

## 22

曲則全

枉則正

窪則盈

敝則新

少則得

多則感

是以聖人抱一 為天下式

不自見 故明

不自是 故彰

不自伐 故有功

不自矜 故長

夫唯不爭

故天下莫能與之爭

古之所謂 曲則全

豈虛言哉

誠全而歸之

Bending keeps one whole

Enduring injustice keeps one righteous

Staying low keeps one full

Aging keeps one fresh

Seeking little keeps one satisfied

Acquiring much keeps one bewildered

Hence the wise embrace one as a model for the world

Without being narcissistic one sees clearly

Without being righteous one becomes exemplary

Without being arrogant one gains merit

Without being self-congratulatory one endures

Without contending with others

Then no one can contend with one

When the ancients spoke of bending to keep whole

How could they have spoken in vain

Let us all earnestly return to these ancient values

### Pinyin Transliteration

qǔ zé quán

wǎng zé zhèng

wā zé yíng

bì zé xīn

shǎo zé dé

duō zé huò

shì yǐ shèng rén bào yī wéi tiānxià shì

bù zì jiàn gù míng

bù zì shì gù zhāng

bù zì fá gù yǒu gōng

bù zì jīn gù cháng

fū wéi bù zhēng

gù tiān xià mò néng yǔ zhī zhēng

gǔ zhī suǒ wèi qǔ zé quán

qǐ xū yán zāi

chéng quán ér guī zhī

### Rhyming Pattern in pre-206BCE Phonetic Rhyme Groups

ok 屋 - ək 職 - on 元

ak 鐸 - ək 職 - əŋ 耕

e 支 - ək 職 - əŋ 耕

et 月 - ək 職 - in 真

au 宵 - ək 職 - ək 職

ai 歌 - ək 職 - ək 職

e 支 - ə 之 - əŋ 耕 - in 真 - uk 幽 - it 質 - oi 歌 - in 真 - a 魚 - ək 職

ə 之 - i 脂 - en 元

a 魚 - əŋ 陽

ə 之 - i 脂 - e 支

a 魚 - əŋ 陽

ə 之 - i 脂 - at 月

a 魚 - ə 之 - əŋ 東

ə 之 - i 脂 - em 侵

a 魚 - əŋ 陽

əŋ 陽 - ui 微 - ə 之 - əŋ 耕

a 魚 - in 真 - a 魚 - ak 鐸 - əŋ 蒸 - a 魚 - ə 之 - əŋ 耕

a 魚 - ə 之 - a 魚 - ut 物 - ok 屋 - ək 職 - on 元

əi 微 - a 魚 - an 元 - ə 之

əŋ 耕 - on 元 - ə 之 - ui 微 - ə 之

## Prosody

The opening stanza repeats the middle character “then” *tsʰək* 則 in all six lines, which serves to hold antithetical characters on both sides to introduce the theme of the verse. The structure heightens the dialectic. This sound forms a compound-rhyme with the ending sounds of the fifth and sixth lines, *tsʰək* 得 and *hək* 感, in reconstructed Old Chinese pronunciation. Likewise, the ending sounds, *teŋ-s* 正 and *leŋ* 盈, provide the foot-rhyme for the second and third lines respectively.

A long line follows raising the theme of the verse, “one.” Parallel construction continues in the second stanza by repeating the phrase – 不自 X 故 X, where all the lines rhyme with *Mraŋ* 明, *taŋ* 彰, *kʰoŋ* 功, and *Cə-N-traŋ* 長 at the end. Both lines of the penultimate stanza end with the sound *tsʰreŋ* 爭 and the last two lines of the concluding stanza share a foot-rhyme with the sounds *tsʰə* 哉 and *tə* 之.

## Annotation

In the first four lines, natural phenomena subtly teach us to be flexible, humble and understand the cyclical nature of the universe. The next two lines talk about the dichotomy of our feelings. “Little” implies possessing little. Laozi tells us that we can feel opulent by feeling satisfied, even as we possess little. Likewise, “abundance” means owning plenty, which stirs the mind into a frenzy.

In the ensuing long thematic line, “one” is the singular wholeness that emerges from Dao, before the appearance of polarity. Those who model after this unitary source are able to look beyond themselves to let go of pride, righteousness, imperiousness, and grandiosity. They walk away from conflict, so no one can confront them. In the penultimate stanza, Laozi reveals that at least one of the admonitions at the very beginning of the verse has come from antiquity. The last character of the concluding line “it” 之 refers to “one,” the theme of the verse.