



# A Chinese Reading of the *Daodejing*

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Wang Bi's Commentary  
on the Laozi with *Critical  
Text and Translation*

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RUDOLF G. WAGNER

A Chinese Reading  
of  
the *Daodejing*

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in  
Chinese Philosophy and Culture

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Rudolf G. Wagner

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## Preface

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It has taken many years, and several other books, to finish this study of which the present book is the second of three separate volumes. In fact, the writing of this study took as many years as Wang Bi, its subject, lived, namely, twenty-three. Debts of gratitude for spiritual and material support and critical discussion have accumulated. The core ideas were developed in 1971 in Berkeley, where I spent a wonderful year as a Harkness Fellow. The first of many drafts of an extrapolative translation of the *Laozi* through the Wang Bi *Commentary* was begun then and continued in the following year in Berlin with a habilitation grant from the German Research Association (DFG). A position as assistant professor at the Free University of Berlin began a long detour. My education had been exclusively in the field of classical Chinese studies; the focus of the Berlin Institute was modern China. While gaining some expertise in this new field, work on Wang Bi remained active, but on the back burner. After the job in Berlin had run its course in 1977, I finished the first full draft of this study, which I submitted in 1980 in German as a habilitation thesis. It was passed in 1981 with my late teacher Professor Wolfgang Bauer (Munich) and Professor E. Zürcher (Leiden) as external referees. Cornell University was generous enough to invite me as a fellow into its Society for the Humanities in the same year, which resulted in a book on Taiping religion. In the subsequent years I worked as a research fellow at Harvard University and as a research linguist at the University of California at Berkeley on two books about the politics of modern Chinese fiction.

Only small segments of my Wang Bi study were published in English during these years, among them earlier versions of Chapters 1 and 3 of this book. In 1987, I began to teach at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, an institute in urgent need of a major development effort. A stipend from the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk made possible another year at Harvard, working now on the English version of this study. In the meantime, scholarship had revived in mainland China, and a sizable amount of new work had emerged. I was relieved that my core arguments seemed

solid enough to survive, and developed new sections, such as the analysis of Wang Bi's commentarial strategies contained in the first volume of this series, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, a full critical edition of the *Laozi* text used by Wang Bi, as well as of his commentary, and an analysis of the textual transmission of Wang's commentary, both of which are contained in this volume; all the rest was reworked. In short bursts of feverish work between long stretches of other equally feverish work, the study finally was completed.

It is published in the following three independent volumes, of which the present is the second: *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi*; *A Chinese Reading of the Daode jing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi. With Critical Text and Translation*; and *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)*.

Much of the emotional cost of such a study is not borne by the author but by those on whom this kind of work imposes painful deprivations. For my lovely daughters, Martha and Tina, this book had been a burden ever since they were born. I wish to thank them both, as well as their mother, for the many years of their bearing the burden of this work with me, and I apologize for the disruptions in their lives.

Catherine Vance Yeh, with her unflinching optimism and support, is thanked for the study's eventual completion—because of her efforts, this protracted, tumultuous, and often very frustrating work lost its grim colors and ended up enriching our lives.

My thanks to the foundations and universities that have generously supported this work at various stages, such as the DFG, the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk, and the universities of Cornell, Harvard, and Berkeley, which offered me research opportunities; to the members of the research group "Text and Commentary" in the Institute of Chinese Studies in Heidelberg, who gave much-needed spiritual support and critical advice; and to Dr. Johannes Kurz and Holger Kühnle who, during the last stages, helped as research assistants to finish the manuscript and the bibliography. In addition, Florence Trefethen eventually applied her firm and gentle pen in an effort to make my English more understandable and economical.

This book is dedicated to my daughters Martha and Tina Dohna as congratulations for completion of their own studies.

## Introduction

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During my work on early Chinese Buddhist thinkers, especially Shi Daoan 釋道安 (312–385) and Shi Huiyuan 釋慧遠 (334–416), I found that Buddhist arguments often were understood and expressed in a language originating in third-century Xuanxue 玄學, the "scholarly investigation of that which is dark," to use a cumbersome translation. Though the importance of Xuanxue in Chinese philosophy, including Chinese Buddhist philosophy and even Song-dynasty neo-Confucianism, is known, few detailed critical studies of particular texts and issues were available. It seemed natural to take up the study of Wang Bi (226–249), by all accounts the most brilliant of the Xuanxue philosophers.

There is a dearth of critical editions of Chinese texts and detailed studies of individual philosophical works. This is most pronounced for the works of commentators, even though China's best minds were working with this medium.

In studies of the Western classics, there has been a division of labor between scholars collating, editing, and perhaps translating texts and scholars mostly bent on analyzing the works thus made available. There were some scholars, however, such as Rudolf Bultman, in his work on the environment of the early Christian dispensation, who managed to span the entire breadth of the enterprise, from painstaking philological research, through broad analyses of religions, social, and political currents, to hermeneutical explorations of the internal logic of philosophical texts and religious beliefs. This model I set out to emulate, assisted by some years of studying hermeneutics with Hans-Georg Gadamer at the University of Heidelberg.

This volume is a workbook for the study of Wang Bi's writings on the *Laozi*. It includes studies on the textual history and available editions of Wang Bi's *Laozi* text, as well as Wang Bi's *Laozi* commentary, which show that the current editions are late, and very deficient; critical reconstructions and editions of both texts on the basis of internal evidence and new sources, including the new manuscript finds Mawangdui (1973) and

Guodian (1993); and fully annotated translations of Wang Bi's *Laozi* text, his *Commentary*, and his *The Structure of the Laozi's Subtle Pointers*, *Laozi weizhi lüeli*.

We have a great many translations of the *Laozi*, and even a few of Wang Bi's commentary. These *Laozi* translations are based on the privilege boldly claimed by the modern scholar to understand earlier Chinese philosophers better than anyone in the long tradition of Chinese commentaries. The present translation focuses on a Chinese reading of the *Laozi*, in particular on that by a young genius called Wang Bi, whose influence on later readings is unanimously and justly described as second to none other. It reads the *Laozi* through this commentary, and while this might arrive at a philosophical rather than historical reading, it certainly makes available an exciting contribution in terms of the sheer brilliance of the solutions it offers to many an enigmatic line in the *Laozi*. It is an even more exciting work in its own right by being a highly original philosophical approach that actively and philosophically engages with the giants of the past. The translation thus sets out to be extrapolative and to extract from Wang Bi's Commentary the exact way in which he read or constructed the *Laozi*.

For many things evident to Wang Bi's implied reader, a modern reader from whatever background—Chinese, Japanese or Western—will need an explicit hint. This might be an unannounced quotation from another part of the *Laozi* or from another text altogether, the implied subject of the entire chapter, or rhetorical information about the links between the different phrases. Mr. Haggett from SUNY Press has nicely matched Wang Bi's making sense of the *Laozi* phrases by putting on the cover of this volume a structure each node of which is in fact constituted by linkages to other nodes. The translation has tried to take seriously its duty of cultural mediation by supplying, in brackets, the relevant information. The purpose is to achieve a similar absence of ambiguity in the translation as Wang Bi managed to achieve through his commentary. The result is, I hope, a translation that is explicit enough to be falsifiable. In places that have remained hard to understand, I have gone out of my way to avoid the opaqueness of grammar, terminology, and rhetoric with which such passages often are rendered. A serious scholarly debate can only be based on translations that are in this sense falsifiable so that it can be proven that they are wrong where they are wrong.

Both the *Laozi* in Wang Bi's reading and Wang Bi himself turn out to be philosophers with important contributions to make. It is my hope to contribute to a deeper and more precise understanding of both through this critical edition, extrapolative reading, and falsifiable translation. It will be completed in the third volume through a study of the key philosophical issues treated in Wang Bi's writings on the *Laozi*.

# Chapter 1

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## The Wang Bi Recension of the *Laozi*

### INTRODUCTION

Since<sup>1</sup> early Tang times, the *Laozi* was transmitted mainly over two commentaries, those of Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) and Heshang gong 河上公. Most Tang excerpts, such as those included in the *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要 by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), on steles, and in manuscripts, are based on the Heshang gong text or, rather, on various Heshang gong texts.<sup>2</sup> By the early Tang, however, some scholars attempted to promote the Wang Bi text and *Commentary*, with Lu Deming 陸德明 (556–627), Fu Yi 傅奕 (554–639) and others making efforts to preserve it from distortions by the competing Heshang gong text. Lu Deming considered the latter text a fake, writing “Heshang (’s readings) are not those of the *Laozi*.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite these efforts, the Heshang gong commentary continued to dominate and had practically replaced the Wang Bi version by the Song dynasty. During the Song, Lu Deming’s efforts were taken up by scholars such as Fan Yingyuan 范應元, who published an edition explicitly comparing the various versions then circulating in an attempt to preserve the “old text.”<sup>4</sup>

In recent decades, Professor Rao Zongyi (Jao Tsung-i) has published, along with an extensive commentary, two Dunhuang manuscripts of parts of the *Laozi*. The Suo Dan 索統 manuscript, Chapters 51–81, is dated c.e. 270 and is closely linked to the Heshang gong text, while the second, the Xiang Er 想爾 manuscript, which contains the first part of the *Laozi*, is dated by various scholars anywhere between the second and fifth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Both of these manuscripts derive from the Celestial Master lineage of Taoism. The 1973 discovery of two *Laozi* manuscripts, in Mawangdui 馬王堆, near Changsha, both from tombs dating from the first decades of the Former Han, has in the main confirmed the stability of the *Laozi* text at that early date.<sup>6</sup> A 1993 discovery of three batches of *Laozi* segments in Chu 楚 script on bamboo slips in Guodiancun 郭店村 tomb No. 1 near Jingmen 荊門 in Hubei, dated by the editors to the “middle of the Zhan-guo period,” around 300 B.C.E., has now been published.<sup>7</sup> The Guodian texts, again, are rather close to the Mawangdui versions, coming as they do from the Chu area.

These finds allow us to trace the history of the *Laozi* with greater precision and have confirmed readings in quotations from the *Laozi* in some pre-Qin, Qin, and Former Han texts. Some readings, however, have not been confirmed, and we have reason to assume that the Guodian and Mawangdui manuscripts belong to one among several textual lineages existing alongside each other.

These discoveries have come on the heels of textual studies by Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732–1815) and Xu Dachun 徐大椿 (1693–1771), and more recently, Ma Xulun 馬敘倫 (1884–1970), who have all resumed the hearty denunciation of the Heshang gong text as a Taoist fake and have established the “Wang Bi version” as the “standard text.”<sup>8</sup> This “Wang Bi standard text,” however, is far from secure. The earliest available copies go back to Ming-dynasty editions, the earliest actual edition (in the *Zhengtong Daozang*) to the mid-Ming (1445). Scholars have noted discrepancies between quotations from the main text given in Wang Bi’s *Commentary* and the very *Laozi* text to which this *Commentary* is attached. Ma Xulun mentioned this as early as 1924.<sup>9</sup> Similar comments have been made by D. C. Lau and William Boltz, but the “Wang Bi version” continues to be used and even translated.<sup>10</sup>

It is odd, too, that Hatano Tarō 波多野太郎 did not consider the problems of Wang Bi’s *Laozi* text in his monumental compilation of the variant readings for the Wang Bi *Commentary*, and even the edition of Wang Bi’s works by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 never questions the *Laozi* text printed over current editions of Wang Bi’s *Commentary*.<sup>11</sup>

As far as I know, the only scholar to have seriously worked at reconstructing the Wang Bi *Laozi* is Shima Kuniō 島邦男. His *Rōshi kōsei* (1973) has the great advantage of having been published before the Mawangdui manuscripts became known. This provides an independent check on the accuracy of his assumptions and conjectures. Sadly, the work basically went unnoticed at the time in the flurry after the Mawangdui discovery, and Lou Yulie did not make use of it for his Wang Bi edition.<sup>12</sup>

## THE PROBLEM

There are various versions of the *textus receptus* of the *Laozi* text of Wang Bi, the oldest reproduced in the *Zhengtong Daozang*. These texts show only slight deviations, however, in all received versions of this Wang Bi *Laozi*, which will be referred to here as *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*, there is a conflict between the *Laozi* text used in the *Commentary* and the text printed above that *Commentary*.<sup>13</sup>

This conflict appears in the following forms:

1. In his commentaries, Wang Bi frequently quotes the *Laozi* with formulae such as “that is why [the *Laozi*] says,” or simply, “that is why.” There are cases where the subsequent quotation deviates from the *Laozi* text printed immediately above this commentary. One such example is found in *Laozi* 6:

*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*: 是謂天地 根  
*Wang Bi Comm.*: 故謂 “ ”之 “ ”

2. Wang Bi quotes one *Laozi* passage in his commentary to a different *Laozi* passage, with differences between *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* and the wording in this commentary.

