Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 124–50.

5. See, for instance, John S. Major et al., trans., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 14, 841–47.

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were performed when first presented to the Han court."[6] Yet to say that the promotional postface is performable is one thing, to say that the entire book is a performance text is quite another. Although not only the postface but also all the *Huainanzi* chapters are poetic and densely rhymed, little or no scholarly effort has been made to prove that all or some chapters of the *Huainanzi*, in addition to the postface, were also performed. Moreover, the idea that the entire *Huainanzi* is a performance text may seem counterintuitive. Could such a lengthy text (130,000 words) be performed? Are there any special poetic forms in the *Huainanzi* that make it particularly suitable for performance? Do poetic forms in a philosophical text convey philosophical meanings?[7] What could be gained by transforming a philosophical treatise into a performable one? Above all, was textual performance in early China merely the aural presentation of (written) texts,[8] or could it also be a philosophical activity or spiritual exercise? To answer these questions, this preliminary study focuses on the first two chapters of the *Huainanzi*, the two early expositions of Zhuangzian philosophy,[9] which contain some of the text's most striking poetic forms.[10]

Previous research has shed much light on how *Huainanzi* 1 and 2 allude to, interpret, or, according to Michael Puett, misread the

6. Michael Nylan, "Note on Logical Connectives in the *Huainanzi*," in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, ed. Queen and Puett, 261–63.

7. By far the most detailed investigation of the argumentative functions of early Chinese literary forms in philosophical prose is Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer, eds., *Literary Form of Argument in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

8. For the vocality of texts, see Jennifer Richards, *Voices and Books in the English Renaissance: A New History of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

9. Opinions differ as to whether *Huainanzi* 1 is based primarily on the *Laozi* or the *Zhuangzi*. Although many scholars argue that it is an exposition on the *Laozi*, Fang Yong 方勇 has convincingly suggested that it is based on Zhuangzian philosophy. See Fang Yong, *Zhuangzi xueshi* 莊子學史, 3 vols. (Beijing: Renmin, 2008), vol. 1, 246–48. Note, however, that since the *Zhuangzi* quotes (and probably also fabricates) many Laozi sayings, it is not surprising that allusions to both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* abound in both chapters.

10. A limitation of this preliminary study is that it does not provide an exhaustive analysis of the use of rhyme and meter in the entire *Huainanzi*. That said, it can be observed that it is much easier to identify the special poetic forms under discussion in *Huainanzi* 1 and 2 than in the subsequent chapters. This impressionistic statement, which may be revised or refuted in the future, may make sense if one recalls that a big book like the *Huainanzi* was relatively new and rare before the era of Emperor Wu. In other words, the *Huainanzi* must have been unfamiliar to contemporary readers. Readability and readers' attention span become emergent issues when it comes to a big book like this. Thus, it is possible that these creative poetic forms were deliberately and densely planted at the beginning of the tome to quickly engage the readers and entice them to continue reading.

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Zhuangzi.[11] Puett's conclusion is striking, as he argues that by violently misreading the *Zhuangzi* the authors of the *Huainanzi* actually claim that they understand Zhuangzi better than Zhuangzi himself;[12] it is they who "explicate and make universalizable what Zhuangzi intuitively understood."[13] Indeed, Zhuangzi's emphasis on intuition is reflected in his distrust of language. According to the *Zhuangzi*, the Way is something inexpressible. It can be attained only by intuition and/or repeated practice of worldly techniques (such as dissecting oxen). This is why one can find such radical claims as "the great way cannot be spoken of" (*dadao bucheng* 大道不稱) and "the great argument cannot be put into words" (*dabian buyan* 大辯不言) in the *Zhuangzi*.[14] In other words, the verbal representation of the Way is not sufficient to capture the essence of the Way, let alone allow for the daily praxis of the Way—the ultimate purpose of understanding the Way.

But if language is a necessary evil to transmit the Way to others and to posterity, then the *Zhuangzi* poses a tremendous challenge to the hermeneutics of its philosophy: how could one explicate and make universalizable the Way with the assistance of language without closing the door to intuitive understanding?[15] In the following, I suggest that the authors

11. Michael Puett, "Violent Misreadings: The Hermeneutics of Cosmology in the *Huainanzi*," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 72 (2000), 29–47.

12. Most received "Masters" texts are composite works that stage their respective "Masters" rather than being authored by them. Thus, by "Zhuangzi" I mean the fictional character Zhuangzi staged by the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, Liu An probably compiled the first *Zhuangzi* anthology. See Harold D. Roth, "Who Compiled the *Chuang Tzu*?" in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham*, ed. Henry Rosemont Jr. (London: Open Court Press, 1991), 79–128; Esther Klein, "Were there 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*," *T'oung Pao* 96.4 (2010), 299–369; and Chang Sen 常森, "*Zhuangzi yishu* de zaoqi liuchuan he dingxing"《莊子》一書的早期流傳和定型, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化 146 (2021), 4–14. Note, however, that writings related to the *Zhuangzi* had already been grouped together and in circulation well before Liu An. See Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo 中國文物研究所, "Fuyang Shuanggudui hanjian *Zhuangzi*" 阜陽雙古堆漢簡《莊子》, in *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究 12 (Beijing: Zhongxi, 2013), 188–201. In other words, Liu An not only systematized and defined the *Zhuangzi* repertoire but also responded to it by crafting the first two chapters of the *Huainanzi*.

13. Puett, "Violent Misreadings," 44.

14. Both sayings come from "Qiwu lun" 齊物論 ("Discussion on Making All Things Equal"), chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*.

15. The propositional force of language confines, defines, and clarifies meaning. However, since the all-encompassing and constantly changing Way is indefinable and inexpressible, literary devices such as metaphors, puns, paradoxes, quotations, endless

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of *Huainanzi* 1 and 2, in response to the *Zhuangzi*'s challenge, invented several sound-correlated poetic forms that are intended to create a space for intuitive understanding by conveying philosophical messages beyond the lexical level of meaning. Thus, to fully experience the book's philosophical richness, readers of the *Huainanzi* must move beyond the surface verbal meaning and pay attention to the text's acoustic dimension. More importantly, I show that these carefully crafted poetic forms enable readers to experience, embody, and, above all, enact the Way through vocalization.[16] In other words, by inventing these poetic forms and transforming the *Huainanzi* into a performance text, Liu An and his retainers heroically closed the perennial gaps between "knowing the Way" (*zhi dao* 知道), "transmitting the Way to others" (*chuan dao* 傳道), and "practicing the Way" (*xing dao* 行道).[17] In this light, the *Huainanzi*'s contribution to Chinese philosophy is tremendous, and its originality, which has often been underestimated, is in fact profound.

