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Autor(en): **Richter, Matthias L.**

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **63 (2009)**

Heft 4: **The genius loci of Chinese manuscripts**

PDF erstellt am: **04.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147837>

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FAITHFUL TRANSMISSION OR CREATIVE CHANGE: TRACING MODES OF MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION FROM THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

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Abstract

The *genius loci* of a manuscript largely consists in the particular production standards according to which meaning was encoded in the materiality of manuscripts and carried over time. These standards varied between small regions and over relatively short periods of time. A manuscript reflects not only the standards of the time and place of its own production but potentially also the standards according to which prior models were produced and from which the manuscript in question was copied. To understand who and what determined the material features of a particular manuscript it is necessary to enquire into the actual mode of its production and into the degree of competence and independence on the part of the scribe or his reliance on a copied model.

1. Introduction

When Plato let Socrates voice his famous complaints about losing control over a text once it is written down, the foremost concern was not whether or not a text could be faithfully transmitted over centuries.¹ Rather, a persuasive text was understood to exist in a certain communicative situation, and it was expected that a text be customised according to the particular occasion and audience for which it was produced. But not only can an oral text, by virtue of not being fixed in writing, be customised to perform precisely the intended communicative function. The meaning conveyed in oral communication is not only encoded in the

1 Socrates: “When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn’t know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father’s support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support.” Cf. *Phaidros* 275e, quoted after NEHAMAS and WOODRUFF, 1995:81.

text itself and its prosodic features, it is also embedded in various non-verbal elements of the communicative act – facial expression, modulation of voice, gestures and so forth. All these help specify what David Olson calls the illocutionary force of the text in the broader sense. Taken out of its situational context, a text can easily be misunderstood. In Olson’s concise words, “writing readily represents the locutionary act, leaving illocutionary force underspecified”.² Writing practices have, consequently, developed means of compensating for the loss of semantic specification that occurs in the transition of a text from the oral to the written mode of communication.³ Hence, all material features of a written document are potentially meaningful: material and format of writing support, textual layout, type and style of script, punctuation or ornamentation – all of these have an influence on the meaning conveyed by the document.

Just as on the level of language proper, written communication requires that a community agree on certain conventions or standards for the encoding of meaning not just in the written word, i.e. in orthography, but also in all material features of the manuscript. Successful communication depends on the degree of encoding and decoding competence on the parts of the producer and the recipient of a text, respectively. If we include textual transmission in our considerations, this process does not only require the transmission of the text in the narrower sense but also the transmission of the encoding and decoding skills on the parts of both the copyists of texts and their readers.

The manuscript culture of a wider area and over a longer span of time is not necessarily uniform with regard to encoding practices. Thus, the *genius loci* of a certain manuscript lies to a large extent in the particular encoding conventions specific to a certain area and period. We can safely include the temporal dimension in our understanding of *genius loci*, since no place can be the same with regard to its cultural specificity at two different points in time.

Since the early Chinese manuscripts available to us today come from different areas and times, many of them from a period before the various regions had been forged into an empire under one central government, it is no surprise that these manuscripts create a strong impression of a general arbitrariness with regard to all their properties – from format and layout down to punctuation and orthography.⁴ Yet, to assume a complete lack of production standards does not

2 OLSON, 1994:93.

3 “Indeed, the discovery and then the management of illocutionary force make up a fundamental part of the history of literacy.” OLSON, 1994:93.

4 Li Ling points out that early Chinese texts were of a fluid nature and that there was a general high degree of freedom on the parts of both who composed the texts and also their readers

seem realistic either. Scribes must have learnt their skills from teachers who surely would not just have made vague suggestions to their students as to how they were supposed to write a certain word. We have evidence of cases in which the scribes took these standards very seriously.