*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* (2.2): 聖人處無爲之事  
*Wang Bi Comm.* (on 17.1): “ ”居 “ ” “ ” “ ”

3. Wang Bi quotes the *Laozi* in his other writings, in words that differ from those in the received text of the Wang Bi *Laozi*. One such example comes from his *Commentary to the Zhouyi* (*Zhouyi zhu* 周易注).<sup>14</sup>

*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* (58.6): 人之迷 其日固 久  
*Zhouyi zhu*: “ ” “ ”也 “ ” “ ”已 “ ”矣

4. Wang Bi's *Commentary* uses elements of the *Laozi* that imply wording in the main text different from the wording in the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*.

*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* (1.2): 無名天地之始  
*Wang Bi Comm.*: 道以無名無形始成萬物  
*Wang Bi Comm.* (on 21.7): 以無名閱萬物之始

The expression *tiandi* 天地 of the received text of the *Laozi* neither occurs in the commentary to the passage itself nor in the reference to it in the commentary on Chapter 21. Both comments suggest, instead, that *wanwu* 萬物 was the reading in the *Wang Bi Laozi*. That sloppy quoting by Wang Bi accounts for these differences should be dismissed for two reasons. First, the readings suggested by the *Commentary* and the other texts by Wang Bi find strong support in the available “old manuscripts,” including the Guodian and Mawangdui. Second, the philosophical authority of the text in the eyes of Wang Bi, who obviously took the exact wording very seriously, would seem to preclude sloppy quoting. We are thus left with the following preliminary conclusions: first, the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* is not identical to the *Laozi* text actually used by Wang Bi, the *Wang Bi Laozi*; second, another *Laozi* text has been superimposed over Wang Bi’s *Commentary*, while the *Commentary* itself has not been changed to conform. That this reflects careless editing has to be dismissed as well. The extreme importance that the different traditions attached to “their” versions as being uniquely true and authoritative would seem to preclude this possibility, but why was the *Wang Bi Commentary* not changed? The only explanation seems to be that it had an authority of its own. While the *Laozi* text was adapted to fit the dominant school, Wang Bi retained his credentials as a philosopher in his own right, the text of his *Commentary* remaining untouched. Obviously, we are now called upon to reconstruct the *Wang Bi Laozi*, to try to figure out how the changes in the received text came about, and to establish the *Wang Bi Laozi* in its proper position within the *stemma codicum*.

## WANG BI’S ORIGINAL RECENSION OF THE *LAOZI*

Since it is possible that Wang Bi’s *Laozi* differed greatly from all known *Laozi* texts, we will have to secure a fair number of firm readings of the *Wang Bi Laozi* before looking at other versions of the *Laozi* text. For evidence about the *Wang Bi Laozi*, we will draw on the following sources:

1. Wang Bi’s quotations from the *Laozi* in his *Commentary* and other writings (with the provision that these might have problems in their transmission);
2. Inferences based on the wording in Wang Bi’s *Commentary*;
3. Quotations of *Laozi* passages with Wang’s commentary in pre-Tang and perhaps early Tang texts, on the assumption that in these cases the wording of the *Wang Bi Laozi* was used;

4. Explicit statements by Lu Deming in his *Laozi Daodejing yinyi* about the readings of the “Wang Bi text” available to him (a text, however, that might already have undergone some changes);<sup>15</sup> and
5. Explicit statements by Fan Yingyuan in his *Laozi Daodejing guben jizhu*, relating his Wang Bi *Laozi* manuscript to one or several “Old Manuscript(s).”

These are listed in a decreasing degree of reliability, however, the reliability of the external sources (quotations and explicit statements about the Wang Bi text) can be enhanced if they coincide with the internal evidence in many places.

In seventy-nine passages, the wording in Wang Bi’s *Commentary* deviates from the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* (see Appendix A). In all but one, the reading suggested by the *Commentary* also can be found in the Guodian and Mawangdui manuscripts, texts such as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, *Wenzi* 文子, or *Zhangguo ce* 戰國策, dated manuscripts such as the Suo Dan manuscript of c.E. 270, or the pre-Tang Xiang Er manuscript from Dunhuang, or the “Old Manuscripts” on which Fu Yi 傅奕 (554–639) and Fan Yingyuan based their own editions. In short, it can be assumed that these readings represent the text of the *Laozi* known to Wang Bi.

On the basis of these confirmed readings, we can proceed to check on the reliability of the other sources for the reconstruction of the *Wang Bi Laozi*. There are hundreds of phonetic glosses by Lu Deming, but only three deviate from the readings common to all strands of the received tradition. In those three cases, the deviant reading is corroborated by either Fu Yi’s or Fan Yingyuan’s “Old Manuscript” or by Wang Bi’s own commentary.<sup>16</sup>

A number of Lu Deming’s readings have to be discarded, however, because strong evidence supports other readings for the *Wang Bi Laozi*. It is apparent that Lu’s text had already undergone some changes. Furthermore, as noted by Hatano Tarō, the difference between quotations of Lu Deming given in Fan Yingyuan’s *Laozi Daodejing guben jizhu* and the *textus receptus* of Lu Deming’s *Laozi Daodejing yinyi* indicates that the latter text also has been tampered with.<sup>17</sup>

In forty-seven places, Fan Yingyuan provides information about the relationship of the “Old Manuscript(s)” available to him with the *Wang Bi Laozi* in his hands (see Appendix B). We do not know the exact origin of Fan’s “Old Manuscript” or the criteria that prompted him to mark the differences and coincidences in those places but not in others. From his remarks, we learn that the Wang Bi *Laozi* recension in his hands agreed with his “Old Manuscript” in all but three places; in each case, the deviation concerns only one character.<sup>18</sup>

The best extant version of the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* differs from the reading given by Fan in no less than thirty-seven places. In twenty cases (2.4, 10.4, 19.1, 20.5, 20.9, 21.6, 28.7, 34.4, 35.3, 38.2, 38.2, 41.15, 42.2, 45.2, 48.3, 49.4, 51.4, 57.3, 59.2, and 65.4) Wang Bi's own comments reveal unequivocally the original reading of the *Wang Bi Laozi*. In thirteen of these twenty cases, the reading given by Fan for his *Wang Bi Laozi* is the original one, while the received text is corrupt. In three cases (19.1, 42.2, and 65.4), both Fan's text and the received text are wrong. In only four cases is the received text supported by internal evidence (20.5, 20.9, 21.6, and 45.2). Indirect summaries by Wang Bi of the *Laozi*'s wording permit educated guesses about his text. These reveal twelve more places where Fan's *Wang Bi Laozi* is superior to the received text (see Appendix B). In the remaining places, there is either no clear evidence, or Fan's reading is improbable. We can conclude that the *Wang Bi Laozi* recension in Fan's hands was rather close to the original: twenty-five out of thirty-two verifiable places favor the reading in Fan's text. As for the quotations in late-Han and early-medieval material, they mostly occur in other commentaries such as Zhang Zhan's 張湛 (fourth century) *Commentary on the Liezi* 列子注, Li Shan's 李善 (d. 689) *Commentary on the Wenxuan* 文選注, or Yan Shigu's 顏師古 (581–645) *Commentary on the Hanshu* 漢書注. No unified conclusion can be reached about them, since some date from a period when the original Wang Bi text was already undergoing changes. Their readings can be accepted only if strongly buttressed by internal and supporting evidence. Shima Kuniō has collected many of these explicit quotations, however, such citations often are not explicit, so locating them can be a matter of serendipity.

We now have a great number of authenticated specifications of the *Wang Bi Laozi*. The high incidence of deviance from the received text suggests that it should be abandoned as the basis for a reconstruction of the *Wang Bi Laozi* if we find another text or textual family where the coincidence with authenticated passages of the *Wang Bi Laozi* is substantially higher. We can already conclude from the differences between the *Wang Bi Laozi* and Lu Deming's *Wang Bi Laozi*, and the even greater difference in Fan Yingyuan's *Wang Bi Laozi*, that the *Wang Bi Laozi* gradually has been superseded by other readings. A second question follows from this conclusion. Is there a text or group of texts that can be identified as having gradually superseded the *Wang Bi Laozi*? We can state from the outset that we do not have a text identical to the *Wang Bi Laozi* Urtext in all authenticated passages to use as a replacement for the received text. Furthermore, there is no extant text other than that including Wang Bi's *Commentary* that is identical to the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*. This excludes the possibility that, at some point, a completely different *Laozi*

text had been superimposed over the old Wang Bi *Commentary*. Things are, as usual, messy. Where can we find the closest approximation to the *Wang Bi Laozi*?

The debate about the Mawangdui and now the Guodian manuscripts has practically obliterated the fact that the search for the “old” and true *Laozi* has been going on for some time. To the natural decay of books written on bamboo strips or silk, to the fires periodically destroying entire private or imperial libraries, to the worms happily feeding on the newly discovered repository for culture’s written products, namely, paper, was added time and again the official destruction of books. Since the destruction during the Qin, this has continuously received unfavorable comments and has spurred and legitimized official and private efforts at book retrieval. Throughout Chinese history, scholars and rich and mighty men have chased and occasionally produced “old manuscripts.” Of Prince Liu De 劉德 (d. 128 B.C.E.), Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) wrote:

He honed his scholarship, was well versed in olden times, and sought truth from facts. When he received a good book from the common folk, he would inevitably make a fair copy for them while keeping the original, and would add presents of gold and cloth to attract them. The effect of this was that people from all directions who were versed in the arts did not consider a thousand miles too far [to come to him], and sometimes there were those who had old books from their forefathers which they often would proffer to the prince. Therefore, he got hold of a great many books, as many in fact as the Han Court itself. At the time, Liu An 劉安, the Prince of Huainan, was also fond of books, but what he attracted were for the most part empty babblers. The books that came into Prince Liu De’s possession were all pre-Qin books in the old scripts. For the likes of the *Zhouguan* 周官, the *Shangshu* 尚書, the *Li* 禮, the *Liji* 禮記, the *Mengzi* 孟子 and the *Laozi*, he had all the classical texts, the transmissions (*zhuan* 傳), the explanations (*shuo* 說), and the records (*ji* 記), and what the seventy disciples [of Confucius] had to say [about them].<sup>19</sup>

We have no further record of his pre-Qin *Laozi* text that must have predated the Mawangdui manuscripts. Seven centuries later, Fu Yi was a fervent collector of *Laozi* manuscripts, eventually publishing his own *Daodejing guben* 道德經古本, a critical conflation of those that he had perused. He also wrote a short history of the discovery of these texts and their transmission. Although this is lost, it forms, along with Lu Xisheng’s

陸希聲 (late ninth century) preface to his *Daode zhenjing zhuan* 道德真經傳, the basis of Xie Shouhao's 謝守灝 *Hunyuan shengji* 混元聖紀, with a preface dated in the third month of 1191.<sup>20</sup> The excerpt given there of Fu Yi's report about the various *Laozi* manuscripts he had seen and perused is again quoted from Xie Shouhao in Peng Si's 彭耜 (fl. 1229) *Daode zhenjing jizhu zashuo* 道德真經集註雜說. Peng Si seems to have had a better version of Xie Shouhao's text than that preserved in the Daozang, and he furthermore indicates that in his version Xie Shouhao mentioned the source from which he had taken this quotation, namely, Du Guangting's 杜廣庭 (850–933) now lost *The Precious Record of Lord Lao*, (*Laojun baolu* 老君寶錄).<sup>21</sup> I shall make use of Peng's text. What survives of Fu Yi's report deserves a translation in full.<sup>22</sup>

Fu Yi of the Tang [dynasty] has carefully examined all manuscripts [of the *Laozi*] and has investigated the number of characters [each of them] had, and he said: “As to the Xiang Yu 項羽 (–202 B.C.E.) Concubine Manuscript, a man from Pengcheng [city in Shandong], who opened the tomb of a concubine of Xiang Yu's in the 5th year of the era *wuping* 武平 of [Northern] Qi [i. e. 574] found it. As to the Anqiu Wangzhi 安丘望之 [fl. 30 B.C.E.)<sup>23</sup> Manuscript [Xie Shouhao writes Wang An Qiu Zhi 望安丘之 here], [i. e. a *Laozi* text with a commentary by Anqiu Wangzhi], it came into the possession of the Daoist Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (363–448) during the *taihé* 太和 era of the [Northern] Wei (477–500).<sup>24</sup> As for the Heshang zhangren 河上丈人 Manuscript [i.e., the manuscript over the commentary by Heshang zhangren], the retired scholar from [Northern] Qi, Qiu Yue 仇嶽, handed it down.