Rhyme and Mimesis

Rhyme in early Chinese philosophical prose is by now well-documented.[18] But the reasons why these texts rhyme have yet to be thoroughly explored.[19] In the following, I show that rhyme in the

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self-denial, and ironical statements are marshaled in the *Zhuangzi* to indirectly describe the Way. See Stephen H. West, "Look at the Finger, Not Where it is Pointing," in *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China*, ed. Pauline Yu et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 71–78. See also Paul R. Goldin, "The Diversity of Perspectives on Language in Daoist Texts and Traditions," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 19.4 (2020), 619–24.

16. A comparable case is the "Qiushui" 秋水 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which was probably composed by Guo Xiang 郭象 (252–312 C.E.). See Dirk Meyer, "Truth Claim with No Claim to Truth: Text and Performance of the 'Qiushui' Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*," in *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*, eds. Gentz and Meyer, 297–340.

17. This sense of a gap between language and doing is vividly expressed in the story of "The Wheelwright Pian" in "Tian dao" 天道, chapter 13 of the *Zhuangzi*, where the Wheelwright Pian laments his inability to transmit his craft to his son through speech or writing.

18. Long Yuchun 龍宇純, *Sizhu xuan xiaoxue lunji* 絲竹軒小學論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2009), 182–293; Kern, "Creating a Book and Performing It," 131–32.

19. One common explanation is that rhyming serves mnemonic and euphonic functions. See Oliver Weingarten, "The Singing Sage: Rhymes in Confucius Dialogues," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 79.3 (2016), 581–607. For other possible functions of rhymed passages, see, for instance, Rens Krijgsman, "A Preliminary Analysis of Rhymed Passages in the Daybook Manuscripts," *Bamboo and Silk* 4 (2021), 291–335.

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Huainanzi serves to mimetically represent the subject matters, such as the Way. The vocalization of these Way-related paragraphs thus enables the embodiment of the Way.

Mimetically Representing the Subject Matters

A paragraph in *Huainanzi* 1, "The Original Way" (Yuandao 原道), states—by evoking the *Laozi*[20]—that those who attain the Way, despite having weak intent as well as empty and tranquil minds, can always demonstrate strength and efficaciousness when reacting to urgent situations. The paragraph can be divided into five subsections on the basis of the semantic change, rhyme, and introductory markers (*gu* 故, *suowei* 所謂, and *shigu* 是故):[21]

1. Thesis Statement:

	Rhyme	
故得道者，		Thus, those who attain the Way:
志弱而事**強**，	陽平 A	Their wills are supple, but their deeds are **strong**.
心虛而應當。	陽平 A	Their minds are empty, but their responses are dead on.

2. On Weak Intent:

所謂志**弱**者，	*	What we mean by a **supple** will
柔毳安**靜**，		is being pliant and soft, calm, and **tranquil**;
藏於不敢，		hiding when others do not dare to;
行於不能，	之平 B	acting when others are unable to;
恬然無慮，		being calm and without worry;
動不失時，	之平 B	acting without missing the right moment;
與萬物回周旋轉，		and cycling and revolving with the myriad things.
不為先唱，		Never anticipating or initiating
感而應之。	之平 B	but just responding to things when stimulated.

20. See, e.g., *Laozi* 44, 45, 76, and 78. For an introduction to the philosophy of *Laozi*, see Paul R. Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 109–28.

21. The Chinese text of the *Huainanzi* with the rhymes marked is cited from D. C. Lau's *Huainanzi yundu ji jiaokan*, with references to the page numbers in the text. The English translations of the *Huainanzi* passages are adopted with minor modifications from John Major et al., trans., *The Huainanzi*. I cite them with their section and page numbers.

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3. From Being Weak to Being Strong:

是故	*	Therefore,
貴者必以賤為號，		the honored invariably take their titles from the base,
而高者必以下為基。		and those of high station invariably take what is below as their base.
託小以包大，	祭 C	They rely on the small to embrace the great;
在中以制外，	祭 C	they rest in the inner to regulate the outer;
行柔而**剛**，	陽平 D	they act pliantly to become **firm**;
用弱而**強**，	陽平 D	they utilize weakness to become **strong**;
轉化推移，	歌平 E	they cycle through transformations and push where things are shifting;
得一之道，		they attain the Way of the One
而以少正多。	歌平 E	and use the few to correct the many.

4. On Being Strong:

所謂事**強**者，	*	What we mean by **strength** of deeds
遭變應卒，	元去 F	is responding with alacrity when encountering alterations;
排患扞難，	元去 F	pushing away disasters and warding off difficulties;
力無不勝，	蒸平 G	being so **strong** that there is nothing unvanquished;
敵無不凌，	蒸平 G	facing enemies, there are none that are not humiliated;
應化揆時，	之平 H	responding to transformations by gauging the proper moment
莫能害之。	之平 H	and being harmed by nothing.

5. Conclusion:

是故		Therefore,
欲**剛**者必以柔守之，	幽上 I	if you wish to be **firm**, you must guard it by being pliant.
欲**強**者必以弱保之。	幽上 I	If you wish to be **strong**, you must protect it by being supple.
積於柔則**剛**，	陽平 J	When you accumulate pliability, you become **firm**.
積於弱則**強**。	陽平 J	When you accumulate suppleness, you become **strong**.
(Lau, 20–21)		(Major et al., 1.10, 60)

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Here, the rhymes convey meanings in at least three ways. First, the beginning of a new subsection is *always* marked by either a new rhyme (subsection 5) or an unrhymed sentence (subsections 2, 3, and 4; the discontinuities in rhyme are marked by asterisks.) Second, both the thesis statement (subsection 1) and conclusion (subsection 5) of the paragraph are highlighted by rhymes. Third, there is a striking correlation between the density of rhymes and the content in each subsection: the subsections (1, 3, 4, and 5) that contain strength-related words (*gang* 剛, *qiang* 強, and *li* 力) are all densely rhymed, whereas the sole "weakness" subsection (2) is sparsely rhymed. It seems that rhyme serves to mimetically represent the subject matter in each subsection, especially when the text is read aloud. A stark contrast between the "weakness" subsection and the "strength" subsections is created at both the semantic and acoustic levels.

Another paragraph in *Huainanzi* 1 states that the Way is characterized by tranquility. Thus, people who possess the Way should, as a corollary, possess tranquil minds. To possess tranquil minds, people must not be aroused or distracted by external things. If desires for external things persist, then emotions evolve and disturb one's mind, and eventually, the Way is lost. This *Huainanzi* paragraph initially seems only to paraphrase the *Zhuangzi*'s teaching that people can enjoy freedom only after they are free from desires for external things.[22] It can be divided into three subsubsections on the basis of rhyme and meter.

1. Thesis Statement: The Way and Its Deviations

喜怒者，道之邪也；	Joy and anger are aberrations from the Way;
憂悲者，德之失也；	worry and grief are losses of Potency.
好憎者，心之過也；	Likes and dislikes are excesses of the mind;
嗜欲者，性之累也。	lusts and desires are hindrances to nature.

