

**THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE  
IN WEI-JIN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY:  
AN EXAMINATION OF WANG BI AND GUO XIANG**

**WANG JINYI  
(M.A. PEKING UNIVERSITY)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR  
OF PHILOSOPHY**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

**2006**

## Acknowledgements

I remember the days when I began to study Chinese philosophy in early 2000. They are as vivid as just yesterday. How little I knew then! Now, looking back the past five years, I conclude this period in my course of learning with this thesis. It is a work, though imperfect due to the limits of my own capacity, that would never have been done without the advice and encouragement I have received gratefully during this period.

Professor Alan K. L. Chan directed me to this interesting field and has guided me patiently yet strictly throughout my Ph.D. candidature at the National University of Singapore, to whom I owe more than I can ever repay. His guidance, in a classic way that I admire but may not achieve, does not end with the completion of this thesis. It exerts an enduring influence on me both as a prospective teacher and a scholar in the future.

I have benefited a lot from the lectures and seminars held by the Department of Philosophy of NUS. I am impressed by the teachers' academic ability, and their kindness, which, I think, is more valuable. I wish to thank especially Associate Professor Tan Sor hoon and Dr. Heng Hock Jiu for their comments on this thesis and help at critical moments.

It is my luck to be the classmate of a group of friendly and bright Ph.D students. Michael Fitzgerald carefully corrected two chapters of an earlier draft. My friend Dr. Sun Wenmin managed to squeeze time to read part of the thesis when he himself was terribly busy. My discussions with Kim Hak Ze, Olalekan Rafiu, Raphael Funwa, and other students are inspiring and pleasant. They made the days right before the submission of this thesis, normally stressful and hectic, enjoyable.

The financial support from the National University of Singapore enables me to concentrate on the research. I also want to extend my thanks to the library of NUS for its five star services. This thesis is materially based on it.

My husband has borne the painful burden of my study emotionally. I thank his understanding and support especially when I stayed overseas. I also wish to thank my mother. She always pushes her daughters to forge ahead. I was once seriously suspicious of her life philosophy. But now I know that I need to be pushed.

This thesis is dedicated to my father.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Conceptions of Human Nature in Warring States and Han China .....</b>	<b>23</b>
1.1. Early Confucian Ideas of Human Nature.....	26
1.2. Human Nature in Han Confucian Synthesis.....	30
1.3. New Developments in Han Confucian Views of Human Nature.....	43
1.4. Human Nature in Early Daoist Philosophy.....	55
1.5 Two Perspectives of Human Nature: Principle vs. Substance.....	65
<b>Chapter 2 Wang Bi: Nature<sup>Dao</sup> and Nature<sup>qi</sup> .....</b>	<b>69</b>
2.1. Nature <sup>Dao</sup> : Human Authenticity and Nature <sup>qi</sup> : Human Substance..	71
2.2. The Relationship between Nature and Feeling: Nature <sup>Dao</sup> Guides Nature <sup>qi</sup> .....	89
2.3. The Ideal Sage: His feelings and Spirituality .....	103
<b>Chapter 3 The Limits of Nature and Self-Knowledge .....</b>	<b>125</b>
3.1. A Comprehensive View of Nature.....	128
3.2. The Limits of Nature and Self-knowledge.....	141
3.3. The Sociopolitical Implications of Guo Xiang's View of Human Nature .....	170
<b>Chapter 4 Wang Bi and Guo Xiang Compared: Inheriting from and Going beyond Han Confucianism .....</b>	<b>189</b>
4.1. Similarities between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang.....	192
4.2. Differences between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang.....	195
4.3. Inheritance from and Development to Han Confucianism.....	201
<b>Selected Bibliography .....</b>	<b>217</b>

## Summary

Falling between the great unified empires of the Han and Tang, the Wei-Jin Period of Division (A.D. 220-420) may be one of the most overlooked and least understood eras to the English world. Compared with the large number of publications on the philosophical currents in the pre-Qin period, Wei Jin philosophy, normally known as *xuanxue* (玄学 Learning of the Profound), is still an under-developed field in the English-speaking world. The concept of human nature in it, in particular, has not been addressed in detail and systematically. This thesis tries to make contribution in this respect.

The concept of human nature is generally considered to be a dominant theme of Confucianism. It seems not to enjoy a privileged position in Daoism and *xuanxue* that mainly built on the commentaries on Daoist classics and the *Yijing*. However, as the examination of this thesis shows, the philosophical understanding of human nature actually serves as the basis for both Daoist and Wei-Jin philosophers' socio-political thoughts. To be specific, Wei-Jin philosophers' views of the socio-political issues, for example, the principle of non-action (*wuwei* 无为), the method of restoring social order, and the role of the sage, derive logically from their views of human nature.

This thesis examines two representative philosophers in the Wei-Jin period, i.e., Wang Bi and Guo Xiang's views of human nature. It begins with a review of the influential views of human nature developed before the Wei-Jin period, then gives a detailed analysis of Wang Bi and Guo Xiang's thoughts, and concludes the examination with a comparison between the two philosophers. It is the submission of this thesis that Wang Bi understood human nature as consisting of two parts, i.e., nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. The former is the differentiation of the *Dao*,

in each human being, which is neither good nor evil. The latter is the material constituent of human nature, whose contact with external things is subject to moral judgment. Wang Bi's view may anticipate the dichotomy that Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi made between *tianli zhi xing* (nature of Heavenly principle 天理之性) and *qizhi zhi xing* (nature of *qi* endowment 气质之性), which indicates the bearing of Wei-Jin philosophy on Neo-Confucianism. As for Guo Xiang, he adopted a comprehensive view of human nature, i.e., to refer human nature to the concrete phenomena of life, physical features, capacity, and feeling principally. The most distinctive of his view of human nature, as the thesis observes, is that the nature of each human being has its limits. So the urgent thing for people is to develop self-knowledge of their respective limits. This mode of self-knowledge guarantees that one fully utilizes one's nature, but not admires or envies others, which forms the resource of one's happiness.

The thesis situates Wang Bi and Guo Xiang in a tradition that took shape in the Warring States period and developed in the Han dynasty. As opposed to a popular yet sectarian view that Wei-Jin philosophy is a revival of early Daoism, the thesis suggests that Wei-Jin philosophy represents a distinctive development to the tradition. A comparison between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang shows not only the dynamic change of the tradition within the Wei-Jin period, but also the connection of the two philosophers to the previous tradition. While both inherited certain basic ideas from the tradition, they also contributed to its renewal by solving the problems that Han Confucians failed to address, i.e., the origin of goodness and evilness and the balance between rites and naturalness, in particular.

## Introduction

Irene Bloom says, “In virtually every culture, there is reflection about how human beings are alike and how they differ”.<sup>1</sup> As far as Chinese philosophy is concerned, the concept of human nature enjoys a privileged position. It is widely accepted that Chinese philosophy has strong ethical and political dimensions. From one perspective, the understanding of human nature serves as the theoretical basis for ethical and political thought. It determines the kind of life that one ought to live and the socio-political policies to be implemented. Also, it is generally agreed that Chinese philosophy aims to pursue a harmonious unity between Heaven and human beings (*tianren heyi* 天人合一). In this context, the concept of human nature functions as a bridge between Heaven and human beings, as human nature is understood to be endowed by Heaven. Confucianism and Daoism may debate with each other on many issues, but both agree that only by realizing one’s nature can one achieve the harmony between oneself and Heaven.

Ever since Confucius proposed that “by nature men are alike, through practice they have become far apart,”<sup>2</sup> the question of human nature has come to be an enduring concern for generations of Chinese philosophers. Their insights into this question have formed a unique tradition of philosophical thought of human nature. This tradition has attracted a great deal of research attention. However, in comparison with the large quantity of studies on the theories of human nature in pre-Qin times and the Song-Ming dynasties, less attention has been paid to those developed in the Wei-Jin period.

---

<sup>1</sup> Irene Bloom, “Human nature and biological nature in Mencius,” *Philosophy East and West* 47.1 (January 1997): 21.

<sup>2</sup> The *Analects*, 17:2; Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 45.

Falling between the great unified empires of Han and Tang, the period of division during the Wei and Jin dynasties (A.D. 220-420) may be one of the most overlooked and least understood eras to the English world. However, it is a distinctive period in Chinese history. It is often claimed that Confucianism with its emphasis on moral rites dominates the development of the Chinese society; yet, the Wei-Jin period is a subtle exception, during which such Daoist classics as the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* gained great popularity among intellectuals. The concepts of the *Dao*, Nonbeing and Being, and other philosophical issues were hotly debated. Wei-Jin philosophy is sometimes praised for having reached unparalleled metaphysical heights in the history of Chinese philosophy;<sup>3</sup> but it has also been fiercely criticized for having indulged in “empty” discussions that resulted in the division of the country.<sup>4</sup>

Of special interest to this thesis, the period abounds with the unorthodox words and behaviour of “famous men of letters” (*mingshi* 名士), which have been either fervently admired or fiercely attacked by the later generations. To take a few examples, Xun Can (荀粲 ca. 212-240) remarked that a woman’s virtue is not worth praising; her beauty is the most important thing.<sup>5</sup> Ruan Ji (阮籍 A.D.210-

---

<sup>3</sup> Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海:上海古籍出版社, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Fan Ning (范寧 339-401) held He Yan (何晏 ca 190-249) and Wang Bi responsible for the superficial state of the Jin intellectual scene, because the two initiated the “empty” discussions of the abstract topics. In his view, the devastation that He Yan and Wang Bi caused is worse than the wicked kings Jie and Zhou. See *Jinshu* 晉書, biography of Fan Ning, 75:1984.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語 edited by Xu Zhene 徐震堦 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京:中華書局, 1984), 489-490. An English translation is available. Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2002), 522. I use my translations throughout the thesis.



263) claimed that rites are not applicable to him.<sup>6</sup> At the funeral of Wang Can (王粲 A.D.177-217), Emperor Wen of Wei (魏文帝 r.220-226) demanded his companions to mimic a donkey's call, for the deceased enjoyed that sound when alive.<sup>7</sup> An extreme yet well-known instance involves Liu Ling (劉伶?-265). He was seriously addicted to alcohol and went about naked in his house. He recriminated against others' rebuke, "I take heaven and earth as my house and the room of my house as my underwear. Why do you enter into my underwear?"<sup>8</sup>

These stories initially aroused my interest in the Wei-Jin period. This interest became a research project, as I discovered that this type of behaviour was not simply the eccentricities of certain individuals, but rather constituted the trend of that time. Then questions arise as to how to explain these unconventional words and behaviour, and why they emerged to such a degree only in the Wei-Jin period. How did these famous men view the earlier tradition? Did they break completely with tradition? Ultimately, the question is what did the thinkers of this period construe to be the defining characteristic of human existence, if morality, the most valuable asset that distinguishes human beings from animals in Confucian view, was called into question? Is it the case that their understanding of human beings was based on a complete denial of Confucianism? To answer these questions, I need to examine the theories of human nature and other related issues in the Wei-Jin period. This examination is useful for a deeper understanding of the unorthodox phenomena in Wei-Jin China.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 393; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 402.

<sup>7</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 347-348; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 346.

<sup>8</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 392; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 402.

## **The social and intellectual context of Han-Wei**

The last years of the Han dynasty and the subsequent Wei-Jin period were eras of great instability. Struggle and chaos ensued relentlessly in the political arena. The Yellow Turban Rebellion (A.D.184) fatally shook the centralized state power of the Han court, and as a result, local military groups emerged and fought for power. After the collapse of the Han dynasty, three kingdoms co-existed, the strongest of which was the kingdom of Wei (魏). The Wei dynasty continued wars with the other two kingdoms. Meanwhile, it witnessed a long factional strife between two powerful families, Cao (曹) and Sima (司馬), at home. The Sima family finally won and established the new dynasty of Jin. The Jin dynasty failed to restore order either. Soon after the establishment, it was caught in the rebellion of the eight princes (八王之亂 A.D. 291-306) for as long as sixteen years. During the same period its northern border was invaded unremittingly by nomadic tribes living in the north of China. This forced the Jin dynasty to retreat southward and make Nanjing (南京) the new capital. Consequently, sixteen kingdoms held northern China successively, each a constant threat to the Jin dynasty.

Political instability deeply affected the lives of Wei-Jin intellectuals, as most of them came from noble families and held high positions in the government. Inevitably, they were drawn into the whirlpool of political strife. In A.D. 249 the Sima family staged a coup and took control of the Wei court. Many intellectuals and officials including Xiahou Xuan (夏侯玄 209-254) and He Yan (何晏), who were close to the Cao family, were executed, either immediately after the coup of 249 or shortly thereafter. With the establishment of the new dynasty of Jin, politics became highly sensitive and dangerous. Ruan Ji, for example, would rather find solace in wine than navigating the treacherous waters of political

intrigues.<sup>9</sup> Xi Kang (嵇康 A.D. 223-262) was executed for irreverence towards the authority and radical criticism of Confucian rites.<sup>10</sup> Under the shadow of his close friend Xi Kang's death, Xiang Xiu (向秀 A.D.227-280) received the government assignment to show his loyalty to the Jin emperor.<sup>11</sup> Given these conditions, the intellectuals' enthusiasm for abstract discussions is often construed as a way of escaping from the cruel political reality. There is some truth to this view. But, as I will show in this thesis, I would understand Wei-Jin philosophy, usually known as "Learning of the Profound" (*xuanxue* 玄學), as an active response to the political instability at that time, with the view of eliminating disorder and restore harmony.

Coinciding with the decline of the Han court, Confucianism, which dominated the Han dynasty, also underwent a severe crisis. Confucian norms, i.e., the "Three Bonds" (*san gang* 三綱) that regulate the relationships between ruler and subject, father and child, and husband and wife, were sharply called into question and shown open contempt. In his famous *Biography of the Great Man* (*Daren xianshengzhuan* 大人先生傳), Ruan Ji stated explicitly that rulers and officials cause oppression and robbery.<sup>12</sup> Later, Bao Jingyan (fourth century A.D. 鮑敬言) even proposed a kind of anarchism by challenging the "Heavenly Mandate (*tianming* 天命)" that had served as the religious or metaphysical basis

---

<sup>9</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 390-394; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 399-404.