In order to distinguish which features of a manuscript reflect an underlying production standard and which were subject to free choice on the part of the scribe, we must learn in as much detail as possible how exactly manuscripts were produced, and we must gauge the degree and precise nature of scribal literacy. Such insights can only be gleaned from detailed studies of concrete examples, and what is concluded from a particular case cannot be generalised to explain manuscript production in early China on a large scale. The best point of departure for such studies are of course manuscripts with nearly or completely identical text, ideally cases in which we have both the copied model and the copy made from it.⁵ Such cases are, however, extremely rare.

The present paper will examine three cases of related manuscripts in order to show what they betray about a possible underlying production standard, whether or not they intended to faithfully transmit a text they copied unchanged, how complete or limited the literacy of the scribes involved was, and who determined the final shape of the written text.

Reverting to Plato for a moment – if fixing a text in writing can be seen as a disadvantage, we must remember that whenever in the history of textual transmission a new written form of a text was produced, this also offered an opportunity to introduce changes to this text. The question is: did anyone, in the act of manuscript production, seize this opportunity, or did the copyist prefer to faithfully copy an existing written version? If changes were administered: who was responsible for them? Did scribes exert any intentional influence on the text, or did they lack the intellectual competence to do so?

(作者的自由度比較大, 讀者的自由度也比較大). Lai Guolong assumes a high degree of liberality in writing conventions and lacking strictness in the teaching of orthography (書寫習慣比較自由[...]正字教育不太嚴格). Cf. LI, 2004:198, and LAI, 2007:519.

- 5 The act of writing a manuscript is often carelessly called copying, even if it is not clear at all whether or not a particular manuscript is really a copy in the sense of a reproduction of an existing written text. Martin Kern has explained the variants between manuscripts and their transmitted or manuscript counterparts as possibly brought about by a dominance of oral textual culture in the sense that manuscripts were written without reference to a written model, namely either after dictation or from memory (see KERN, 2002). At least the latter was probably often the case. The fact that the absence of a written model is more difficult to prove than the presence of one should not lead us to exclude such a possibility. However, I will in this paper concentrate on cases of which we know a written model existed.

2. The Mawangdui *Xing de* and *Laozi* Manuscripts

Copyists seem to have had a decisive influence on many texts, especially on those of a technical nature. In his studies of ancient and mediaeval manuscripts with occult content, Donald Harper has found evidence indicating that “the roles of compiler, copyist, and reader [...] must have been fluid, with instances of individuals who compiled and copied manuscripts for their own use as well as instances of readers who wanted to acquire the manuscripts”.⁶ A case in which we know a manuscript was produced in reliance on another one is that of the *Xing de* 刑德 A and B manuscripts from Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb number three, excavated in Changsha in 1974.⁷ For these two manuscripts, Marc Kalinowski has conclusively shown how a copyist’s error in B is most certainly due to an eye-skip of the scribe who copied from A.⁸ Thus, at least part of the text of *Xing de* B definitely depended on the written version in *Xing de* A. Yet, another part of the text and the layouts of both manuscripts are significantly different. In terms of the placement of the texts and diagrams on the writing surface in the two manuscripts, B is in some ways the mirror image of A.⁹ This is a case in which the fact that a certain text had been fixed in writing did not safeguard it against changes.

In the discussion of textual variants (both variants between parallel texts and between what can be seen as instantiations of the same text at different stages of its transmission) the assumption that these variants must reflect accidental changes to a text, usually called copyist’s errors, is still so dominant

6 HARPER, forthcoming. I thank the author for allowing me to quote from his unpublished draft of April 2008.

7 For comprehensive information on this find, see HE, 2004. Important studies of the two *Xing de* manuscripts are KALINOWSKI, 1998–1999, as well as CHEN, 2000 and 2001.

8 See KALINOWSKI, 2005:160–161. In column 34, the copyist of B first faithfully copied from manuscript A (column 55), until a point where he continues with what is in the same position of the next column (56) in A. Having done so for a length of fifteen characters, he must have realised this mistake. Consequently, he left the rest of this column (34) in B blank and started afresh in the next column, this time copying the text correctly as it is in manuscript A.