22. In fact, subsections 1 and 3 of this *Huainanzi* paragraph parallel chapter 15 of the *Zhuangzi* nearly verbatim. For the purpose of comparison, I only quote here the Chinese text: "悲樂者，德之邪；喜怒者，道之過；好惡者，德之失。故心不憂樂，德之至也；一而不變，靜之至也；無所於忤，虛之至也；不與物交，恢之至也；無所於逆，粹之至也." See "Ke yi" 刻意, *pian* 15, in *Zhuangzi jiaoquan* 莊子校詮, comp. Wang Shumin 王叔岷, 5 *juan* in 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2007), vol. 1, juan 2, 558. Additionally, subsection 2 elaborates on chapter 11 of the *Zhuangzi*, which states that "人大喜邪，毗於陽。大怒邪，毗於陰。陰陽並毗，四時不至，寒暑之和不成，其反傷人之形乎！使人喜怒失位，居處無常，思慮不自得，中道不成章，於是乎天下始喬詰、卓鷙，而後有盜跖、曾、史之行." See "Zai you" 在宥, *pian* 11, in Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, vol. 1, juan 2, 369–70.

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2. On the Harm Brought about by Emotions

人大怒破陰，	侵平 A	Violent anger ruins the *yin*;
大喜墜陽；	陽平 B	extreme joy collapses the *yang*.
薄氣發瘖，	侵平 A	The suppression of vital energy brings on dumbness;
驚怖為狂；	陽平 B	fear and terror bring on madness.
憂悲多恚，	錫 C	When you are worried, aggrieved, or enraged,
病乃成積；	錫 C	sickness will increasingly develop.
好憎繁多，	歌平 D	When likes and dislikes abundantly pile up,
禍乃相隨。	歌平 D	misfortunes will successively follow.

3. On Tranquility, the Ideal Mental State

故	Thus,
心不憂樂，	when the mind is not worried or happy,
德之至也；	it achieves the perfection of Potency.
通而不變，	When the mind is inalterably expansive,
靜之至也；	it achieves the perfection of tranquility.
嗜欲不載，	When lusts and desires do not burden the mind,
虛之至也；	it achieves the perfection of emptiness.
無所好憎，	When the mind is without likes and dislikes,
平之至也；	it achieves the perfection of equanimity.
不與物殺，	When the mind is not tangled up in things,
粹之至也。	it achieves the perfection of purity.
能此五者	If the mind is able to achieve these five qualities,
則通於神明。	then it will break through to spirit-like illumination.
通於神明者	To break through to spirit-like illumination
得其內者也。	is to realize what is intrinsic.
(Lau, 30–31)	(Major et al., 1.14, 66–67)

The first subsection presents the thesis statement, which defines the Way by first stating what it is *not*. The second subsection focuses on the harm brought about by the fluctuation of emotions. The third recapitulates the message of the first, but this time, it directly states what the ideal mental state is. Notably, the second subsection is densely rhymed whereas the first and last subsections are not rhymed at all. Again, a stark contrast is created, but why? I suggest that the highly musical subsection 2, characterized by its dense rhymes, mimetically represents the emotional fluctuations that it describes. More striking is that the A–B–A–B rhyme scheme, as shown in the first four lines of the subsection, perfectly mimics the fluctuation of emotions described by these lines. In contrast, subsections 1 and 3 are not rhymed, thereby mimicking the equanimity prescribed by the two sections. Furthermore, the mantra-like language, the recurrent syntactical patterns ("X 者, Y 之 Z 也" in subsection 1 and "X 不 Y, Z 之至也" in subsection 3), and the anadiplosis (*tongyu shenming* 通於神明)

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in these "equanimity subsections" create a repetitive and monotonous aural effect that linguistically mimics (and potentially causes) a stable mental state. In other words, when the entire paragraph is read aloud, readers and audience first intuitively sense and experience mental stability, then mental instability, and, eventually, mental stability.

Mimetically Representing the Nondominant and Circular Way

Thus far we know that, from the perspective of human beings, the Way is related to tranquility. Once we possess a peaceful and undisturbed mind, the Way automatically resides in us. But what is the *intrinsic* nature of the Way, and how exactly does it operate? *Huainanzi* 1 explains that the Way gives rise to myriad things but does not exercise control over them. At first, the idea once again seems to be nothing more than a commonplace allusion to "Lao-Zhuang" non-action philosophy. It seems that the *Huainanzi* has contributed nothing original in terms of philosophy. After analyzing the rhyme scheme and metrical pattern, however, the originality of the *Huainanzi* becomes obvious.

1. The Great Way

夫太上之道，		The most exalted Way
生萬物而不有，	之上 A	generates the myriad things but does not possess them,
成化像而弗宰。	之上 A	completes the transforming images but does not dominate them.

2. The Myriad Creatures

跂行喙息，	職 B	Creatures that walk on hooves and breathe through beaks,
蠉飛蠕動，		that fly through the air and wriggle on the ground,
待而後生，		depend on it for life,
莫之知德；	職 B	yet none understands its Potency;
待之後死，		depend on it for death,
莫之能怨。		yet none is able to resent it.
得以利者不能譽，		Those who attain it and profit are unable to praise it;
用而敗者不能非。		those who use it and lose are unable to blame it.

3. The Great Way

收聚畜積而不加富		It gathers and collects yet is not any richer for it.
布施稟授而不益貧	諄平 C	It bestows and confers yet is not diminished by it.
旋緜而不可究，		It cycles endlessly yet cannot be fathomed.
纖微而不可勤。	諄平 C	It is delicate and minute yet cannot be exhausted.

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4. The Myriad Creatures

累之而不高，		[The myriad creatures try to] pile it up, but the Way will not get higher;
墮之而不下，	魚上 D	collapse it, but it will not get lower.
益之而不眾，		Add to it, but it will not increase.
損之而不寡，	魚上 D	Take away from it, but it will not decrease.
斲之而不薄，		Split it, but it will not get thinner.
殺之而不殘，	元平 E	Kill it, but it will not be destroyed.
鑿之而不深，		Bore into it, but it will not deepen.
填之而不淺。	元平 E	Fill it in, but it will not get shallower.