These three manuscripts all have 5,722 characters and are related to [the *Laozi* text which forms the basis of] the Hanfeizi 韓非子 chapter “Yu Lao” 喻老. Furthermore, there is also the Luoyang Official Manuscript (*guanben* 官本) with 5,635 characters. As for Wang Bi Manuscripts, there is one with 5,683 characters and one with 5,610. As for Heshang gong 河上公 Manuscripts, there is one with 5,355 [Xie Shouhao: 5,555] characters and one with 5,090 characters. The [manuscripts transmitted over] the various commentaries all have greater or lesser differences, but as time went on, each [school] believed only in [the manuscript] handed down [by their own people], or they mixed them up with manuscripts from other people. Therefore, there are errors and mistakes, and there is no unity.

In the *Shiji* 史記, Sima Qian 司馬遷 says that Laozi published a book that talks about the meaning of Dao and De, and has “five thousand plus words” (*wuqian yu yan* 五千餘言).<sup>25</sup> “Five thousand plus” means more than five thousand but less than six thousand. When the Daoists today say that the *Laozi* is a text with “five thousand characters,” they refer to the general volume 大數 [but not to the text’s having exactly 5,000 characters].<sup>26</sup>

Fu Yi’s account shows that the endeavor to find the “original” *Laozi* has a long history. We do not know the exact basis of his own “Old MS” edition, but it is probable that it is an attempt to establish a critical text through the comparison with the seven “old MSS” that he managed to peruse. Lu Deming operated in much the same vein. His effort to establish the correct reading of the *Laozi* assumed that the notation in the manuscripts before the reform of writing was largely phonetic and that, given the large number of loan graphs in old manuscripts, the meaning would only become clear once the reading had been established. In his own (badly corrupted) notes, he refers to the *Laozi* texts given over different commentators, and also to a *Laozi* text on bamboo slips, *jian wen* 簡文, which must have been a Han or even a pre-Han dynasty manuscript.<sup>27</sup> Editors such as Fu Yi also made efforts to stabilize the text. Evidence of this attempt is to be found in the notation, in the Mawangdui B manuscript, of the number of characters in each of the two *pian* 篇.

Fu Yi read and compared these seven manuscripts, counting their characters in the process. The discovery of the Mawangdui manuscripts indicated that, at least since Qin-dynasty efforts at cutting off certain textual traditions altogether, the statement of the number of characters the copied text contained was a device both to enhance textual stability and to define textual lineage. The number of characters indicated to which kind of lineage a given manuscript belonged. *More sinico*, Fu Yi’s narrative sequence gives us a chronological order for the writing (not the discovery or copy) of these manuscripts. The Xiang Yu Concubine Manuscript must be the oldest, as Xiang Yu died in 202 B.C.E. and must have still been alive for the concubine to receive such a lavish tomb. At least one of the texts from this tomb, a *Guwen Xiaojing* 古文孝經 manuscript survived to the early Song, where it formed one of the sources of reference for Xia Song’s 夏竦 (985–1051) *Guwen sisheng yun* 古文四聲韻, a work completed in 1044 that provided under standard characters the forms in which they were written in a variety of old manuscripts and inscriptions.<sup>28</sup> Sadly, no work has hitherto been done on the texts in old script used in early Song handbooks

that set out to provide help and guidance in the reading of old inscriptions and manuscripts to the rapidly growing number of scholars and officials fascinated with the “authentic” traces of China’s past. Among the twelve “old texts” listed in the preface to Guo Zhongshu’s 郭忠恕 (tenth century) *Han jian* 汗簡 as having been used by him, there is an “old *Laozi*” 老子 or rather “*Laozi* in the old script,” but I have not been able to locate a direct quotation from this *Laozi* edition in his work.<sup>29</sup> This is different with Xia Song’s 夏竦 (985–1051) *Guwen sisheng yun*, a book that used the *Han jian* and many new materials.<sup>30</sup> Xia makes use of two old *Laozi* manuscripts, namely, a “*Laozi* in old script,” 古文老子, and a *Daode jing* but does not seem to have had access to the *Laozi* manuscript from the tomb of Xiang Yu’s concubine.<sup>31</sup> In his preface, Xia talks about the texts in old script, their discovery and transmission. Since the Wei and Jin dynasties the capacity to read these texts all but disappeared. However, among a few devotees, the interest and skill were preserved, as well as some texts. The son of Li Yangbing 李陽冰 (ca. 713–ca. 785), a relative of Li Bo’s and a poet as well as seal script specialist in his own right,<sup>32</sup> had a *Xiaojing* 孝經 and another text in the old script in his family possession. Obviously unable to read it, he gave it to none other than Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), but at this time Han Yu had not discovered his interest in rediscovering the “authentic” pre-Buddhist China and, seemingly unable to read it, he brought it to the attention of Master Gui 歸公 (Gui Deng? 登) who “loved antiquity and was able to understand it.” The manuscript therefore was bequeathed to him. While nothing about the origin of Xia’s “*Laozi* in the old script” is known, he details some of the transmission of the *Daode jing* in two *juan* written with lacquer on bamboo strips, a *qishu* 漆書, to which he had access. It had been in the possession of another great specialist in old script, the Heavenly Master Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735). A copy of this manuscript from the hands of another Taoist was stored on Tiantai shan and eventually retrieved during the Song dynasty’s efforts to assemble reliable texts so that Xia had access to it.<sup>33</sup> Sadly, we still lack a critical study of these two texts, or rather of the individual characters quoted from them in Xia Song’s book. It is possible that Fan Yingyuan’s “Old MS” had a connection to either of these two texts.

We return to Fu Yi’s list. The Xiang Yu Concubine Manuscript, it should be remembered, is thus older than both Mawangdui manuscripts, which date from the first decades of the second century B.C.E. Next comes a surprising lacuna in Fu Yi’s holdings, namely, the absence of a Zhuang Zun 莊遵 (= Yan Zun 嚴遵) manuscript, the original of which would have predated his next manuscript, the late first century B.C.E. Anqiu Wangzhi manuscript that ended up in the hands of the famous Daoist Kou Qianzhi of the Northern Wei. The text here has an impossible era name. The *taihe*

太和 era began in 477, but Kou had died in 448. It must be the era *yanhe* 延和 (432–435) or *taiping* 太平 (440) under Taiwu di.<sup>34</sup> The Heshang zhangren manuscript first surfaced after the founding of the Northern Qi in 550. As it is mentioned before Wang Bi, Fu Yi dates this text into the later Han dynasty. He rejects the link between a Heshang zhangren of the Zhangguo period mentioned in the *Shiji*<sup>35</sup> and this text, which had been made by the Liang dynasty book catalogue.<sup>36</sup> Fu Yi noted the closeness of the three oldest manuscripts in his hands to the version used in the *Hanfeizi*. Their identical number of characters (5,722) points to a surprisingly high degree of standardization but is not close enough to the aggregate number given for the two parts of the *Laozi* in Mawangdui B, namely, 3,041 plus 2,426 = 5,467, to warrant an argument that the Mawangdui manuscripts represent a text close to these three manuscripts.

The Luoyang Official Manuscript again is mentioned before Wang Bi. As Luoyang was the capital of the Later Han dynasty, this Luoyang Official Manuscript must have been an uncommented Laozi manuscript from the Later Han imperial library. The Wang Bi texts come next, followed by the youngest and last of the manuscripts worthy of any consideration, that of Heshang gong. Here again, Fu Yi rejects the Liang dynasty book catalogue that dates this commentary to the time of the Han emperor Wen 文 (red. 179–156 B.C.E.).<sup>37</sup>

Since Fu Yi counted the number of characters in the Heshang zhangren manuscripts, and thus must have read them, it can be inferred that he saw a substantial difference both in age and structure between the Heshang zhangren and the Heshang gong manuscripts. The criticism voiced in the last section evidently refers to Ge Xuan's 葛玄 (164–244) actual reduction of the *Laozi* to exactly 5,000 characters, which Fu Yi considers an all too verbatim reading of the remark by Sima Qian. Fu Yi's own "Guben" or "Old Manuscript" does not fit any of the numbers mentioned above. Without further evidence, we have to assume that he tried to arrive at a critical edition using all available early manuscripts at his disposal, and that he chose the best corroborated reading. The same is true for Fan Yingyuan. We know nothing of the origin of his "Old Manuscript(s)," but its relationship to Fu Yi's is so close that one must treat them like Shima Kuniō, as closely related members of a single family of texts. They are even more closely related than the Mawangdui A and B manuscripts. The "Old Manuscripts" of Fu and Fan differ from each other in about 100 places, but their common deviations from other extant texts are substantially higher.

Of extant texts, we have a fair number to consider in reconstructing a new *Wang Bi Laozi*. First, the two Mawangdui manuscripts from the early Han, closely linked, show more deviations from other known texts

than against each other. In many cases, the Guodian texts support their reading. Next, Zhuang (Yan) Zun's 莊 (嚴) 遵 *Laozi zhu* 老子注, a work lost since the Tang, is preserved only in quotations. Zhuang (Yan) Zun, who lived at the end of the Former Han, also wrote a *Laozi zhihui* 老子指歸, which, except for the first six chapters, is preserved in the Zhengtong Daozang under the title *Daode zhenjing zhihui* 道德真經指歸.<sup>38</sup> This text has been little studied and often has been regarded as a fake, however, Shima Kuniō shows convincingly that many of the readings of the *Laozi* inserted in the *Laozi zhihui* are matched by other early evidence. In fact, he took the readings from *Laozi zhihui* for the second part of the *Laozi* as the basis of his own critical edition against which he defines the deviations of the other manuscripts.<sup>39</sup> Third is the *Xiang Er Commentary* 想爾注 to the *Laozi*, a Dunhuang manuscript, first mentioned by Lu Deming, who says that one tradition claims that it was written by Zhang Lu 張魯 (d. 216) of the Celestial Master school. In this regard, the *Maoshan zhi* 茅山誌, by Liu Dabin 劉大彬 of the Tang dynasty, preserves a lengthy quote from Tao Hongjing's 陶宏景 (456–535) *Dengzhen yin jue* 登真隱訣:

The Hermit says: “As for the *Daodejing* by Laozi there is the old manuscript of Zhang Zhennan 張鎮南 handcopied by the Master of the Dark, the Immortal Yang 楊. “Zhennan” refers to [Zhang Lu 張陸], the third generation descendant of the Han-dynasty Heavenly Master [Zhang] Lu [張] 魯. [Zhang Lu 張陸] was appointed General of Zhennan by Wudi of the Wei dynasty [i.e., Cao Cao 曹操]. That this, the so-called “5,000 text,” *wuqian wen* 五千文, has 5,000 characters, is based on counting the internally [transmitted] classic, *neijing* 內經, of the Master by Inheritance [i.e., Zhang Lu] with its 4,999 characters. The one [character] missing is in the formula “30 spokes . . .” 三十輻 that should be written [with one character less as] 卅輻. One should follow the abbreviated form, not the standard form. The adherents [of the Celestial Master school] do not preserve this authentic form [of the *Laozi*]; today [they] transmit a text in 5,000 characters as the standard text. It has a first and a second *pian*, and no divisions into *zhang*.<sup>40</sup>

The Xiang Er manuscript does write the 三十 in *Laozi* 11 in the form 卅, but it certainly had more than 5,000 characters in its *Laozi* text. The hand-copied manuscript by Yang Xi 楊羲 (active between 326 and 335 on Maoshan) seems to be the antecedent of the version in 5,000 characters commonly associated with Ge Xuan 葛玄. Finally, there is the Heshang

gong *Commentary* with its own *Laozi* text or texts. Quotations from the Heshang gong recension indicate that this, too, was a textual family with a variety of readings. Shima Kuniō cites two new pieces of evidence to prove that the Heshang gong *Commentary* must have been written in the fifth century. First, he finds the first verbatim quote in Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景 (452–536) writings. Second, its readings of the characters *che* 轍 and *hui* 恢, written in most *Laozi* manuscripts as *che* 徹 and *tan* 惔, respectively, link the text to the *Laozi jiangshu* 老子講述 by King Wu 武 (464–549) of the Liang.<sup>41</sup> Since he also has discovered loans in the Heshang gong *Commentary* from the *Commentary* of Gu Huan 顧歡 (fl. late fifth century), he concludes that it was written “late in the Six Dynasties period,” which would coincide with the dating implied in Fu Yi's narrative.<sup>42</sup> “This,” he writes, “is proof that the Heshang gong manuscript is not an old manuscript.”<sup>43</sup>

However, in his *Rōshi kōsei* 老子校正 Shima Kuniō seems unaware of the Suo Dan manuscript, published in 1955. As noted by Rao Zongyi, this dated manuscript supports many of the singular readings of the Heshang gong recension.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Shima Kuniō does not mention an indirect quotation (albeit of a passage not found in the extant Heshang gong *Commentary*) in Gao You's 高誘 (late second century) *Commentary to the Huainanzi*.<sup>45</sup> He also fails to mention a quotation that occurs in Xie Zong's 謝宗 (d. c.E. 243) *Commentary to Zhang Heng's* 張衡 *Dongjing fu* 東京賦, included in the *Wenxuan*.<sup>46</sup> It must be added, however, that the reliability of this commentary is open to question, since it contains a quotation from Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) *Commentary on the Erya* 爾雅, a text written about sixty years after Xie Zong's death.<sup>47</sup> Whatever the final verdict on the Heshang gong *Laozi*, its prominent role during the Tang makes it a candidate for the text or group of texts that gradually superseded the *Wang Bi Laozi*.