9 In *Xing de* A, both diagrams and text 1 occupy the left two thirds of the manuscript. Diagram 1 to the upper left, diagram 2 in the upper middle, and text 1 below these two; text 2 occupied the entire length of the columns in the remaining third of the material. In *Xing de* B, text 2 is placed on the left over the full length of the columns, while text 1 is placed on the lower right with diagrams 1 and 2 (1 to the right and 2 in the middle) above it. Cf. KALINOWSKI, 2005:154, figure 4.

that a case like that of the two *Xing de* manuscripts needs to be emphasised: Here we can be sure that whoever produced *Xing de* B or ordered it to be produced based its contents on an earlier written version but at the same time seized the opportunity to introduce changes to it.¹⁰

On the face of it, the two Mawangdui manuscripts bearing a *Laozi* 老子 text appear to be a similar case.¹¹ Each manuscript contains six texts, two of which are counterparts of the *Laozi*. The two texts titled *De* and *Dao*, correspond to chapters 38–81 and 1–37 of the transmitted text, respectively.

LZA	LZB
text 1: <De 德>	text 1: <i>Jing fa</i> 經法
text 2: <Dao 道>	text 2: <i>Shiliu jing</i> 十六經 ¹²
text 3: <Wu xing 五行> (3a: <i>jing</i> 經, 3b: <i>shuo</i> 說)	text 3: <i>Cheng</i> 稱
text 4: <Jiu zhu 九主>	text 4: <i>Dao yuan</i> 道原
text 5: <Ming jun 明君>	text 5: <i>De</i> 德
text 6: <De sheng 德聖>	text 6: <i>Dao</i> 道

The placement of the *Laozi* texts at opposite ends of the respective manuscripts is reminiscent of the reverse layouts of *Xing de* A and B. Also, both *Xing de* B and LZB belong to a group of silk manuscripts that follow almost identical production standards in terms of format, some layout features and type of script: the other members of this group being *Zhou yi*, *Wu xing zhan* and *Xiang ma jing*. However, other than in the *Xing de* case, there is no indication showing that LZB was directly influenced by LZA or vice versa, hence there is no sufficient cause

- 10 It is difficult to decide whether the eye skip in *Xing de* B reflects lacking intellectual grasp of the text on the part of the copyist. If so, the person who designed the layout and devised the changes to part of the text must have been someone else, probably the commissioner of the manuscript.
- 11 Cf. the publication of these manuscripts in GUOJIA WENWUJU GU WENXIAN YANJIUSHI, 1980. Henceforth, the designations “LZA” and “LZB” are used to refer to the manuscripts as a whole, not just their parts corresponding to the *Laozi* text. The pointed brackets in the following table indicate that the titles of the texts in LZA are not original ones but were given by the editors of the manuscripts. The titles in LZB are written in the original manuscript at the end of the individual texts.
- 12 The title *Shiliu jing* is disputed. For a discussion of this problem see RICHTER, forthcoming.

to understand the textual order of one as a conscious reversal of that of the other, as in the case of *Xing de B*.¹³

Although the two manuscripts are not immediately related as model and copy, several indications suggest that they were both copied from written models. In an earlier study of the distribution of variants in these manuscripts I have shown that the scribe of LZA must have copied the individual texts of this manuscript from models that used different orthographies.¹⁴ Why did the scribe of LZA so closely adhere to orthographic features of the different models from which he copied the several texts? In some cases he may not have been sure whether these features represented lexical distinctions and he may not have had the competence – with regard to both orthography and contents of the text – to make his own decision. But in other cases this can hardly be so: Even a scribe with a very limited knowledge or understanding of the texts he wrote and perhaps a limited literacy would surely have recognised the variants of 其 and 者 – 亓 and 耂, respectively – as full vs. abbreviated forms of these two very frequent characters. That the scribe of LZA adhered to the copied models also in such simple cases, is more difficult to explain. We should not discount the possibility that scribes were supposed to not just adequately represent a text on the level of its wording but to faithfully preserve some material features of the copied model as well.