5. The Great Way

忽兮怳兮，	陽上 F	Hazy! Nebulous!
不可為象兮；	陽上 F	It cannot be imagined.
怳兮忽兮，	術 G	Nebulous! Hazy!
用不屈兮；	術 G	It cannot be exhausted.[23]
幽兮冥兮，	耕平 H	Dark! Obscure!
應無形兮；	耕平 H	It responds formlessly.
遂兮洞兮，	東上 I	Deep! Penetrating!
不虛動兮。	東上 I	It does not act in vain.
與剛柔卷舒兮，		It rolls and unrolls with the firm and the pliant.
與陰陽俛仰兮。		It bends and straightens with the yin and the yang.
(Lau, 4–5)		(Major et al., 1.3, 51)

Based on the rhyme scheme and metrical pattern, this paragraph is divided into five subsections; the change in rhyme and meter coincides with and reflects the change in grammatical subject. In fact, the paragraph makes sense only after one realizes that the grammatical subjects of the five subsections are, in sequence, the Way, the myriad creatures, the Way, the myriad creatures, and the Way. In other words, the rhymes are not merely dispensable embellishment; without them, the shift in the grammatical subject becomes much less discernible, and, as a result, the meaning of the entire paragraph may well be distorted.

Still, why did the authors design such a peculiar structure for a paragraph that describes the Way? Why not simply let the Way be the subject of the entire paragraph?[24] Can the paragraph be paraphrased in a plain

23. The translation is slightly modified to emphasize that the Way is the subject.

24. Compare *Laozi* 51, which is the source of the *Huainanzi* paragraph under discussion: "Thus, the way gives them life and rears them ["them" refers to the myriad creatures]; Brings them up and nurses them; Brings them to fruition and maturity; Feeds and shelters them. It gives them life yet claims no possession; It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude; It is the steward yet exercises no authority. Such is called the mysterious virtue." (故道生之，德畜之，長之育之，亭之毒之，養之覆之。生而弗有，

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and straightforward manner without any loss of meaning? I read the alternation of grammatical subjects, which are emphasized by the changes in rhyme and meter, as a consciously crafted literary form that conveys philosophical meanings. By allowing the myriad creatures to be the grammatical subject in some of the subsections of the paragraph that describes the Way, the idea of the Way being "nondominant," which is a description presented at the very beginning of the paragraph, is beautifully translated into the parallel linguistic realm: the Way does not dominate the real world that it creates, just as the Way as a grammatical subject does not dominate the paragraph devoted to it. More important, by performing this paragraph aloud, the reciter would activate the embedded rhyme scheme, discern the implicit change of grammatical subjects, role-play both the Way and the myriad creatures, and eventually gain the all-encompassing perspective and actualize the nondominant feature of the Way.

Notably, the paragraph is concluded by a subsection in which the Way is the subject. This concluding remark stands out as being the most densely rhymed of all the subsections. Furthermore, every sentence there ends with *xi* 兮, a poetic marker of exclamation. In other words, the greatness of the Way is now celebrated through the power of the highly emotional and musical language. This linguistic feature reveals that the nondominant Way is, after all, the ultimate source of and therefore superior to all things.

Curiously, the subject of both the first and last subsections of the paragraph is the Way. This cyclical textual structure emphasizes that the Way is both the source and the normative destination of all things. According to the *Laozi*,

> 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。
>
> The Way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures.[25]
>
> 萬物並作，吾以觀復。夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。
>
> The myriad creatures all rise together, and I watch their return. The teeming creatures all return to their separate roots.[26]

The Way gives birth to myriad creatures, and myriad creatures eventually return to the Way. The textual structure of the *Huainanzi* passage mimics this cyclicity beyond the immediate lexical level. Readers can

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為而弗恃，長而弗宰。是謂玄德。) Here, the Way is exactly the grammatical subject of the entire paragraph. D. C. Lau trans., *Tao Te Ching: A Bilingual Edition* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001), 72–75.

25. *Laozi* 42; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 63.
26. *Laozi* 16; Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 23.

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therefore intuitively experience how the Way operates simply by reading the paragraph aloud.

The cyclicity of the Way is also expounded in the *Zhuangzi*. There, the metaphor of a potter's wheel (*tao jun* 陶鈞), which is circular, is used to describe how the world operates.[27] The wheel rotates so fast that the distinction between different points on the circumference (which signifies different perspectives and/or myriad things) blurs. The *Zhuangzi* adds that only those who attain the Way can stay at the center of the circle, remain impartial to various points on the circumference, and remain unchanged and unmoved themselves.[28] Now, *Huainanzi* 1 endorses this Zhuangzian insight and frequently invokes the metaphor of the potter's wheel.[29] As we can see at the beginning of *Huainanzi* 1, three adjacent paragraphs there describe the circular pattern of change, and all of them show a similar syntactical pattern "A 而 B."[30] (Note: *er* 而 can mean either "and" or "but.")

Example 1:

源流泉涔，	術 B	Flowing along like a wellspring, bubbling up like a font,
冲**而**徐盈；	耕平 A	it is empty **but** gradually becomes full.
混混汩汩，	術 B	Roiling and boiling,
濁**而**徐清。	耕平 A	it is murky **but** gradually becomes clear.
(Lau, 1)		(Major et al., 1.1, 48)

Example 2:

約	藥 A	It is constrained
而能張	陽平 B	**but** able to extend.
幽	幽平 C	It is dark
而能明	陽平 B	**but** able to brighten.
弱	藥 A	It is supple
而能強	陽平 B	**but** able to strengthen.
柔	幽平 C	It is pliant
而能剛。	陽平 B	**but** able to become firm.
(Lau, 1–2)		(Major et al., 1.1, 49)

---

27. For the connotations of the metaphor of the "potter's wheel" in the *Zhuangzi*, see Yang Rubin 楊儒賓, *Rumen nei de Zhuangzi* 儒門內的莊子 (Taipei: Linking, 2016), 238–46, 285.

28. "So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer" (是以聖人和之以是非而休乎天鈞) in chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, "On Making Things Equal"; Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 11. For an introduction to the philosophy of *Zhuangzi*, see Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy*, 129–52.

29. Example 3 below quotes a sentence from chapter 20 of the *Zhuangzi*: "既彫既琢, 復歸於朴." See "Shan mu" 山木, *pian* 20, in Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, vol. 2, juan 3, 732.

30. A signifies the original state, and B usually conveys the meaning of "gradually moving closer to the new state and/or gradually moving back to the original state."

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Example 3:

鬼出神入，	緝 A	Ghosts departed and spirits entered.
龍興鸞集；	緝 A	Dragons arose and phoenixes alighted.
鈞旋	元平 B	Like the **potter's wheel** turning,
轂轉	元平 B	like the wheel hub spinning,
周**而**復匝。	緝 A	they circled round **and** round.
已彫已琢，	屋 C	Both carved and polished,
還反於樸。	屋 C	they returned to the Unhewn.
(Lau, 3)		(Major et al., 1.2, 49–50)

The pattern of the circular movement is only implied in the first two examples and is spelled out in example 3: "like the potter's wheel turning, like the wheel hub spinning, they circled round and round" (鈞旋轂轉, 周而復匝). Note that the recurrent rhyming pattern of these circular-movement-related lines, namely, "the circular rhyming pattern," is remarkable.