Based on the certified elements of the *Wang Bi Laozi* on the one hand, and the authenticated old versions of the *Laozi*, on the other hand, we shall look for complete texts to replace the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* as a basis for the *Wang Bi Laozi*. As shown in Appendix B, the *Wang Bi Laozi* in the hands of Fan Yingyuan closely resembled his own “Old Manuscript,” coinciding in forty-four out of the forty-seven places where he provides information. The “Old Manuscript” of Fan Yingyuan also is closely linked to Fu Yi's “Old Manuscript.” Given the ongoing hunt for old manuscripts, there is no reason to believe that the texts used by these two were younger than the Mawangdui manuscripts. The Peking editors of the Mawangdui manuscripts recognized the strong affinity between them and Fu Yi's “Old Manuscript,” and they provided a synoptic version, juxtaposing Mawang-

dui A, Mawangdui B and Fu Yi's "Old MS," but not the much more popular *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*.<sup>48</sup> Strangely enough, Gao Ming's 高明 otherwise very careful reedition of the Mawangdui manuscripts does not follow this practice but goes back to an uncritically accepted *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* as a reference text to compare the Mawangdui manuscripts.<sup>49</sup>

Together, the two "Old Manuscripts" differ from the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* in about 300 places, but they differ from the Heshang gong tradition even more. Therefore, I think that we can assume that the two "Old Manuscripts" together represent a text much closer than the *Receptus* to the *Wang Bi Laozi*. Of the approximately 100 deviations between the two "Old Manuscripts," internal evidence indicates the preferable reading in about sixty places, about half for each side. The three or four cases where the *Wang Bi Laozi* deviates from both "Old Manuscripts" are listed by Lu Deming and Fan Yingyuan.

The *Wang Bi Laozi* is approximately "in the middle" of the two "Old Manuscripts," the three forming a very close textual family. They share a number of deviations against the Guodian and the Mawangdui manuscripts; however, these were written at a time when the connection between written characters and words was still highly unstable. A comparison even between these two sets of texts shows an increasing stability of this word/character relationship.<sup>50</sup> Both texts, therefore, show only moderate interest in the accuracy of the written word. They operate on the assumption that reading largely means identifying spoken words from the graphs. As long as they achieve this goal, all graphs are legitimate, whether operating through a phonetic loan such as 又 for 有, or a graphic variant. Writing stabilized only during the following generations, and the number of written characters with such stabilized connections to words grew dramatically. Some of the thrill coming with this "new medium" can be seen in the plethora of new written characters paraded through the *fu*-poetry of the Han. Due to this instability of the written word, the number of deviations between the "Old MSS" edited (and standardized) by Fu Yi and Fan Yingyuan against the Guodian and Mawangdui manuscripts is extremely high; once these phonetic and graphic variants are eliminated, the common elements dominate. The "Old MSS" and the two Mawangdui manuscripts have many fewer deviations from each other than jointly from the Heshang gong tradition.

Shima Kuniō has not made explicit the principles that he followed in reconstructing his *Wang Bi Laozi*. He constructs a textual family for the *Wang Bi Laozi* based on the text over the *Daozang* Wang Bi edition and other core pieces of the *textus receptus*. As I have shown, the substantial changes wrought on this *Laozi* version make it a weak candidate for the

base text of the *Wang Bi Laozi*. In fact, the textual family to which the *Wang Bi Laozi* belongs has two close members, the “Old MSS” of Fu Yi and Fan Yingyuan, and two more distant members, the Mawangdui manuscripts, with the Guodian manuscripts being further relatives. In his editing work, however, Shima Kuniō pays less attention to the textual family than to the specific evidence at hand: he uses (1) internal evidence from Wang Bi’s commentary (in which his contribution is greatest), and (2) external evidence from what he variously calls a “Later Han text” or a “Han Wei text.” This second “text” is reconstructed on the basis of quotations from other texts of the period as well as from other *Laozi* versions that he believes circulated at the time. While his references to Zhuang (Yan) Zun, in particular, lend some substance to this reconstruction, two points seem to contradict it. First, the various schools and traditions disputed the authenticity of each other’s *Laozi*. These schools often formed fairly cohesive and exclusive intellectual communities; it is probable that at any given time different *Laozi* texts existed in different schools and regions without crossings paths or influencing each other. Second, neither the Zhuang (Yan) Zun nor the Xiang Er and Suo Dan manuscripts (nor, for that matter, the Heshang gong version) are supported by the internal evidence of Wang Bi’s commentary as serious candidates for the original *Wang Bi Laozi*. On the other hand, the “critical editions” by Fu and Fan on the basis of “Old Texts” fulfill this requirement, even though put together much later. By constructing a textual family for the *Wang Bi Laozi* that does not qualify for this role, Shima Kuniō deprived himself of the fruits of his own labor, because he allowed himself to change this *receptus* only in those places where he had clear and particular proof and never questioned the *receptus* as a whole.

## SUPERIMPOSITION

Having established a high degree of internal cohesion within the group of texts made up by the *Wang Bi Laozi*, the two “Old Manuscripts” and, less closely, the Mawangdui manuscripts, we shall deal now with the direction in which the *Wang Bi Laozi* was altered. Of the twenty-five places where the original text available to Fan Yingyuan is definitely superior to the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*, no fewer than twenty-two were changed in favor of the Heshang gong version.<sup>51</sup> Some examples may be cited.

## PARTICLES

*Laozi 19.1*

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	此三者	以爲文	不足
Heshang gong:	" " "	" " "	" "
<i>Wang Bi Comm.:</i>	" " "	" " "	而未足
Old MSS (Fu):	" " "	" " "	" " 也
Old MSS (Fan):	" " "	" " "	不 " "
Guodian A:	"言	" " 貞	不 "
Mawangdui A:	此 " "	也 " "	文 未 "
Mawangdui B:	" " " "	" " "	" " "
Xiang Er:	" " "	" " "	" " "
Pei Wei 裴頠 (267–300):	" " "	" " "	" " 52

From this it is clear that Wang Bi's *Laozi* must have read 此三者以爲文而未足, coinciding with Fu Yi's "Old Manuscript" as well as in the 未 with the Mawangdui manuscripts. The received text was apparently changed in favor of the Heshang gong text.

*Laozi 48.1*

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	爲學	日益
Heshang gong:	" "	" "
Zhuang (Yan) Zun:	" "	" "
Wang Bi quote in <i>Comm.</i> on <i>Laozi 20.1:</i>	" " 者	" "
Old MSS (Fu and Fan):	" " "	" "
Mawangdui B:	" " "	" "
Guodian B:	" " "	" "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* must have read 爲學者日益, coinciding with the two "Old MSS" and the two Mawangdui manuscripts as opposed to the texts of Heshang gong and Zhuang (Yan) Zun (as well as manuscripts from the Xiang Er tradition not cited here).

## TERMS

*Laozi* 1.2

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus</i> :	無名	天地之始
Heshang gong:	" "	" " " "
Xiang Er:	" "	" " "
Old MSS (Fu and Fan):	" "	" " " "
<i>Wang Bi Comm.</i> :	未形無名之時則爲萬物之始	
Mawangdui A and B:	無名	萬物之始也
<i>Shiji</i> 史記 127.3220:	無名者	萬物之始也

The *Wang Bi Laozi* must have read 無名萬物之始, supported by the *Commentary*, Mawangdui A and B, and the *Shiji* quotation. The *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* derives from the Heshang gong version, which here is matched by the Suo Dan version and even the two “Old MSS.”

*Laozi* 2.4

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus</i> :	萬物作焉而不辭						
Heshang gong:	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
<i>Wang Bi</i> quotation on 17.1:	"	"	"	"	"	"	爲始
Old MSS (Fan):	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Old MSS (Fu):	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
Guodian A:	"	"	"	"	弗	"	
Mawangdui B:	"	"	昔	"	"	"	"

The *Wang Bi Laozi* must have read 萬物作焉而不爲始, which involves a substantial change in meaning from that given in the received text. Against the entire family, Wang Bi’s *Laozi* has, however, the 焉.

*Laozi* 20.1

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus</i> :	善之與惡	相去若何
Heshang gong:	" " " "	" "何若
<i>Wang Bi Comm.</i> :	美	" " " "
Old MSS (Fu):	" " " "	" " " "
Old MSS (Fan):	善 " " "	" " " "
Xiang Er:	美 " " "	" " " "
Mawangdui A and B:	" " "其	" " " "
Guodian B:	" " " "	" " " "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* must have read 美之與惡相去何若, supported in the *mei*, 美, for *shan*, 善, and the 何若 for 若何 by Fu Yi’s “Old MSS,” the

Guodian B, and the two Mawangdui manuscripts. His commentary predicates the choice between Fu Yi's and Fan Yingyuan's "Old Manuscript."

*Laozi 35.3*

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	道之出口	淡乎其無味
Heshang gong:	" " " "	"兮" " " "
Wang Bi quotation on 23.1:	" " "言	" " " " "也
Old MSS (Fu and Fan):	" " " "	" " " " " "
Guodian C:	故 "口口口	"呵" " " " "
Mawangdui A and B:	故 "之出言也曰	" " " " " "
Xiang Er:	" " " "	" "
Suo Dan:	" " " "	" "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 道之出言淡兮其無味也, supported in the word 言 *yan* not only by the Wang Bi quotation, the Guodian C, the two "Old MSS," and the two Mawangdui manuscripts, but also by the Xiang Er tradition. The *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* version is derived entirely from the Heshang gong version.

*Laozi 69.2*

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	禍莫大於輕敵輕敵	幾喪吾寶
Heshang gong:	" " " " " " " "	" " " "
Suo Dan:	" " " " " " " "	" " " "
<i>Wang Bi Comm.:</i>	欲以取強無敵於天下也..	故曰幾亡吾寶
Old MSS (Fu):	禍莫大於無敵無敵	則幾亡吾寶
Old MSS (Fan):	" " " "輕 "輕 "	" " " " " "
Mawangdui A:	歟 "於 "無適無適	斤 " "葆矣
Mawangdui B:	禍 "大 " "敵 "敵	近 " "琛矣

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 禍莫大於無敵無敵則幾亡吾寶, supported in the characters 無敵, and 亡, by Wang Bi's *Commentary*, by Fu Yi's "Old Manuscript," and by both Mawangdui manuscripts (discounting the writing of 適 for 敵 in the A Manuscript). The change is dramatic in terms of content.

## PHRASE SEQUENCE

*Laozi* 13.6 and 13.7*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:*

	若可 寄 天下..	若可 託 天下
Heshang gong:	"以 "於 " "...	"以 "於 " "
Wenzi:	"以 " " "...	所以托 " " <sup>53</sup>
Wang Bi <i>Comm.</i> :	"以託 " "...	可以寄 " "
Old MSS (Fu and Fan):		
	則 " " " " "矣..	則 " " " " "矣
Guodian B:	若 " "尾 " " "...	若 " "込 " " "
Mawangdui A:	若 " "迺 " " "...	女 " "寄 " "
Mawangdui B:	若 " "囊 " "口..	" " " " " " "
<i>Zhuangzi</i> 26/11/14f:	則 " "託 " " "...	則 " " " " " "
<i>Huainanzi</i> 12/109/18:		
	焉 " " " " " "...	焉 " " " " " "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 則可以託天下...則可以寄天下. The sequence of the phrases in the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* is that of the Heshang gong version, while the commentary has been left in its original order. The *ke yi*, 可以, in the commentary could be an explanatory elaboration of *ke* 可, but the *yi* 以 is supported by such a wealth of early readings that *ke yi* must be accepted as the reading of the *Wang Bi Laozi*. As for the *ze* 則, Wang Bi's commentary reads in full: 如此乃可以..., so that the *nai* 乃 has to be read as an explanation of logical sequence, forcing us to accept the *ze*, well supported in some early versions.

