

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 56 (2002)

Heft: 3: Textual scholarship in Chinese studies : papers from the Munich conference 2000

Artikel: Some preliminary remarks on notational systems in two medical manuscripts from Mawangdui

Autor: Pfister, Rudolf

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147581>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 12.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON NOTATIONAL SYSTEMS IN TWO MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS FROM MAWANGDUI

Rudolf Pfister, University of Zurich

1. Introduction

1.1 *The tombs of Mawangdui*

This paper compares two manuscripts on sexual body techniques which were found in tomb 3 at Mawangdui 馬王堆. This is a village near Changsha, the current provincial capital of Hunan. The place was in the territory of the old state of Chu 楚.¹ Mawangdui, which means literally “the hillock of king Ma,” is a small hill formed by the three burial places. During the cultural revolution tomb 1 was opened in 1972, tombs 2 and 3 in 1973–74. A full archeological report exists only for tomb 1.²

- 1 For information on the cultural and social situation, please consult the recent work, edited by Constance A. Cook and John S. Major, *Defining Chu: Image and Reality of the South in Ancient China*, Honolulu 1999, as well as Reinhard Emmerich, “Chu und Changsha am Ende der Qin-Zeit und zu Beginn der Han-Zeit,” *Oriens Extremus* 34.1/2 (1991), 85–137.
- 2 See the archaeological report Hunan Sheng Bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Zhongguo Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 中國科學院考古研究所, *Changsha Mawangdui yi hao Hanmu (shang, xia ji)* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓(上, 下集), Beijing 1973. The youngest burial place is tomb 1. It was closed shortly after 168 B.C. Because of the works on it, tombs 2 and 3 got damaged. It held the very well preserved corpse of an about fifty year old woman. This is probably the wife of Li Cang; on a seal she is called Xin Zhui 辛追. Her husband, Li Cang, lies in tomb 2. From 193 B.C. he was marquis of Dai (Dai hou 戴侯, according to *Shi ji*, *Hui Jing hou ze nian biao*, and *Han shu*), and chancellor of the kingdom of Changsha (Changsha cheng xiang 長沙丞相). This is testified by the presence of two bronze seals for rank and title, together with a personal jade seal. He died in 183 B.C. (For illustrations of the seals, see Fu Juyou 傅舉有 and Chen Songchang 陳松長, *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu* 馬王堆漢墓文物 — *The Cultural Relics Unearthed from the Han tombs at Mawangdui*, (translations by Zhou Shiyi 周士一 and Chen Kefeng 陳可風) Changsha 1992, page 40, or He Jiejun 何介鈞 and Zhang Weiming 張維明, *Mawangdui Hanmu* 馬王堆漢墓, Beijing 1982, pages 6–29, illustrations 4–7, and 9.)

One assumes that the about 30 year old man in tomb 3 could be Li Xi 利豨, the second marquis of Dai. But this is not certain. There is some inconsistency: tomb 3 was closed in 168 B.C., but according to *Shi ji* and *Han shu* he should have died in 165 B.C. Therefore the tomb owner could be another son of Li Cang 利蒼, the first marquis of Dai.

At Mawangdui we see a burial place of the high ranking family Li 利 which was in power in Changsha shortly after the establishment of the empire of the Han and which remained prominent in the region until at least 110 B.C. This is attested not only by the extraordinary rich archaeological remains,³ but also by the transmitted historiographical writings.⁴

1.2 The manuscripts

In tomb 3 a library was discovered with manuscripts on many issues.⁵ For the corpus of fourteen medical manuscripts, there is now an English translation by Donald Harper in his monography *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*. Harpers *prolegomena* of about 200 pages give a detailed panoramic description on matters of content, as well as on other medical finds of the time.⁶

1.3 Physical description of the compared manuscripts

For the sake of simplicity I compare only short passages from two manuscripts: first, *Tian xia zhi dao tan* 天下至道談—“*The discussion on the utmost method under the skies*” (shortened to “*Discussion*” in the remainder of this paper), and second, *He yin yang* 合陰陽—“*On uniting yin and yang*” (shortened to “*On uniting*”).⁷

3 For which see the excellent photographic illustrations in Fu Juyou and Chen Songchang (fn. 2).

4 These historical facts are conveniently summarized in Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts. Translation and Study by Donald J. Harper*, [The Sir Henry Wellcome Asian Series], London and New York 1998, 14–15.

5 There were two versions of *Lao zi*, an *Yi jing*, and several philosophical texts with the title “*Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor*” *Huang di si jing*, all written on silk. There are technical texts on celestial phenomena, as well as 14 medical manuscripts (either on silk or on bamboo slips). Some excerpts are photographed in Fu Juyou and Chen Songchang (fn. 2).

6 See Harper (fn. 4), 3–183 *prolegomena*, pages 22–30 give a list of the 14 medical manuscripts.

7 Both titles were given to the texts by the Chinese editors; all references to slip numbers are to the transcription of Mawangdui Hanmu boshu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小

The “*Discussion*” consists of 56 bamboo slips, which are about 28 cm long and 0.5 cm wide; “*On uniting*” consists of 32 bamboo slips, which are about 23 cm long and 1 cm wide.⁸ The slips of the “*Discussion*” are very regularly cut at the tips, and there are marks of the binding on three registers. Writing and binding marks do not overlap. This is different with “*On uniting*”, where there are only two registers of binding marks, and writing and binding marks sometimes do overlap. Moreover, the tips of the bamboo slips are cut in an irregular way. It seems that they were originally a few centimeters longer; being broken at the ends they were perhaps cut again to reshape them.⁹

Due to their respective measurements, character size was not the same for the two manuscripts. The “*Discussion*” has much more text than “*On uniting*” on comparable space. Writing was done by two different scribes. Both used the Han clerical script *lishu* 隸書. Because of a possible taboo and the writing features of the characters, it is thought that they were copied within a time span of ten or twenty years before tomb closure (168 B.C.). Nothing is known about the authorship.¹⁰

組, *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, vol. 4, Beijing 1985. The title *Tian xia zhi dao tan* occurs on slip 17 of the “*Discussion*”; the three words *He yin yang* are to be found in the first sentence of “*On uniting*”.

8 This follows Harper (fn. 4), 28–30.

9 This can be seen in the reproductions of the slips, as seen in Jao Tsung I and Chen Fong Ching (chief editors) et al., *CHANT (CHinese ANcient Texts) Database. III. Excavated Wood/Bamboo and Silk Texts*. Volume I, Hong Kong: CHANT (Chinese Ancient Texts) Center, Institute of Chinese Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong 1999, Distributed by the Chinese University Press. [CD-ROM]

10 A possibility for internal dating exists only for “*On uniting*”, which seems to respect the taboo on the personal name—i.e. Liu Heng 劉恒—of the Han emperor Wen (reigned 179 to 157 B.C.). Slip 103 writes *chang shan* 常山 instead of *heng shan* 恒山 to name the *mons veneris* (cf. *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu zhengli xiaozu* (fn. 7), 155 n. 3.). According to this, copying should fall between 179 and 168 B.C. (tomb closure).