Example 1: BABA (B–A–B and A–B–A)

Example 2: ABCBABCB (A–B–C–B–A, B–C–B, B–A–B, and C–B–A–B–C)

Example 3: ABBA

Admittedly, the rhyming patterns in examples 1 and 3 could be coincidental as "alternating rhyming" (*jiaoyun* 交韻) (A–B–A–B) is a common phenomenon in early Chinese texts.[31] Yet, not only the adjacency of the three examples but also the exceptional ABCBA and CBABC patterns in example 2 strongly suggest that the recurrent rhyme scheme is a carefully crafted poetic form. Above all, the circular pattern of rhyming perfectly mimics the circular movement of the Way, which is described by these paragraphs. When the chapter is read aloud, readers and audiences can intuitively *experience* how the circular Way works. And when they perform these paragraphs regularly (similar to Cook Ding in *Zhuangzi* 3, who keeps dissecting oxen and eventually understands the Way), they are more likely to internalize and physicalize the cyclicity of the Way. Seen in this light, a text facilitates not only the cognitive understanding of the Way but also its praxis; theory and practice become one. In other words, one understands the nature of the Way and concurrently puts what one learns about the Way into practice *during* the reading process but not necessarily thereafter; Liu An intended to start a reading revolution.

Meter, Rhythm, and Mimesis

The functions of metrical patterns in early Chinese philosophical prose have rarely been discussed. In the following, I show that the metrical

31. On "alternating rhyming," see Wang Li 王力, *Shijing yundu* 詩經韻讀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1980), 70–75.

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patterns (and nonpatterns) in *Huainanzi* 2, "The Original Genuineness" (Chuzhen 俶真),[32] mimetically represent the virtues and encode the process of inner cultivation.[33]

Mimetically Representing the Virtues

Huainanzi 2 denigrates humaneness (*ren* 仁) and rightness (*yi* 義) by claiming that they are derived from the fundamental Way (*dao* 道) and Potency (*de* 德):

> 夫道有經紀條貫，得一之道，連千枝萬葉 … … 是故以道為竿，以德為綸，禮樂為鉤，仁義為餌，投之于江，浮之於海，萬物紛紛，孰非其有！(Lau, 51–52)

> The Way has both a warp and a weft linked together. [The Perfected] attain the unity of the Way and then automatically join with its thousand branches and ten thousand leaves … Thus, they take the Way as their pole; Potency as their line; Rites and Music as their hook; Humaneness and Rightness as their bait; they throw them into the rivers; they float them into the seas. Through the myriad things are boundless in numbers, which of them will they not possess? (Major et al., 2.4, 89)

Way and Potency are superior to and therefore more desirable than humaneness and rightness. Again, similar sayings abound in both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*.[34] The message is also reiterated in the following paragraph in *Huainanzi* 2, which can be divided into four subsections on the basis of the change in subject matter:

---

1. On Humaneness

今夫	Now, to
積惠重厚，	accumulate debt of gratitude and multiply generosity,
累愛襲恩，	gather up love and concentrate kindness.
以聲華	With a glorious reputation,
嘔符嫗掩萬民百姓，	love and protect the myriad people and hundred clans,
使之訢訢然，	causing them to be joyful
人樂其性者，	and delight in their natures;
仁也。	this is **Humaneness**.

---

32. Note that both the chapter content and chapter titles of chapters 1 and 2 are set forth in parallel fashion (原=俶=Original; 道=真=the Way).

33. For the Daoist inner cultivation thought, see Harold D. Roth, *The Contemplative Foundations of Classical Daoism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2021).

34. See, e.g., *Laozi* 18 and 38 and chapters 2 and 8 of the *Zhuangzi*.

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2. On Rightness	
舉大功，	To achieve great merit,
立顯名，	establish an illustrious name,
體君臣，	support ruler and minister,
正上下，	correct superiors and inferiors,
明親踈，	distinguish kin from stranger,
等貴賤，	sort out the noble and the base,
存危國，	preserve the endangered kingdoms,
繼絕世，	continue the broken [ancestral] lines.
決挈治煩，	To break off the rebellious and control the disorderly,
興毀宗，	revive destroyed ancestral temples,
立無後者，	and establish those with no descendants;
義也。	this is **Rightness**.
3. On Potency	
閉九竅，	To block off the nine orifices,
藏心志，	to store up the attention of the mind,
棄聰明，	to discard hearing and vision,
反無識，	to return to having no awareness,
芒然仿佯于塵埃之外，	to vastly wander outside the dust and dirt
而消搖于無事之業，	and freely roam in the activity of effortless,
含陰吐陽，	to inhale the *yin* and exhale the *yang*,
而萬物和同者，	and to completely harmonize with the myriad things;
德也。	this is **Potency**.
4. Thesis Statement	
是故	For these reasons,
道散而為德，	when the Way is scattered, there is Potency.
德溢而為仁義，	When Potency leaks away, there is Humaneness and Rightness.
仁義立而道德廢矣。	When Humaneness and Rightness are established, the Way and its Potency are abandoned.
(Lau, 61)	(Major et al., 2.8, 96)

Old Chinese was a largely monosyllabic language: one Chinese character represented one syllable. Thus, the stark contrast in the metrical pattern between subsections 1 and 2 immediately captures one's attention. Although subsection 2 mostly consists of regular trisyllabic units, subsection 1 is metrically looser and less tidy. Furthermore, subsection 2 has a fast-paced and forceful 1–2 (verb–object) rhythm when read aloud, whereas subsection 1 is characterized by the frequent use of reduplicates and repetitive phrases (1. *xinxinran* 訢訢然; 2. *oufu* 嘔符, which is similar to *yuyan* 嫗掩; 3. *jihui* 積惠, which is semantically similar to *zhonghou* 重厚, *leiai* 累愛, and *xien* 襲恩; 4. *wanmin* 萬民, which is similar to *baixing* 百姓), which significantly slows the rhythm of this subsection. Again, one can argue that the contrasts in the metrical

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pattern and rhythm are coincidental. I will show, however, that there is actually a strong correlation between

1) the contrast in the metrical pattern and rhythm between the two subsections; and

2) the contrast in humaneness (discussed in subsection 1) and rightness (discussed in subsection 2).

To begin with, the difference between humaneness and rightness is succinctly explicated in *The Six Virtues* 六德, a Warring States bamboo text from Guodian 郭店 tomb no. 1:

> 門內之治恩弇義，門外之治義斬恩。仁類柔而束，義類持而絕。仁柔而匿，義剛而簡。
>
> In the order within the [family] gates, goodwill holds check over rightness; in the order beyond the [family] gates, rightness cuts short goodwill. The manner of humaneness is flexible and cohesive; the manner of rightness is steadfast and uncompromising.[35]

Put simply, humaneness is lenient, loving, forgiving, flexible, and loosely disciplined. It ties people together. In contrast, rightness is justice-driven, absolute, steadfast, and forceful. In this light, the two contrastive metrical patterns mimic humaneness and rightness respectively: the looser pattern of subsection 1 mimics the flexibility of humaneness whereas the regular and orderly pattern and the resulting vigorous rhythm of subsection 2 aptly mimics the resoluteness and steadfastness of rightness.