*Laozi* 69.1

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	扔無敵執無兵
Heshang gong:	仍 " " " " " "
Suo Dan:	" " " " " "
Wang Bi <i>Comm.</i> :	執 " 兵 扔 " 敵
Zhuang (Yan) Zun:	" " " 仍 " "
Old MSS (Fu):	" " " " " "
Mawangdui A and B:	" " " 乃 " "
Lu Deming:	扔

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 執無兵扔無敵, which has been replaced in the received text by the Heshang gong version, unique among all other early manuscripts with the single exception of Fan Yingyuan.

# ELIMINATION OF WORDS INVOLVING SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN MEANING

## *Laozi 20.15*

*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:* 我獨異於人  
 Heshang gong: " " " " "  
*Wang Bi Comm.:* " "欲 " " "  
 Xiang Er: " " " " "  
 Old MSS (Fu and Fan): 吾 " " " " "  
 Mawangdui A and B: "欲獨 " " "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 我獨欲異於人, again replaced in the received text by the Heshang gong version. The elimination of *yu* 欲 implies a substantial change in the status of “Laozi” (i.e., the person saying “I” in the text). The 我 has to be maintained against the 吾 in the rest of the family, as it is so quoted in Wang’s commentary.

## *Laozi 34.3*

*Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:*  
 萬物歸焉而不為主 可名為大  
 Heshang gong: " " " " " " " " 故 " " " "矣  
*Wang Bi Comm.:*  
 " " "之以生而力使不知其所由.. " "於 "矣  
 Xiang Er: " " " " 不為主 " " " "  
 Old MSS (Fu): " " " "而 "知 " " " " " "  
 Old MSS (Fan): " " " " " " " " " "爲 " "  
 Mawangdui A: " " "焉口口 " " " "於 "  
 Mawangdui B: " " "焉 "弗爲 " "命於 "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 萬物歸之而不知主可名於大矣, the received text being mainly that of the Heshang gong version. The replacement of *zhi* 知 with *wei* 爲 is a fundamental philosophical change and also alters the subject of the phrase. In the Heshang gong version, “he” is not lord-ing it over them (*bu wei zhu*, 不為主); in Wang Bi’s version, the 10,000 kinds of entities remain the subject, and they all render themselves unto

him but do not perceive who or what is their lord. This phrase became a cornerstone for Wang Bi's interpretation of *xuan* 玄 (dark), the aspect of Being that it is the base of all entities, which they are unable to perceive and name.

*Laozi* 39.2

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	其致之
Heshang gong:	" " "
<i>Wang Bi Comm.:</i>	各以其一致此清寧靈盈貞
Zhuang (Yan) Zun:	其致之
Old MSS (Fu and Fan):	" " "一也
Mawangdui A:	"至" "
Mawangdui B:	" " "

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 其致之一也, his commentary corresponding to the version contained only in the two "Old MSS."

*Laozi* 47.1

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	不出戶知天下不闕牖見天道
Heshang gong:	" " "以" " " " " " "以" " " "
<i>Wang Bi Comm.:</i>	雖處於今可以知古始故不出戶窺牖而可知
<i>Hanfeizi:</i>	不出於戶可以知天下不窺於牖可以知天道
<i>Huainanzi:</i>	" " " " " " " " " " "見" " "
Zhuang (Yan) Zun:	" " " " " " " " " " " " " "
Old MSS (Fu):	" " " " " " " " " " " " "知" " "
Old MSS (Fan):	" " " " " " " " " " " " "見" " "
Mawangdui A and B:	" " " " " " " " "規" " " "知" " "
Lu Deming:	窺

The *Wang Bi Laozi* read 不出戶可以知天下不窺牖可以知天道, the received text using the Heshang gong version. However, *jian* 見 in the Heshang gong and Zhuang [Yan] Zun versions seems to be supported as an old variant by a *Huainanzi* quotation and Fan Yingyuan.

These examples show the superimposition of elements of the Heshang gong version over the original *Wang Bi Laozi* to form the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus*. The *Wang Bi Laozi* is very close to the two "Old Manuscripts," supported in many cases by the Mawangdui manuscripts or by

early quotations, and sometimes by the *Xiang Er Commentary*. I propose to abandon the *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* altogether as a textual base for the reconstruction of the *Wang Bi Laozi* and to replace it with a conflated version of the two “Old Manuscripts” as the core and the two Mawangdui manuscripts as more distant relatives. The differences between the two “Old MSS” are handled on the basis of available internal or, failing this, external evidence. Preference in the latter case should be given to the Mawangdui manuscripts. Only where there is clear proof that the *Wang Bi Laozi* disagreed with all other members of the same textual family is it necessary to deviate from this rule. An example may be adduced from Laozi 21. *LZWZLL* refers to Wang Bi’s *Laozi weizhi lüeli* 老子微指略例 that is edited and translated in this volume.

*Laozi 21.6*

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	自古及今其名不去
Heshang gong:	" " " " " " " "
<i>Wang Bi Comm.:</i>	" " " " " " " " 54
<i>Wang Bi in LZWZLL:</i>	" " " " " " " "
<i>Xiang Er:</i>	" " " " " " " "
<i>Old MSS (Fu and Fan):</i>	"今 "古 " " " "
<i>Mawangdui A and B:</i>	" " " " " " " "

Despite the readings of the “Old Manuscripts” and the Mawangdui manuscripts, the *Wang Bi Laozi* must have read 自古及今其名不去, as confirmed by his own quotations. Unaware of the supporting Wang Bi quotation elsewhere, Shima Kuniō opted for the version of the textual family. There is an occasional later adaptation of Wang Bi’s commentary to the changed main text:

*Laozi 70.2*

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus:</i>	言有宗事有君
Heshang gong:	" " " " " "
Suo Dan:	" " " " " "
Zhuang (Yan) Zun:	" " " " " "
Mawangdui B:	"又 " "又 "
Mawangdui A:	"有君 "有宗
<i>Wang Bi Comm.:</i>	宗萬物之宗君萬物之主
<i>Old MSS (Fu and Fan):</i>	言有宗事有主

The initial *jun* 君 of the second clause of Wang Bi’s commentary ought to be changed to *zhu* 主, so that the phrase 君萬物之主 parallels the structure of the preceding phrase 宗萬物之宗, where the term *zong* 宗 is repeated

twice. That his text had *zhu* instead of *jun* is not only supported by the two “Old Manuscripts” but also by a statement in Wang Bi’s *LZWZLL* which paraphrases the present passage: 言不遠宗 事不失主.<sup>55</sup>

One passage often quoted to determine what “school” the *Laozi* belongs to shows some of the problems in reconstructing the *Wang Bi Laozi*.

*Laozi* 57.3, 4

<i>Wang Bi Laozi Receptus</i> :	人多伎巧 奇物滋起法令滋彰
Heshang gong:	" " " " " " " " "物" "
<i>Huainanzi</i> 12/106/5:	"令" "
<i>Shiji</i> 62.3131:	" " " "
Zhuang (Yan) Zun:	" " " " " " " " " " " "
<i>Wenzi</i> 1/5/15:	民 "智能" " " " " " " "章
Old MSS (Fu and Fan):	民 "智慧而寡事" " " " " " "
Guodian A:	人 " " 天戢勿慈記 "勿慈" "
Mawangdui A:	人 "知 而何物茲□□□□□
Mawangdui B:	□□□□□□□□□□物茲章
Wang Bi <i>Comm.</i> :	民 "智" 則巧僞生巧僞生則邪事起
Wang Bi in <i>LZWZLL</i> :	息淫在乎去華不在滋章

The reading *fa ling* 法令, shared by the versions given in the *Huainanzi*, *Shiji*, *Wenzi*, and Zhuang Zun directly attacks the Legalists. The Mawangdui manuscripts come from a Legalist milieu and thus do not transmit this version, but the Guodian A also has the reading 法勿 [物]. Wang Bi attacked the legalism of the Wei court. If, however, Wang Bi’s text had the 法令, why should he have missed out on the occasion to attack the concept of running the state by laws? He did not, however, comment on this term at all. The statement in the *LZWZLL* is further evidence that he had a text that had to do with *hua* 華, luxury, and the “beautiful objects,” *fawu* 法物, clearly fit this better. Accordingly, Wang’s text followed the GuodianA/Mawangdui reading and had 民多智慧而邪事滋起法物滋章.

## THE DIVISION INTO ZHANG AND PIAN

Wang Bi read the *Laozi* as divided into *zhang* 章. There are three passages where he refers to a “later” or “earlier” *zhang*.<sup>56</sup> In two of these, the *zhang* referred to is found within the same *pian* 篇 of the current editions, while in the third case the reference is to a *zhang* in the other *pian*.<sup>57</sup> The division into *zhang* also is evident in the Guodian and Mawangdui manuscripts, where it is not only indicated on occasion by dots,<sup>58</sup> but where

the *zhang* are ordered in a sequence different from the received texts but remain intact as units. For the Mawangdui manuscripts this is true for *zhang* 38 (marked by its being the beginning), 39, 41, 40, 42, 66, 80, 81, 67, 79, 1, 21, 24, 22, 23, and 25 (in the sequence in which they appear in the Mawangdui manuscripts). A similar situation prevails in the Guodian manuscripts, however, there are neither numbers nor titles to mark the borders between *zhang*. Their beginnings and endings are marked by stylistic and argumentative features with occasional punctuation. The Tang dynasty stone engraving of the *Laozi* shows this same feature. In his short history of the transmission of the *Laozi*, Xie Shouhao writes:

The manuscripts which are put together today are based on textual links (*wenlian* 文連). [Some] copyists have also given separate headings to each of the 81 *zhang*. But, as with the stanzas of the *Old Poems* where each stanza is separated from the next through its literary cohesion, one can determine the [*Laozi*'s] subsections without the need for a separate heading for each *zhang*.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Wang Bi saw the text as consisting of many *zhang*, but it is not clear whether the *zhang* were separated in his edition by any means similar to those employed in the Guodian and Mawangdui manuscripts. It seems that the earlier habit of marking *zhang* and occasionally even phrase limits with dots which we see in the Guodian manuscripts, was gradually discontinued, considered unnecessary for an increasingly “literate”—that is, writing-oriented—elite. Already in the Mawangdui manuscripts there is much less and much more irregular interpunctuation. We might assume that Wang Bi’s text looked more like the *Xiang Er Commentary*, which has no formal separations between the *zhang* or even between the *Laozi* text and the commentary. In the *LZWZLL*, Wang Bi describes each *zhang* (without using the term) as an argumentative unit. This also is evident in his *Commentary*, where he rarely explains the conclusion contained in the last phrase of a *zhang*, since it is deemed to be self-evident.<sup>60</sup>

For the separation of the text into two or more *pian*, the evidence is more complex. Assuming that the internal references to other *zhang* have survived unscathed in Wang Bi’s *Commentary*, his original text evidently did not follow the *deldao* sequence of the two Mawangdui manuscripts. The received Wang Bi editions come in two *pian* (the four-*pian* arrangement in the *Zhengtong Daozang* is based on the print arrangement of this edition); there is substantial evidence from the early Han on that a textual division into two *pian* was quite common. This could, however, have substantial philosophic and interpretive implications, as the titles given for

the two sections already in the Mawangdui B manuscript indicate; that is, one of the *pian* deals with *dao* 道, the other with *de* 德. Wang Bi does use the term *pian* with regard to the macrostructure of the *Laozi*. In his commentary to *Laozi* 20, he quotes a passage from *Laozi* 48, with the indication that this could be found “in a, or in the, *xia pian* 下篇. In his *LZWZLL* he introduces two quotations from the *Laozi* by saying, “in the *pian* he says”<sup>61</sup> (there is a variant writing for *pian*, namely, *jing* 經, but this would be the only time that Wang Bi referred to the *Laozi* as a *jing*); evidently *pian* here is a plural and refers neither to a first nor second *pian* but rather is used interchangeably with *zhang*. This is confirmed by the fact already mentioned, that one quotation from “a later *zhang*” crosses the traditional *pian* division, the quotation being in *zhang* 28 and the reference to *zhang* 40.

In his *Fushi ji* 酈時記, a work written in 1111, Chao Yuezhi 晁說之 says: “If we can rely on Fu Yi, Wang Bi wrote at the top of his book [the *Laozi*]: ‘The *Daodejing* is not divided into *Dao* and *De* chapters.’”<sup>62</sup> It was on the basis of this note that Dong Sijing 董思靖 (1059–1129) wrote that Wang Bi did not divide the text in this manner,<sup>63</sup> and in the *LZWZLL*, Wang Bi refers to his text simply as *Laozi*, never as “*Daodejing*,” or some similar title. This accords well with his polemical rejection of other *Laozi* interpretations current during his life.