The “*Discussion*” might have been copied earlier, because it uses older graphic forms. In addition, it writes the character *ying* 盈, which was tabooed during or after the reign of emperor Hui of the Han, from 194 to 187 B.C. (On these taboos, see Chen Yuan 陳垣, *Shi hui ju li* 史諱舉例, Hong Kong 1971, 130.)

Of course these are not statements on the age of the contents of the texts, which could be much older, forming part of an orally transmitted sexual lore.

2. Questions and aims

2.1 Comparability of the two manuscripts

The two selected manuscripts are easy to compare because both treat sexual body techniques, and both offer passages which are largely identical. They revolve around the basic question: Why is it that, compared to the entire body, the private parts *yin* 陰 (of a man) die first? With other words, what is the reason that the male sexual function and the uro-genital system will develop disorders and illnesses so easily, and why do they undergo premature aging processes?¹¹ The subject treated is therefore the “hidden weakness” of the male sex. The men of thirty, forty, or fifty years which—on the outside—occupy important social positions might be at a loss in the inner quarters. This scandalizing discrepancy forged the basic question. Both texts try to give a practical answer. They provide the addressed men with knowledge about the adequate measures to take during sexual intercourse. Measures not only to prevent “premature dying” of the penis, but also how to gain additional profit from sexual encounters.

2.2 Aims of the comparison

In the following, I will concentrate on semantic aspects of the writing process. How are certain words written, and which variations do occur? We will treat *intertextual* as well as *intratextual* variations in wording. There seems to be a confusing and very extensive loan practice in the Mawangdui manuscripts. Is it possible to get to know how this practice worked?¹²

Not each and every loan proposal, which is given as a reading in the transcriptions, is in fact a loan.¹³ Sometimes it is nothing more than a service to

11 This basic question is found in slight variations not only in the “Discussion”, slip 12, but also in the Mawangdui-manuscript “Ten Interviews” *Shi wen* 十問, in the third interview, slip 15, in the fifth interview, slips 43–45, and in the seventh interview, slip 61. Each text gives an answer within the framework of sexual body techniques.

12 It should be possible to go one step further than A. F. P. Hulst, who wrote in his *Remnants of Ch'in Law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C. Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province in 1975*, Leiden 1985, 5: “These texts contain a great many loan characters, as has been duly noted by the editors. However, they not unfrequently fail to produce convincing arguments to support their suggestions regarding the words actually intended.”

13 Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 says in his *Chinese Writing*, translated by Gilbert Louis Mattos and Jerry Norman, [Early China Special Monograph Series, No. 4] New Haven, CT 2000, 295: “It is

the modern reader, or an adaptation to current orthographical conventions. Even if there are good phonological reasons to accept a given loan proposal, this is sometimes not enough for a decision. Semantical and interpretative considerations, especially regarding the textual cohesion, should possibly complement them. There may be no strict rules for this, but what kind of flexibility is asked for?

Manuscripts written in almost the same time period differ in the ways they write the same words. Is there any system in this? If a manuscript would do this systematically we probably could see *restrictions* and *liberties* regarding grammar, phonology, ways of writing, etc. Are there any graphical traits which mark out certain readings? At best such observations could be used for interpretative and other linguistic purposes.

In this paper, I will call a *notational system* the way a certain manuscript writes its words, and try to compare it to a second manuscript, to work out the *intertextual variations* of their notational systems. The term 'notational system' does *not* include what is meant by 'writing style,' or the individual characteristics the script of a scribe bears. In our case, both manuscripts use the same 'writing system,' namely Chinese characters or sinographs.

Even within a manuscript certain notational differences occur. These I call *intratextual variations* of a notational system. If possible, these too should be analyzed. In addition to graphic variation they show not only mistakes of the scribe, as is often assumed, but it might well turn out, that there was some *manipulation of the content* involved. As will be seen below in one example, such remnants of cognitive activity could include word plays, deliberate re-writings, etc. These are *unique* features of each manuscript.

More attention than in previous studies should also be given to *paratextual elements*; this means to address questions of how the writing space is organized and used, and whether there are spaces left open? What is the communicational intent of graphical or schematic representations?

My aim in this paper is of course not to give full answers to the above outline of questions, but just to demonstrate with a few examples, which consequences they might have for the interpretation of manuscript texts.

3. Comparisons

3.1 *Intertextual comparisons*

3.1.1 Variations in the choice of words

Let us begin the communication of intertextual comparisons with the simple case where the two manuscripts use different words for the same content, with *variations in the choice of words*.

Example (1):

“*Discussion*” slip 46

● 一曰高之
二曰下之
三曰左之
四曰右之
五曰深(深)之
六曰淺之
七曰疾之
八曰徐之
此謂八道 || 丿

The first is called upwards.
The second is called downwards.
The third is called to the left.
The fourth is called to the right.
The fifth is called deep.
The sixth is called shallow.
The seventh is called quickly.
The eighth is called leisurely.
These are said the eight ways.

“*On uniting*” slips 118–199

● 十脩
一曰上之
二曰下之
三曰左之
四曰右之
五曰疾之
六曰 丿 徐之
七曰希之
八曰數之
九曰淺之
十曰深之 || 丿

The ten embellishments:
The first is called upwards
The second is called downwards.
The third is called to the left.
The fourth is called to the right.
The fifth is called quickly.
The sixth is called leisurely.
The seventh is called intermittent.
The eighth is called regular.
The ninth is called shallow.
The tenth is called deep.

First, a word on the transcription: Throughout this paper I use 丿 to mark the end of a bamboo slip. This is an indication of the spatial relationships and a reminder on the used writing material. The two parallel strokes || mark unwritten space in the manuscript. The black dot ● occurs already in the original. It is

methodically important to study the *paratextual* relationships of manuscripts.¹⁴ Elements such as the black dot • at the beginning and the leaving of a blank space at the end of a line (||) mark in both texts, and by unambiguous optical means, a thematically closed unit or topic of the text.

The two passages of example (1) show some differing and some equal traits. The order of the list is not the same, and in “*On uniting*” we find two more items listed, namely ‘intermittent’ *xi zhi* 希之 and ‘regular’ *shuo zhi* 數之. ‘To the top, upwards’ *gao zhi* 高之 and ‘upwards’ *shang zhi* 上之 are examples of a simple variation in the choice of words.¹⁵ Another kind of inter-textual variation is the notational variation between older and younger characters, here we find the two graphs *shen* 采 and *shen* 深 for ‘deep’ in example (1).¹⁶

The two passages refer to other parts of their texts by means of a title, which is either given at the top of the sequence or at the end of it. The expressions used in the titles work here as textual *links*, and simple words create a technical language within such a framework. In fact, these traits show that the two manuscript texts are *hypertexts*. They ask their model readers to travel with the eyes from topic to topic; this in contrast to texts which you read in a linear way from the beginning to the end. Out of relatively short units they build a network. The units can be either short lists—like in example (1)—, or expositions of them. One has to search the network to find adequate linking structures and mentally compose the overall meaning.¹⁷ As hypertexts they differ in a marked way from other text forms found in the medical corpus of Mawangdui, for example, *collections of recipes*, which tend to be additive, with weak linking structures, or *dialogues*, which follow simple question-answer structures.