<sup>10</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 194-195; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 190.

<sup>11</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 43; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Chen Bojun 陳伯君, *Ruan Ji ji jiaozhu* 阮籍集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京:中華書局, 1987), 170. Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics, The Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D. 210-263* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 195-196.

for the ruler.<sup>13</sup> With regard to the parent-child relationship, a similar crisis was also evident in the fact that some officials who had been recommended to the government on the merit of filial piety turned out to live separately from their parents.<sup>14</sup> The husband-wife relationship also underwent a fundamental change during this period. Xun Can, as cited earlier, stated that woman virtues are negligible. In fact, elite women during this period generally disregarded the Confucian rules of propriety. As recorded in the official history of the Jin dynasty, elite women took part in social activities instead of doing housework, and they openly expressed their feelings of jealousy rather than hiding them. Their fathers and older brothers did not reproach them, nor did the world condemn them.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the mourning rites, the most fundamental part of Confucian rites characterised by a large number of formalities, was not observed strictly. The atmosphere at the funeral was not as solemn as before, as one might imitate a donkey's cries or do other unconventional things to extend one's condolence. Some famous men of letters sang, ate meat and drank wine while observing the mourning period. On hearing the death of his mother, Ruan Ji did not stop playing chess, though after that, he became "wasted" over his grief.<sup>16</sup> This reminds one of Zhuangzi, who sang along to the rhythm of a drum instead of

---

<sup>13</sup> Ge Hong 葛洪, *Baopuzi* 抱樸子 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1993), 4:773-74.

<sup>14</sup> Ge Hong 葛洪, *Baopuzi* 抱樸子, 3:509.

<sup>15</sup> For more details, see *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 362-379; also see Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1974), 1:136; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 363-381.

<sup>16</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 390-410; *Jinshu*: Biography of Ruan Ji 晉書·阮籍傳, 5:1360; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 399-422.

crying at the death of his wife.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, Daoism had a bearing on the life-style of the famous men in the Wei-Jin period.

There were also serious problems with Han Confucianism in both content and methodology. The most distinctive part of Han Confucianism is its cosmology, whose origin can be dated back to Zou Yan's (鄒衍 c. 350-270 B.C) theory of *yinyang wuxing* (the positive and negative vital energy and the five phases of metal, wood, water, fire and earth 陰陽五行).<sup>18</sup> Han Confucians formulated their cosmological arguments and used them to support their views of society and human beings.

Dong Zhongshu is the best representative of Han Confucians. He formulated a theory of Heaven resonating with human beings and combined it with that of *yinyang wuxing* (陰陽五行). The former theory involves a mystical resonance or match between Heaven and human beings. The resonance exists, because Heaven fashions human beings after itself. For example, Heaven has four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter; therefore man has four kinds of feelings, i.e., pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy. Under the theory of *yinyang wuxing*, the positive and negative *qi* and the five phases of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth not only constitute the cosmos, but also account for all physical phenomena within the cosmos. For example, human beings and things arise out of the interaction between the positive and negative *qi*. Each dynasty is characterised by one of the five phases, which determines state affairs such as the national colour,

---

<sup>17</sup> The *Zhuangzi* 莊子, 73.

<sup>18</sup> For the philosophy of Zou Yan and its development, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 232-244; Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史 (*History of thought during the two eras of the Han*) (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe 上海: 華東師範大學出版社, 2001), 3-8.

the royal calendar system, and even the succession of one dynasty by another. It was believed that fire characterises the Zhou (周 B.C.1066-256) dynasty and metal, the Shang (商 c.a.17<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century). Since fire normally conquers metal, as the theory goes, it is unsurprising that Zhou succeeded Shang.<sup>19</sup>

Evidently, Han cosmology takes on a superstitious dimension. Towards the end of Han it degenerated into prophecies and divinations. Convinced by the resonating theory between Heaven and human beings, a steady stream of Han Confucians devoted their attention to natural phenomena, calamities in particular. They believed that Heaven knows what people, the rulers in particular, do and Heaven shows its approval or disapproval through natural phenomena. It was also popular practice to interpret socio-political phenomena in terms of the five phases. Han Confucians debated on whether earth or water characterises the Han dynasty and on the policies that should follow accordingly. For example, if earth represents the major virtue of the Han dynasty, state affairs should be arranged in accordance to the properties of earth. As earth is yellow, the royal colour of the Han court should be yellow; as earth is still and plain, the ruler should implement light taxation, to reduce the burden on peasants and give them and their farm land enough time to recover. There is some value to these explanations. For example, they reflect an attempt to set constraints on the ruler. However, they failed to reveal the true reasons for socio-political problems. Worse, people might be misdirected to focus entirely on natural phenomena and neglect the real problems. Towards the end of Han, Han Confucianism was dominated with these mysterious prophecies and divinations, and it began to lose its appeal for serious thinkers.

---

<sup>19</sup> Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史, 215-216.

Exegesis, the traditional method of Confucian scholarship, also degenerated into fragmented textual analysis in late Han. This methodology refers to the way of defining, comparing, analysing, and explaining the classical texts, through which a new understanding of the texts is systematically built up. At the end of the Han dynasty students of the Confucian school concentrated solely on explaining certain individual words and sentences, paying little attention to the context and the main themes of the texts. An extreme case is that five textual characters were given an explanation of twenty to thirty thousand words.<sup>20</sup> To make it worse, a student might be required to devote a whole lifetime to only one text. The result of such training, to be sure, was a narrow-minded student.<sup>21</sup> He would not be competent to produce a comprehensive interpretation of the classics.

Disappointed at Han Confucianism, Wei-Jin thinkers shifted to three classical texts, i.e., the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi* and *Yijing* that were collectively called *sanxuan* (the three profound texts 三玄).<sup>22</sup> The reinterpretations of the three texts constitute the main body of what was lately called Learning of the Profound (*xuanxue* 玄學).<sup>23</sup> Learning of the Profound is a direct response to the socio-

---

<sup>20</sup> Ban Gu 班固, *Houhanshu yiwenzhi* 後漢書·藝文志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1962), 30:1723.

<sup>21</sup> For relevant arguments, see Zhou Shaoxian 周紹賢, *WeiJin qingtán shulun* 魏晉清談述論 (Taipei: shangwu yinshuguan 臺北: 商務印書館, 1966), 1-9.

<sup>22</sup> The earliest extant reference to the three texts collectively as the *sanxuan* is probably in the 6<sup>th</sup>-century work *Yan shi jiaxun* (Family Instructions of the Yan Clan 顏氏家訓), which was composed by Yan Zhitui (顏之推 531-595). See Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yangshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1980), 179; Teng, Ssu-yü, trans. *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan: Yen-Shih Chia-Hsün* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 70.

<sup>23</sup> Wang Baoxuan 王葆琰 thinks that the term *Xuanxue* 玄學 began to be used to refer retrospectively to the thought prevalent in the Wei-Jin period in 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries. See his book, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學 (Jinan: Qilu shushe 濟南: 齊魯書社, 1987), 2-7.

*Xuanxue* 玄學 is translated variously as Neo-Daoism, Learning of the mysterious, Mysterious Learning, Abstruse Learning, and scholarly investigation of that which is dark. As Livia Kohn points out in her review of Brook Ziporyn's book *The Penumbra Unbound* (available at

political failure at the end of the Han period. Wei-Jin thinkers sought to find effective ways of restoring social order by looking into the three classics. They debated on topics such as the relationships between Being and Nonbeing (*youwu* 有無), naturalness and “orthodox” teachings characterized by the rites (*ziran mingjiao* 自然名教), nature and feeling (*xingqing* 性情), word and meaning (*yanyi* 言意), capacity and nature (*caixing* 才性) and other socio-political issues.

Learning of the Profound is primarily an objection to the Han cosmology. Wei-Jin thinkers wiped out the teleological indications and superstitious contents that abound in Han cosmology, and proposed a completely different ontology.

---

<http://rels.queensu.ca/dao/> under book review), the different translations indicate the extent to which the translators emphasize the Daoist dimension of *xuanxue* 玄學. Scholars who translate *xuanxue* 玄學 as Neo-Daoism, Yu Yingshi for example, construe Wei-Jin thought primarily as a revival of early Daoism. In contrast, other scholars, who prefer the translations of Learning of the mysterious or Abstruse Learning, for example, do not consider *xuanxue* 玄學 to be a sectarian movement. Rather, they understand *xuanxue* 玄學 as a reconciliation of Daoism and Confucianism or a “broad philosophical front (Alan Chan).”

The various translations also reflect the different understanding as to the word class of *xuan* 玄, i. e., whether it is a noun or an adjective. If 玄 is used as a noun, the term *xuanxue* 玄學 means learning of the Profound, the mysterious, or the metaphysical (*xuan* 玄); if 玄 is taken as an adjective to qualify *xue* 學, the term *xuanxue* 玄學 indicates that the leaning is profound or mysterious.

In my understanding, the character *xuan* 玄 can be used as a synonym of the *Dao*, and it also refers to the ancient wisdom hidden in the classics. Wei-Jin philosophers sought to uncover this profound wisdom and appealed to it to restore order in society. In light of this, I would use *xuan* 玄 as a noun, and translate *xuanxue* 玄學 as Learning of the Profound. I would not interpret Learning of the Profound in a sectarian way. Rather, I situate it into the tradition that took shape in the Warring States period and developed in the Han dynasty and understand it as representing a unique development to the tradition.

See Alan K.L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-Shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 25; “Zhong Hui’s *Laozi* Commentary and the Debate on Capacity and Nature in Third-Century China,” *Early China* 28(2003): 102. Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound, The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (State university of New York Press, 2003), 17-18. Rudolf G. Wagner, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China, Wang Bi’s Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)* (State University of New York Press, 2003), 2; *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi’s Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (State University of New York Press, 2003), 1. Yu Yingshi, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin Chin,” in *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* edited by Donald J. Munro (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), 121.



Wang Bi is the representative in this respect. He realized that it is impossible to trace the ultimate creator within the physical world, which leads to infinite digress. The ultimate creator must be beyond the physical world, which is the *Dao*, the formless and nameless Nonbeing (*wu* 無). He made lengthy interpretations on the metaphysical features of the *Dao* and highlighted its overwhelming importance to nature and the human world.

However, Learning of the Profound should not be understood as purely metaphysical exploration of the *Dao*, Nonbeing, and Being. It also involves sustained discussions of socio-political topics, which I will turn to later in this thesis. The metaphysical discussions in fact serve as the theoretical basis for the discussions of practical issues. For example, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang shared that the original nature of human beings is in order naturally. Human nature conceived in this way makes possible the Daoist principle of non-action (*wuwei* 無爲),<sup>24</sup> which was strongly advocated in the Wei-Jin period. The sage, for his thorough comprehension of the *Dao*, qualified to implement this principle. Clearly, the philosophical discussions of human nature and the ideal personality of the sage serve as the premise of a certain political policy. Similarly, underneath the debate on the relationship between nature and capacity is the practical concern with official appointment. With the corruption of the Han system of local recommendation, and with the growing need for capable people to enhance the new dynasty, Wei-Jin thinkers needed to re-examine the standards of official

---

<sup>24</sup> The concept of *wuwei* opens to different interpretations, which results in different translations of it. Since one specific translation hardly exhausts its richness, I simply utilize the literal “non-action” and explain further my understanding of the concept in the thesis. As one will see later, *wuwei* can mean that one refrains from some specific action, or one stays free of deliberate action, or it may refer to a mindset of spontaneity, depending on the context.

appointment. Their discussions of the relationship between nature and capacity reflect a pragmatic attempt to find an effective way of recruiting able people.<sup>25</sup>

The method prevalent in Han scholarship was replaced by a new method of interpretation. The new method placed special emphasis on the fundamental meaning of a classical text as a whole and sought to uncover the universal truth hidden behind the written words. Consequently, in dramatic contrast to the Han scholars, who had immersed themselves in a sea of trivial fragments of textual exegesis, thinkers of Learning of the Profound interpreted the texts in a more philosophical way. The new approach to interpretation made them competent in grasping the main themes of the texts. Wang Bi's commentaries on the *Laozi*, *Yijing*, and Guo Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* have survived generations of careful scrutiny, which suggests the appeal of their interpretive method for later scholars. Keeping the contrast in methodology in mind, we can explain the debates on the relationship between words and meaning (*yanyi* 言意). In general, Wei-Jin philosophers maintained that in order to grasp the true meaning of a text, one should not stick to the surface meaning of the words. This position may be taken as the principle of the new method of interpretation adopted by Wei-Jin philosophers. I will return to this point in detail later.

### **Literature review**

Wei-Jin thought is not as popular as pre-Qin thought in Western scholarship. Fortunately, the situation has improved in recent years, with the

---

<sup>25</sup> Alan Chan produces a fresh interpretation as to the four views of the relationship between nature and capacity (*Sibenlun* 四本論) from within a historical context that official appointment turned to be a crucial part of the socio-political reform. See Alan K. L. Chan, "What are the Four Roots of Capacity and Nature?" in *Wisdom in China and the West*, edited by Vincent Shen and Willard Oxtoby (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004), 143-184.

appearance of a number of studies and translations.<sup>26</sup> Richard J. Lynn has made accurate and fluent translations of Wang Bi's *Laozi* commentary and Guo Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*,<sup>27</sup> on which this thesis is mainly built. I have referred to them frequently when I made my own translations. Regarding general research on this period, Charles Holcombe situates Wei-Jin thought within the transitional context from the Han period to the Wei-Jin period, and reveals the interplay between the new intellectual trends and the economic and cultural background.<sup>28</sup> Yu Yingshi suggests that the Western concepts of individualism and holism are applicable to the study of early Chinese thought: the Neo-Taoist movement in the Wei-Jin period, in his view, celebrates the appearance of Chinese individualism.<sup>29</sup>

Besides general research, examinations of particular philosophers have been fruitful. Both Rudolf G. Wagner and Alan K. L. Chan explore Wang Bi as not only a commentator but also a philosopher in his own right. Wagner demonstrates that Wang Bi used the analytical style that was already implied in the

---

<sup>26</sup> Some examples are (in chronological order) J. K. Shryock, trans. *The Study of Human Abilities: The Jen Wu Chih of Liu Shao*. American Oriental Series, vol. 11 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1937; reprint, New York, 1966); Richard B. Mather, trans. *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World, by Liu I-ch'ing*; Paul J. Lin, *A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1977); Ariane Rump and Wing-tsit Chan, trans. *Commentary on the Lao-Tzu by Wang Bi* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979); Robert G. Henricks, trans. *Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China: The Essays of Hsi K'ang* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Richard J. Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Rudolf G. Wagner, *The Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's commentary on the Laozi with critical text and translation*. Others will be cited in subsequent notes.