In fact, the correlation between moral qualities and aural effects was evident in early China; the two contrastive rhythms discussed above belong to two sound types in the Chinese musical tradition. Specifically, Wang Bao's 王褒 (d. 61 B.C.E.) *Rhapsody on the Panpipes* 洞簫賦 compares and contrasts "sounds of humaneness" (*ren sheng* 仁聲) and "martial sounds" (*wu sheng* 武聲). Wang Bao defines "sounds of humaneness" as "docile and compliant, humble and meek" (優柔温潤): "Their sounds of humaneness are like the mild warmth of a southern breeze, generously dispensing kindness" (其仁聲，則若颺風紛披，容與而施惠). The gentleness of the sounds of humaneness thus captures and mirrors the characteristics of humaneness at the aural level, just as the loose metrical pattern of subsection 1 reflects the flexibility of humaneness. In contrast, in describing "martial sounds," Wang Bao states that "the morals and

35. Translation adopted with minor modifications from Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian: A Study & Complete Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2012), 791–92.

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lessons contained in its measures and rhythms, correspond indeed to principles of rightness. They surge with fury, are roused to passion—Oh, how like the brave warrior!" (科條譬類，誠應義理，澎濞慷慨，一何壯士) and "their martial sounds are like booming blasts of thunder, speeding swiftly, rumbling and roaring" (故其武聲，則若雷霆輘輷，佚豫以沸憒).[36] The swiftness and strength of the martial sounds mimetically represent the characteristics of "the principles of rightness" (*yi li* 義理) at the aural level, just as the regular trisyllabic metrical pattern and the resulting fast-paced, vigorous rhythm of subsection 2 mirror the steadfastness of rightness.

Mimetically Representing the Process of Inner Cultivation

Nevertheless, one may wonder why subsection 3 of the *Huainanzi* paragraph under discussion, which describes Potency, encompasses both types of metrical patterns discussed above: the metrical pattern of subsection 3 shifts from being trisyllabic (cf. subsection 2) to irregular and untidy (cf. subsection 1). There are, I suggest, two possible and compatible explanations. First, as mentioned above, both humaneness and rightness are derived from Potency. That is, Potency (the root) gives birth to and encompasses them. Thus, at the linguistic level, subsection 3 (Potency) also encompasses the metrical patterns of both subsections 1 (humaneness) and 2 (rightness).

Second, a notable intertextual parallel suggests that the metrical change within subsection 3 is not arbitrary or coincidental. More specifically, a paragraph in *Huainanzi* 7, which is also devoted to the explication of Zhuangzian philosophy, is both semantically and metrically similar to subsection 3. Both describe how one can attain the Way.

***Huainanzi* 2: On Potency** 德	***Huainanzi* 7: On the Way** 道
Part A	***Part A***
	達至**道**者則不然：
	Those who penetrate through to **the Way** are not like this.
閉九竅，	理情性，
To block off the nine orifices,	They regulate the genuine responses of their natures,
藏心志，	治心術，

36. Translation adopted with minor modifications from David R. Knechtges, trans., *Wenxuan or Selections of Refined Literature, vol. 3: Rhapsodies on Natural Phenomena, Birds and Animals, Aspirations and Feelings, Sorrowful Laments, Literature, Music, and Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 239.

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Huainanzi 2: On Potency 德	*Huainanzi* 7: On the Way 道
to store up the attention of the mind, 棄聰明， to discard hearing and vision, 反無識； to return to having no awareness.	cultivate the techniques of the mind, 養以和， nourish these with harmony, 持以適； take hold of these through suitability.
Part B 芒然**仿佯**于塵埃之外， To vastly **wander** outside the dust and dirt, 而**消搖**于無事之業， and **freely roam** in the activity of effortless, 含陰吐陽， to inhale the yin and exhale the yang, 而萬物和同者， and to harmonize with the myriad things; **德**也。 this is **Potency**.	***Part B*** 樂**道**而忘賤， They delight in **the Way** and forget what is lowly; 安**德**而忘貧， they find repose in **Potency** and forget what is base. 性有不欲， Since their natures desire nothing, 無欲而不得， they attain whatever they desire. 心有不樂， Since their minds delight in nothing, 無樂而弗為， there are no delights in which they do not partake. 無益於情者不以累德， Those who do not exceed their genuine responses do not allow them to tie down their Potency. 不便於性者不以滑和， Those who find ease in their natures do not allow them to injure their inner harmony. 故**縱體肆意**， Thus, with their **relaxed bodies and untrammeled awareness**, 而度制可以為天下儀。 their standards and regulations, they can become models for the empire. Lau, 239–40; Major et al., 7.14, 257–258.

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By juxtaposing the two comparable paragraphs,[37] one immediately notes that they both begin with four trisyllabic units (part A). Furthermore, part A of both paragraphs emphasizes the importance of self-regulation and restraint. The metrical pattern then loosens in part B. Curiously, part B of both paragraphs contains numerous freedom-related phrases (such as *fang yan* 仿佯, *xiao yao* 消搖, *zong ti* 縱體, and *si yi* 肆意). Thus, I suggest that the change in the metrical pattern within subsection 3 of the above-noted paragraph in *Huainanzi* 2, which is an exposition of Zhuangzian thought, beautifully encodes the Zhuangzian cultivation process that is described in *Zhuangzi* 6:

> 吾猶守而告之，參日而後能外天下；已外天下矣，吾又守之，七日而後能外物；已外物矣，吾又守之，九日而後能外生。
>
> So I began explaining and kept at him for three days, and after that he was able to put the world outside himself. When he had put the world outside himself, I kept at him for seven days more, and after that he was able to put things outside himself. When he had put things outside himself, I kept at him for nine days more, and after that he was able to put life outside himself.[38]

It is said that one must exercise self-restraint and self-governance at the early stage of cultivation if one is to refrain from external things and remain mentally stable. Once the cultivation reaches a critical point, one eventually gains the utmost freedom—being free from the fear of death—as the boundary between life and death has now been forgotten and obliterated. In other words, one must first be self-disciplined in order to eventually be undisciplined and free. In this light, the change in rhythm within the discussed paragraphs in *Huainanzi* 2 and 7 mimics the Zhuangzian cultivation process on an aural level: from strictness to flexibility. Above all, rhythm can be contagious.[39] Thus, in experiencing the process of inner cultivation through vocalization, oral performance, praxis, and the cognitive understanding of the Way once again become one.

All the sound-correlated poetic forms noted above mark the *Huainanzi* as a performance text; at the same time, their poetic inventions elevate the philosophical depth of textual performance to an unprecedented

37. The difference between Potency and the Way is subtle: Potency is the Way actualized in the human realm whereas the Way exists everywhere.