14 On paratexts, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexte: Das Buch vom Beiwerk des Buches*, Frankfurt am Main 1989.

15 At the end of this paper some more examples of each group are listed in the SYNOPSIS, see *a. Variations in the choice of words*.

16 One more example is found in the SYNOPSIS, see *b. The notational variation between older and younger characters*.

17 Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space. The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, Hillsdale, NJ and London 1991, 24, defines a hypertext in the following way: “[...], a hypertext consists of topics and their connections, where again the topics may be paragraphs, sentences, individual words, or indeed digitized graphics. A hypertext is like a printed book that the author has attacked with a pair of scissors and cut into convenient verbal sizes. The difference is that the electronic hypertext does not simply *dissolve into a disordered bundle of slips*, as the printed book must.” (*Italics are mine.*)

The reader may have anticipated that the four directions, the two indications of speed and the two on relative depth, along with the two additional rhythms in “*On uniting*” refer to the variation of the movements during penetration. Men should not move like sewing machines, but try to integrate the “eight ways” or the “ten embellishments” into their repertoire of hip movements.

The “*Discussion*” has the following linking text on slip 47:

● 十脩暨(既)備

十勢(勢)豫陳

八道雜 ✓¹⁹

The ten embellishments¹⁸ are to be completely prepared,

the ten positions are to be arranged in advance,

and the eight ways are to be varied.

Here the “eight ways” are contextualised; the scenario of the sexual encounter demand of a man to combine several elements to a diversified experience.

3.1.2 Reading strategies: either to show or to even a semantic difference

Example (2) on the “eight movements” will be used to show how different reading strategies influence first the transcription and second the interpretation. The question is whether we should make explicit and show the semantic differences between our two compared texts, or, as others have already done, even out one with the other. Note that the second strategy leaves us with only *one* text where we first had two or more.

In example (2) two ways of transcription are presented: First, a *structural transcription* which tries to render the graphical structure of the characters as faithfully as possible into a printable type; second, a *normalizing transcription* which intends to give a readable text to the modern reader of Old Chinese. The second transcription already includes a strong *semantic* interpretation. It is a statement on meaning. But the latter is the usual transcription found in manuscript sources.

18 These are different ones than those discussed in “*On uniting*”.

19 The sentence marker originally used in the manuscripts is transcribed as ✓ in this paper.

Example (2)—Part 1: “Discussion” slips 49, 52–53

structural transcription normalizing transcription²⁰

● 八疇	八動	The eight movements:
一曰接手	一曰接手	the first is called joining hands;
二曰信紂	二曰伸肘	the second is called extending elbows;
三曰平甬	三曰平踊	the third is called gently bobbing;
四曰直踵	四曰直踵	the fourth is called straightening of the heels;
五曰交股	五曰交股	the fifth is called crossing the thighs;
六曰振銅	六曰振動	the sixth is called shaking vibration;
七曰廁枸	七曰側鉤	the seventh is called sideways contorsion;
八曰上梟 〓 丿	八曰上鉤	the eighth is called up-lifting.
[...]	[...]	
● 接手者欲腹之傳 ✓	接手者欲腹之傳	When she is joining hands, approaching of the bellies is wanted;
信紂者欲上之麻且據也	伸肘者欲上之 <u>摩</u> 且 <u>距</u> 也	when she is extending elbows, the dinging of the upper side along with resting on the hands is wanted.
廁枸者旁欲麻也	側 <u>鉤</u> 者旁欲 <u>摩</u> 也	when she is sideways contorted, a dinging of the sides is wanted.
交股者刺太過也 丿	交股者刺太過也	when she is crossing the thighs, the jabbing is too excessive;
直踵者窠不及	直踵者深不及	when she is straightening the heels, the depth is not enough;
上 <u>梟</u> 者下不級心也	上 <u>鉤</u> 者下不 <u>及</u> 心也	when she is lifting herself up below the center is not tense;
平甬者欲淺	平踊者欲淺	when she is gently bobbing, shallow [penetration] is wanted;
振銅者至善也	振動者至善也	when she is in shaking vibration, it reaches eminence;
此謂八觀 〓 丿	此謂八觀	these are called the eight observations. ²¹

20 Here I give basically the transcription/interpretation found in Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu Zhengli Xiaozu (fn. 7), but with adaptations for the current purposes of this paper. Underlined in the normalizing transcription are such interpretations of graphs that this work proposes, but which are questioned in this paper.

Example (2)—Part 2: “*On uniting*” slips 121–124

structural transcription	normalizing transcription	
● 八動	八動	The eight movements:
一曰接手	一曰接手	the first is called joining hands;
二曰信肘	二曰伸肘	the second is called extending elbows;
三曰直踵	三曰直踵	the third is called straightening of the heels;
四曰側句	四曰側鉤	the fourth is called bending sideways;
五曰上句 丿	五曰上鉤	the fifth is called bending upwards;
六曰交股	六曰交股	the sixth is called crossing the thighs;
七曰平甬	七曰平踊	the seventh is called gently bobbing;
振動 ✓	【八曰】振動 ²²	[the eighth is called] shaking vibration
夫接手者欲腹之傳也	夫接手者欲腹之傳也	Now, when she is joining hands, approaching of the bellies is wanted;
信 丿 肘者欲上之擗且距也	伸肘者欲上之靡且距也	when she is extending elbows, the dinging of the upper side along with a distancing is wanted;
直踵者深不及也	直踵者深不及也	when she is straightening of the heels, the depth is not enough;
側句者旁 丿 欲擗也	側鉤者旁欲靡也	when she is sideways bending, a dinging of the sides is wanted;
上句者欲下擗也	上鉤者欲下靡也	when she is upwards bending, a downward dinging is wanted;
交股者夾太過也	交股者刺太過也	when she is crossing the thighs, the jabbing is too excessive;
平甬者欲 丿 淺也	平踊者欲淺也	when she is gently bobbing, shallow [penetration] is wanted;
振動者欲人久持之也 〓 丿	振動者欲人久持之也	when she is in shaking vibration, the man's endurance and holding it is wanted. ²³

21 An alternative translation, according to the normalizing transcription, is given by Harper (fn. 4), 434–435: “When she clasps hands, she wants her abdomen pressed; when she extends elbows, she wants the upper part rubbed and scratched; when she hooks the flanks, she wants the sides rubbed; when she crosses thighs, penetration is excessive; when she straightens heels, entry is insufficiently deep; when she hooks up above, the lower part is not reaching the heart; when she makes a level upspring, she wants shallow entry; when she shakes, superbness is culminant. These are the eight observations.”

22 Here, a probable omission by the scribe is inserted by the editors.—The omission is interesting, because the sentence marker ✓ shows the care the scribe took to punctuate the text. Therefore, we see a careful writer committing a lapsus.