## CONCLUSION

The above evidence suggests the following:

1. The *Laozi* text transmitted over Wang Bi’s commentary is not Wang Bi’s text but rather a text gradually superseded by elements of the Heshang gong text.
2. The *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* has to be abandoned as a base text for a critical edition of the *Wang Bi Laozi*.
3. Internal textual evidence suggests that the two “Old Manuscripts” of Fu Yi and Fan Yingyuan should be considered most closely affiliated with Wang Bi’s original text, the Mawangdui manuscripts being more distant members of the same textual family and the Guodian manuscripts even more distantly related.
4. A conflated version of the two “Old Manuscripts,” supplemented by the two Mawangdui manuscripts, forms the basic core for a reconstruction of Wang Bi’s recension of the *Laozi*, the *Wang Bi Laozi*.

5. The *Wang Bi Laozi* recension was subdivided into *zhang*, probably without formal markers. It was not divided into a *Daojing* and a *Dejing*, but it might have had two *pian*.

My edition of the *Wang Bi Laozi* will try to do what has been suggested under point 4. The question of the transmission and present state of the Wang Bi commentary is treated separately in the next chapter.

## APPENDIX A

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* AND *Laozi* TEXT USED IN *WANG BI Commentary*

Abbreviations used:

MWD/A and B:	Mawangdui <i>Laozi</i> A and B manuscripts
GD/A/B/C:	Guodian <i>Laozi</i> sets A, B, and C
FY:	Fu Yi
FYY:	Fan Yingyuan
HNZ:	<i>Huainanzi</i>
ZZ:	Zhuang (Yan) Zun
XE:	Xiang Er
SD:	Suo Dan
I:	indirect evidence

Laozi Phrase	Wang Bi Laozi Receptus	Wang Bi Commentary	Corroborating Texts
1.2	天地	萬物	MWD/A, B
1.5	此兩者	兩者	MWD/A, B; I
2.2	處	居	MWD/A, B; GD/A
2.4	辭	爲始 (17.1)	MWD/B; GD/A (both only 始); I
2.5	弗[居]	不[居]	FY; FYY
2.4	弗[居]	不[居]	FY; FYY
4.1	或	又	HNZ; MWD/B (有); <i>Wenzi</i> ; I
4.1	知誰	知其誰	MWD/B; FYY
6.1	地根	地之根	MWD/A, B; FY
9.1	如	若	MWD/B; GD/A; <i>Guanzi</i>
9.2	稅	銳	HNZ; FYY; ZZ
10.2	能嬰	能若嬰	FY and FYY: 能如嬰
10.4	無知	無以知	MWD/B; FY, FYY
10.6	無爲	無以爲	MWD/B: 無以知; FY, FYY
13.5, 6	寄...託	託...寄	MWD/A, B; GD/B; FY; FYY; XE; SD

Laozi Phrase	Wang Bi Laozi Receptus	Wang Bi Commentary	Corroborating Texts
14.1	夷	微	MWD/A, B
14.4	以	可以	FY
16.3	觀復	觀其復	MWD/A, B; FY; FYY
17.6	貴言	貴言也	MWD/A, B; GD/C
19.1	文不足	文而不足	FY (未足)
20.1	善	美	MWD/A, B; GD/B; FY; XE
20.4	獨	廓	Lu Deming
20.12	無止	無所止	MWD/A, B; XE
20.14	似	且	FY
20.15	異	欲異	MWD/A, B; XE; SD; FYY
23.4	德	得	FY (two times)
28.7	不割	無割	MWD/A, B; HNZ; FY; FYY; ZZ
29.4	故	凡	FY
30.1	強天下	強於天下	MWD/B; MWD/A: 強口天下; GD/A
30.4	不敢以取	不以取	MWD/A, B; GD/A; XE; SD
34.2	主常	主故常	FY; FYY
34.3	爲	知	FY; FYY
34.3	爲	於	MWD/A, B; FY; XE; SD
35.3	口	言	MWD/A, B; FY; FYY; XE; SD
37.5	不	無	XE; SD
38.2	無以爲	無不爲	FY; FYY; ZZ; I;
38.2	有以爲	無以爲	FY; FYY; I
38.2	始	首	MWD/A, B; <i>Hanfeizi</i>
40.1	動	動也	MWD/A, B; GD/A
40.3	天下萬物	天下之物	MWD/B; GD/A; FY; FYY
41.1	勤而行	堇能行	MWD/B; GD/B
41.15	且成	且善成	MWD/B; FYY
42.2	教之	教人	MWD/A; FY; FYY
47.1	戶知	戶以知	MWD/A, B; HNZ; <i>Wenzi</i>
48.1	學	學者	MWD/B; GD/B; FY; FYY
48.2	道	道者	MWB/B; GD/B; FY; FYY
48.3	爲而無	爲則無	FY; FYY
48.4	取	其取	——
48.4	天下	天下者	FY; FYY; ZZ
48.6	不	又不	MWD/B (lacuna two spaces); FY
48.6	天下	天下矣	MWD/B (天口口); FY
49.4	歛歛	歛歛焉	MWD/A, B; FY; FYY
49.4	渾其心	渾心	MWD/A; FY; FYY
49.4	心	心焉	FY; FYY
50.2	有三人之生	有三而民之生	FY; FYY (om. 而) ZZ
52.1	以爲	可以爲	FY
54.4	修之於身	修之身	MWD/B; GD/B; FY; FYY; SD (3)
54.4	乃餘	乃有餘	<i>Wenzi</i>
55.1	厚	厚者	MWD/B; MWD/A 厚口; GD/A; FY; FYY
55.8	氣曰強	氣則強	FY
56.4	分	紛	MWD/A, B; GD/A; FY; FYY; HNZ; I

Laozi Phrase	Wang Bi Laozi Receptus	Wang Bi Commentary	Corroborating Texts
57.3	人多伎巧	民多智慧	FY; FYY; I
58.6	迷	迷也	MWD/B; FY
59.2	服	復	Lu Deming
61.4	以靜爲下	以其靜故爲下也	FYY; FY (靜 for 靜); MWD/B; (爲其靜也故宜爲下也)
61.9	欲大	欲則大	MWD/B
62.4	加人	加於人	FY; FYY
64.8	學復	學以復	FY
65.2	智多	多智	FY (多知)
65.4	常知	能知	FY
67.4	能成	能爲成	MWD/A, B; FYY
67.6	戰	陳	FY; FYY
69.1	扔無敵執無兵	執無兵扔無敵	MWD/A, B (乃 for 扔); ZZ; FY (仍 for 扔)
69.2	輕敵	無敵	MWD/A, B; FY
70.1	莫能	莫之能	MWD/A, B; FY; FYY
70.4	我者貴	我貴矣	MWD/A, B; FY; FYY
77.2	唯有道者	其唯道者乎	FY (惟)
78.1	其 (Daozang)	以其	MWD/A, B; FY; I
81.4	不	無	MWD/A, B; FY; FYY; ZZ

## APPENDIX B

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* AND  
PLACES WHERE FAN YINGYUAN'S *Laozi Daode jing*  
*guben jizhu* COMMENTS THAT WANG BI'S MANUSCRIPT  
COINCIDED WITH THE "OLD MANUSCRIPT[s]"

The notes are coded as follows:

- a: Fan Yingyuan's reading is correct, as evidenced by Wang Bi's commentary
- b: Fan Yingyuan's reading is correct, as evidenced by indirect evidence
- c: *Wang Bi Laozi Receptus* is correct
- d: both readings are incorrect
- e: evidence not conclusive

Laozi Phrase	Wang Bi Laozi Receptus	Fan Yingyuan's "Old Manuscript"	Code
2.4	萬物作焉而不辭	萬物作焉而不爲始	a
9.3	金玉滿堂	金玉滿室	b
10.4	愛民治國能無知呼	愛民治國能無以知乎	a
14.1	視之不見名曰夷	視之不見名曰幾	d
15.4	孰能濁以靜之徐清	孰能濁以靜之而徐清	b
18.3	六親不和有孝慈國家昏 亂有忠臣	六親不和有孝慈焉國家昏亂有貞 臣焉	b
19.1	三者以爲文不足	三者以爲文不足也	d
20.5	儼儼兮若無所歸	儼儼兮其若不足，似無所歸	c
20.9	俗人昭昭我獨昏昏	俗人皆昭昭我獨若昏	c
21.3	惚兮恍兮其中有象恍兮 惚兮其中有物	芴兮芒兮中有象兮芒兮芴兮中有 物兮	d
21.6	自古及今	自今及古	c
22.2	枉則直	枉則正	b
25.2	寂兮	索兮	b
25.5	字之曰道	故強字之曰道	b
26.3	燕處	宴處	b
28.7	不割	無割	a
34.2	衣養	衣被	e
34.3	萬物歸焉而不爲主	萬物歸之而不知主	a
34.4	以其終不自爲大	是以聖人以其終不自爲大	d
35.3	道之出口	道之出言	a
38.1	上德無爲而無以爲	上德無爲而無不爲	a
38.1	下德爲之而有以爲	下德爲之而無以爲	a
39.4	是以侯王自謂孤寡不穀 此非以賤爲本邪，非乎	是以王侯自稱孤不穀是其以賤 爲本也，非歟	b
41.2	故建言有之	故建言有之曰	b
41.15	夫唯道善貸且成	夫惟道善貸且善成	a
42.2	人之所教我亦教之	人之所以教我而亦我之所以教人	d
45.2	大盈若冲	大滿若虛	c
47.2	其知之彌少	其知彌匙	b
48.3	損之又損，以至於無爲 無爲而無不爲	損之又損之，以至於無爲無爲則 無不爲	a
49.4	聖人在天下歛歛爲天 下渾其心	聖人之在天下歛歛焉爲天下渾 心焉	a
51.3	故道生之德畜之	故道生之畜之	a
57.3	人多伎巧奇物滋起	民多智慧而衰邪事滋起	a
59.2	是謂早服	是以早復	a
64.2	其脆易泮	其脆易判	e
65.4	知此兩者亦稽式常知稽式	知此兩者亦稽式也知此稽式	d
67.2	我有三寶持而保之	我有三寶持而寶之	b
73.8	緘然	坦然	b

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# Chapter 2

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## Patronage and the Transmission of the Wang Bi *Commentary*: Foundations for a Critical Edition

### THE PROBLEM

Having outlined in the first chapter the evidence on which a new critical edition of the Wang Bi *Laozi* is to be based, we now look at the reliability of the current editions of the Wang Bi *Commentary* in order to determine whether a new edition is needed, and if so on what material it might be based. It is my contention that all current editions of the *Commentary*, with the exception of the edition included in Shima Kuniō's *Rōshi kōsei*, are based on the text printed in the *Daozang* around 1445 and taken up by Zhang Zhixiang during the Wanli (1573–1620) period; that a sizably better text can be extracted from the collections of excerpts from *Laozi* commentaries compiled during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, but that, as no single complete early text of high quality is available to replace the current edition, a critical edition of the Wang Bi *Commentary* will have to select the best readings for each item as a base text, critically edit it, and note the deviant readings of the other relevant textual traditions. This work will be done in the critical edition of both the Wang Bi *Laozi* and the Wang Bi *Commentary* in this book.

This chapter will present the evidence through a reasoned history of the transmission of the Wang Bi *Commentary*. In the process I hope to provide what may be called the social history of a text focusing on the particular type of interest that the *Commentary* evoked and the patronage it received as a consequence; both were instrumental in preventing the text from disappearing with the disintegration or destruction of the materials on which it was written at any given time.

In 1927, Wang Zhongmin 王重民 compiled many of the relevant references in earlier book catalogues and works by bibliophiles to Wang Bi's *Commentary on the Laozi*.<sup>1</sup> Later scholars down to Hatano Tarō 波多野太郎 and Shima Kuniō 島邦男 have added references.<sup>2</sup>

We still lack, however, a reasoned history of the text integrating the various types of information. Such histories have been written for independent texts such as the *Wenzi*, the *Huainanzi*, or the *Taiping jing*,<sup>3</sup> but perhaps due to the low esteem in which commentaries have been held, not for the philosophical contributions that took the commentary form.