Perhaps such material features of a text were in some cases, even if they had no impact on the wording of the text, respected as values in their own right. If so, this should caution us not to assume too freely that how a certain word was written did not matter as long as one could recognise it. If a practice existed to intentionally retain material features of texts that one reproduced, and if we assume that there was a general, if slowly progressing, development towards a

13 For a study that understands LZA as an intentional reversal of LZB and thus dependent on the latter, see FRIEDRICH, 1996.

14 See RICHTER, 2005. For example, in text 2 of this manuscript the word *shēng* {聲} is written as 馨 and the word *shèng* {聖} as 馨, while all other texts of the manuscript consistently write the former as 聲 and the latter as 聖. The word *tīng* {聽} is written as 聽 in texts 2 and 3. Texts 4 and 5, however, use the abbreviated form 聦, and the other texts of the manuscript do not contain this word. For the word *cōng* {聰} the manuscript uses two entirely different forms. The word occurs only in texts 3 (*Wu xing*) and 6 (*De sheng*). Text 6 and the core text of *Wu xing* (usually called “guideline” or “canon”, *jing* 經) use the form 聰 that could pass as an abbreviated archaic version of the modern character, but interestingly the commentary section (*shuo* 說) of the *Wu xing* text uses a character of entirely different structure, i.e. 雙, to write the same word. This probably indicates that the written models of the *Wu xing* core text and that of the commentary to it were of different provenance.

more unified orthography, this would also mean that the degree of orthographic variance in manuscripts of a certain time may not just reflect the orthography of *that* time but also that of earlier periods or of different regions, which the heterogeneous sources of the manuscript stemmed from.

3. The Shanghai Museum Bamboo Manuscripts *Tianzi jian zhou* A and B

In order to learn more about the degree to which material features of a copied manuscript were deemed important enough to be preserved, we would ideally need to have cases of manuscripts of which we can be sure that they were clearly copied without any intention of using the act of copying as an opportunity to alter the text. And we would need both the model and the copy made from it. One such rare case can be found among the Chu bamboo manuscripts bought by the Shanghai Museum from the Hong Kong antique market.¹⁵ The two manuscripts entitled by the editors *Tianzi jian zhou* 天子建州 A and B (henceforth: TZA and TZB) are not only directly related in terms of their production, but also their texts are exactly identical.¹⁶ Both manuscripts are well enough preserved to maintain such an assumption: Of TZA all thirteen slips are preserved and only thirteen characters of the altogether 406 words are lost.¹⁷ TZB is less complete; probably two entire slips are missing, we have only eleven slips with altogether

- 15 These manuscripts were presumably produced around 300 BCE and buried in a tomb in the vicinity of the Chu capital Ying 郢 (Jiangling 江陵 county, Hubei 湖北 province). For the dates and locations of the several Chu capitals see Barry B. Blakeley in COOK/MAJOR, 1999:9–20. For concise information about this collection of manuscripts, see the foreword in MA, 2001; for the titles of manuscripts in the first five of the seven volumes published so far, see PIAN/DUAN, 2006:470f. Volume 7 was published only in December 2008.
- 16 Reproductions and annotated transcriptions of both manuscripts are published in MA Chengyuan, 2007. Henceforth, reference to particular places in the manuscripts are made after the following fashion: “manuscript.slip.character”, e.g. “TZB.2.5” refers to the fifth character on slip 2 of the manuscript *Tianzi jian zhou* B.
- 17 The number of missing characters can be determined with a high degree of certainty, based on the length of the damaged slips, compared with the complete ones, as well as on grounds of syntax of the text and the parallel text in the other manuscript. The count of 406 words for the text results from adding this number of thirteen missing characters to the 386 preserved ones, seven of which are compound characters (*hewen* 合文) that stand for two words (for the sake of simplicity I understand “word” here as identical with syllable). The calculation is thus $13 + 386 + 7 = 406$.

356 characters (including seven compounds), but of these extant slips only one character is lost.