Comparison: In both texts we find a list of eight items, called the “eight movements”—or the “eight observations”—of the female sexual reaction. But in the “*Discussion*” the text is discontinuous, slip 51 intervenes with the exposition on slips 52–53, which deals with the appropriate masculine action to the observed female bodily reactions. Please note, the man is here given the role of an observer who reads female behavior.

Moreover, the order of the “movements” is not the same in the list of the “*Discussion*”, slip 49, as in the exposition on slips 52–53; moreover it is not the same as in “*On uniting*”. Therefore, “*On uniting*” has a better ordered textual organisation and succeeds better in fulfilling modern expectations on a logical textual sequence.²⁴

For the sake of brevity I will not discuss every sentence in example (2). The following two sentences have been selected, because they allow treatment of more complex cases of semantic differentiation.

Example (3) — the close reading of a sentence in example (2)

A. “*Discussion*” slip 52:

	MY TRANSLATION:
信紂者欲上之麻且據也	when she is extending elbows, the dinging of the upper side along with resting on the hands is wanted.

PROPOSED READING:

伸肘者欲上之摩且距也

23 Harper (fn. 4), 419 translates the lower section as follows: “The eight movements: [...] When she clasps hands, she wants her abdomen pressed; when she extends elbows, she wants the upper part rubbed and scratched; when she straightens heels, entry is insufficiently deep; when she hooks the flanks, she wants the sides rubbed; when she hooks above, she wants the lower part rubbed; when she crosses thighs, penetration is excessive; when she makes a level upspring, she wants shallow entry; when she shakes, she wants the man to continue holding for a long time.”

24 I surmise that the different sequences of the two texts might be an implicit clue to the intention of the text. Maybe there was no intention to speak of a time sequence, and that means, each of the “eight movements” could occur at any point of the female sexual reaction. On the other hand, they do give clear signals to the man as to her state.

B. “*On uniting*” slips 122–123:

信 𢇛 肘者欲上之攢且距也 when she is extending elbows, the dinging of the upper side
along with a distancing is wanted;

PROPOSED READING:

伸肘者欲上之攢且距也

All interpretations assume that the graphs *zhou* 肘 and *cun* 𢇛 stand for the word *zhou* 肘 ‘elbow’. Such cases seem relatively unproblematic.²⁵ Even though it remains unexplained why *zhou* 肘 was *not* used, since this graph is found in other texts of the Mawangdui medical corpus.²⁶ Now, let us consider more tricky issues.

3.1.2.1 *ju* 據 — *ju* 距.

Interpretations of the sentences in example (3) vary widely. Douglas Wile understands the sentence of the “*Discussion*” as follows: “‘Straightening her elbows’ means that she desires her upper body to be rubbed and scratched.”²⁷

With scratching the body we enter a scenario which might be more common in an Old Indian text, and for which I could not find any hint in the Chinese texts on sexual techniques. Donald Harper located the action in the vagina, but quite astonishingly, the wording of the translation remained similar: “[...]; when she extends elbows, she wants the upper part rubbed and scratched.”²⁸ I find the metaphor of a “scratching penis” unsatisfying. It is true that *ju* 據 sometimes means ‘to claw’ or ‘to grip with the claws’ when speaking of wild animals. But the semantic extension to ‘scratch (with the nails)’ I have not yet found. On the other hand, in the manuscript *Yin shu* 引書 (“*Writings on Stretching*”) of the 2nd century B.C., found in tomb 247 in Zhangjiashan, the word is used to denote ‘to rely on, to support oneself with the hands, to rest on the hand(s)’ in therapeutical gymnastics. We read:

25 Similar cases are listed below in the SYNOPSIS as c2. *Differing loans express the same word.*

26 Cf. the index of Emura Haruki 江村治樹 (chief ed.) et al., *Ma-ô-tai shutsudo isho jikei bunrui sakuin* 馬王堆出土醫書字形分類索引, privately published 1987, 105; or Ma Jixing 馬繼興, *Mawangdui gu yishu kaoshi* 馬王堆古醫書考釋, Changsha 1992, 1120; Harper (fn. 4), 515 ‘elbow’.

27 Wile Douglas, *The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics Including Women’s Solo Meditation Texts*, Albany 1992, 82. The sentence of “*On uniting*” is treated as strictly parallel (*op. cit.* page 79).

28 Harper (fn. 4), 434 n. 7, makes clear that a stimulation of the vagina is intended by the text.

● 引癰	The stretching with cramps:
其在脅	with those on the sides of the body—
左手據壁	the left hand rests against a wall;
右手據尻	the right hand rests on the buttocks.
前左足	Put forward the left leg
詘(屈)其𦵏(膝)	and bend its knee.
信(伸)右足	Extend the right leg
而引之極	and stretch it to the extreme.
因前右足	Then put forward the right leg
詘(屈)其𦵏(膝)	and bend its knee.
信(伸)左足	Extend the left leg.
各三而已」	Each three times and stop. ²⁹

In this exercise stretching and shifting of the body weight is used to counter the cramps in the sides. It is perfectly clear that one hand rests on the hip and the other against the wall, thus attesting the meaning of *ju* 據.³⁰

Returning to the sentence of example (3) in the “Discussion” we find two actions mentioned. They are connected with the conjunction *qie* 且 ‘along with, also, moreover’ which expresses simultaneous actions. Based on the above development of the meaning of *ju* 據, I am of the opinion that the man should support himself on his hands, in order, first, to disburden the woman from the weight of his body, and, second, to direct the thrusting of the penis even better to the upper wall of the vagina.³¹ Therefore I translate: “When she extends her

29 Cf. Gao Dalun 高大倫, *Zhangjiashan Hanjian «yin shu» yanjiu* 張家山漢簡《引書》研究, Chengdu 1995, 152. An alternative translation is given by Vivienne Lo, *The Influence of Yangsheng Culture on Early Chinese Medical Theory*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, Department of History, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1998, 351.—Other occurrences of *ju* 據 are to be found on slips 17, 19, 20, 38, 50, 52, and 84 of the same text.

30 This development of the meaning of *ju* 據 is consistent with the definition in the *Shuo wen jie zi*; cf. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 [Qing, 1735–1815], *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, Shanghai [1815] 1986, 12A, 597: “*ju*, that is ‘to hold a stick’ / ‘to support oneself with a stick’.” 據杖持也. Duan Yucai notes: “This means to support oneself with a stick and holding it.” 謂倚杖而持之也. Xu Shen chose a concrete picture to make transparent the basic sense of the word, which is, however, often used more figuratively for ‘to rely on somebody, to be supported by someone’.

31 Willibrord Weijmar Schultz, Pek Van Andel, Ida Sabelis, and Eduard Mooyart, “Magnetic Resonance Imaging of Male and Female Genitals During Coitus and Female Sexual Arousal”, *British Medical Journal* 319 (1999), 1596–1600, URL: <<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/reprint/319/7225/1596.pdf>>, took magnetic resonance images of sagittal sections of the genital

elbows, the dinging [hard thrusting] of the upper side [of the vagina] along with resting on the hands is wanted [of the male partner].”