38. See "Da zongshi" 大宗師, *pian* 6, in Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, vol. 1, juan 1, 235. See also Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 46–47.

39. Haun Saussy, "Contagious Rhythm: Verse as a Technique of the Body," in *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form*, ed. Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 106–27; Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 178.

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level.[40] Vocalization thus becomes an *actionable* and *repeatable* spiritual exercise, which facilitates the internalization of philosophical values—in particular, one assumes, for Emperor Wu of Han, the young and impressionable recipient who was known for his appreciation and promotion of verbal artistry.[41]

Reading the *Huainanzi* in Early China: Evidence from *Han shu* 44

The modern experience of reading any ancient text is that one silently reads the original text side by side with its commentaries. When one encounters a difficult word or expression, one consults dictionaries. The assumption behind this bookish approach is that if one knows the meaning of every single word in an ancient text, one knows or at least comes closer to the overall meaning of the text.[42] In this light, the *Huainanzi* seems a particularly demanding text, which contains difficult phrases and complicated sentence patterns everywhere.[43] Emperor Wu, however, did not have even a single written commentary in hand.[44] How, then, could he possibly read and understand it? But could this be a wrong question? What if the *Huainanzi* was not intended for silent reading *only*?

The cumulative weight of all the evidence presented above strongly suggests that *Huainanzi* 1 and 2 are performance texts: the intended aural effect and philosophical implications of these sound-correlated poetic forms could be activated and brought out only by trained reciters fully versed in its linguistic artistry and complexities. One should also bear in mind that not only *Huainanzi* 1 and 2 but also other subsequent

40. With this, I do not mean to suggest that every use of rhyme and metrical pattern in the *Huainanzi* serves to convey meaning. A majority of these usages may simply serve aesthetic, mnemonic, and euphonic purposes. Nevertheless, it is likely that the reciters had access to script-like bamboo texts where particular passages were marked for emphatic performance while other rhymed paragraphs were to be read aloud in a plain manner. For evidence of such marks in early Chinese manuscripts, see the excellent discussion in Rens Krijgsman, "An Inquiry into the Formation of Readership in Early China: Using and Producing the **Yong yue* 用曰 and *Yinshu* 引書 Manuscripts," *T'oung Pao* 104.1–2 (2018), 2–65. On how medieval scribes visualized rhyming patterns in Latin poetry, see Ayelet Even-Ezra, *Lines of Thought: Branching Diagrams and the Medieval Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 119–28.

41. David Knechtges, "The Emperor and Literature: Emperor Wu of the Han," in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Frederick P. Brandauer and Chun-Chieh Huang (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 51–76.

42. The essence of this semantic approach is best summarized by Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), who was one of the leading Qing philologists. See Qian Zhongshu, *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*, selected and translated by Ronald Egan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), 199.

43. See Wong Tsung Kei 王棕琦, *Huainanzi pianzhang jiegou kao* 《淮南子》篇章結構考 (M.Phil. Thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2019), 1–3.

44. The earliest commentary appeared only in the second century C.E.

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chapters are examples of the Western Han *fu*-rhapsody,[45] and that many Han *fu* were intended for oral performance.[46] Thus, to fully appreciate the philosophical richness and nuances of the *Huainanzi*, one should be attentive to its performance context. Admittedly, there is no explicit historical record indicating that the *Huainanzi* was performed in early China. Consider, however, Liu An's interaction with Emperor Wu, as described in the *Han shu*:

> 淮南王安為人**好書，鼓琴** … … 招致賓客方術之士數千人，作為《內書》二十一篇 … … 時武帝方好藝文，以安屬為諸父，辯博善為文辭，甚尊重之。每為報書及賜，**常召司馬相如等視草乃遣**。初，安入朝，獻所作《內篇》，新出，上愛祕之。**使為《離騷(傳)[傅]》**，旦受詔，日食時上。**又獻《頌德》及《長安都國頌》**。每宴見，談說得失及方技。**賦頌，昏莫然後罷**。
>
> Liu An, the King of Huainan, was a person **fond of texts and of playing the zither** … He invited several thousand retainers and masters of prescriptions and techniques who created "inner writings" in twenty-one bamboo rolls [that is, the *Huainanzi*] … At that time Emperor Wu was fond of art and literature. Because An was among the uncles of the Emperor, and he was eloquent, erudite, and skilled at literary expression, the Emperor respected him greatly. When responding to An's letters or rewarding him, the Emperor regularly **summoned Sima Xiangru** and others to inspect the draft before sending it out. In the beginning, when An visited the court, he presented the "inner chapters" [that is, the *Huainanzi*] that he had created. As they were newly produced, the Emperor liked them and carefully stored them in the imperial library. He then tasked [An] to **compose a *fu*-rhapsody on "Encountering Sorrow"**;[47] having received the order in the early morning, [An] submitted [his composition] by breakfast time. He also **presented "Eulogizing Virtue" and "Eulogy on the Inner and Outer Realm of Chang'an."** Whenever receiving An to banquets, [the

45. For a textbook account, see Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史, in 3 vols. (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu, 2014), vol. 1, 153–54.

46. See *Han shu* 漢書, 100 *jian* in 12 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), vol. 6, juan 30, 1755, where the rhapsody (*fu*) is defined by its mode of presentation: "To recite without singing is called *fu*." On the performativity of the Western Han *fu*, see Martin Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63.2 (2003), 383–437.

47. I agree with Wang Niansun 王念孫 (1744–1832) who reads the phrase *Lisao zhuan* 離騷傳 ("a commentary on 'Encountering Sorrow'") as *Lisao fu* 離騷傳/賦 ("a *fu*-rhapsody on 'Encountering Sorrow'"). See the discussion in *Shiji jiaozheng* 史記斠證, comp. Wang Shumin, 130 *juan* in 5 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2007), vol. 4, juan 54, 2514.

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> Emperor] discoursed with him about success and failure and about prescriptions and techniques. **They also chanted eulogies, which lasted until after dark**.[48]

Elements alluding to oral performance abound: Liu An is fond of both texts and *music*; the famous *fu*-rhapsodist Sima Xiangru is called on to review the Emperor's draft letters to Liu An; Liu An himself presents to Emperor Wu a *fu*-rhapsody on the poem "Encountering Sorrow" and two other performable "eulogies" (*song* 頌);[49] and the two men's recitations (*fusong* 賦頌) last into the night. Above all, the *Han shu* implies that it was only after Liu An presented the *Huiananzi* that Emperor Wu requested the rhapsody on "Encountering Sorrow." Note that *only* the *Huainanzi* chapters (*Huainanzi* 1 and 2 in particular),[50] *not* the postface, contain numerous allusions to the *Chu ci* 楚辭 anthology, in which "Encountering Sorrow" is the central text.[51] In other words, the chronology given in the *Han shu* strongly suggests that *Huainanzi* 1 and 2, which contain numerous allusions to "Encountering Sorrow," had been performed first. The oral performance must have aroused the Emperor's interest in the *Chu ci*, and as a result, Liu An was asked to compose (and probably also perform) a rhapsody on "Encountering Sorrow." Stated simply, both the internal linguistic evidence and contextual information suggest that the *Huainanzi* was performed at the Han court.

