The present chapter analyzes the composition of three Shangshu 尚書 chapters—“Gao Yao mo” 皋陶謨, “Yao dian” 堯典, and “Lüxing” 呂刑—which are among the most important and most puzzling chapters within the Shangshu.¹ The meaning of single characters, phrases, names, titles, and concepts and the punctuation of sentences in all three chapters have been discussed over and over, and there is little point in adding another trifle to this awesome corpus of scholarship.² Instead, I focus on an aspect that has been largely neglected by traditional and modern commentators—namely, the integrity of these texts.³ Traditional commentaries, by their very nature, have emphasized the coherence of Shangshu chapters, rendering the meaning of phrases and sentences intelligible and arguing for the consistency of larger textual units.⁴ Rather than following this synthetic approach, I put forth an analytical argument, pointing to inconsistencies within all three chapters. Starting with a detailed analysis of “Gao Yao mo,” I argue that this chapter consists of conflicting parts that appear to be in outright opposition to one another. I then go on to suggest that similar patterns may be detected in “Yao dian” and “Lüxing.” Finally, I discuss the question of what consequences these observations may have for the study of the Shangshu as a whole.

¹ Throughout, comparison to Martin Kern’s essay on “Yao dian” (chapter 1 in this volume) is suggested, which by other methods arrives at much the same conclusions as my essay.

² The summa of this scholarship is perhaps represented by the four volumes of Gu Jiegang and Liu Qiyu 2005.

³ Questions concerning textual integrity and methods of analysis have been extensively discussed in biblical studies; for a succinct introduction to the field, see Steck 1998: esp. 47–61.

⁴ Indeed, traditional commentaries go so far as to claim coherence for the entire Shangshu and even “a single, coherent message underlying all Five Classics” (Nylan 2001: 8). This view is not particular to the “Confucian” canon; in fact, the very concept of a canon “is the principle of a new form of cultural coherence” (Assmann 1999: 127) and one of the “most common commentarial assumption[s] regarding the character of canons in most traditions is that they are well ordered and coherent, arranged according to some logical, cosmological, or pedagogical principles” (Henderson 1991: 106).
"Gao Yao mo"

“Gao Yao mo” is the second chapter in the jinwen 今文 (modern-script) recension of the *Shangshu*, following “Yao dian.” Indeed, “Gao Yao mo” is in many ways parallel to “Yao dian”: (1) it has many exact parallels with the latter, starting with the first sentence, *yue ruo ji gu* 曰若稽古; (2) it shares some exclamations with the latter that are unique to these chapters, namely, *yu* 俞 and *du* 都; (3) both “Yao dian” and “Gao Yao mo” have curious textual histories, being made up of two distinct parts: in the case of “Gao Yao mo,” this is the “Gao Yao mo” proper (henceforth A) and “Yi ji” 益稷 (henceforth B). While in the ancient-script recension, these appear as separate chapters, they are integrated as a single “Gao Yao mo” in the modern-script recension. Therefore, it has been assumed that these parts indeed belong together organically.

However, a closer look at “Gao Yao mo” reveals breaks and inconsistencies. There seems to be no connection between short speeches that follow one another, prose alternates with rhymed passages, lists and songs interfere with narrative passages, new speakers, themes, and concepts appear abruptly, and some passages seem to be outright contradictory. In order to get a detailed impression of the chapter’s structure, it is helpful to first divide it into smaller literary units, which may be done as follows:

- **A1** Speech by Gao Yao about following virtue; question by Yu.
- **A2** Speech by Gao Yao about caring for oneself and for one’s family; acknowledged by Yu.
- **A3** Speech by Gao Yao about knowing men and giving peace to the people; answer by Yu.
- **(a)** Rhetorically styled passage about knowing men, governing, and giving peace to the people.
- **A4** Speech by Gao Yao about the nine virtues; question by Yu.

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5 “Da Yu mo” 大禹謨, which follows “Yao dian” and “Shun dian” in the ancient-script recension, has been convincingly shown to be a product of later times (see Yan Ruoqu 2010); it will therefore not be discussed here.

6 See Jiang Shanguo 1988: 32–33, citing Lü Zuqian, Gu Yanwu, Yan Ruoqu, and Hui Dong, who all agree on this issue.

7 The Chinese text follows the edition by Pi Xirui (1998), *Jinwen Shangshu kaozheng* 今文尚書考證. For reference purposes, the translation by Karlgren 1950 (with transliteration modified, parenthetical remarks omitted, and spelling adjusted to American English) is given in table 2.1. The same applies to “Yao dian” and “Lü xing” (tables 2.2 and 2.3), discussed below.

8 Passages I consider subsequent additions are marked with lowercase letters; see below for their discussion.