The editor’s loan proposal *ju* 據 > *ju* 距 in the “*Discussion*” being unnecessary, one would prefer—instead of now changing the direction of the assumed loan to *ju* 距 > *ju* 據 in “*On uniting*”—, to read *ju* 距 in its proper sense of ‘keep at a distance’. This gives: “When she extends her elbows, the dinging of the upper side [of the vagina] along with a distancing is wanted [of the man].”

This fits the text nicely, and makes the same statement as the “*Discussion*”, namely *not* to cling to the female body in this situation. (Compare also in example (2)—part 2 the contrast between “approaching of the bellies” in the first with “a distancing” in the second “movement” of the woman.) With this new interpretation of the second action in the sentences of example (3) no loan is needed. The same content was just worded in slightly different ways.

To follow the loan proposal *ju* 據 > *ju* 距 means to adhere to a reading strategy which constructs a *single* text out of two and leaves us with a flat middle ground of meaning. This strategy I call *levelling*.³²

3.1.2.2 *ma* 麻 — *mi* 攢 — *mo* 摩 .

Still we have not discussed the notation of the first action in example (3). The graph *ma* 麻 ‘hemp’ in the “*Discussion*” can only be a loan graph; and together with the rare *mi* 攢 in “*On uniting*” it is treated as standing for the word meaning *mo* 摩 ‘to rub’.

Let us first have a look at *mi* 攢. Its *locus classicus* is the “*Kao gong ji*” chapter of the *Zhou li*, which speaks rather tersely about the technical terms regarding the parts of a chime bell:

于上之攢謂之隧

The ‘hitting place’ *mi* above the [arch-shaped] ‘lips of the bell’ *yú* is called ‘indentation’ *sui*.³³

Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) comments:

organs during coitus. In the “missionary position” the penis has the shape of a boomerang. It seems, that figure 3 shows a man lying flat on the woman; if he would ‘support himself on his hands’ or ‘keep a distance’, this would change the rake of penis and backbone (when flat it is about 60°). At least, it might lead to the subjective sensation of thrusting more in an upward direction.

32 For more cases, see SYNOPSIS, c3. *Levelling strategy: semantical differences gone*.

33 *Zhou li zheng yi* 周禮正義, ed. *Si bu bei yao*, juan 78, 12b.

攢所擊之處	The ‘hitting place’ <i>mí</i> is the part [of the body of the bell] which is hit [by the mallet].
攢敵也	‘To ding’ <i>mí</i> means ‘to batter’ <i>bì</i> .
隧在鼓中	The ‘indentation’ <i>sui</i> is in the middle of the ‘striking area’ <i>gu</i> ,
窪而生光	it is going to be dented and develop brilliance,
有似夫隧	quite similar to a concave [bronze] mirror <i>fú-sui</i> [used to ignite fire].

The traditional view has it that the ‘hitting place’ *mí* 攢 is on the lower outside part of the bell.³⁴ In order to produce a clear sound, it must be hit precisely.³⁵ This was done with a T-shaped mallet of about 60 cm in length, or even with lacquered wooden poles of more than 2 m in length which had metallic tips.³⁶ With time the ‘hitting place’ will turn shiny from the hitting, and it becomes slightly indented; therefore it is also called ‘indentation’ *sui* 隧.³⁷

34 Other commentaries are cited by Sun Yiran in *Zhou li zheng yi* (fn. 33), *juan* 78, 12b–13a. Drawings with indication of the traditional nomenclature can be found in Dai Zhen 戴震 [Qing, 1724–1777], *Kao gong ji tu* 考工記圖, (*Wan you wenku huiyao* 萬有文庫薈要), Taipei 1965, 43, and in Li Jinghua 李京華 and Hua Jueming 華覺明 “Bianzhong de zhongmi zhongsui xinkao” 編鐘的鐘攢鐘隧新考, in: *Kejishi wenji* 科技史文集, vol. 13 (1985), 40–46, esp. 41, figures 1–3.

35 Some bells show small drawings of birds to mark tone B, others bear inscriptions with the names of the sound system in the ‘striking area’ at the lower side of the bell. Tone A is found in its middle, tone B to its sides. (Cf. Li Chunyi 李純一, “Zhongyuan diqu Xi Zhou bianzhong de zuhe” 中原地區西周編鐘的組合, in: *Wenwu yu tiandi* 文物與天地 5 (1990), 22–25, and Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music. Chime-Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 1993, 15–16, figures 12 and 13, as well as the discussion of the musical theory of the Zeng inscriptions in chapter 8, pages 280ff.)

36 Tomb number 1 in Leigudun (Suizhou, Hubei) enclosed six T-shaped lacquered wooden mallets of 62 cm in length, and two round lacquered wooden poles of 2.15 m in length. In tomb number 2 in Xiasi (Xichuan, Henan) metallic tips of a similar pole were found. (Lothar von Falkenhausen, fn. 35, 210–211, figure 107.)

37 After the archaeological discovery of the chime bells described by Lothar von Falkenhausen (fn. 35) this traditional view was challenged in the article on *mí* 攢 and *sui* 隧 of Li Jinghua and Hua Jueming (fn. 34): They claimed that the troughs on the inside wall of the bell, underneath the striking platform, were meant by the term ‘indentation’ *sui* 隧. The irregularly distributed troughs are the products of the attempts to improve the tonal quality of a bell after its casting by altering the shape of the bells’ wall. Von Falkenhausen (op. cit. page 73) followed them and translated the sentence from *Kao gong ji* as follows: “The hollowed-out part above the *yu* is called *sui* 隧.” The *sui* 隧 would be a “trough underneath [the] striking platform”, a concave wall portion located beneath the center of the ‘striking area’. This new interpretation sees *mí* 攢 as ‘hollowing out (sc. metal)’ or even ‘chiseling off’, that is a very hard hitting of a hard surface.

The above considered, I conclude that *mi* 攢 in its verbal use meant the ‘hard hitting (of a metallic surface),’ and translate it with ‘to ding’ which carries well the metallic connotation.³⁸

Next, we check the grounds for the loan *ma* 麻 > *mi* 攢 in the “Discussion”. Lu Deming 陸德明 (fl. 550–630) notes three different readings of *mi* 攢 in his *Jing dian shi wen*.³⁹

① *mó* 攢 < *ma* < **^amaj* ‘to rub’.⁴⁰

② *mí* 攢 < *mje* < **^bm(r)aj* ‘to batter, to hit hard’ > ‘to ding’.

③ *mò* 攢 < *maH* < **^amajs* ‘the hitting place (of a bell)’.⁴¹

For technical details, cf. von Falkenhausen (fn. 35), 80 ff., 118ff. on the tuning; figure 51 and page 120 on the modulation of the thickness of the wall with a chisel. On chiseling-out, see also Li Jinghua and Hua Jueming (fn. 34), 42, figure 4; visible cuts of the chisel can be clearly seen in figure 25 of Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, “Shang Zhou qingtong shuangyin-zhong 商周青銅雙音鐘 — The two-pitch bronze bells of the Shang-Zhou period”, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1 (1981), 131–146. The irregular distribution of the troughs is discussed in Li Chunyi (fn. 35).