Conclusion: Performativity and Originality

The *Han shu* passage cited above emphasizes that the *Huainanzi* was "newly produced" (*xin chu* 新出). Most likely because of its newness, Emperor Wu liked it very much. Paradoxically, the originality of the *Huainanzi* has often been challenged by modern scholars as it borrows

48. *Han shu*, 44.2145; cf. the translation by Hanmo Zhang, "The Lore of Liu An and the Authorship of the *Huainanzi*," *Monumenta Serica* 64:2 (2016), 339–40.

49. *Fu* and *song* remained largely interchangeable in the Western Han. See Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics," 399–400.

50. Naoko Yata 矢田尚子, "Enanji ni mieru tenkai yūkō hyōgen ni tsuite－gen dō hen・ran mē hen o chūshin ni－"『淮南子』に見える天界遊行表現について－原道篇・覽冥篇を中心に－, *Chūgoku bungaku kenkyū* 中国文学研究 31 (2005), 170–82; Yata, "Enanji ni mieru tenkai yūkō hyōgen ni tsuite－shuku shin hen o chūshin ni" 『淮南子』に見える天界遊行表現について－俶真篇を中心に, *Gengo to bunka* 言語と文化 16 (2007), 63–78.

51. For the intertextuality between the *Huainanzi* and the *Chu ci*, see Zheng Liangshu 鄭良樹, "Qufu yu Huainanzi" 屈賦與淮南子, in Zheng, *Cifu lunji* 辭賦論集 (Taiwan: Xuesheng, 1998), 1–15; Chen Guangzhong 陳廣忠, "Lun *Chu ci*, Liu An yu *Huainanzi*" 論《楚辭》、劉安與《淮南子》, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 (2000.4), 86–91.

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extensively from an array of pre-existing texts.[52] Simply put, ancient reader(s) found the text new and exciting while quite a few modern readers found it unoriginal and mundane. How are we to make sense of such a considerable difference in terms of readers' perceptions between the ancients and the moderns? I suggest that although the *Huainanzi* often invokes the teachings of Zhuangzi (and Laozi), its originality is manifested in its carefully and beautifully crafted poetic forms. These literary forms not only convey meanings beyond the lexical level but also, perhaps for the first time in Chinese history, allow for the praxis of the Way in the process of reading and recitation. Liu An, having the chance to present the text to Emperor Wu *in person*, must have demonstrated to him its indispensable performative dimension *in extenso*. During the subsequent transmission process, however, the sounds were gone, and long live the written text. Not only the original performance context but also the linguistic-performative-philosophical dimension have gradually been forgotten.

Finally, one may ask, did the *Huainanzi* authors invent these sound-related literary devices only to show off their originality, perhaps out of the anxiety of influence? The answer is yes and no. On the one hand, the authors of the *Huainanzi* responded *creatively* to the *Zhuangzi*'s challenge by inventing highly original sound-correlated literary forms to convey meaning in a nonverbal and musical way. On the other hand, they designed these poetic forms precisely because they were heavily indebted to the *Zhuangzi* to the extent that they followed Zhuangzi's preference for sound and music, as implied by the following passage from *Zhuangzi* 6.

> 南伯子葵曰：「子獨惡乎聞之？」曰：「聞諸**副墨**之子，副墨之子聞諸洛誦之孫，洛誦之孫聞之瞻明，瞻明聞之聶許，聶許聞之需役，需役聞之於**謳**，於謳聞之玄冥，玄冥聞之參寥，參寥聞之疑始。」
>
> Naopo Zikui asked the woman Crookback, 'Where did you of all people come to hear of the Way?' 'I heard it from **Inkstain's** son, who

52. Major et al., trans., *The Huainanzi*, 27–32. On the intertextual patterns in the *Huainanzi*, see, for instance, Paul R. Goldin, "Insidious Syncretism in the Political Philosophy of *Huainanzi*," in Goldin, *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 90–111; Oliver Weingarten, "Intertextuality and Memory in Early Chinese Writings: A Case Study from *Huainanzi*," *Early China* 42 (2019), 201–36; Tobias Benedikt Zürn, "The Han Imaginaire of Writing as Weaving: Intertextuality and the *Huainanzi*'s Self-Fashioning as an Embodiment of the Way," *Journal of Asian Studies* 79.2 (2020), 367–402; and Peter Tsung Kei Wong 王棕琦, "Budongxin de benzhi shi shenme — *Mengzi* Zhiyan yangqi zhang de wenli yu yili" 「不動心」的本質是甚麼？——《孟子・知言養氣章》的文理與義理, *Chinese Studies* 漢學研究 39.2 (June 2021), 20, 31.

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> heard it from Bookworm's grandson, who heard it from Wide–eye, who heard it from Eavesdrop, who heard it from Gossip, who heard it from **Singsong**, who heard it from Obscurity, who heard it from Mystery, who heard it from what might have been Beginning.'[53]

It is suggested that music and sound are relatively closer to the Way than words and texts.[54] I thus speculate that this is precisely the reason why the authors expended so much effort to invent these sound-related literary forms of argument: sound and music convey the Way better than words convey it.

To put it in Zhuangzi-style paradoxical language: the originality of the *Huainanzi* goes hand-in-hand with the unoriginality of the *Huainanzi*.

淮南子的文本聲景：早期中國的詩歌、表演、哲學與實踐

王棕琦

提要

本文論證早期中國的文本表演可以是一種具創造性的哲學活動，而非只是以聲音演繹書寫文本的朗讀活動。文中首先指出《淮南子》裏跟聲音有關的詩歌形式不但有助朗誦表演，更能讓讀者直觀感悟書中哲學思想而不落言筌。而且，這些詩歌形式更讓讀者通過朗讀而實踐、內化書中所述之大道。可以說，《淮南子》對中國哲學的一大貢獻在於它將「知道」、「傳道」和「行道」三者合而為一。

Keywords: The *Huainanzi*, orality and textual performance, rhyme and meter, aural mimesis, the history of reading
淮南子, 文本表演, 押韻與韻律, 聲音模仿, 閱讀史

53. Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, vol. 1, juan 1, 238. Translation adopted with minor modifications from A. C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 87.

54. On the musical references in the *Huainanzi*, see Avital H. Rom, "Echoing Rulership: Understanding Musical References in the *Huainanzi*," *Early China* 40 (2017), 125–65.

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