The text *Tianzi jian zhou* is a prescriptive brief statement about the proper manifestation and thus preservation of social order. The first half describes the proper place and scope in which the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子), the Lords of States (*bang jun* 邦君), the Grandees (*daifu* 大夫) and the Officers (*shi* 士) should maintain ancestral altars. The importance of ritual and ceremony is emphasised. And, interestingly, ritual is declared to be superior to ceremony.¹⁸ Next, the importance of precise and cautious execution of punishment is emphasised. Eventually, the complementary aspects of civilian and military power are placed in a cosmological context. In both manuscripts, a hook mark at this point signals a caesura.¹⁹ The second half of the text describes how the same social strata that were named in the first half manifest their positions by assuming certain postures and distinctive demeanour. The following passage defines the same classes with regard to appropriate privileges in everyday life. The rest of the text describes specific behaviour, mostly with regard to taboos relevant for different activities, most notably divination.²⁰ A short coda mentions “strength in acting, loyalty in devising plans and trustworthiness in speaking” as three qualities which one cannot learn from a teacher.²¹

This text is quite unique and has, as far as I can see, no parallel in any other early Chinese text. But I will neither present the entire text here nor interpret it in detail. Instead, I will discuss a number of peculiarities of the two manuscripts that allow conclusions as to specific circumstances of their production.²² These

18 A sentence on slips TZA.3 and TZB.2 reads: “Ritual is an extension of ceremony” (禮者儀之兄 [kuàng, also written 況] 也).

19 See TZA.6 and TZB.5. The same hook mark occurs also at the end of the text in TZA and probably did in TZB as well, which cannot be verified since the end of the manuscript is lost. TZA also has another kind of mark (short single strokes) that divides shorter textual units in the middle section of the manuscript. The exact function of these marks is difficult to ascertain, but the hook marks clearly indicate a division of the entire text in two parts.

20 “When one is about to perform divination, one does not speak of disorder, nor of invasions, nor of extinction, nor of uprooting, nor of shortness. Thus, the turtle (divination) has five taboos.” (臨兆: 不言亂, 不言侵, 不言滅, 不言拔, 不言短. 故龜有五忌.) Cf. TZA.11 and TZB.10–11.

21 所不學於師者三: 強行, 忠謀, 信言. 此所不學於師也. TZA.13 (missing in TZB).

22 A comprehensive codicological study of these manuscripts, including transcription and English translation of their text, is being prepared by Daniel Morgan (University of Chicago), who has already published some of his observations in an article posted on the website of the Centre of Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts at Wuhan University. See MORGAN, 2007.

peculiarities – as will be shown in the following – indicate that TZA is a fair copy made from TZB, which was at some point found inadequate. Since these manuscripts were not recovered in a controlled archaeological excavation, we cannot even be sure that they were buried in the same tomb, but as they are immediately related as copy and copied model, they must at some point have been in the same place. This is not the same as to say that they were produced in the same scribal milieu and followed production conventions or standards that are characteristic of one and the same area. The manuscript that was copied may have come from afar.

The physical features of both manuscripts are consistent with other brush-written bamboo manuscripts recovered from the proximity of the Chu capital Ying and dated to around 300 BCE.²³ The first peculiarity that stands out when one compares the physical appearance of this identical text in the two manuscripts is a peculiar shape and structure of the first character for the word *ye* {也}. This word occurs only four times in the entire text, and only the first time it is written with a hitherto unattested, though still easily recognisable, form of the character 也 (see fig. 1). The last stroke of 也 is as a rule written as an extra stroke. It is sometimes merged with either the right or the left downward stroke, but never is it in any way connected with the horizontal stroke as it is in the peculiar form. Remarkably, this peculiarity occurs in both manuscripts. The scribe of *one* of the manuscripts could have made such a mistake. This would be odd enough, since one would expect a well-developed routine in writing one of the simplest and most frequent characters. It is even more extraordinary that the scribe of the other manuscript repeated this mistake, and both scribes wrote the character correctly in the following cases, one of them being the very next sentence. From this example alone it is impossible to decide which manuscript is the copy and which the model. But that one of them is influenced by the other seems certain.