- 38 More figuratively *mi* 攢 was also used for the destruction of an enemy in wartime. See *Hou Han shu* (ed. *Zhong hua shu ju* 1997) 80A, 2600, where it is said that the people of the Wu-Huan were ‘crushed, crunched, smashed’ 東攢烏桓. The meaning ‘annihilate’ as an extension of ‘to rub’ > ‘to crunch (a people)’ is also found in *Fang yan*, see Zhou Zumo 周祖謨, *Fang yan jiao jian (fu suo yin)* 方言校箋 (附索引), Beijing 1993, 13/86/127.

Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary 1913: „**Ding** (*Ding*) v. t. [*imp.* & *p. p.* *Dinged* *Dang* or *Dung* (*Obs.*); *p. pr.* & *vb. n.* *Dinging*.] [OE. *dingen*, *dengen*; akin to AS. *dencgan* to knock, Icel. *dengja* to beat, hammer, Sw. *dänga*, G. *dengeln*.]

- 39 *Jing dian shi wen* 經典釋文, Lu Deming 陸德明 (fl. A.D. 550–630), ca. A.D. 583, edition: Xu Qianxue 徐乾學 [Qing, 1631–1694], *Tongzhi tang jing jie* 通志堂經解, Taipei 1969, vol. 40, 22673.

I use the model language, or reconstruction called ‘Old Chinese,’ as developed in William H. Baxter, *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology*, [Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 64], Berlin / New York 1992, and revised recently in unpublished papers. An outline of the revision is accessible in Wolfgang Behr, *Reimende Bronzeinschriften und die Entstehung der chinesischen Endreimdichtung*, Dissertation, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt 1996, 102, 134–136. To mark the phonological feature of the A/B-syllable distinction, I follow Laurent Sagart, *The Roots of Old Chinese* [Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series IV—Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, Volume 184], Amsterdam 1999, in using ^a and ^b in superscript.

- 40 Reading ① is the same as *mo* 摩 < *ma* < **^amaj* ‘to rub’; it is in favour of the interpretation given by the Chinese editors and virtually all subsequent commentaries. Phonological criteria do not speak against it: *ma* 麻 < *mæ* < **^amraj* ‘hemp’ has the same initial and rhyme as *mo* 摩 < *ma* < **^amaj*. The only difference lies in the medial **-r-* of *ma* 麻 < **^amraj*.

Reading ② has only a difference in Middle Chinese to *ma* 麻 < *mæ* < **^amraj* ‘hemp’ which is an A-syllable in grade II, whereas *mi* 靡 < *mje* < **^bm(r)aj* ‘to ding’ is a B-syllable in grade III. The A/B-contrast is controversial in historical phonology, but there is also nothing to say against this loan.⁴²

It is important to note that the notational system of the “Discussion” uses *ma* 麻 < **^amraj* in contradistinction to the word *mi* 靡 < *mje* < **^bm(r)aj* which is used in the sense of ‘to boil (over)’ bones to gelatine.⁴³ But in another passage of the text the very same graph must be read *mo* 摩 < *ma* < **^amaj* in the sense ‘to rub’ of the homophonic *mo* 摩.⁴⁴

There arises the possibility that in this text we see an intentional *graphic distinction* of a word with medial **-r-* (麻), to distinguish it from others with which it could have been confused, i.e. those of uncertain (靡) or no medial **-r-* (摩). In any case it would seem highly *uneconomical* and arbitrary to use with *ma* 麻 < **^amraj* yet another graph to write *mo* 摩 < **^amaj*.

In my view, these kinds of *intratextual distributions* will be decisive in helping to develop a better understanding of the loan process and of the writing conventions at a given time and place. Only with the recent manuscript discoveries could they come into view, because the transmitted literature probably underwent considerable re-writing. New forms of script lead to considerable change on this notational level.

In accordance with Laurent Sagart’s hypothesis,⁴⁵ it is possible to interpret medial **-r-* in *ma* 麻 < **^amraj* as a functional marking of *intensity* and *repetition*. This matches well the sense of ‘to ding’—to hit hard and rhythmically on a metallic surface—, and it would also fit rather well to the semantic relations within the word family.⁴⁶

41 Reading ③ could be interpreted as a derivation of reading ① with **s*-suffix, on which see Laurent Sagart (fn. 39), 131–133.

42 Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The Old Chinese Origin of Type A and B Syllables”, *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 22 (1994), 73–100, favours a prosodical distinction. See the discussion of other approaches in Wolfgang Behr (fn. 39), 118–120, and Laurent Sagart (fn. 39), 42–49.

43 See in “Discussion”, slip 57. The word could also be written with the two characters *mi* 靡 < *mjwe* < **^bm(r)aj*.

44 See in “Discussion”, slip 64.

45 Cf. Sagart (fn. 39), 111–120.

46 ‘To ding, to hit hard’ marks just one extreme end of a *semantic continuum* which describes actions of ‘rubbing to and fro’ (with the hand or instruments). The other extreme is to rub something fine in order to ‘polish’ it, to ‘make it fine’; in between are also ‘to pestle, to smash, to grind’; and going over to faster actions, where rubbing finds more resistance, where one has ‘to beat, to hit’ the material. (This paper only discusses the following words

When the two Mawangdui texts speak in example (3) of the “dinging of the upper part” of the vagina, they use metaphorically the hard and precise striking of a bell as a model. In the context of the “eight movements” this means a *specific way of penetration*, namely a hard and forceful pushing with the penis against the sides and the top of the vagina. This specification is expressed with the word **^amraj*, which is written either 麻 or 攢. Other interpretations do not note anything special in example (3). But why would one call it a ‘rubbing’ **^amaj* 靡摩? Better to call it a *friction*. Quite probably this hard thrusting is technically relevant knowledge—it is even contrasted with “jabbing” excessively, meaning that he could overdo it. In recent sexological research a strong stimulation of the anterior upper wall of the vagina is considered a prerequisite to letting the erotogenic zone—now called the Gräfenberg zone—swell, and trigger orgasms. This is probably a comparable observation of our times.⁴⁷

3.2 Intratextual comparisons

Coming now to the *intratextual comparisons*, I will use examples from the “Discussion” only.⁴⁸ There is a list of “seven impairments” of the inner ‘flow events’ or *qi* 氣 in the body of a male person. The third of which reads on slip 32 as follows:

Example (4)

三曰竭(竭) The third [impairment] is called ‘to exhaust oneself’.

Slips 37–39 explain all of the “seven impairments” in a context of potentially damaging effects of sexual actions. The third is explained on slip 37:

爲之不已曰竭(竭) To act [sexually] and not to pause is called ‘to exhaust oneself’.

According to the editors of the transcription the two homophonic graphs *jie* 渴 and *jie* 竭 < *gjet* < **^bgrat* are to be read as *jie* 竭 < *gjet* < **^bgat* in the sense of

of this family, but there are others: 麻攢靡摩靡靡. See Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata serica recensa*, Stockholm [1957] 1972, group 17.)