<sup>27</sup> Richard J. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); *Zhuangzi: A New Translation of The Sayings of Master Zhuang As Interpreted by Guo Xiang* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming)

<sup>28</sup> Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasty* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Yu Yingshi, "Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China," 121-148.

*Laozi*, what Wanger calls the “interlocking parallel style,” to interpret the *Laozi*. This strategy of using the *Laozi* to explain the *Laozi* makes Wang Bi stand out among his competitors.<sup>30</sup> Chan compares the two commentaries by Wang Bi and the legendary Heshang gong, and demonstrates how the *Laozi* was approached in different ways. Wang Bi dedicated himself to uncovering the true meaning, or the principle of the *Dao*, that he read between the lines and which was hard to be discerned by a common reader. In contrast, Heshang gong took pains to explain what individual words or sentences mean, referring them to specific or concrete things. Wang Bi was more concerned with philosophical issues than Heshang gong, which explains the central place attributed to him as an interpreter of the *Laozi* in the history of Chinese philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Brook Ziporyn is the first to produce a book-length study of Guo Xiang in English, leaving aside Fung Yu-lan’s selected translation.<sup>32</sup> In his book *The Penumbra Unbound*, Ziporyn presents a compelling analysis of the three key concepts in Guo Xiang’s thought, i. e., the concepts of “traces” (*ji* 迹) and “what leaves traces” (*suoyiji* 所以迹), “vanishing into things” (*ming* 冥), and “self-transformation” (*duhua* 獨化). Based on this analysis, he goes on to show how Guo Xiang successfully unified independence and interdependence, activity and nonactivity, and finally Daoism and Confucianism. Ziporyn also formulates an interesting explanation of Guo Xiang’s conception of nature, and suggests a solution to the related question of whether Guo Xiang is a fatalist. I will discuss his interpretation later in chapter 3 on Guo Xiang.

---

<sup>30</sup> Rudolf G. Wagner, *The Craft of A Chinese Commentator*.

<sup>31</sup> Alan K.L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way*.

<sup>32</sup> Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*; Fung Yu-lan, *Chuang Tzu: a new selected translation with an exposition of the philosophy of Kuo Hsiang* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933).

A number of papers on some important topics of Learning of the Profound are also noteworthy. Regarding the relationship between *ziran* (naturalness 自然) and *mingjiao* (Names and teachings 名教), Richard B. Mather produces an informative analysis of the different views of this topic during the Wei-Jin period.<sup>33</sup> As for another hotly debated topic, i. e., the relationship between nature and capacity, Alan Chan formulates a historical interpretation by relating this debate with the issue of official appointment that became urgently meaningful for the newly established Wei and Jin dynasties.<sup>34</sup>

In Chinese scholarship, Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 is of great importance. Thanks to his pioneering research, the significance of Wei-Jin thought in the history of Chinese philosophy has been widely recognized. He introduces a metaphysical approach to Wei-Jin thought and this approach has remained influential. Besides his general research on Wei-Jin thought as a whole, Tang also contributes his insights into particular topics of Wei-Jin thought. In his *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿,<sup>35</sup> Tang discusses topics as broad as the relationship between nature and feeling, that between nature and capacity, and that between language and meaning; he also examines the questions of whether the sage has feelings, and Wang Bi's commentaries on the *Analects* and the *Yi jing*.

However, due to his emphasis on metaphysics, Tang may have neglected the socio-political dimension of Wei-Jin thought. He is keen to draw a clear line between the two. As he suggests, Wei-Jin thinkers who discussed the relationship

---

<sup>33</sup> Richard B. Mather, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties," *History of Religions* 9.2-3 (1969-1970): 160-80.

<sup>34</sup> Alan K.L. Chan, "Zhong Hui' *Laozi* Commentary and the Debate on Capacity and Nature in Third-Century China," *Early China* 28-29 (2003-2004): 101-160.

<sup>35</sup> Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海：上海古籍出版社, 2001.

between nature and capacity were more practically oriented, while those who discussed the relationship between nature and feeling showed more interest in philosophical or metaphysical enquiry.<sup>36</sup>

I am afraid there is not such a clear distinction between practical concern and philosophical concern in Wei-Jin thought. In fact, as the analysis in the thesis will show, it is hard to find a Wei-Jin thinker who had purely philosophical interests. It is not the case that the practical issues are clearly separated from the philosophical ones. Rather, they are two sides of the same coin. As shown before, the discussions of the relationship between nature and feeling and that between nature and capacity reflect both philosophical and political concerns.

Tang Yijie 湯一介 needs to be mentioned here. He is a worthy successor to his father, Tang Yongtong regarding this kind of scholarship. He constructs a comprehensive philosophy of Guo Xiang.<sup>37</sup> His discussions on self-transformation (*duhua* 獨化) and the limits of nature (*xingfen* 性分) are especially instructive, to which I can add my own observations later.

Tang Changru's 唐長孺 contribution also deserves to be noted. His research mainly concentrates on the Wei-Jin political and economic systems.<sup>38</sup> Given the strong socio-political concern of Learning of the Profound, and the noble family background of many Wei-Jin thinkers, Tang's research deepens one's knowledge of the historical context from which Learning of the Profound arose

---

<sup>36</sup> Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Tang Yongtong xueshu lunwenji* 湯用彤學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京：中華書局, 1983), 260-261.

<sup>37</sup> Tang Yijie 湯一介, *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin xuanxue* 郭象與魏晉玄學 (Peking University Press 北京大學出版社, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Tang Changru 唐長孺, *WeiJin NanBei chao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian 北京：三聯書店, 1955, 1978).

and against which it developed. For example, he suggests that Cao Cao (曹操 A.D. 155-220) intended to build a centralized state power like the Han dynasty. To do that, Cao had to weaken the power possessed by the local noble families. At that time, besides other political and economic privileges, the local noble families controlled Pure Criticism (*qingyi* 清議) whose main function was to recommend virtuous people to the government. Cao's policy of promoting capable people regardless of their moral cultivation was one measure to curb their power. This may have initiated the debate on the relationship between nature and capacity. In this regard, Tang produces a helpful political account for the debate on nature and capacity.<sup>39</sup>

Mou Zongsan's 牟宗三 research on Wei-Jin thought is also noteworthy. In his *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, Mou states that the concept of nature is generally defined in terms of *qi* (vital energy) in the Wei-Jin period, and this definition is different from the moral definition in Confucianism.<sup>40</sup> According to Mou, the definition of nature as *qi* is liable to fatalistic or deterministic interpretation, for it admits to different endowments of *qi* from one person to another. In contrast, the moral understanding of nature entails an egalitarian view, i.e., everyone has equal possibility of becoming a sage.<sup>41</sup>

Although Mou's arguments are plausible to some extent, I am afraid that his conclusion is too strong. Confucius mentioned nature only twice in the *Analects*. More important, it is hard to discern any moral implication in these

---

<sup>39</sup>Tang Changru 唐長孺, "Jiupin zhongzheng zhidu shishi" 九品中正制度試釋, in *Wei-Jin Nanbei chaoshi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢, 85-99.

<sup>40</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理 (Taipei: xuesheng shuju 臺北: 學生書局, 1978), 1-8.

<sup>41</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 35-42, 56-62.

mentions. As Chen Lai 陳來 observes in his paper on one recently excavated Guodian bamboo script, *Xingzimingchu* 性自命出, some disciples of Confucius conceived nature as the *qi* of pleasure, anger, sorrow and grief, and the view that human nature is good was actually not central in the Pre-Qin Confucian school.<sup>42</sup>

A number of hypotheses have been made about the issue of the relationship between capacity and nature, which is one of the most important topics of Wei-Jin thought, since the critical text on it *Sibenlun* (*Four Fundamental Views* 四本論) was lost.<sup>43</sup> Among them, Chen Yinqu 陳寅恪 suggests a direct relation between the views of the proponents in this debate and their political commitments. Those who hold that capacity is identical or coincides with nature are members of the Sima faction, whereas the others claiming that capacity is different or diverges from nature are followers of the Cao family.<sup>44</sup> However, despite the instructive interpreting perspective, Chen's conclusion is less convincing. It might be rigid to try to ascribe the four thinkers into the two competing political camps. In fact, evidence has shown that Zhong Hui, who held that capacity coincides with nature, is also a member of the Cao camp.<sup>45</sup> Evidence also suggests that the participants in

---

<sup>42</sup> See Chen Lai 陳來, "Guodian chujian zhi xingzimingchupian chutan" 郭店楚簡之性自命出篇初探, *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3 (1998): 52-60.

<sup>43</sup> The issue of the relationship between capacity and nature attracted a great deal of philosophical attention in the Wei-Jin period. Zhong Hui (鍾會 225–264) collected the various views of this issue and edited them under the title *Caixing sibenlun* (The Four Fundamental Views of Capacity and Nature 才性四本論). But the text is not extant. What we know today is only that the four views are that nature is identical (同) or coincides with (合) capacity, and nature is different (異) or diverges from (離) capacity, which were held respectively by Fu Gu (傅 209–255), Zhong Hui, Li Feng 李豐 (d. 254) and Wang Guang 王廣 (d. 251).

<sup>44</sup> Chen Yinqu 陳寅恪, "Shu shishuoxinyu wenxuelei Zhong Hui zhuan sibenlun shibitiaohou" 書世說新語文學類鍾會傳四本論始畢條後, *Chen Yinqu xiansheng lunwenji* 陳寅恪先生論文集, vol. 2 ( Taipei: Sanrenxing chubanshe 臺北：三人行出版社, 1974) 601-7.

<sup>45</sup> Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅, "Zhong Hui yu zaoqi zhexue" 鍾會與早期玄學, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi yanjiu* 中國哲學史研究 2 (1987): 28-32.



this debate were unlikely to be able to maintain a firm political stand in the fierce political struggle of Wei-Jin.<sup>46</sup>

In recent Chinese scholarship, two books merit attention. One is *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學 by Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, the other is *Zhongguo wenhua de qingliu* 中國文化的清流 by Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅. Wang Baoxuan understands Learning of the Profound in the early Wei period as theoretical support for the political reforms that took place during the Zhengshi 正始 era. This understanding highlights the socio-political dimension of Learning of the Profound. With this basic understanding, he also examines the issue of the relationship between nature and capacity and that between nature and feeling. He reconstructs the chronological sequence of the four views on the relationship between nature and capacity. He also explores the original meaning of *cai* (capacity 才) in the context of the *wuxing* theory, which is wood or substance in his view.<sup>47</sup>

As for the debate on the relationship between nature and feeling, Wang Baoxuan traces it back to the beginning of the Han dynasty. He suggests that Wang Bi integrated both Han Confucian and Han Daoist views of this issue and arrived at a comprehensive theory of nature and feeling. However, Wang thinks that Wang Bi was inconsistent in his views on whether the sage has feelings. Wang Bi implied that the sage does not have feelings when interpreting the *Laozi*, but claimed that the sage does have feelings when interpreting the *Yijing*.<sup>48</sup> I will

---

<sup>46</sup> Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅, *Zhongguo wenhua de qingliu* 中國文化的清流 (Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1991), 65.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 389-392, 401-403.

<sup>48</sup> Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 375-389.

respond to Wang Baoxuan's position and show that Wang Bi was consistent in the second part of chapter 2.

Wang Xiaoyi contributes to the scholarship of the period with his panoramic portrait of Learning of the Profound. His clarification of the concept of nature is especially helpful. According to him, in the debate on the relationship between nature and capacity, capacity is generally taken to refer to political abilities, but the meaning of nature varies from one thinker to another. Nature may mean essence, moral asset, character, or disposition, which lead to respectively the four views of the relationship between nature and capacity.<sup>49</sup> Wang's argument is fresh and instructive, but, it seems to me that nature conceived as character overlaps with nature as disposition.

There are other studies on Wei-Jin history and literature, but the works reviewed above are the more representative modern research on Learning of the Profound. Their achievements are impressive and noteworthy. However, compared with the large number of publications on the philosophical currents in the Pre-Qin period, Wei-Jin philosophy is still an under-developed field in the English-speaking world. This should be remedied, especially when we realize that Wei-Jin philosophy has exerted a deep and direct influence on Neo-Confucianism later in the Song-Ming dynasties.

### **Thesis Structure**

Methodologically, this thesis is both historical and analytical, and also comparative. Learning of the Profound can be understood against its historical context, given its socio-political orientation. However, an analytical approach to each particular question is more basic, as it provides a clearer account of what the

---

<sup>49</sup> Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅, *Zhongguo wenhuade qingliu* 中國文化的清流, 173-180.

question is about rather than its relationship with certain historical circumstances. A comparison between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang attempts to demonstrate a dynamic tradition, i.e., the change and continuity of this tradition not only from Han to Wei-Jin but also within the period of Wei-Jin. This thesis consists of four chapters. It begins with a review of the influential views of human nature developed before the Wei-Jin period, then gives a detailed analysis of Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's understanding of human nature, and concludes the examination with a comparison between the two philosophers.

The review of the pre-Qin and Han views of human nature in **Chapter 1** is necessary, as these theories form a tradition against which the accounts of both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang can be better understood. The two philosophers formulated their arguments by both inheriting from and interrogating this tradition. The chapter begins with a brief review of early Confucian views of human nature. Following that is a detailed examination of Han Confucian thought of human nature. The third part is an analysis of early Daoist views of human nature, mainly built on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Based on this review, the last part concludes that there was a contrast between two understandings of human nature as principle and as substance, which would become sharper in Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's thought respectively.