23 The slip lengths of ca. 44.5 cm (TZA) and ca. 42.7 cm (TZB) are in the middle range of the size of the Shanghai Museum bamboo manuscripts. Both manuscripts were bound with three cords and in both the space outside the top and bottom binding strings was left blank as margins. The number of somewhat over 30 characters per slip and the resulting character size and spacing, as well as the general style of script are typical for Chu manuscripts of that time. The same is true for punctuation.

	TZA		TZB
TZA.3.9		TZB.2.33	
TZA.3.15		TZB.3.6	
TZA.8.11		TZB.7.23	
TZA.13.23		lost	—

Figure 1: All forms of 也 in TZA and TZB.

Arguably, one such example could pass as coincidence, but there are other cases where both manuscripts change character forms at the same position in the text. The case of 凡 is similar to that of 也. The second example is written correctly, but the first and third look like unsuccessful renderings of the same form (see fig. 2). In TZA the first 凡 is lost, but given the several examples of identical changes in both manuscripts, it seems safe to assume that the scribe also used the peculiar form in this place. The unfamiliar forms have the same number and approximate orientation of strokes, but the proportions (both in terms of length of strokes and their relative positions or connections) are so different that the character seems to consist of entirely different, though not clearly identifiable components.²⁴

24 Daniel Morgan has also recognised that both manuscripts in exactly the same position of the text change the ways in which they write 也 and 凡. However, in the latter case he disagrees with the identification of the two irregular cases by the editor Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎 as 凡.

	TZA		TZB
lost	—	TZB.1.1	
TZA.1.23		TZB.1.24	
TZA.8.12		TZB.7.24	

Figure 2a: All forms of 凡 in TZA and TZB.

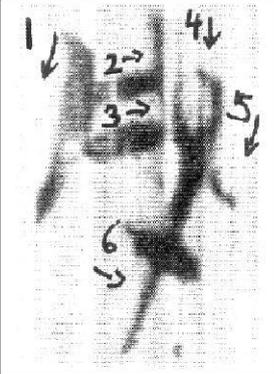
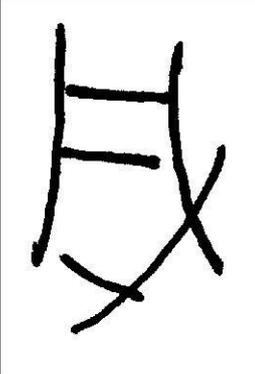
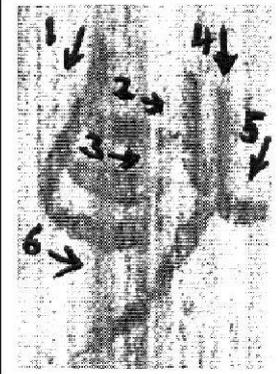
correct form TZA.1.23	conjectured ambiguous form	incorrect form TZA.8.12
		

Figure 2b: Comparison TZA.1.23 and TZA.8.12.

Both peculiarities described so far are completely absent from all other palaeographic materials. Hence they can be confidently identified as deviations from an existing standard. Accordingly, they should not be interpreted as ex-

MORGAN, 2007; cf. MA, 2007. He understands these characters as unidentified (當是未釋字) but of similar syntactic function as that of 凡. (很明顯為兩個字. 不過, 因出現位置與‘凡’相似, 或許具有類似的語法作用.)

amples of a general variability of early Chinese writing but should rather be classified as mistakes. In this example, the calligraphic quality of the characters indicates that the scribe of TZA had probably better skills than that of TZB. It is well conceivable that a good scribe may have written the character 也 incorrectly and may then have corrected his mistake. It does not seem likely, however, that he should have written a wrong form first, then reverted to the correct form but in the next instance have repeated the same mistake that he had made in the first case. This seems to exclude the scribe of TZA as the originator of the mistake, which implies that he must have copied the mistakes from TZB. However, it does not seem likely either that a skilled scribe should have copied such drastic mistakes from another manuscript.