47 See Alice Kahn Ladas, Beverly Whipple and John D. Perry, *The G Spot and Other Recent Discoveries about Human Sexuality*, New York 1982 and Heli Alzate and M.L. Londono, “Vaginal Erotic Sensitivity”, *Journal of Marital and Sex Therapy* 10 (1984), 49–56.

48 See SYNOPSIS d. *Intratextual variation in the “Discussion”*.

‘to dry out, to run dry, to exhaust oneself’.⁴⁹ Nobody would object against this loan. Also, the use of graph *jie* 渴 in this sense is common.⁵⁰ In the medical corpus of Mawangdui both graphs are used to write the word ‘to dry, to exhaust’.⁵¹ Compare the advice to the man on slips 109–110 of “*On uniting*”:

因復下反之	Draw repeatedly [the penis] down and back,
毋使其「氣歇	but do not cause its flow events to be spilled,
而女乃大竭	for the woman afterwards would dry out greatly. ⁵²

Maybe this means, that he should not just penetrate deeply and thrust carelessly, but at times change the direction of the thrusting downwards while drawing back the penis. This is done for his own benefit, to better hold his erection, and for building up the ‘flow events’ *qi* 氣 or the tumescence of the member. If they ‘spill out’ *xie* 歇 it flattens, and the lubrication (and arousal) of the woman would run dry. In this text ‘to dry’ *jie* 竭 is more or less a local event, whereas I consider ‘to exhaust oneself’ in example (4) to be of a more general kind, where the sexual encounter without pauses of stimulation generate an impairment of the all-body ‘flow events’ *qi* 氣.⁵³

From a text-critical viewpoint, we have a simple finding: One text uses *jie* 渴, the other uses *jie* 竭 for the same word, but with different shades to its meaning. The notation *jie* 渴 > *jie* 竭 in example (4) does not mark a real loan, because they are synonymous and homophonous in this sense.⁵⁴ To note *jie* 竭 in parentheses is nothing more than a *reading aid* for modern readers.

49 Ma Jixing (fn. 26), 1037 n. 3, categorizes the case as one of approximately homophonous graphs.

50 Duan Yucai (fn. 30), 11A.2, 559 treats *jie* 渴 as the older notation compared to *jie* 竭, but the graph *jie* 渴 would have preferably been used for the meaning ‘to dry’. This finding is attested in manuscript sources: the *Lao zi* recensions from Mawangdui use *jie* 渴 in those places where the *textus receptus*, paragraph 39, uses *jie* 竭. (Manuscript A, line 6; B, line 178, cf. Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, Beijing 1996, 11.) Shima Kunio 島邦男, *Rôshi kôsei* 老子校正, Tokyo 1973, does not include any variants at this place; this could be a hint that *jie* 渴 might indeed be an older graph for the word ‘to dry’.

51 Cf. Emura Haruki (fn. 26), 20, 37.

52 Compare Harper’s translation (fn. 4), 416: “Then once again bring it back down. Do not let the vapor spill out, lest the woman become greatly parched.”

53 But Harper (fn. 4), 431 and n. 5 understands *jie* 渴 and *jie* 竭 to mean “parched”.

54 Apparently there is a semantic field of closely related semantic values: ‘to dry’ in contrast to ‘to exhaust something/oneself’, ‘to use up’, and also—this is the reading *ke* < *k^hat* < **ak^hat* of the graph 渴 —‘to have a dry mouth’ > ‘to be thirsty’.

But there is one point which offers resistance to this simple state of affairs. Why is there a character *jie* 揭? Ma Jixing explains the case as a theoretically unproblematic loan of homophonous graphs (*jie* 揭 > *jie* 竭).⁵⁵ With William Boltz we could say, it is a case of desemantized writing; this means *jie* 揭 lost its own semantic value and stands only for a sound **^bgrat*.⁵⁶ But all this does not explain why the scribe, while putting down the “Discussion”, uses at one point a “semantized” verb *jie* 竭 ‘to dry, to exhaust’, and at another, only a few lines later, the desemantized *jie* 揭 < **^bgrat*. Was it pure pleasure of writing? Or is it an unknown element of style?

Let us check what semantic aspect was lost with *jie* 揭. First, we note that this graph, although old, is rare not only in the transmitted literature, but also in Qin-Han manuscripts.⁵⁷ Its *locus classicus* is the “Qiu guan” 秋官 chapter of the *Zhou li*, i.e. *la shi* 蜡氏:⁵⁸

若有死于道路者	If there are corpses on roads and ways,
則令埋而置揭焉	let them be buried and erect a ‘memorial pole’ <i>jie</i> .

To this Zheng Zhong 鄭衆 (died A.D. 83) comments:

揭欲令其識取之	A ‘memorial pole’ <i>jie</i> should catch [the event] to commemorate it;
今時揭槩是也	nowadays this is a ‘commemorative pole’ <i>jie zhu</i> . ⁵⁹

According to the conventional interpretation of example (4), the relatively rare and special word ‘memorial pole’ *jie* 揭 should stand for the common word ‘to dry, to exhaust’ *jie* 竭.

But let us consider an alternative: could it be that the text here comments ironically upon itself? Is it possible that the “Discussion” created a *pun* by using ‘memorial pole’ *jie* 揭 in the sexual context? A pole for a dead person

55 Ma Jixing (fn. 26), 53, 1044 n. 4.

56 William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* [American Oriental Series, Volume 78], New Haven, Connecticut 1994, 179: “Desemantization: loss of the semantic aspect [...] of a graph, such that the graph comes to stand only for a sound without any associated meaning.”

57 An old occurrence is noted in Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒 (chief ed.), *Hanyu guwenzi zixingbiao* 漢語古文字字形表, s.l. 1981/1985, 226. Cf. Bernhard Karlgren (fn. 46), 313 o. The reading *qia* 揭 < *k^hæt* < **^ak^hrat* with the two meanings ‘a kind of musical instrument’ and ‘wooden vase’, both found in *Li ji*, can be neglected in the current discussion.

58 *Zhou li zheng yi* (fn. 33), *juan* 70, 6b, 7a (commentary).

59 This word is also written *jie zhu* 揭槩.

would become a ‘dead pole’—for a man ‘exhausting’ himself one should be ready to erect a memorial pole? ‘Dried out’ in this manner, is he to be considered as ‘dead wood’ himself?

The two homophonous words (*^bgrat 楊渴) allow for a *verfremdungseffekt*, giving way to combine things that are wide apart: ‘a picket, dead wood (*memento mori*)’ in contrast to ‘sexual exhaustion, a dead virile member’. The ironic concept finds its graphic expression in the subtle change of the semantic determinative ‘water’ (氵) into ‘wood’ (木). By doing this the content of the passage is not distorted. But the possible *irritation* of the readers leads them inevitably back to slip 32 in order to check the issue. And exactly this kind of *checking* enables and quickens the play of words! This is a very elegant way to introduce an ironic comment; it even treats the content of the text with some distance. Such playful writing requires quite an understanding readership. The thought of the pun which likens dead wood to an exhausted man accords well with the following sentence on slip 26 of the “*Discussion*”:

七十下枯上澆 (脫) With seventy [years of age] he withers below and releases above.