Opinions have ranged from the uncritical assumption that the *Laozi* inscribed over the transmitted Wang Bi *Commentary* is indeed the “Wang Bi *Laozi*” and that the current Wang Bi *Commentary* editions are indeed the best to be had to the radical suggestion by Hong Yixuan 洪頤煊 (1765–1833), who concluded in 1821 from a discrepancy between a Wang Bi quotation in Fa Lin's 法琳 early-seventh-century *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 and the Wang Bi *Commentary* in his hand that “today's manuscripts of the Wang Bi *Commentary* all have come to light only during the Ming dynasty and have perhaps been put together by later people.”<sup>4</sup> In this he was echoing Qian Zeng 錢曾 (1629–1701), who had said: “Sadly enough, [Wang] Fusi's [= Bi's] *Commentary* is not transmitted or sparsely transmitted. The days of this book are already over, alas.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, Wang Bi's *Commentary on the Laozi* struggled to survive the Confucian suspicion that its ideological influence had contributed to the demise of the Jin 晉 dynasty and the breakup of China. It competed with the commentaries preferred by the Daoist religious communities and with commentaries written by emperors who had the means to make their reading dominant. The text thus could not rely on the main Chinese patronage lines to secure its own transmission and could not even promise the copyist merit points in the karma register.

The difficulty in writing the history of this *Commentary* is from the outset one of method. Most modern scholars dealing with the history of this text have linked the history of the Wang Bi *Laozi* to the Wang Bi *Commentary*, thus they have looked for the earliest monograph editions in which only these two appear, and together. This has led to the adoption of the texts of this type preserved in the *Daozang* and in the *Siku quanshu* and their derivatives as the standard base texts, down to the 1980 edition by Lou Yulie.<sup>6</sup> As the previous chapter has shown, however, the *Laozi* text over the Wang Bi *Commentary* had a history all its own. It was gradually adapted to the Heshang gong version of the *Laozi*, while the *Laozi* quotations in the Wang Bi *Commentary* remained largely unchanged. We are thus forced in a second step to study the transmission of the *Commentary* independently of the *Laozi* text under which it was transmitted. Shima

Kuniō has again pioneered such an approach in his *Rōshi kōsei*. Instead of following the Ming editions as everyone else had done, he looked for the earliest available texts of the *Commentary* and found them in the various editions of “collected commentaries” to the *Laozi* that had been put together between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. His focus though was on the different lineages of the text of the *Laozi*, not on the commentaries. So while quoting what he thought were the best commentary texts, he did not establish a critical text for the commentaries included in his work, including the Wang Bi *Commentary*. The Wang Bi *Commentary* quotations in these collections in turn might have been, and were, attached to *Laozi* texts from lineages other than that to which the Wang Bi *Laozi* belonged.

## A HISTORY OF WANG BI'S COMMENTARY ON THE *LAOZI*: THE EVIDENCE

He Shao 何劭 (236–ca. 300), whose dates overlap Wang Bi's, writes in his “Biography of Wang Bi” that Wang “commented on the *Laozi*.”<sup>7</sup> Anecdotes collected by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444) in his *Shishuo xinyu* (SSXY) 世說新語, as well as by Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462–521) in his *Commentary* on that text, also refer to Wang Bi's *Commentary*.<sup>8</sup> Most of these anecdotes are from earlier collections. According to one, Wang Bi's mentor, He Yan 何晏 (ca. 190–249), rewrote his own commentary on the *Laozi* into two philosophical essays after hearing Wang Bi's interpretation and acknowledging its superiority over his own analysis.<sup>9</sup> This first report on Wang Bi's *Commentary* best defines the reason for its survival. It could not claim a lobby of Confucian scholars, the court, Buddhists, or Daoists. It could rely only on Wang Bi's analytical skill in handling the *Laozi* and on his philosophic depth. Time and again those who took it upon themselves to track down a copy and to spread it to the world were attracted by these qualities. Wang Bi's fame and notoriety among his contemporaries and later generations rested on his two commentaries on the *Laozi* and the *Zhouyi*, and on his two treatises outlining their basic structure. Thus we have direct and indirect contemporary evidence that Wang Bi wrote a *Commentary on the Laozi*, and that it reached instant fame.

The first three explicit verbatim quotations from this *Commentary* are in Zhang Zhan's 張湛 (fl. 320) *Commentary on the Liezi* 列子注. (We leave aside implicit quotations.) Zhang Zhan was related to Wang Bi, and (parts of?) the *Liezi* that he put together came from the library of Cai Rong 蔡邕 (133–192) that had come to the Wang family.<sup>10</sup> Like the *Zhuangzi*



commentaries by Xiang Xiu and Guo Xiang, Zhang's *Commentary* is in the tradition of Wang Bi's *Commentary on the Laozi*. It is thus probable for both domestic and scholarly reasons that Zhang Zhan was in possession of a good copy of Wang Bi's *Commentary*. Where the *Liezi* and the *Laozi* overlap, Zhang Zhan sometimes quotes Wang Bi's *Commentary*.

Such quotations enclosed in another text often preserve parts of texts otherwise lost or an older reading of available texts. If the separate editions of the text were changed, these quotations very often were not adjusted. The first two quotations in Zhang Zhan's *Commentary* are from Wang Bi's commentary on *Laozi* 6. The editions used for comparison are the oldest available Song and Ming texts. The text in square brackets is the *Liezi/Laozi* text in Zhang Zhan's edition that quotes it, however, as being from the *Book of the Yellow Emperor, Huangdi shu*.

Example 1 (facing page) is from Wang Bi on *Laozi* 6.

Example 2 is a quotation from Wang Bi on *Laozi* 73 not transmitted in any of the Song dynasty commentary collections:

1. Zhang Zhan<sup>16</sup> 孰誰也言誰能知天 意 耶其唯聖人也
2. Daozang<sup>17</sup> " " " " " " " " "下之所惡 "故邪 " " " "
3. Siku<sup>18</sup> "

In both cases Zhang Zhan's reading in the two major deviations—故謂之玄牝 versus 故謂[之]天地之根綿綿若存用之不勤 and 誰能知天意耶 versus 誰能知天下之所惡意故邪—is superior to all surviving texts, a unanimous opinion among modern editors. The surviving editions, however, share a homogeneous if corrupt reading, suggesting that they all go back to a single edition with a substantial number of misreadings. The same feature is shared by the *Laozi* text printed over Wang Bi's *Commentary* in the surviving editions that feature only Wang's *Commentary*. They rather uniformly disagree with the provable original readings in Wang Bi's *Laozi* text. The comparative study of different surviving Ming and later editions, as undertaken by Hatano Tarō and others, while necessary and useful, does not provide enough textual diversity to allow for the elimination of even the major corruptions.

One element is not visible in the first comparison above. All variants of the *textus receptus* append the whole commentary to this *zhang* to the end of the *Laozi* text. Zhang Zhan in fact quotes two commentary passages. The first ends with 玄牝, then the *Laozi* text 玄牝之門, followed by the rest of the commentary. On the basis of the *textus receptus* of Wang's *Commentary*, it is hard to judge which organization should be preferred. There are many instances where a commentary is attached to each phrase, and sometimes to a section of a phrase, but others, such as the commen-

tary to *Laozi* 38, have a coherent long essay as commentary. Given the date and overall quality of Zhang Zhan's quotations, including the fact that the wording of the *Liezi* text in which he quotes Wang Bi definitely represents with 天地之根 the wording of Wang Bi's *Laozi* text instead of the 天地根 in the Wang Bi *textus receptus*, Zhang Zhan's arrangement seems preferable.

From these two examples we formulate three hypotheses:

1. Since all three quotations reappear in their entirety in the editions surviving to the present, the survival rate of individual passages from Wang Bi's *Commentary* is high.
2. No manuscript find during the last 400 years has enabled scholars to directly base a text of the *Commentary* on an "old" Tang or pre-Tang manuscript. The high degree of coincidence between the quotations and the extant texts suggests a fairly uninterrupted textual transmission down to the first printed editions in our hands.
3. The Wang Bi *Commentary* had a high textual status since the time when the base text for the surviving editions was fixed, so that it was substantially transmitted without further unnoted emendations. This hypothesis by and large also applies to the *Laozi* quotations within the *Commentary*. We shall try to test these hypotheses and add others.

Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462–521), the commentator of the *Shishuo xinyu*, quotes Wang Bi's *Commentary* once.

Example 3 (facing page) from Wang Bi on *Laozi* 39.

It is evident that Liu Xiaobiao quotes excerpts from two different *Commentary* sections. Both are extant in the transmitted texts. The first is uniformly corrupt in the various prints of the *textus receptus* in the formula 一物之生. The fifth-century Buddhist Huida 惠達 quotes the same passage in his *Zhao lun shu* 肇論疏 in the same wording as Liu Xiaobiao, confirming the assumption that it is the older (and better) reading.<sup>23</sup>

Liu Xiaobiao never refers to the Heshang gong commentary on the *Laozi*. This gives us a glimpse at the circles in which the Wang Bi *Commentary* enjoyed prestige. The *Shishuo xinyu* records and glorifies the intellectual achievements of the scions of the aristocratic families and their friends between the second and fourth centuries. The intellectual tradition recorded here is clearly that of Wang Bi. The *Laozi* quotations in Liu



Xiaobiao's *Commentary* accordingly are most probably from Wang Bi's *Laozi* text. Huida, in his turn, wrote a commentary to Seng Zhao's 僧肇 (384–414) *Zhao lun* 肇論, the most important set of Buddhist treatises written in fifth-century China. Like his teacher, Kumārajīva (d. 412?), Seng Zhao is credited with a commentary on the *Laozi*,<sup>24</sup> and both moved within an intellectual framework set by third-century philosophers such as Wang Bi. Liu Xiaobao also provides us with the text's title at the time, *Laozi zhu* 老子注.

The growth of Daoist influence throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, often with strong imperial patronage, gradually led to the ascendance of the Heshang gong commentary and the *Laozi* text transmitted over it. During the same period, the Later Han transformation of Laozi into a high, even supreme, god had been fleshed out with a plethora of stories, including the claim that Laozi had gone West to convert the barbarians, who now came back as Buddhists. Wei Zheng's 魏徵 (580–643) handbook of memorable sayings and principles for the education of the crown prince, the *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要, ended up using only the Heshang gong version.<sup>25</sup>

Wang Bi's *Commentary*, however, continued to be copied and is listed in the book catalogue of the *Sui shu* under the title *Laozi Daode jing* in 2 juan with a *Commentary* by Wang Bi. It was further appreciated by scholars active in the revival of classical studies at the time, most prominently Fu Yi 傅奕 (555–629), who collected and analyzed a number of "Old Manuscripts" of the *Laozi*. His interest was in the *Laozi* itself. Since the Later Han, these manuscripts mostly also carried commentaries, so that he often defined them by the commentary with which they came. Among those he found were two "Wang Bi texts," that is, *Laozi* texts with Wang Bi's *Commentary*, one having 5,683, and the other having 5,610 characters. Fu Yi did not express a preference for either the Heshang gong or the Wang Bi commentary or text; his own (surviving) conflated edition of a *Guben Laozi* 古本老子, however, clearly rejects the Heshang gong version of the *Laozi* and might even have been circulated as an antidote against it.<sup>26</sup>

Among the scholars reacting against a style of commenting that was more associative than analytical, we also find Lu Deming 陸德明 (556–627), who decided to base his phonetic notes on the *Laozi*, the *Laozi Daodejing yinyi* 老子道德經音義 (which also contains information on textual variants in the editions over different commentaries), on Wang Bi's text. While not doubting the authenticity of the Heshang gong commentary, he eventually comes out in favor of the Wang Bi *Commentary*, saying:

[This, Heshang gong's commentary] talks about the essentials of bringing order to one's body and to the state. There was

none among the later intellectuals who would not hold his words about the Dark in high esteem. Only Wang Fusi [= Bi] had a finer grasp on the pointers towards the empty and negativity.<sup>27</sup>

In the *Laozi Daodejing yinyi* we have phonetic glosses on terms of Wang Bi's *Commentary* to no less than 56 of the 81 *zhang* of the *Laozi*. There are no phonetic glosses for other commentators. He took Wang Bi as the "standard" commentary in the same manner in which he took the *Lunyu Commentary* compiled by He Yan and his associates as his "standard" for the *Lunyu*. With one single exception, all his notations from Wang Bi's *Commentary* can be found in the extant text. The exception is a missing piece in *zhang* 27.<sup>28</sup> The *Laozi Daodejing yinyi*, in our hands, however, had been tampered with even before the twelfth century, so that it is not as reliable a guide to the Wang Bi text as it might originally have been. In his phonetic notes on the *Xiaojing* 孝經, Lu Deming gives the titles and numbers of the section headings. He does not do so in his *Laozi Daodejing yinyi*.