**Chapter 2** examines Wang Bi's view of human nature, which centres on, as I propose, his understanding of human nature as consisting of two parts, nature<sup>Dao</sup>, the share of the *Dao* in human beings and nature<sup>qi</sup>, the material constituent of human nature. The first part of this chapter examines how Wang Bi's conception of Nonbeing has decisive bearing on his conception of human nature and the role of *qi* in his thought. The second part is devoted to an analysis

of the relationship between nature and feeling, i.e., that between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>, as feeling generates from the contact of *qi* with things. The third part revolves around the debate between He Yan and Wang Bi on whether the sage has feelings or not. It addresses questions like the ideal nature of the sage, the personality of the sage, the commonality and the difference between the sage and the common people, and whether sagehood is inborn or attainable in Wang Bi's view.

**Chapter 3** explores Guo Xiang's view of human nature. It addresses three main questions: what does human nature refer to concretely in Guo Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, how to understand his distinctive conception of *xingfen* (the limits of nature 性分), and what is the socio-political implication of Guo Xiang's view of human nature? Some related questions will also be examined. For example, is Guo Xiang a fatalist? What is his conception of non-action--does it refer to a set of behavioural codes or a special mindset? Does the natural order in society based on a rediscovery of one's true nature make the role of a ruler unnecessary? Is Guo Xiang an anarchist?

**Chapter 4** is an attempt to link the previous three chapters. It situates both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang in a tradition that took shape in the Warring States period and developed in the Han dynasty and tries to show their relation with that tradition. The first part of this chapter is devoted to a comparison between Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's views of human nature. The second and third parts give an account of the similarities and differences between the two philosophers by looking to the tradition. It is my submission that the similarities and differences between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang arise from their inheritance from and interrogation of the tradition respectively.

## Chapter 1 Conceptions of Human Nature in Warring States and Han China

Ideas do not arise out of a historical vacuum; and thinkers of the Wei-Jin period are no exception. They were heirs to a tradition that took shape during the Warring States period and developed in the Han dynasty. This tradition was transmitted through the classics such as the *Analects*, the *Xiaojing* (Book of Filial Piety 孝經), the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Yijing* (Book of Change 易經). Most Wei-Jin thinkers came from powerful families and had received a good family education, the most crucial part of which was to learn the classics.<sup>50</sup> Given this, it is reasonable to assume that when Wei-Jin thinkers formulated their ideas of human nature, they were already well-informed of the influential views proposed by previous thinkers on this topic. These views form the background against which we can come to a better understanding of the ideas of human nature during the Wei-Jin period. On the one hand, Wei-Jin thinkers utilized these past views of human nature as their theoretical resources; on the other hand, they sought to go beyond them, as some of them were believed to be responsible for the upheaval of

---

<sup>50</sup> Evidence shows that the family education that Zhong Hui 鍾會(225-264 A.D.) received centered on reading the classical texts, which is thought to reflect the general situation of family education in the aristocratic clans, such as the Wang clan (into which Wang Bi was born), the Wei clan (Wei Guan 衛瓘 220-291), the Pei clan (Pei Xiu 裴秀 224-271), etc. It reads,

[Zhong Hui] learned the *Xiaojing* when he was four years old, learned the *Analects* at seven, the *Shi* at eight, the *Shangshu* at ten, the *Yijing* at eleven, the *Chunqiu zuoshi zhuan* and the *Guoyu* at twelve, the *Zhouli* and the *Liji* at thirteen, the *Yiji* by Chen Hou at fourteen, and at fifteen he was admitted to the Imperial College to study remarkable books and unusual exegetical works from all parts of the empire.... [Zhong Hui's] mother was well learned and read various kinds of books, of which she was especially fond of the *Yijing* and the *Laozi*.  
 年四歲授《孝經》，七歲誦《論語》，八歲誦《詩》，十歲誦《尚書》，十一誦《易》，十二誦《春秋左氏傳》，《國語》，十三誦《周禮》、《禮記》，十四誦成侯《易記》，十五使入太學問四方奇文異訓.....(其母)雅好書籍，涉曆衆書，特好《易》、《老》。

For the Chinese text see Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quanshanggu sandai qinhan sango liuchao wen*, series of Wei 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 之 全三國文魏 (Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1999), vol.25: 250.

the late Han and unhelpful to restoring order in society. Consequently, as we will see later in this thesis, Wei-Jin theories of human nature are both indebted to and distinct from the views of human nature established previously.

This chapter is a review of these previous views. First, I give a brief outline of Confucian ideas of human nature in the Warring States period, brief because the topic has been well researched by scholars. After that, I concentrate on the Han period, dealing with two questions. (1) How Han Confucians synthesized the early Confucian ideas and built a comprehensive framework of human nature. (2) Is there any innovation in this framework? I propose that besides producing some fresh ideas on the relationship between nature and feeling, Han Confucians formulated a theory of *qi* endowment, which exerted a deep and enduring influence on later views of human nature. My analysis of Han Confucian views is much more detailed, as these views have received less philosophical attention than those of the Warring States period. Moreover, Wei-Jin philosophy is generally seen as a direct response to the collapse of the unified Han Empire and the decline of Han Confucianism. To better understand Wei-Jin philosophy, it is necessary to review carefully Han Confucian thought.

The fourth part of this chapter involves an examination of the early Daoist views of human nature. It is mainly built on two well-known Daoist classics, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Of course, the full scope of Daoist philosophy is much broader than these two texts. But the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* have long been considered to be the most fundamental classics of Daoist philosophy. More importantly, they dominated the Wei-Jin intellectual scene. Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi* and Guo Xiang's on the *Zhuangzi* occupy central place in Learning of the Profound. An examination of the two texts exemplifies how a

Chinese thinker built his own systematic thought through the medium of commentary. Moreover, it helps to show how Wang Bi and Guo Xiang reinterpreted the Daoist classics by both inheriting from and interrogating Han Confucianism.

In this part, I focus on early Daoist philosophy, without mentioning its development in the Han dynasty, as I do with Confucianism. This imbalance is simply because Daoist philosophy did not thrive in the Han dynasty, at least not after the reign of the Han Emperor Wu (r. 140-86 B.C.), when Confucianism triumphed over the other schools. Daoism did flourish during the early Han, although it was mixed with the teachings of other schools, in particular Mingjia (the school of Names 名家), Fajia (the school of Legalism 法家), Nongjia (the school of Agriculture 農家), and Bingjia (the school of Military Strategists 兵家). For example, the so-called Daoist text *Huannanzi* (淮南子 compiled by Liu An 劉安 ca. 179-122 B.C.) is in fact a syncretic work. Most of the discussions of human nature in that text can be traced back to the *Zhuangzi*, the *Laozi*, and Confucians in the Warring States period.<sup>51</sup> As such, to understand the Daoist thought of human nature before the Wei-Jin period, it is enough to look into the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*.

Based on the analysis in the previous parts, I propose in the last part of this chapter that there is a contrast in understanding human nature as “principle” and as “substance,” which is applicable to the development of Chinese philosophical tradition of human nature before the Wei-Jin period. I will return to this later. Inherited from this tradition, Wei-Jin philosophers Wang Bi and Guo Xiang would

---

<sup>51</sup> Jan Yun-hua, “Human Nature and its Cosmic Roots in the Huang-Lao Taoism,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 17(1990): 215-234.

make this contrast more evident in their commentaries on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* respectively.

### 1.1. Early Confucian Ideas of Human Nature

Reference to the concept of human nature occurs only twice in the *Analects*. One is from Confucius himself, pointing out the similarity and difference of human beings. The other comes from his disciple, Zi Gong, who wondered why Confucius' views on human nature and the way of Heaven could not be heard (*The Analects*, 5:12). Confucius' words on human nature are concise yet ambiguous; this opens the possibility of various interpretations of human nature in Chinese philosophy. In saying that human beings are alike by nature, Confucius is thought to be concerned with the commonality of human beings. This position has inspired a comparative approach to human nature, i.e., the commonality of human nature vs. the individuality or diversity of human nature.<sup>52</sup> In saying that through practice human beings are apart, Confucius seems to concentrate on human effort, which, together with the first half of his observation, introduces a contrast between a potential nature and a realized nature.<sup>53</sup> Besides, a reader may wonder whether human beings are similar in their biological features or spiritual aspects.

Especially important to my study, it is not clear whether Confucius understood human nature as principle or as substance. In my view, the former understanding answers questions such as “what is the origin of nature,” “what decides nature,” or “where does the base of nature lie”? In contrast, the latter

---

<sup>52</sup> Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun* 中國哲學原論, yuanxing pian 原性篇 (xinyashuyuan yanjiusuo 新亞書院研究所, 1968), 2; Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理 (Taipei: xuesheng shuju 臺北：學生書局, 1978), 1-8.

<sup>53</sup> Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun* 中國哲學原論, yuanxing pian 原性篇, 2; Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 1-8.



answers the questions “what forms nature,” “what is the content of nature,” or “what constitutes nature”? While in the former understanding nature is associated with a transcendental principle or the way of Heaven, in the latter it refers to concrete things, such as physical body, life, feelings, *qi* and capacity.<sup>54</sup> As for Confucius, one has no sufficient evidence to say whether he considered human nature to be a principle or a substantive concept. This is also a question with Daoism, which I will examine later. In conclusion, the conceptual ambiguity of human nature in the *Analects* makes it possible for very different interpretations.

Zi Gong did not hear Confucius’s views on human nature, probably because Confucius placed less emphasis on human nature and the Way of Heaven than he did on practice, i.e., education; or, the relationship between human nature and the way of Heaven was too profound to be comprehended by most people and therefore Confucius kept silent about it.<sup>55</sup> In the case of the first possibility, later Confucians would visit what Confucius had neglected or had not taken seriously; believing in the second possibility, they would assume the responsibility of uncovering the profound wisdom that Confucius had comprehended.

If the problem of nature did not yet enjoy a central position in the *Analects*, with Mencius it became an enduring concern. According to Mencius, human nature is inherently good. That is, human beings are born with four sprouts, i.e., hearts of compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and right and wrong.<sup>56</sup> If they are carefully attended to, they will grow into the four virtues of benevolence,

---

<sup>54</sup> Irene Bloom, “Human nature and biological nature in Mencius,” *Philosophy East and West* 47: 1(January 1997): 21-32; Fu Sinian 傅斯年, “Xingming guxun bianzheng” 性命古訓辯證, in *The Complete Works of Fu Sinian* 傅斯年全集 (Taipei: lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 臺北：聯經出版事業公司, 1980), vol. 2: 236-252.

<sup>55</sup> Wing-tsit Chan holds such a position. See his translation of the *Analects* 5:12, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> D.C. Lau, trans., the *Mencius* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1970), 82-83.

righteousness, propriety and wisdom. The core of Mencius' thought is to base morality and the rites on the inner nature of human beings. In his view, morality and rites are natural derivatives of the fulfillment of human nature. Man's moral nature, in other words, justifies morality and the rites. Mencius' view of human nature became influential since the Han dynasty. Coupled with Xunzi's views of human nature, which I will turn to next, it had deep bearings on later philosophers, Han Confucians in particular. However, especially of interest to me, the question remains whether human nature is a principle or a substance in Mencius' view, to which I will return in the last part of this chapter.

One interesting view concerns Gaozi. Mencius developed a certain part of his argument through refuting Gaozi's position of human nature. Judging from Mencius' serious response to Gaozi, it is highly possible that Gaozi's view had a fair amount of support in Mencius' day. Gaozi's view can be summarized as follows: (1) nature is what is innate; (2) nature is the craving for food and sex; (3) nature is neither good nor evil, just as water goes neither eastward nor westward; (4) righteousness is external to human beings, as it is not intrinsic to human nature.

Except for point (1), Mencius strongly objected to the other three. Chinese philosophers generally agreed on the "formal" concept of human nature as communicated in point (1), but they disagreed on the substantive content of the innate nature. Both points (2) and (3) look similar to the views of the Yang Zhu and the Daoist schools. Xunzi held a view similar to point (4), though his approach is different from that of Gaozi.

Opposing Mencius, Xunzi maintained that the nature of man is evil; his goodness is the result of education.<sup>57</sup> Human nature is a set of desires that seek to be satisfied. If everyone indulges in his/her desires, strife and chaos will result. Here the significance of the teachings of the sage is highlighted. The sage invents morality and the rites, whose function is to transform the evil nature of human beings. With moral education, the barbarian will become the cultivated, and society will attain harmony. Xunzi strongly denied that human nature is good, because such a position would undermine the teachings of the sage. As he inquired, were man good by nature, what then would be the relevance of the sage's teachings?

Comparing Xunzi with Mencius, it is noteworthy that they maintained different views as to the origin of morality, which stems from their different views of human nature. For Mencius, morality is the natural flow of one's inborn nature that is inherently good; for Xunzi, morality is an external imposition that the sage placed on the common people. In this light, the disagreement between Xunzi and Mencius anticipated the distinction between virtue morality and normative morality. As A. S. Cua points out, both notions of morality, the internal and the external, or virtue morality and normative morality, have their own value.<sup>58</sup> As the words "internal" and "external" indicate, the two understandings of morality by Mencius and Xunzi, far from being mutually exclusive, turn out to be

---

<sup>57</sup> *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, vol. 17, *on the evil of nature* 性惡篇, in *zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Zhengjiang guji chubanshe 浙江古籍出版社, 1999), 339; English translation is available in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 128. Other English translations of Xunzi's work are: Burton Watson, *Hsun Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1967), 157; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> A. S. Cua, "Morality and human nature," *Philosophy East and West*, 31:2 (1981): 280.

complementary, and equally necessary for a full comprehension of morality, if one takes into consideration both the psychological and social aspects of morality.

## 1.2. Human Nature in Han Confucian Synthesis

The issue of human nature remained a major philosophical topic during the Han dynasty. It attracted the attention of many influential thinkers of that time, such as the orthodox Confucian Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒 c. 179-c. 104 B.C.), the “Daoistic Confucian”<sup>59</sup> Yang Xiong (楊雄 53 B.C.-18 A.D.), the unorthodox thinker Wang Chong (王充 27-100?), and the high official Liu Xiang (劉向 77 B.C.-6 A.D.). Their accounts on human nature represent a synthesis of the views of human nature developed in the Warring States period. However, this does not mean that these Han thinkers simply combined the previous views mechanically; rather, they made their own contributions. For example, they developed the ideas incipient in the Warring States period, one of which is the theory of “three grades” of human nature implied by Confucius.<sup>60</sup> They also formulated a theory of *qi* endowment, which turned out to be a most important theory in Chinese philosophy.