Any explanation of this phenomenon will have to take into account several other cases in which TZA and TZB are clearly related with regard to their character forms. One such example is the character 友, consisting of two 又 written side by side on top of a 冂 component. This character is, in both manuscripts, written with an additional stroke in each of the two 又 components (see fig. 3). Instead of the single continuous stroke that leads from top left to bottom right, two strokes are intertwined in the middle. This very rare feature is consistent with the wavy, ornamental style of this character in TZB (note the unusually broad beginnings of the strokes) but it looks strangely untypical of the very clear and regular style of TZA.²⁵ Again, it seems that the scribe of TZA copied from TZB. He copied a purely stylistic (non-structural) feature without any visible attempt to generally copy the rather irregular style of TZB. The only conceivable reason for this, it appears, is that the scribe of TZA was not sure whether or not the special features he took over from TZB might be meaningful distinctions. He was evidently well trained in writing basically the same characters as used in the manuscript he copied. But he probably did not understand the underlying orthographic standard. As the features described so far occur in simple words the recognition of which does not depend on comprehension of the contents of the text, it seems that the reason why the scribe of TZA was not fully sure about the orthographic standard was not necessarily lacking intellectual grasp of the text but primarily his insufficient familiarity with the language in which the text he

25 This peculiar way of writing 友 with such intertwined strokes also occurs twice on slip 30 of the Guodian *Liu de* 六德 manuscript, while only two slips earlier (slip 28) 友 is written without this ornament. Another kind of ornament – a knot-like black dot in the place where in the other cases the strokes are intertwined – is used on slip 6 of the Guodian manuscript *Yucong* 語叢 3. However, to my knowledge these are the only attested cases of such an ornamental way of writing 友. Cf. JINGMEN SHI BOWUGUAN, 1998:71, 97.

copied was written. It could have been a different regional language or a literary language on a significantly different stylistic level than the language the scribe himself understood.

	TZA		TZB
TZA.10.28		TZB.10.6	

Figure 3: Characters used to write *you* {友} in TZA and TZB.

Other examples show that the scribe of TZA only in some cases did not trust his own competence enough to make his own orthographic decisions, so that he took over irregularities or even mistakes from TZB. In other cases he was in fact confident enough to make his own choices independently of TZB. While in TZB the first two instances of the character 語 in a row of eight parallel phrases are written in the full form, the latter five are abbreviated by leaving out the 口 component on the right and also the top stroke of the classifier 言 (see fig. 4). The scribe of TZA follows the abbreviation of the right hand side of the character, perhaps because he was not sure if leaving out the 口 was a meaningful distinction, but he was obviously confident enough to decide how the semantic classifier 言 was to be written.

	TZA		TZB
TZA.9.29		TZB.9.2	
lost	—	TZB.9.6	
TZA.10.5		TZB.9.11	
TZA.10.10		TZB.9.16	
TZA.10.20		TZB.9.26	
TZA.10.25		TZB.10.3	
lost	—	TZB.10.8	
TZA.11.4		TZB.10.13	

Figure 4: All forms of 語 in TZA and TZB.

The variation between different forms of writing the character 辟 is a similar case. The character, whose left hand part is composed of 卩 and 口 (or, strictly speaking, an oval form that is in later types of script rendered 口), occurs four times (see fig. 5). Counter to the common feature in manuscript cultures to increasingly abbreviate in the course of one manuscript, TZB introduces an additional 口 in the second instance of the character and then continues to add this in the third and fourth instance. The scribe of TZA conformed to this practice but did not follow TZB in writing the first 卩 component incorrectly with an additional stroke. Again, it appears, the scribe of TZA was sure how to write this component correctly but he was not confident enough to decide whether or not the additional 口 was required to write the word in question, i.e. whether all four 辟 were intended to be identical in this text or not.