The ‘private parts’ *yin* 陰 of the old man ‘wither’ *ku* 枯 because they are no longer reached adequately by the ‘hidden flow events’ *yin qi* 陰氣. Again, a malfunction is metaphorically the same as to dry out. Whereas below there is dryness, above there are all kinds of fluids released, a slobbering old man.

This picture adds the required touch of cohesion to the pun for it points out that our ironic reading might have been similarly conceived at the time of the writing of the text. It gives therefore invaluable information on the ‘postulated encyclopedia’ of the time which otherwise would be difficult to bring about.⁶⁰ Michael Friedrich wrote on similar lines in his analysis of differences in the two Mawangdui recensions of the *Lao zi* 老子:

Bevor nicht die Manuskripte nach allen Regeln der philologischen und historischen Kunst untersucht worden sind, bevor nicht Kriterien dafür entwickelt werden, was *einfache Verschreibungen* und was *absichtliche Verballhornung* ist, bevor also die *Intention* hinter den Manuskripten als Gesamtkompositionen nicht aufgeschlossen ist, bleibt jede Interpretation beliebig.⁶¹

60 Umberto Eco, *Die Grenzen der Interpretation*, trans. by Günter Memmert, München, Wien 1992, 205, and *passim*.

61 Michael Friedrich, “Zur Datierung zweier Handschriften des ‘Daode jing’.” *Text.Kritische Beiträge* 2 (1996), 105–117, quote page 117, *italics* are mine.

Hopefully, examples (1) to (4) showed that to work with the concept of a *notational system* in a given manuscript has some potential in helping to gain access to the multi-layered complexities of interpretative tasks. On suspicion of irony, I see the pun of example (4) as *intentional* and translate it explicitly in the sentence of the “*Discussion*”. This is comparatively clumsy, but will not serve as a kind of “corrective” loan, which overwrites an amusing aspect of an interesting text.⁶² As a concluding reminder, it reads:

爲之不已曰竭(竭)	To act [sexually] and not to pause call it ‘getting a memorial pole for a road accident’ (or ‘to exhaust oneself’).
-----------	---

62 My thanks go to John Moffett, librarian at the Needham Research Institute (Cambridge), for providing me with an article on the chime bells; to Robert H. Gassmann, Wojciech Simson (Zurich), Elisabeth Hsu (Cambridge), and the participants of the conference “Textual Scholarship in Chinese Studies” in Munich for their many valuable comments, and to David Cusack (Basel) for his help with English matters.

Synopsis of Intertextual Variation

see Example (1)

A. VARIATIONS IN THE CHOICE OF WORDS

*"Discussion"**"On uniting"**gao zhi* 高之*shang zhi* 上之

'upwards'

mi gu 靡 (*mi* 靡) 骨*fan gu* 燔骨

'boiled over bones'

yuan ju 爰 (爰) 居*yuan bu* 爰捕

'monkey-grip'

B. NOTATIONAL VARIATION BETWEEN OLDER AND YOUNGER CHARACTERS

*"Discussion"**"On uniting"**shen* 桼桼*shen* 深

'deep'

jue 决*jue* 決'to break through'
(said of the ejaculation)

C. LOAN GRAPHS

C1. THE LOAN GRAPH EXPRESSES AN UNRELATED OR NON-OBVIOUS MEANING

*"Discussion"**"On uniting"*

intended meaning:

ce 廁 'latrine'*ce* 側 'sideways'

'sideways'

homophon, known loan graph

regular graph

hou 後 'later'*hou* 后 'empress, ruler'*ran hou* 然後 'thereafter' written as
然后

regular graph

homophon, desemantized
use (also current use)*qiu* 糗 'soaked parched grain'*chou* 臭 'to stink''slime' (used to describe the con-
sistence of a fluid)isometrical word, de-
semantized use

C2. DIFFERING LOANS EXPRESS THE SAME WORD

<i>"Discussion"</i>	<i>"On uniting"</i>	both graphs used for a third graph with the meaning:
zhou 肘	cun 村 (扌)	zhou 肘 'elbow'
zhong 撞	dong 動	dong 動 'to move'
qun ju 困 羴	qun chu 困 牯 / 桷	jun chu 麋 觸 'river deer butting' (a figura veneris)
qing ling 青 靈	qing ling 青 令	qing ling 蜻 蛉 'dragonflies' (a figura veneris)
chi yu 尺 扌	chi huo 斥 虜	chi huo 尺 虜 'the geometer' (a figura veneris)

C3. LEVELLING STRATEGY: SEMANTICAL DIFFERENCES GONE

see Examples (2) and (3)

<i>"Discussion"</i>	<i>"On uniting"</i>	interpretation as levelling
ju 據 'to hold, to rely on'	ju 距 'keep at a distance'	ju 距 'to scratch' (?) see 3.1.2.1.
ma 麻 'hemp'	mo 擽 'to rub hard' > 'to ding'	mo 摩 'to rub' (?) see 3.1.2.2.
gou 枸 'to form a hook (like wood inside out)' > 'to contort' (movement from within as a result of sexual reaction)	gou 句 'to form a hook (with the body)' > 'to bend' (movement from within as a result of sexual reaction)	gou 鉤 'to hook (with the legs)' (active movement)
ju 羴 'to bend (upwards)' (movement from within as a result of sexual reaction)	gou 句 'to bend' (movement from within as a result of sexual reaction)	gou 鉤 'to hook (with the legs)' (active movement)

D. INTRATEXTUAL VARIATION IN THE “DISCUSSION”

see Example (4)

D1. VARIATION MARKS SEMANTIC DIFFERENCE

<i>“Discussion”</i>	<i>“On uniting”</i>	levelling:
wordplay (?): see 3.2.		
<i>jie</i> 渴 ‘to dry, to exhaust’	<i>jie</i> 竭 ‘memorial pole’	<i>jie</i> 竭 ‘to exhaust’
phonological contrast, but similar meaning:		
<i>xi</i> 犀 < <i>sej</i> < * ^a <i>səj</i>	<i>chi</i> 遲 <i>drij</i> < * ^a <i>drəj</i>	<i>chi</i> 遲 ‘slow’
obscure metaphor (?):		
<i>jie</i> 接 ‘to graft’	<i>jie</i> 接 ‘to cross, to join (the hands)’	<i>jie</i> 接 ‘to cross, to join (the hands)’

D2. GRAPHIC VARIATION WITHOUT SEMANTIC DIFFERENCE

<i>“Discussion”</i>	<i>“On uniting”</i>	modern usage:
without radical:	with radical:	
<i>wei</i> 胃	<i>wei</i> 謂	<i>wei</i> 謂 ‘to say, to mean’
use of a homophon:		
<i>hou xi</i> 侯息	<i>hou xi</i> 候息	<i>hou xi</i> 喉息 ‘to breathe from the throat’
use of words with similar sense and reading:		
<i>xu qi</i> 畜氣	<i>xu qi</i> 蓄氣	‘to hoard the flow’

Note: The list of examples in the synopsis is not exhaustive, many more could be found in the two compared manuscripts.