Since the Wei-Jin period comes immediately after the Han dynasty, it is not surprising that Wei-Jin thinkers were influenced by Han ideas of human nature. For example, He Yan (何晏 ca. 190-249), a prestigious official and thinker of the Wei dynasty, is said to follow the view of the three grades of human nature, and

---

<sup>59</sup>A *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 289.

<sup>60</sup>The *Analects* 17:3: “Only the most intelligent and the most stupid do not change,” A *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 46.

traces of this view are also discernable in Wang Bi's thought.<sup>61</sup> The debate between He Yan and Wang Bi on whether the sage has feelings is believed to originate from a popular view that is generally attributed to Dong Zhongshu: namely, that nature is good while feeling is evil.<sup>62</sup> It is also evident that many Wei-Jin thinkers including Wang Bi and Guo Xiang were influenced by the theory of *qi* endowment on account of its intrinsic merit and explanatory power. We will see the indebtedness of Wei-Jin thinkers to Han Confucianism later in this thesis.

In this part, I first focus on the syncretic aspect of the views of human nature in Han Confucianism. Following that I explore its innovative aspect. Methodologically, I will not present selected Han thinkers one after another in the same way as I did with the thinkers of the Warring States. Rather, my discussion will be thematic—focusing on what they as a whole have inherited from the tradition and the innovations they have brought to that tradition.

The tradition of Chinese philosophy, of human nature in particular, took shape in the Warring States period and developed in the Han dynasty. The development of this tradition is characterized by both continuity and change. The issues addressed in the early classics, for example, the issues of morality, the *Dao*, human nature, and the harmony of society, turn out to hold great interest for later thinkers. Each of them tried to put forth what he considered to be the most convincing interpretation. In so doing, he had to show the inaccuracy or even falsity of the previous views and to prove the strength of his own view. However, this does not mean that a thinker cuts himself off completely from past tradition.

---

<sup>61</sup> Zhou Daxing, 周大興, "Wang Bi 'xingqiqing' de renxing yuanjin lun" 王弼 '性其情' 的人性遠近論, *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊, 16 (March 2000): 344-345.

<sup>62</sup> Wang Baoxuan, 王葆玟, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 374.

On the contrary, he had to rely on it to formulate new ideas. In light of this, it is worthwhile to show what Han Confucians as a whole inherited from and went beyond the tradition. As one will see later, in my discussion of Wang Bi and Guo Xiang, their relationship with the same tradition will also be highlighted.

In addition, Confucianism had come to be accepted as the state ideology of Han, which contributed significantly to the development of a distinctive Confucian school with a canonical curriculum and ideological focus. In this regard, Han Confucianism is different from early Confucianism in the Warring States period. The latter exists only as a label applied by later historians retrospectively to certain Warring States thinkers. Mencius and Xunzi were individual thinkers who had different philosophical concerns, and they were not associated with each other under one and the same school. However, when Confucianism came to be a well-defined school fully supported by the Han court and enrolled most of the prominent scholars of the period, it began to establish common interests and similar positions shared by its subscribers. For example, many Han scholars shared the view that human nature is a mixture of good and evil. Considering this, it is more effective to concentrate on the main points shared by Han Confucians than to present them one after another. No doubt, a detailed study of Han philosophy would show that each thinker had come to reinterpret the classical heritage in his own way—that is, a syncretistic intellectual orientation does not entail identity of positions; nevertheless, to understand the development of Wei-Jin philosophy, it is sufficient to highlight the main thematic issues.

### **1.2.1. Nature as a mixture of good and evil**

The position that nature is a mixture of good and evil dominated the Han dynasty. Its prevalence was largely due to the influence of Dong Zhongshu. He says,

The fact of the human being is that he or she has both humanity (*ren* 仁) and greed (*tan* 貪). Both the *qi* of humanity and the *qi* of greed reside in the human person. The human person is formed after Heaven. Heaven has dual operation of *yin* and *yang* (passive and active cosmic forces), and the human person also has dual nature of humanity and greed.

人之誠有貪有仁，仁貪之氣兩在於身。身之名取諸天，天兩，有陰陽之施；身亦兩，有貪仁之性。<sup>63</sup>

Many other thinkers held a view similar to that of Dong Zhongshu. For example, Liu Xiang says,

Nature resonates with feeling; nature is not completely good, and feeling is not completely evil.

性情相應，性不獨善，情不獨惡。<sup>64</sup>

Yang Xiong is more straightforward in saying:

Man's nature is a mixture of good and evil. He who cultivates the good part will become a good man and he who cultivates the evil part will become an evil man.

人之性也善惡混。修其善則為善人，修其惡則為惡人。<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Lai Yanyuan 賴炎元, *Chunqiuifanlu jinzhu jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯, vol. 10, Shencha minghao 深察名號 (Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1984), 266; *A Source Book*, 274. I especially thank Prof. Richard J. Lynn for his suggestion as to the translation of *shen* 身.

<sup>64</sup> Xun Yue 荀悅, *Shenjian* 申鑒, 25; Ch'i-yün Ch'en, *Hsun Yueh and The Mind of Late Han China: a translation of the Shen-chien with introduction and annotations*, 187.

These Han thinkers followed the early Confucians in approaching human nature in terms of good and evil. Meanwhile they realized the difficulty previous views had in explaining certain phenomena in real life. As noticed by Wang Chong and Xun Yue (荀悅 A.D. 148-209), if Mencius' view of human nature is right, how can one explain the wicked kings of Jie (桀) and Zhou (紂)? Similarly, if man is evil by nature, where should the three sages of Yao (堯), Shun (舜) and Yu (禹) be placed?<sup>66</sup> I will explain in detail later the sense in which human nature can be said to be a "mixture" of good and evil, as Han Confucians maintained. At this point, suffice it to say that no matter which view one holds, there are always counter examples. Consequently, any new theory of human nature would have to take into account both the paragons of virtue and examples of evil in the Chinese past. It is thus understandable that Han thinkers would combine Mencius' and Xunzi's views. Moreover, considering that they were discussing the nature of the *common* people, who stand somewhere between the sage and the wicked, a combined version of Mencius' and Xunzi's views would hold greater explanatory power in accounting for the variety of man's good and bad.

However, this version is apparently unsuitable for the sage and the wicked. The sage, who is admired as the shining example of human morality, shows a good moral sprout even as a little baby; while the wicked, who is admonished as the example of human corruption, communicates something evil even in his infant

---

<sup>65</sup> Yang Xiong 楊雄, *Fayan* 法言, in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Zhengjiang guji chubanshe 浙江古籍出版社, 1999), 1134; *A Source Book*, 289.

<sup>66</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, (Taibei shangwu yinshuguan 臺北: 商務印書館, 1964), vol.1: 126-127, 130; Xun Yue 荀悅, *Shenjian* 申鑒, 25; *Hsun Yueh and The Mind of Late Han China*, 188; *A Source Book*, 294-295. Wang Chong's works is translated into English by Alfred Forke, *Lun-hêng* (vol. 1, London: Luzac and Co., 1907; vol. 2, Berlin: George Reimer, 1911; reprint, New York, Paragon Book Galary, 1962); another English version is available in De Bary, William Theodore, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. Columbia University Press, 1999, 2 volumes.,.



cry.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, it is just as unimaginable to say there is something evil in the nature of the sage as to say there is something good in the nature of the wicked. For this reason, no Han thinkers proposed implicitly or explicitly that the nature of the sage, as well as that of the wicked, is a mixture of good and evil. But the sage and the wicked are human beings too, Han thinkers needed to give an account of their nature.

### 1.2.2. The three grades of human nature

Han thinkers developed the theory of the three grades of human nature to explain the difference of human beings.

The term “three grades of human nature” is often ascribed to Han Yu 韓愈 (A.D.768-824), a Tang Confucian famous for his vitriolic attacks against Buddhism and Daoism. He says:

Human nature can be divided into three grades: the upper, the medium, and the lower. The upper is good and good only. The medium may be led to be either upper or lower. The lower is evil and evil only.

性之品有上中下三。上焉者，善焉而已矣；中焉者，可導而上下也；下焉者，惡焉而已矣。<sup>68</sup>

Although Han Yu is well known for his theory of the three grades of human nature, a similar theory was already proposed and became prevalent in the Han dynasty. The seeds of this theory may be planted much earlier by

---

<sup>67</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 126, 130.

<sup>68</sup> Ma Qichang 馬其昶 and Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元, ed., *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注 (Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1986), vol.1: 20; English translation is available in *A Source Book*, 451-452.

Confucius.<sup>69</sup> Even the term “three grades (*san pin* 三品)” is not the invention of Han Yu. Wing-tsit Chan points out that the term is found in several classics and Xun Yue’s works. But he thinks that Xun Yue used the term to refer to the three grades of human fate (命 *ming*) rather than human nature,<sup>70</sup> with which I disagree. The frequent use of the compound 性命 *xingming* indicates that nature and fate are closely associated with each other. In many cases, they are interchangeable. Xun Yue’s words read,

Someone asks about Heaven’s mandate and human effort. The answer is that there are three grades involved. The upper and the lower are unmovable. In between them human effort lies [i.e. what is between them is changeable through human effort]. People are alike in what they are destined, but through effort they become far apart. Therefore they either have good fortune or bad fortune, completely different from one another.

或問天命人事，曰，有三品焉。上下不移，其中則人事存焉爾。命相近也，事相遠也，則吉凶殊也。<sup>71</sup>

This passage occurs in the context of a discussion of human nature. Preceding it, Xun Yue talked about how one’s nature relates to one’s *ming*. Immediately after it, he reviewed previous views of human nature and pointed out that neither Mencius’ nor Xunzi’s view is perfect, for they fail to account for the extremely wicked and the sages respectively. However, a combined version of

---

<sup>69</sup> In the *Analects* 17:3, Confucius indicates that human beings fall into three categories in terms of intelligence, the most intelligent, the most stupid and the common people. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 46.

<sup>70</sup> *A Source Book*, 454.

<sup>71</sup> Xun Yue 荀悅, *Shenjian* 申鑒, 25; *Hsun Yueh and The Mind of Late Han China*, 187.

Mencius and Xunzi is only applicable to the common people. Consequently, human beings can be divided into three groups: the sages, the most vicious people, and the common people between them. They are divided in terms of nature. The upper grade and the lower grade are respectively good and evil by nature, and their good and evil nature remain forever so. The middle grade is changeable through human effort. As Dong Zhongshu, Yang Xiong, and Liu Xiang indicated, whether a man comes to be good or evil depends on his own effort. In view that nature is a mixture of good and evil, the common people in the middle grade are alike (命相近也); but the different effort they devote to moral cultivation makes them apart (事相遠也).

Xun Yue was not the only proponent of the theory of the three grades of human nature in the Han dynasty. Before him, there was Wang Chong; long before Wang Chong, there was Dong Zhongshu. Both contributed to the development of this theory.

Pointing out the strength and weakness of each previous position of human nature, Wang Chong put forwards his own synthetic conclusion. It reads:

I therefore consider Mencius' view of good nature as referring to people above average and Xunzi's view of evil nature as referring to those below average; and Yang Xiong's view of mixed nature of good and evil as referring to ordinary people.

余固以孟軻言人性善者，中人以上者也；孫卿言人性惡者，中人以下者也；楊雄言人性善惡混者，中人也。<sup>72</sup>

Although each of these views has its own merit, Wang Chong thought that they fail to reach the ultimate principle of nature. He agreed with Shi Shuo (世

---

<sup>72</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉，*Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 135; *A Source Book*, 295-296.

碩?-249 B.C.) that the nature of some people is good and the nature of others is evil. Prima facie, it seems that Wang Chong proposed a theory of two grades of human beings. But he actually remains consistent. Good nature and bad nature refer respectively to people above and below average. As for ordinary people, in light of Wang's theory of *qi* endowment (氣稟), which I will examine later, those endowed with sufficient *qi* have a larger "good" part in their nature while those endowed with meager *qi* have a larger "bad" part in theirs, but both are changeable through education. In view of this, if A is said to have a good nature and B a bad nature, this simply means that A has a larger good part than B. This does not affect the fact that both A and B have a mixed nature of good and evil.

Dong Zhongshu maintained that man has a dual nature of humanity and greed. Conceived in this way, nature refers only to the nature of the common people.

Nature is named not to refer to the upper and the lower, but to the average.

名性不以上，不以下，以其中名之。<sup>73</sup>

Clearly, Dong also classified human beings into three grades. But he was entirely concerned with the medium grade. The other two grades do not hold interest for him, for they have nothing to do with, or even undermine the significant role of education.

The theory of the three grades of human nature is not a sudden product. An early source can be found in the *Analects* 17:3, where Confucius observed that only the most intelligent and the most stupid do not change. Confucius divided

---

<sup>73</sup>*Chunqiu fanlu jinzhu jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯, vol. 10, Shencha minghao 深察名號, 267; *A Source Book*, 275-276.

human beings by intelligence, but in Han Confucians' understanding intelligence and capacity are part of nature. As such, the difference in intelligence changes smoothly into a difference in nature.

Confucius indicates that ordinary people can become more intelligent through learning. Since ordinary people constitute the majority of human beings at any place and time, this lays a solid foundation for Confucius' theory of education. Education is an overriding concern of Han Confucianism, as it was of Mencius and Xunzi. Even Wang Chong, famous for his critique of certain aspects of Han Confucianism, presented himself as a staunch Confucian for his emphasis on education. It is interesting to notice that despite the disagreement in understanding human nature by Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi and Han Confucians, they all arrived at a conclusion that education is necessary.

### **1.2.3. The Significance of Education**

Han Confucians generally agreed that to an ordinary person, having a good nature does not mean that he/she is actually completely good. Both the good and bad elements in nature are just *potential*. Education is needed for transforming the good potential into reality and extinguishing the bad seeds at their earliest stage.

Dong Zhongshu employed an analogy to demonstrate the relationship between good nature and realized goodness.

Man's nature is comparable to the rice stalk and good to rice. Rice comes out of the rice stalks but not all rice stalk turns rice. Similarly, good comes out of nature but not all nature turns good. Both goodness and rice are based on what is endowed by Heaven and completed by human effort. They are not the within the realm of activity of Heaven.