	TZA		TZB
TZA.8.30		TZB.8.9	
TZA.9.5		TZB.8.15	
TZA.9.8		TZB.8.18	
TZA.9.11		TZB.8.21	

Figure 5: All forms of 辟 in TZA and TZB.

Other cases in which the scribe of TZA was confident enough not to repeat irregularities found in TZB are the characters for *kuàng* {况 / 況} and *lín* {臨}. In the former case, the bottom right component is in TZB wrongly assimilated to

the bottom left component, and in the latter case TZB left out one of the three bottom components (see fig. 6a–b).

	TZA		TZB
TZA.3.8		TZB.2.32	

Figure 6a: 兄 / 況 in TZA and TZB.

	TZA		TZB
TZA.11.1		TZB.10.10	
TZA.11.6		TZB.10.15	
TZA.11.28		TZB.11.12	

Figure 6b: 臨 in TZA and TZB.

All in all, TZB was written by a person whose brushwork was not wholly inexperienced but who did not write a regular, neat hand, nor was he very skilled in writing the words of the text in a consistent orthography. This is true with regard to both structure and stylistic details. Sometimes he was not sure how to connect the strokes of a character or with how many strokes to produce the required form. He was probably someone who did not write very often or very great amounts of text, but he understood very well what he was writing. Judging from the dynamic brushstrokes, he wrote the relatively short text of TZB quickly and rather carelessly.

TZA is evidently a fair copy of TZB, its production was entrusted to a scribe who was highly skilled in writing regularly sized and spaced, correctly structured, well proportioned, balanced and legible characters.²⁶ He was not, however, competent enough to decide in all cases of irregularities that he found in TZB whether or not they reflected a meaningful distinction. This particular incompetence did not make the scribe of TZA a mediocre scribe. The aesthetic aspect of his work may even have been of a higher value than orthographic competence. Orthographic correctness was not a major concern in the production of either TZA or TZB, and neither apparently in the production of many other early Chinese manuscripts.²⁷ If a text is well known, orthographic consistency is not of great consequence, since the reader does not solely rely on the written form to access the text. The written text is either “merely” of a representational value or an aid to memory. Since the function of a manuscript was not necessarily to acquaint someone with its text, the visual aspect of the text was often regarded as very important, perhaps not so much in view of legibility but rather of this representational value.

4. Conclusion

This brings us back full circle to the questions of the *genius loci* of a manuscript as embodied in its material features. The enormous variability in these features should not lead us to assume a general absence of any standards of manuscript production – neither with regard to orthography nor punctuation nor layout etc. Rather, standards were probably restricted to small circles of persons who learned writing from the same teachers, i.e. scribal schools. Moreover, especially in a period during which the borders of rivalling states constantly changed, these local standards may have changed more rapidly than they would in times of social stability. If we envisage a situation in which a manuscript did not predominantly function to grant access to the text but rather to a great extent ful-

26 Note the by far more regular number of characters per slip in TZA (30–32), as compared with TZB (28–38).

27 Since the completion of this article, another volume of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts has been published, which contains three such pairs of manuscripts with apparently identical text, viz. *Zhengzi jia sang* 鄭子家喪 A and B, *Jun ren zhe he bi an zai* 君人者何必安哉 A and B, and *Fan wu liu xing* 凡物流形 A and B. After a first cursory study, I presume there is a possibility that some or all of these pairs are cases of copied model and fair copy.

filled representational functions, the most sought after competence in scribes may not necessarily have been orthographic correctness or even just constancy, but rather the high visual quality of their work. For us who do depend on the characters they wrote to access and identify the text, this poses the problem that we need to learn as much as possible about the actual process of manuscript production, in order to understand the degree and nature of scribal competence, to know which decisions are those of the scribe, which those of the commissioner, and which features are accidents. The manuscript does not just reflect the actual production standards or at least conventions of the time and place where it was produced but also those of potentially several models from which it was copied and in turn their underlying models. All these considerations are not only necessary to understand the social context and historical significance of the manuscript but also to inform our decisions as textual critics and ultimately readers of its text.

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