From this we extract a fourth hypothesis. The *zhang* of the *Laozi* were neither numbered nor titled in the Wang Bi *Laozi zhu* manuscript in Lu Deming's hand. This might reflect the original Wang Bi arrangement. The only dated third-century fragment of a manuscript of a *Laozi* is the Suo Dan of 270, found in Dunhuang. In this manuscript, the *zhang* are not numbered, have no titles, and are separated by beginning a new *zhang* with a new line.<sup>29</sup> The undated but also early Xiang Er 想爾 manuscript from Dunhuang, S 6825,<sup>30</sup> also has no titles. It does not even begin a new *zhang* with a new line, and it does not visibly separate text and commentary. The transformation of texts from an amorphous endless line of Chinese characters to a visibly structured textual body with a title, table of contents, separation of chapters and sections, and text and commentary was a slow process, the history of which is still to be written.<sup>31</sup>

While not giving headings for the *zhang*, Lu Deming gives the titles *dao jing* 道經 and *de jing* 德經 to the two chapters in the manner of the Heshang gong 河上公 commentary. While this tradition can be traced as far back as the Mawangdui B manuscript, it seems not to have been a feature of the original form of Wang Bi's *Commentary on the Laozi*.

Lu Deming's preface and his use of the Wang Bi *Laozi* are important evidence for the esteem in which Wang Bi's *Commentary* was again held, as well as of efforts to make it more widely available. Wang Bi's *Zhouyi zhu* 周易注, *Commentary to the Zhouyi*, at about the same time became the official commentary to this text for the Tang dynasty and had been provided with a subcommentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648). It

had achieved this prominence only after years of bitter struggles between the proponents of three different *Zhouyi* commentaries, those of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), Wang Su 王肅 (195–256), and Wang Bi.<sup>32</sup> The analytical method applied by Wang Bi to this text is similar to that applied to the *Laozi*, quite apart from the fact that Wang read both works as approaches to a similar philosophic dilemma.

Another famous scholar from that generation, Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645), who wrote the most important commentary to Ban Gu's *Hanshu*, found an “old [Liu] Song-dynasty manuscript,” of Wang Bi's *Commentary*, that is, from a time between 420 and 479. There should have been numerous copies of Wang Bi's *Commentary* in the south in the libraries of the northern elite fleeing there, quite apart from the fact that the Liu Song established *xuanxue* 玄學 as the most important of the fields of scholarship, ahead of *ru* 儒, “Confucianism,” *wenxue* 文學, “literature,” and *shi* 史, “the histories.”<sup>33</sup> Although Yan Shigu's own *Xuanyan xinji ming Lao bu* 玄言新記明老部, of which a fragment survives among Pelliot's Dunhuang manuscripts, generally follows Heshang gong's reading and reproduces in the introduction the Heshang gong lore, Yan also was interested in what Wang Bi had to say. He writes in a slightly confusing passage:

Wang Bi, *zi* Fusi, from Shanyang, managed in his official career to become a *shangshu lang*. [He died] in the 10th year of the zhengshi era [249] in his 24th year. [I, Yan Shigu] checked a [Liu] Song manuscript which said: “Wang Fusi was famous among later [generations] for his *Commentary on the Daode [jing]* in two *pian*; he linked the symbols [for heaven and earth], the highest yang number being the 9, he set the limit at nine times nine. That is why there are 81 *zhang* [in his *Laozi*].”<sup>34</sup>

To my knowledge, no other source makes the claim that it was Wang Bi who established the division in 81 *zhang*. This often is attributed to Liu Xiang.<sup>35</sup> It is plausible, however, that this number should have been fixed since his time. Obviously the Wang Bi *Commentary* in Yan Shigu's hands had this number; the confirmation of this number by the “old” Liu Song text was necessary, since different divisions of the *Laozi*, such as the one by Zhuang Zun, existed and continued to be produced. The second important piece of information is that copies of Wang Bi's *Commentary* were already hard to get. Third, the text seems to have circulated now under the title *Daode jing zhu* 道德經注. We formulate a fifth hypothesis: although not formally divided by number and title, Wang Bi's *Laozi zhu* had eighty-one *zhang*, as confirmed for the fifth and sixth centuries.

The coexistence of the Wang Bi and Heshang gong commentaries in Lu Deming and Yan Shigu also can be observed in Li Shan's 李善 (d. 689) *Commentary to the Wenxuan*, which makes use of both commentaries. Li Shan quotes Wang Bi's *Commentary* twenty-seven times in his own *Commentary to the Wenxuan*.<sup>36</sup> As a rule, he quotes the title as *Laozi zhu*. All but two quotations can be located in the extant texts.<sup>37</sup> The number of quotations with some textual deviation is twenty.<sup>38</sup> Of these twenty readings, internal and external evidence prompted me to accept fourteen, fully or in part, as genuine.<sup>39</sup>

Example 4: Li Shan quotes Wang Bi on *Laozi* 1.5:

1. Li Shan<sup>40</sup> 玄 冥 黑 無有也
2. Jizhu<sup>41</sup> "者"也默然 " " "
3. Jiyi<sup>42</sup> " " " " " " "
4. Daozang<sup>43</sup> " " " " " " "
5. Siku<sup>44</sup> " " " " " " "

Example 5: Li Shan quotes Wang Bi on *Laozi* 10.9:

1. Li Shan<sup>45</sup> 滌除邪飾至于極覽
2. Jizhu 言能 " " " " " " "
3. Jiyi " " " " " " "
4. Daozang " " " " " " "
5. Siku " " " " " " "

Example 6: Li Shan quotes Wang Bi on *Laozi* 41.15:

1. Li Shan<sup>46</sup> 有形則亦有分有分者不溫則涼 故象 者形者非大象也
2. Jizhu " " " " " " "炎不炎則寒 " "而 " " " "
3. Daozang " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "
4. Siku " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "

Most differences are in particles, where textual variations usually are largest but meaning is least likely to be influenced. Substantial clarifications in meaning, as found in Zhang Zhan's quotations, are few, namely, those cases where text has been lost. In one case, the interlocking of text and commentary is arranged differently.<sup>47</sup> The text, however, is quoted in excerpts, and there are no good grounds to accept this arrangement. Li Shan's quotations often are excerpts, and the writing is riddled with mistakes. However, from the high coincidence between the quotations from Wang Bi's *Commentary* and Li Shan's *Commentary on the Wenxuan* we can infer that, in quality and quantity, the seventh-century Wang Bi *Commentary* text had survived the conflagrations of the preceding centuries rather well and is part of a fairly unbroken transmission down to the editions that have come to us.

A few decades after Li Shan, in 719, the famous historian, Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), proceeded to challenge the authenticity of the Heshang gong commentary in a memorial to the Ministry of Propriety and another one directly to the throne.

The *Laozi* most commonly circulating now, 今俗所行老子, is that with the Heshang gong *Commentary*. Its preface says: "Heshang gong is a man living during the reign of Emperor Wen of the Han (r. 176–159 B.C.E.); he made himself a straw hut at Riverbend 河曲 [near the Huanghe], and took his eponym [Heshang gong, the Gentleman Living by the (Yellow) River] from there. He handed the *Laozi* commented by him to Emperor Wen, and thereupon soared into space and went towards Heaven." Evidently these are trite words not worthy of a classic, trivia as they circulate among the vulgar.

[Now] to the facts, as the bibliographical section of the *History of the [Former] Han* lists three scholars with commentaries on the *Laozi*, but has never heard of any explanations coming from someone "by the River, 河上," is this not the case of a [later] commentator making up such a tale because he wanted to have this affair appear miraculous? [This *Commentary*'s] language is uncouth and his reasoning distorted. Already those content with [such simple tasks as] differentiating the purple from the red or to separate the wheat from the beans, will scoff at its fallacies, how much more the knowledgeable! How can [Ho-shang-kung] match Wang Bi's brilliant talent and superb insight [with which he, as the *Xici* 繫辭 says of the divinatory capacity of the milfoil stalks and turtle shells] "explores the abscond and brings out the hidden." As, upon examination,

his [Wang Bi's] comments are superior in terms of meaning and purport [旨 for 者]<sup>48</sup> the unequivocal rejection of the Heshang gong and promotion of Wang Fusi [Bi] would indeed be most appropriate for those engaged in study.<sup>49</sup>

In Liu Zhiji's argument we find the same rationale for preserving and spreading Wang Bi's *Commentary* that had made He Yan abandon his own project.

The State Council, to whom the matter was referred, had a committee discuss the issue. Its members were luminaries such as Sima Zheng 司馬貞, a professor at the Imperial University, Xi Changtong 郗嘗通, a professor at the First College, and eight others. At the end of May 719, they came up with a compromise supported by Liu Zhiji.

We also received a memorial claiming that Laozi's [elaborations] on *dao* 道 and *de* 德 are truly [實 for 是]<sup>50</sup> words concerning the Dark 玄. Though there have been many commentators, few have exhausted their purport. "Heshang gong" is a fictitious appellation, there is no such person in the historical records of the Han. Yet, his *Commentary* has the nurture of spirit as its principal aim and non-interference as its mainstay. His language is easy, and his principles are encompassing. On the small [scale of the individual], it helps in nurturing the self and to clear up one's sincerity, and on the grand [scale of the state] it can be instrumental to pacify men and bring peace to the state. Hence Gu Huan 顧歡 [read 歡 for 歎; himself a *Laozi* commentator] (390–453) said "Though Heshang gong is called a commentary to a book, it in fact is a text [written in order to] establish a teaching [of his own]. Throughout he dwells little on distant matters but brings out things of immediate application." This may be accepted as a well-informed statement.

Wang Fusi [Bi] [on the other hand] was sophisticated and skilled at speaking about the Dark and probed the essentials of the Way. [Even with regard to such esoteric topics as] bringing to an end the spiritual functions 神用<sup>51</sup> in [what the *Laozi* 5.3 refers to as] the "drum and flute" [of the space between Heaven and Earth] or maintaining calm and silence in [what *Laozi* 6.1 calls] "the dark female animal 玄牝," his reasonings are clear and the pointers [he discovers] subtle. In the realm of the Philosophy of the Dark 玄學, this [read 是 for 謂] definitely is the best. But when it comes to being accessible to people and setting up [clear] arguments, to nurturing the self and spreading

the Way, Heshang gong has the advantage. With regard to these two commentaries by Wang [Bi] and Heshang gong, we now look forward to and apply for it that students are required to act on them both.<sup>52</sup>

Liu Zhiji's memorial seems to have caused quite a controversy at the university. The final imperial edict closing the matter on May 28 refers disapprovingly to "discussive gatherings of our students." Interestingly, the edict referred to imperial attempts to "search for unnoticed texts and neglected fragments far and wide" in order to secure materials to restore the correct texts. This search had prompted Liu Zhiji to submit his memorial in the first place. The edict decided: "Let . . . the Heshang gong commentary . . . remain in force as before. Since few have used the Wang [Bi] commentary, . . . let encouragement be given to its study so that its transmission might not terminate." Also, during the first half of the eighth century, Zhang Junxiang 張君相 came out with a first collection of commentaries to the *Laozi*, the *Sanshi jia zhujie Daode jing* 三十家注解道德經, the *Assorted commentaries by 30 authors on the "Daode jing,"* in which he included Wang Bi as well as other third-century commentators. The text is lost.<sup>53</sup>

Although "few have used" the Wang Bi commentary at this time, and although the Heshang gong version was "most commonly circulating," Wang Bi's *Commentary* attracted very strong and prominent support, and it was probably more widely copied as a consequence of this 719 edict. It is quoted in sources as diverse as the *Chuxue ji* 初學記 by Xu Jian 徐堅 (659–729),<sup>54</sup> Fa Lin's 法琳 (572–640) *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論,<sup>55</sup> and Hui Lin's 慧琳 (737–820) *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義.<sup>56</sup> This indicates that the text was relatively widely available in philosophic circles.

Eventually, however, the emperor who had signed the above edict had his own revelation, which installed him as the one, and most authoritative, commentator of the *Laozi*. The Tang Imperial Family Li 李 inherited an old claim by many aspirants for power during the Six Dynasties to have descended from Laozi, to whom the family name Li was ascribed in the *Shiji*. The claim implied the religious authority to rule as well as a social ideal as encoded in the text transmitted under the name of Laozi.<sup>57</sup> Since the Six Dynasties, emperors had taken to writing the official commentary to the *Laozi* themselves, a habit sustained from Liang Wudi (r. 502–550) to the founder of the Ming dynasty. Eventually, in 731 Emperor Xuanzong had a dream encounter with Laozi, who confirmed that Laozi was the ancestor of the Imperial Family.<sup>58</sup> This association made the *Laozi* even more important, and it was introduced into the state examinations for a time.