故性比於禾，善比于米；米出禾中，而禾未可全為米也；善出性中，性未可全為善也。善與米，人之所繼天而成於外，非在天所為之內也。<sup>74</sup>

It is important to point out that “human effort” here does not refer to a common person’s effort. Rather, it refers, specifically, to the ruler’s activity.

People receive from Heaven a nature that cannot turn good [by itself]. And they turn to the ruler for education that will complete their nature. It is the duty of the ruler to obey the will of Heaven to complete the nature of people.

民受未能善之性於天，而退受成性之教于王，王承天意以成民之性為任者也。<sup>75</sup>

This quotation is reminiscent of Xunzi’s view that the sage transforms the nature of the people, since ideally, the ruler should be virtuous and the sage is the one who is most qualified to become a ruler. Although Dong acknowledged the good elements in the nature of ordinary people, he did not seem confident of their self-cultivation. He defined “people” (*min* 民) as those in sleep (*ming* 瞑, literally meaning closing one’s eyes) who wait for others [the ruler] to awaken them. Consequently, in the educational system Dong pictured, the common people are only passive receivers. If the good elements in their nature have any value, they only make possible the ruler’s educative mission and testify to the indispensable role of the ruler.

---

<sup>74</sup> *Chunqiu fanlu jin zhu jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯, vol. 10, Shenchangminghao 深察名號, 267; *A Source Book*, 274-275.

<sup>75</sup> *Chunqiu fanlu jin zhu jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯, vol. 10, Shenchangminghao 深察名號, 267; *A Source Book*, 274-275.

It is said that some democratic germ is discernable in Dong's thought, for he formulated a resonating theory between Heaven and man, which places restrictions on the ruler. Under this theory, Heaven oversees the ruler and communicates its approval or disapproval through natural (in some cases supernatural) phenomena. With the supervision of Heaven, the ruler would be more careful and responsible. However, looking at Dong's theory from another angle, one gets a quite contrary conclusion. If the ruler is the only medium connecting Heaven and ordinary people, if he is the only man appointed by Heaven to educate ordinary people, isn't Dong in fact elevating the position of the ruler and strengthening his power? This remains a controversial question beyond the scope of this thesis.

Human nature is a mixture of good and evil. The character 混 (mixture) conveys a meaning of uncertainty and indeterminacy. This also makes education necessary. If human nature is entirely good, there is no need for education; if it is completely bad, education hardly works. Education is meaningful only to the common people, who have a mixed nature of good and evil. Wang Chong says:

The ruler and the father observe the nature of the minister and the son. If their nature is good, the ruler and the father will nurture and guide them, keeping them far away from the bad. If their nature is bad, the ruler and the father will assist them and help them stay clear of the bad, making them approach gradually the good. Consequently, the good exerts a continued influence on the bad, and the bad is transformed into the good, which becomes a part of their nature.

凡人君父審觀臣子之性，善則養育勸率，無令近惡；惡則輔保  
禁防，令漸於善。善漸於惡，惡化于善，成爲性行。<sup>76</sup>

Here the unorthodox thinker Wang Chong looked quite “Confucian” in emphasizing education. He held a view similar to that of Dong Zhongshu, i.e., it is the superior’s responsibility to teach the inferior. This view presupposes that the superior is virtuous. But the question is whether this presupposition itself is reasonable. Ideally, in Confucianism (1) only virtuous men should be credited with high official positions; only the sage is qualified to be ruler. If point (1) is strictly observed, then point (2) follows that those in high positions must be virtuous. But the question is that point (1) is an ideal statement, which is hardly realized in real life. Confucius has been esteemed as the highest sage by later generations; but the powerful men in his time seemed uninterested in his ideas, let alone handing over the throne to him. Clearly, point (1) legitimates point (2). If (1) cannot be proven, then (2) is questionable. But many Han thinkers, Wang Chong for example, paid little attention to the qualification of (1), and started their discussions directly with (2). Yet, (2) alone is a very weak statement.

At this point, it is necessary to revisit the view that human nature is a mixture of good and evil in light of the above discussion on education. The word “mixture” tells nothing about the proportion of good to evil in one’s nature. One’s nature might be a mixture of 90% good and 10% bad, which is apparently different from another’s nature of 10% good and 90% bad. Now the question is whether the ratio of good to bad in nature is different from one person to another, or each ordinary person is simply half good and half bad in his/her nature.

---

<sup>76</sup>Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 63.



The theory of *qi* endowment, which will be examined later, does indicate a variety of proportions of good to bad in nature. For example, a person may be said to have been endowed with more benevolent *qi* than others. Then the question that arises is: whether this fortunate person, whose nature is 90% good and 10% bad for example, is more (or more likely to be) benevolent than another one, whose nature is 10% good and 90% bad?

A possible explanation involves an understanding of education. Only the sage and the most vicious are definitely 100% good and 100% bad. In contrast, it is uncertain whether ordinary people actually become good or bad. Even if one's nature is 99% good, it is still possible that the remaining 1% bad may ruin one's well-being, if one just indulges in this slightest part of bad. Similarly, even if one has only 1% of good elements in one's nature, one may become virtuous through sustained cultivation. In a word, both the good part and bad part in one's nature are simply potentials. It is at this point that education comes into play. Through education one turns potential into reality. Consequently, it does not matter whether a man's nature is a mixture of 90% good and 10% bad or a mixture of 10% good and 90% bad, since both ratios do not necessarily entail actual good or bad. But it does matter that through education a man having only 10% good in his nature becomes virtuous, while without cultivation a man having 90% good in his nature degenerates into viciousness. This may explain why Han Confucian thinkers simply put forth that human nature is a mixture of good and evil, paying no attention to the variety of the mixture among ordinary people.

### **1.3. New Developments in Han Confucian Views of Human Nature**

So far I have focused on the syncretic aspect of Han Confucian views of human nature. In this part I explore the innovations Han Confucians brought to

the tradition. Firstly, I examine their fresh explanations of the relationship between nature and feeling, which exert a deep influence on later thinkers. Then I explore the theory of *qi* endowment, which turned out to be one of the most important theories in the history of Chinese philosophy.

### 1.3.1. On the relationship between nature and feeling

The problem of the relationship between nature and feeling did not attract philosophical attention until the Han dynasty. The main reason, I think, is that Han thinkers began to make a clear distinction between nature and feeling. In the Warring States period nature and feeling often referred to one and the same thing. Human nature, i.e., the four moral sprouts, looks similar to moral feelings under Mencius' interpretation (*Mencius* 6A: 6). In Xunzi's view, man's evil nature consists of feelings and desires such as hatred, jealousy and arrogance. Although Xunzi made a distinction among nature, feeling, and desire, the three actually refer to one thing.<sup>77</sup> Similar evidence is found in a passage from the text entitled

---

<sup>77</sup> Xunzi says,

What is natural without any effort effecting it is called the 'nature.' When the nature feels fondness or hate, pleasure or anger, sadness or joy, these are referred to as the 'emotions'.

不事而自然謂之性，性之好惡喜怒哀樂謂之情。

Human nature is the product of Heaven; feeling is the substance of nature; desire is the response of feeling

性者，天之就也；情者，性之質也；欲者，情之應也。

Xunzi agreed with most Chinese philosophers in that nature is what is innate to human beings, but went on to give a substantive definition of nature. That is, feelings, for example, like, dislike, joy, anger, sadness, and pleasure, constitute nature. Without feeling, nature is only a purely formal concept. Desire stems from feeling. Human nature or feeling tends towards contact with external things. If this contact becomes uncontrollable, say, one is entirely distracted by things, desire results. To give an example, by nature man likes (feeling) good food; when he sees (contact) fresh tuna, he is eager (desire) to get it.

However, nature, feeling and desire, in Xunzi's interpretation, should not be understood as separate from one another. Both feeling and desire are external expressions of nature. To summarize their relationships, feeling is the content of nature, and desire is the excessive or deviant feeling. And, nature refers to one's original and internal state, feeling points to one's response to external things, and desire pertains to one's obsession with these external things. Since human nature is evil, and since feeling constitutes nature, feeling is prone to degenerate into desire, which is evil. Xunzi often put the characters 性 and 情 together as the compound 性情. As human nature is evil for its insatiability, the word *xingqing* 性情 actually pertains to desire. In this

“Human Nature Comes out of Life” (*xing zi ming chu* 性自命出), one of the recently discovered bamboo texts in Guodian, China which are believed to be composed as early as around 300 B.C.<sup>78</sup> It reads: “the *qi* of joy, anger, sadness, and sorrow is nature” (喜怒哀悲之氣，性也). Obviously, nature covers feeling in the thought of Warring States philosophers.

In the Han dynasty, however, the distinction between nature and feeling became evident. Dong Zhongshu held that man has a dual nature of humanity (仁 *ren*) and greed (貪 *tan*), for Heaven has its dual operation of *yang* (active) and *yin* (passive). Heaven restricts the *yin* function, for example, in Autumn and Winter (corresponding to *yin*) plants wither. So human beings should reduce their feelings and desires. Apparently, Dong thought that feelings and desires are *yin* and bad. As Wing-tsit Chan rightly points out, Dong Zhongshu initiated the view that human nature is good whereas feeling is evil, which became a prevalent view in the Han dynasty.

Liu Xiang’s view of the relationship between nature and feeling is also noteworthy. He says,

---

respect, as Xu Fuguan points out, although Xunzi conceptually distinguishes nature, feeling, and desire, they are in fact three different descriptions of one thing.

For Chinese texts, see *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, vol. 16, on *rectifying names* 正名篇, 335, 337. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *History of the Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature: the pre-Qin Period* 中國人性論史 (先秦篇) (Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1969, 1990), 387.

<sup>78</sup> Jingmen Museum, Hubei Province, “The Chu tomb #1 in Guodian, Jingmen,” 湖北省荆門市博物館《荆門郭店一號楚墓》, in *Wenwu* 文物 (July 1997): 35-46; Other related papers: Peng Hao 彭浩, “The times of Chu tomb #1 in Guodian and the structure of the abbreviated *Laozi* text” 郭店一號墓的年代與簡本<老子>的結構, 13-15; Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “A preliminary exploration of the *Laozi* bamboo scripts in Guodian” 郭店<老子>簡初探, 25-26; and Li Xueqin 李學勤, “An interpretation of the ultimate One engendering water in terms of mathematical tactics” 太一生水的數術解釋, 299, all in Chen Guying 陳鼓應, ed., *Research on Daoist Culture* 道家文化研究, vol. 17 (Joint Publishing company 三聯書店, 1999).

Man's nature is as it is because it is inborn; it remains within his person and is not expressed. His feelings are as they are because they result from contact with things; they take form externally. What is revealed externally is called *yang* and what is not expressed is called *yin*.

性，生而然者也，在於身而不發；情，接於物而然者也，形出於外。形外，則謂之陽；不發者，則謂之陰。<sup>79</sup>

Nature resonates with feeling; nature is not completely good, and feeling is not completely evil.<sup>80</sup>

性情相應，性不獨善，情不獨惡。

Both Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang approached nature and feeling in terms of *yin* and *yang*, which I will discuss more below. This indicates the popularity of the theory of *yinyang wuxing* (陰陽五行) in the Han dynasty. The difference between the two thinkers is also noteworthy. Unlike Dong Zhongshu, who approached nature and feeling in terms of good and evil, Liu Xiang explained nature and feelings in terms of “the internal” (*nei* 內) and “the external” (*wai* 外). Nature is what is within man and latent, and feelings are what is expressed externally. The two correspond to each other. As man's nature is a mixture of good and evil, his feelings cannot but be a mixture of good and evil too.

Another important point is that in Liu Xiang's case, the terms of *yin* and *yang* involve no evaluative connotation, which is contrary to a popular misconception that *yang* is superior to *yin*. Nature is *yin* and feeling is *yang*.

---

<sup>79</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 133; *A Source Book*, 295. I thank Richard Lynn for his advice on the translation.

<sup>80</sup> Xun Yue 荀悅, *Shenjian* 申鑒, 25; *Hsun Yueh and The Mind of Late Han China*, 187.

Since both nature and feelings are mixture of good and evil, obviously, there is no way that *yin* is less valuable than *yang*, or *yang* is better than *yin*.

Han thinkers generally considered the conceptions of *yin* and *yang* to complement one another. According to Dong Zhongshu, *yin* and *yang* are the dual operating patterns of Heaven. All natural phenomena can be classified as either *yang* or *yin*. For example, spring and summer are *yang*, when trees grow and flowers blossom; autumn and winter are *yin*, when trees and flowers wither. The succession of the four seasons is a natural and ever-lasting process, in which no season can be omitted. The sun (*yang*) alternates with the moon (*yin*), so people work in the day and rest at night. The process of alternation goes on smoothly, indicative of the perfect operation of Heaven. All of these suggest that Dong treated the *yin* and the *yang* operations of Heaven equally.

However, Dong Zhongshu contradicts himself when discussing human nature. He clearly remarked that people should reduce or get rid of their feelings that correspond to the *yin* of Heaven. Here the inconsistency is evident: since *yin* of Heaven is indispensable, why should one condemn the *yin* of human nature, i.e., feelings? Dong thought that *qi* is responsible for both the humanity and greed in human nature.<sup>81</sup> Combining this view with the one that man's dual nature corresponds to Heaven's dual operation, it looks like that man only inherits the neutrally dual structure of *yin* and *yang* from Heaven, and it is *qi* that fills this structure with good and evil assets. Nonetheless, Dong did not give any further explanation on the relationship between *qi* and human nature. It is Wang Chong

---

<sup>81</sup> Dong says, "if the *qi* that human beings are endowed with is completely free of evil, why does the heart have deviant tendencies." (人之受氣苟無惡者，心何枉哉?) See *Chunqiu fanlu jinzhuzhu jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯, vol. 10, Shencha minghao 深察名號, 266; *A Source Book*, 274.

who formulated a theory of *qi* endowment to account for the variety of human nature, human fate, and human life.

### 1.3.2. The theory of *qi* endowment

The concept of *qi* can be traced back to Zou Yan (鄒衍 c. 350-270 B.C.).<sup>82</sup> Broadly speaking, this concept was usually employed to explain the origin, the composition, and the operation of the cosmos, to which Han thinkers made significant contributions. As far as the relationship between *qi* and human beings is concerned, although the notion that human beings come out of *qi* had already occurred in the Warring States period, the question of the relationship between *qi* and human nature was not addressed at great length until Wang Chong.

Wang Chong followed the general view that human beings are composed of *qi*.<sup>83</sup> But he went further to state that *qi* endowment is different from one person to another, from which all other differences of human beings, for example, in nature, fate, health, life span, character, and intelligence, stem. He says,

The endowment of *qi* can be thick or thin, so nature can be good or evil. A person is cruel, as he is endowed with a meager portion of the *qi* of benevolence; a person is foul-tempered, for he is endowed with a full dose of *qi* of boldness.... Man's good and bad depend on the original *qi*; *qi* can be more or less in man, so man's nature can be worthy or stupid.

---

<sup>82</sup> For the philosophy of Zou Yan and its development, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), vol.2: 232-244.

<sup>83</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 136

稟氣有厚薄，故性有善惡也。殘則授仁之氣泊，而怒則稟勇渥也。……人之善惡，共一元氣。氣有少多，故性有賢愚。<sup>84</sup>

Mou Zongsan points out that the term *qixing* (*qi* nature 氣性) occurred frequently in Wang Chong's time.<sup>85</sup> This does not necessarily entail that Wang Chong invented the term; however, at least it shows that the term is generally associated with Wang Chong. No doubt, due to the influence of Wang Chong's thought, *qixing* had become a crucial concept in Chinese philosophy.

Out of the above quotation two questions arise: (1) whether the difference of *qi* endowment is in degree or in kind; and (2) does *qi* itself have some good or evil aspects? At first sight, Wang Chong seemed to indicate a difference in degree. He frequently used characters such as “*duoshao*” (more or less 多少) and “*houbo*” (thick or thin 厚薄) to qualify *qi*, which indicates that *qi* endowment can be measured. Consequently, the theory of *qi* endowment is often formulated to mean that greater or lesser endowment of *qi* determines the good and bad in human nature.

However, a careful examination of Wang Chong reveals that the difference of *qi* endowment is also a difference in kind. Although the original *qi* (*yuanqi* 元氣) is the basic substance forming the cosmos and human beings, it differentiates into various kinds of *qi* when filling each person, for example, *qi* of benevolence and that of boldness. Since there is *qi* of benevolence, one may wonder if there is *qi* of evil. Wang Chong's answer is affirmative. As he explained, if the union of husband and wife is invaded by the *qi* of deviance, or if the pregnant woman is

---

<sup>84</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 75

<sup>85</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 1.

affected by it, the baby born to them will be deviant.<sup>86</sup> Clearly, *qi* of benevolence is different in kind from that of deviance. To combine the above discussion, the nature of a person is decided by both the kind and the volume of his endowed *qi*.

Turning to the question whether *qi* itself has some good or evil assets, the answer seems simple. As Wang Chong's expressions of benevolent *qi*, deviant *qi*, and bold *qi* suggest, *qi* does have some good or bad aspects within itself. As such, if *qi* can determine whether human nature is good or evil, that is just because *qi* itself has good or evil assets within it. In other words, the nature of endowed *qi* determines the nature of human beings. However, the theory of *qi* endowment cannot do more than trace the abstract concept of human nature to a more substantive material *qi*. Obviously, one's nature is good or bad, as one is endowed with good *qi* or bad *qi*; this is a circular argument. We will see later that both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang would not be bothered by this problem, as they produced fresh interpretations of the good and bad of human beings

Besides nature, *qi* endowment also determines human fate. Wang Chong says,

When being endowed with *qi* from one's parents, one receives one's fate: whether one has fortune or misfortune has been determined.

凡人受命，在父母施氣之時，已得吉凶矣。<sup>87</sup>

Wang Chong reiterated that once determined by *qi*, one's fate can never change. He says,

---

<sup>86</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 47

<sup>87</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 47.



Being wealthy and noble or being poor and humble, all are determined when one is initially endowed with *qi*. They are not the results of one's cultivation after having become an adult.

則富貴貧賤皆在初稟之時，不在長大之後隨操行而至也。<sup>88</sup>

Relating the above quotations to Wang Chong's emphasis on education, one notices two interesting questions: (1) Human nature is changeable whereas human fate is not; (2) One's fate does not necessarily correspond to one's nature, or worse, it rarely corresponds to the latter.

Wang Chong attached great significance to education, as most Han thinkers did. Even a man is born with a large proportion of evil in his nature, he still has the promise to become good through sedulous cultivation. Now the question is: why is a man's nature changeable whilst his fate is not, since both are determined by his endowed *qi*? Another question is: if a once bad man becomes good through education, will this affect his originally endowed *qi*? Or is a man's *qi* changeable throughout his life? These questions remain unclear in Wang Chong's thought.

As for the relationship between one's nature and fate, Confucian thinkers normally based the latter on the former explicitly or implicitly. If a man cultivates his nature and become virtuous, he will live a happy life. Wang Chong, however, refuted this notion. For him, man's fate does not correspond to his nature and on many occasions the two run in opposite directions.

One's nature is different from one's fate. Either a person having good nature meets with ill luck, or a person having evil nature meets with good luck. Being good or bad, this is called nature;

---

<sup>88</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 49.

fortune or misfortune, good luck or ill luck, they are named fate. One does good things but gets misfortune; this happens when nature is good while fate is bad. One does bad things but gets fortune; this is when nature is evil while fate is good. Nature is either good or evil in itself, and fate is either lucky or unlucky in itself. If one has a lucky fate, even if one does not conduct good, one may get fortune. If one has bad fate, even if one cultivates oneself sedulously, one may have misfortune.

夫性與命異，或性善而命凶，或性惡而命吉。操行善惡者，性也；禍福吉凶者，命也。或行善而得禍，是性善而命凶；或行惡而得福，是性惡而命吉也。性自有善惡，命自有吉凶。使命吉之人，雖不行善，未必無福；凶命之人，雖勉操行，未必無禍。<sup>89</sup>

Although Wang Chong aligned himself with a threefold classification of human fate--namely, *zhengming* (正命) *suiming* (隨命), and *zaoming* (遭命)<sup>90</sup>--he was largely concerned with the third kind, i.e., one's fate runs counter to one's nature.<sup>91</sup> I will revisit this question in chapter 3. Now the question is if one's fate

---

<sup>89</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 47.

<sup>90</sup> This is a dominant view of human fate in the Han dynasty. For its origin and development, see Chen Ning 陳寧, *Zhongguo gudai mingyunguan de xiandai quanshi* 中國古代命運觀的現代詮釋 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe 瀋陽: 遼寧教育出版社, 1999), 146-172.

<sup>91</sup> Wang Chong made an explanation of the three kinds of human fate. He says,

*Zhengming* means that one receives good luck by what one is endowed with naturally. One's nature and physiognomy are naturally good, so one need not to seek fortunate by resorting to moral cultivation, and fortune comes to one. That is why it is called *zhengming*. *Suiming* means that one receives good luck if one cultivates oneself sedulously and one meets bad luck if one just indulges oneself in desire. That is why it is called *suiming*. *Zaoming* means that one devotes oneself to moral cultivation but receives bad luck anyway. What one meets has

does not match one's nature, one may lack motivation for moral cultivation. Although moral cultivation is primarily for one's inner well-being, it often brings material achievement. For example, a virtuous man could be recommended to the government and appointed to a high position. This builds a necessary association of moral cultivation with material achievement, even though on many occasions the latter is only a by-product of the former. Even Confucianism, which is overwhelmingly concerned with the inner good, accepts this association by insisting that only the sage qualifies as a ruler and only the virtuous qualifies for high position.

A rational person would agree that a good man deserves a materially and spiritually happy life, and this happy life serves as one important motivation for moral cultivation. This is also implicit in Confucianism, as the stories of virtuous men suggest.<sup>92</sup> Now that the association between one's nature and one's fate is broken, and the unpredictability of one's fate is highlighted, one may lack motivation to cultivate oneself. If moral cultivation does not guarantee one a

---

nothing to do with one's inner cultivation, and misfortunate is inflicted on one externally.

正命，謂本秉之自得吉也。性然骨善，故不假操行以求福而吉自至，故曰正命。隨命者，擲力操行而吉福至，縱情施欲而凶禍到，故曰隨命。遭命者，行善得惡，非所冀望，逢遭於外而得凶禍，故曰遭命。(Lunheng jiaoshi 論衡校釋, vol.1: 49-50)

Although Wang Chong classified human fate into three kinds, he was largely concerned with *Zaoming*. As a matter of fact, Wang Chong is remembered in the history of Chinese philosophy for his argument on the ill match between nature and fate, in addition to his theory of *qi* endowment. He did not address *zhengming* much. As for *suiming*, he simply excluded it from his worldview, for he thought there is no way to verify it in real life (隨命之說，安所驗乎?). (Ibid., 51)

<sup>92</sup> These stories normally tell how a virtuous man is eventually recognized by the community or government and is appointed to high position. Besides a successful career, he also has a happy family, virtuous wives and filial children. Of these stories the most wide spread involves the sage-king Shun (舜). Shun requited his brother's malevolence with kindness, and was recommended to King Yao (堯). Thinking highly of Shun, Yao not only handed over the crown to him, but also married his two daughters to him. Shun had remarkable achievements in governing the nation; he lived a happy life with his two wives and died at 100. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju 香港:中華書局, 1969, vol. 1: 32-44.

happy life; even worse, a good man may suffer more than a bad man, and if one's good effort has nothing to do with one's predetermined fate, how can one be expected to cultivate oneself enthusiastically?

To summarize, the theory of *qi* endowment has become an influential theory from the Han dynasty onward, to which Han Confucians, Wang Chong in particular, made remarkable contributions. After the Han dynasty, the two approaches to human nature become distinct; one is from moral principle and the other from *qi* endowment. We will see that in the Wei-Jin period, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang reinterpreted these two approaches in their own ways. These two approaches anticipate the distinction between 天理之性 (nature of Heavenly principle) and 氣質之性 (nature of *qi* endowment) made most prominent by the Song philosopher Zhu Xi (朱熹). They also enabled thinkers to interpret, comparatively, the issue of human nature in terms of potential vs. reality, commonality vs. individuality, equality vs. inequality, and mind/spirit vs. life/body.

However, the theory of *qi* endowment does have some problems. To take Wang Chong for example, since both human nature and human fate are determined by *qi* endowment, why is the former changeable but the latter is not? And, since human fate is predetermined and unchangeable, what is the point of moral cultivation? Sometimes Wang Chong was optimistic about the strength of education in shaping one's nature; but in most cases he remained pessimistic about the fact that one could do nothing about one's fate. As such, his position on education and fate actually undermine each other. As a matter of fact, Wang Chong's discussion of the unchangeableness of human fate is so impressive that it is generally conceived of as the key theme in his thought. The theory of *qi*

endowment is thus associated with fatalism, and education, despite the significance attached to it, actually does not count too much.

#### 1.4. Human Nature in Early Daoist Philosophy

The issue of human nature is more intriguing in Daoism than in Confucianism, because the way Daoists approached the issue is much more complicated. Confucian thinkers have shown an enduring concern with human nature and have normally approached it from a moral perspective. However, the situation is quite different in Daoism. The *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* contain no reference to the terms “human nature” and “nature”.<sup>93</sup> But the terms occur frequently in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and other Daoist texts, such as the *Guanzi* and the *Huainanzi*. This imbalance may invite questions such as whether the early Daoists were not interested in the issue of human nature or if it was simply beyond their horizon? Was it due to the influence of the Confucian doctrine of human nature that later Daoists had to

---

<sup>93</sup> One explanation for this absence is that the term *de* 德 conveys a meaning similar to that of *xing* 性. As *de* is the differentiation of the *Dao* into human beings and things, it actually seems to play the same role as *xing*.

An alternative explanation involves a contrast between Daoism and Confucianism. While Confucians were concerned with the Way of human beings (*rendao* 人道), Daoists were more interested in the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道). Thus they paid little attention to the nature of human beings.

The latter explanation is less convincing, for the distinction between the Way of Heaven and the Way of human beings, in my understanding, is not sufficient to characterize the fundamental difference between the two schools. Confucianism and Daoism actually share the same ideal, i.e., a harmonious relationship between Heaven and human beings. In Daoist language, this harmony comes if one fully comprehends and spontaneously follows the *Dao* so that the two seem identical. The basic divergence between the two schools lies in their understanding of the *Dao*: a moral principle or a principle of naturalness and non-action? This difference results in other debates between the two schools on education, rituals, human nature, and the happy life.

For two explanations, see Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *History of the Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature: the pre-Qin Period* 中國人性論史, 先秦篇, 338, 369; Zhou Shaoxian 周紹賢, *Weijin qingtan shulun* 魏晉清談述論 (Taipei: shangwu yinshuguan 臺北：商務書局, 1966), 58-61.

address this issue? It is difficult to answer these questions without looking at the etymology of the character 性 (nature), which needs another examination.

Besides the total absence of the term “nature” in the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, the lack of a clear definition of “nature” in other Daoist texts also contributes to the complexity. A fundamental theme running through Daoist texts is to deny the Confucian conception of human nature. Laozi says, “get rid of benevolence and discard righteousness, and people will return to filial piety and kindness” (The *Laozi* 19:1). The author of the *Zhuangzi* thought that man’s true nature had been distorted by benevolence and righteousness (The *Zhuangzi*, 8/22/28). Daoists sought to prove that human nature is not at all what Confucianism had conceived in moral terms. But the question remains: after deconstructing the Confucian conception of human nature, what did Daoists construct in its place?

This is a difficult question, since we find no clear definition as to what nature is in the texts containing this term. Daoists also agreed that nature means what a person (thing) is endowed with naturally. But this meaning is very broad, as feeling, capacity, characteristics, physical features, and intelligence, all can be said to be naturally endowed. Even benevolence and righteousness, which were refuted by Daoists for being artificial, is just what the human being is naturally endowed with in the Confucian worldview. Given this broadness, in Daoism the meaning of nature is completely dependent on the context. For example, in the eleventh chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, nature means natural life (11/26/17, 11/26/21, 11/26/25, 11/27/7), but in the eighth chapter it means the basic function of sense organs (8/23/7-9). Elsewhere it either conveys the meaning of capacity (19/51/30,

19/52/1), or that of a constant life course (9/23/24), or the essence of life itself (23/67/12).

Despite this complexity, there have been remarkable achievements in research on this issue. Harold D. Roth outlines the development of the concept of nature in Daoism, which, according to him, is characterized by three kinds of theories.<sup>94</sup> The first, the Yangist theory, holds that nature is an innate tendency for longevity, the second, the Primitivist theory, conceives nature to be simple (素 *su*) and unhewn (樸 *pu*). Incorporating the previous two, the third Syncretist theory proposes that human nature is an innate tranquil essence that is ultimately based in the *Dao*.

This classification is valuable; however, there are still some problems with it. Roth stresses that the Daoist theory of human nature is derived primarily from the Yangists. But we know that in the *Zhuangzi* Yang Zhu and Mozi are criticized by name for misunderstanding human nature.<sup>95</sup>

Another problem concerns the Syncretist theory. According to Roth, the Syncretist theory, which was developed in the *Huainanzi* and the miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, bases one's tranquil essence in the *Dao*. Obviously,

---

<sup>94</sup> Harold D. Roth, "An Outline of the Concept of Innate Nature in Early Daoism," in *Contacts between Cultures* edited by Bernard Hung-Kay Luk (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 37-41.

<sup>95</sup> Roth's view implies that Yangist views or texts come earlier than the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. But the fact is that Yang Zhu's date remains undetermined. No complete work by Yang Zhu is extant. Only citations and paraphrases of his words are available in texts such as the *Lüshichunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (ch.1, 2, 21) and the *Liezi* 列子, both of which are works of the Han-Wei period. Of course this is insufficient to prove that Yang Zhu's life is closer to the Han, but it is also insufficient to date him to an earlier period. Benjamin I. Schwartz influences Roth here. He thinks that Yang Zhu's view of human nature emerges out of his dialectic encounters with the Mohist school, and Yang may have influenced both Laozi and Zhuangzi. Again, Schwartz implies that Yang Zhu's view was available to Laozi. However, as Xu Fuguan proposes, Yangist theory is a branch of Daoism, deriving from Lao-Zhuang thought. See Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 191; Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *History of the Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature: the pre-Qin Period* 中國人性論史 (先秦篇), 415-418.

Roth implies that this idea is a quite late development. However, as I will show later, this idea was addressed as early as in the *Laozi* and had been shared by various Daoist proponents of human nature. For example, in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and in the *Huainanzi*, it is said that feelings and senses are part of nature, and they should not be rejected for they have their origin in the *Dao*.<sup>96</sup>

Some misconceptions make the issue of human nature in Daoism even more intriguing. For example, it is widely accepted that Daoists adopted a naturalistic approach to human nature, i.e., they construed human nature as equivalent to life and were overwhelmingly concerned with self-preservation. However, one must be cautious to apply the term “naturalism” to Daoist philosophy. One needs consider at least two points when grappling with this comparative perspective. (1) What are the core meanings of “naturalism” and its Chinese equivalent *ziran* 自然? Is there any difference between the two? (2) What is the ultimate goal of Daoist philosophy: a spiritual enlightenment, or only the preservation of the physical body? I will return to these questions in chapter 3.

So far I have introduced the complexity of Daoist thought on nature. In this part I present my examination of the topic, which is mainly built on two Daoist classics, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, for the reason that I stated at the beginning of this chapter. I hope to answer the following questions: whether there is any *idea* of (human) nature in the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* despite the absence of the word “nature” in them? What is the main feature of this idea? How is human nature understood in later Daoist texts? And, what makes this understanding distinct from earlier ideas? I propose there is a change in the

---

<sup>96</sup> Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋 (Peking University Press 北京大學出版社, 1997), vol.1: 722.



development of Daoist philosophy concerning the issue of human nature. The ideas of human nature in the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* focus primarily on the origin of human nature and its relation to the *Dao*, while in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, human nature refers to a life of health and longevity. In other words, whereas in the former nature is understood as a principle, in the latter it refers to something that is substantive.

#### 1.4.1. The idea of nature in the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*

Although the terms “nature” and “human nature” do not occur in the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, this does not mean that the texts do not convey any *idea* or *view* of human nature. Laozi stressed that the myriad things originate from the *Dao*. He employed the mother-child analogy to illustrate the relation between the *Dao* and the myriad things. But one should not thus consider the *Dao* apart from its creations. The *Dao* is *internal* to things. The *Dao* is both transcendental and immanent. Thus, each human being has the *Dao* in him/herself, which forms his/her nature. Human nature conceived in this way is the root to which human beings should return. Laozi says, “things are numerous and various, but each returns to its root (The *Laozi* 16).” The Chinese equivalent of “root”, *gen* 根, means the fundamental, the core, and the focal point of a thing, and can be used as a substitute for the word “nature”.

Laozi employed another term, *de* 德, to convey what is meant by the word “nature”. The *Dao* is intrinsic to each human being. The *Dao* in this form is called *de*.<sup>97</sup> The subtle distinction between the two is: the *Dao* refers to the

---

<sup>97</sup> Given its importance in Daoist philosophy, it is necessary to give a clarification as to the translations of the concept of *de*. In the *Laozi*, 德 and 得, both pronounce *de*, were used interchangeably to refer to the differentiation of the *Dao* in each human being. However, the basic meanings of the two characters are different. 德 means virtue, while 得 means “to receive”, “to have”, or “to obtain”. *De* is often translated as “virtue”, but evidently this translation fails to

ontological reality engendering and sustaining the cosmos, and *de* describes the differentiation of the *Dao* into each thing and human being.

*De* is not only the share of the *Dao* in human beings, it also means that one attends to this sharing carefully and holds it permanently. While the *Dao* creates human beings, *de* sustains them and guarantees them a life free of worry and bitterness. It is the core of Laozi's view of human nature: to maintain *throughout one's life* what one is endowed with from the *Dao*.

So far I have focused on the idea of human nature in the *Laozi*. Now let us see whether there is any similar *idea* in the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. It is generally agreed that Zhuang Zhou composed the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, and his followers appended to them the outer and miscellaneous chapters. Scholars have revealed inconsistencies between the inner chapters and the outer and miscellaneous chapters in idea and language.<sup>98</sup> One of them is that the term

---

communicate the meaning of *de* 得. Moreover, as I will argue below, this translation is somewhat misleading, as the word "virtue" is typically associated with Confucianism rather than Daoism.

A related translation is "power," for "virtue" in its Latin origin means "power". Although this translation hits the mark to some extent, it is only a derivative of the meaning of virtue 德 and that of attainment 得. In Confucianism and Daoism one's power relies entirely on one's virtue and one's attainment of the *Dao* respectively.

Some scholars translate *de* in its Daoist context. Rudolf G. Wagner, for example, renders *de* as "receipt/capacity". This translation is more accurate than that of "virtue" or "power" in communicating Daoist ideas. In the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, *de* usually means one's receipt from the *Dao*. This receipt has no moral dimension, since Daoism saves its most vitriolic criticism for Confucian morality. In view of this, the translation of "virtue" in Daoist context may cause confusion.

I leave *de* untranslated in this thesis, and refer it to the differentiation of the *Dao* or the sharing of the *Dao* in each human being.

Philip J. Ivanhoe produces interesting argument regarding the power of *de* (virtue). See "The concept of *de* (virtue) in the *Laozi*," in Mark Csikzentmihalyi and Philip J. Ivanhoe, ed., *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999), 239-257; Rudolf G. Wagner, *The Craft of A Chinese Commentator Wang Bi on the Laozi*, 182, 183, 273.

<sup>98</sup> Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, *Philosophy of Zhuangzi and Its Development* 莊子哲學及其演變 (Press of Chinese Social Sciences 中國社會科學出版社, 1988), 5-20. The first three chapters of Liu's work are translated into English by William E. Savage, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*

“nature” does not occur in the inner chapters but occur frequently in the outer and miscellaneous chapters.

The idea of human nature in the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* is similar to that in the *Laozi*. That is, human nature has its base in the *Dao*. Zhuang Zhou was concerned with the well being of human beings. According to him, to live a peaceful life in constant change, one must know the *Dao*. Unlike Laozi, Zhuang Zhou conceived the *Dao* primarily as a principle of ceaseless transformation circulating the cosmos. Once realizing that everything is transient and nothing lasts forever, people will not be affected by loss and gain, including life and death. Zhuang Zhou encouraged people “to approach *de*” (進德) (2/6/6), which conveys a meaning similar to that of “returning to the root” (歸根) in the *Laozi*. One should follow one’s nature and this allows one’s nature to be completely fulfilled. A completely fulfilled nature is a perfect reflection of the *Dao*. A person fully fulfilling his nature is at one with the *Dao*.

Such a person is the ideal of Daoism, who is esteemed as “the authentic person” (真人 *zhenren*) (6/15/32, 6/16/2, 6/16/5, 6/16/7, 6/16/14, 6/16/20), “the numinous person” (神人 *shenren*) (1/2/2, 1/2/14, 4/12/11, 4/12/17), or “the perfect person” (至人 *zhiren*) (1/2/2, 2/6/17, 4/9/2, 5/14/13, 5/14/14, 5/15/10, 7/21/21). Such people do not resist change. They ride the tides of transformation, changing with the changes of the external world. They attain the ultimate *de* (德之至) (4/10/21), i.e., they embody the *Dao*.

---

(Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1994), 18-39; A.C. Graham, “How Much of *Chuang tzu* Did *Chuang Tzu* Write?” in *Studies in Classical Chinese Thought* edited by Henry Rosemont Jr. and Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Issue* (1979). Chico: American Academy of Religion, 1980, 459-501.

To sum up, Laozi and Zhuang Zhou maintained a similar view of human nature, despite the absence of the word “nature” in their writings. They based human nature in the *Dao*. A key concept to understand their views is *de*, meaning the differentiation of the *Dao* in each human being, or the receipt or share of the *Dao* in each human being. This concept bridges the *Dao* and its creation, making the transcendental *Dao* present in each thing. What is the most important is that one should keep this *de* intact and possess it permanently.

#### 1.4.2. Human nature in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*

In the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, the issue of human nature is no longer mediated by the term *de*, though the latter is still in use. There the word “nature” is used directly and frequently. In contrast with the term *de*, whose use in the *Laozi* indicates a prior concern with the *Dao*, the term “nature” points directly to human beings and the myriad things. Given this, the frequent occurrence of the term “nature” in these chapters suggests a shift in Daoist concern from the *Dao* to human beings, or from the absolute principle to individual life.

The understanding of nature in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi* is substantive.<sup>99</sup> There nature is taken to refer to concrete things. For

---

<sup>99</sup> However, this does not mean that the metaphysical reason for human nature is entirely neglected in these chapters. In several passages the term “nature” is related to the *Dao*, in the same way as it is in the *Laozi* and the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. For example, in chapter 9 it is said, If one identifies perfectly with ignorance, his *de* will not lose; if one identifies perfectly with dispassion, this is called pristine simplicity. It is by being pristinely simple that the nature of people is fulfilled.  
同乎無知，其德不離；同乎無欲，是謂素樸；素樸而民性得矣。

This is parallel to Laozi’s view that people should have no knowledge and no desire (ch. 3), and they should attend to the simplicity and embrace the unhewn (ch.19). What is implied here is because the *Dao* is simple and unhewn, human nature determined by the *Dao* is simple and unhewn.

Translation is Lynn’s and altered slightly.

animals and inanimate things, nature pertains to their physical features and capacities. For example, a horse's hoof can withstand frozen snow and its fur can resist strong wind. It feeds only on grass and water, and needs no special shielding (ch.9). All these are the true nature of a horse.

As for human beings, nature refers to human life. As A. C. Graham puts it, "nature seems to refer, not to life in general or particular lives, but to the course of life proper to man, in particular to health and longevity."<sup>100</sup> To live a life of health and longevity, first of all, one need correct the misunderstanding of human nature. No doubt, the moral understanding of human nature in Confucianism is the main target of Daoist criticism. In addition, Daoists also sought to dispel another view, which holds human nature to be physical desires. To them, this view is just as wrong as the Confucian view.

One can get a sense of the Daoist notion of human life from its criticism of other views. Daoism conceives human life as consisting of two sides, body (身 *shen*) and heart/mind (心 *xin*). Only if one's body and mind are both nurtured, can one live a life of health and longevity. However, false views often mislead people and ruin their otherwise healthy and happy lives. To be specific, the Confucian view that human nature is benevolent and righteous disturbs one's mind, and the view that human nature is only physical desire damages one's body.

Influenced by the Confucian view, one is keen to be virtuous. However, in the Daoist view, one's enthusiasm for moral cultivation seriously damages one's originally tranquil and simple mind. Even worse, with moral cultivation being highly valued, people cannot realize the damage that it causes to the human mind

---

<sup>100</sup> A. C. Graham, "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy & Philosophical Literature* (The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, Singapore, 1986), 10.

and life. As reiterated in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, it is easy to know that people should not sacrifice their lives for profit, but it is hard to recognize that to sacrifice one's life for reputation and morality is equally harmful. People make effort to achieve various goals. A mean man sacrifices his life for profit, and the sage sacrifices his life for others. In the Daoist view, the two equally hurt life and damage nature (8/22/27-30, 8/23/1-5).

While morality disturbs the tranquility and simplicity of the human mind, uncontrolled physical desires damage the human body. The view that human nature includes natural desires is popular during the Warring States period. The lengthy debate between Mencius and Gaozi is enough to prove this. Despite their sharp contrast in other aspects, Confucianism and Daoism agree that this misunderstands human nature. It is dangerous, for it legitimates one's indulgence in sensory pleasures. A person obsessed with desires will lose sight of his true nature. The authors of the *Zhuangzi* followed Laozi in saying, "the five colors dazzle one's eyes, blurring one's sight; the five sounds harass one's ears, deafening one's hearing; the five smells suffocate one's nose, hurting one's forehead; the five tastes numb one's mouth, reducing the sensibility of one's palates. These four groups, plus moral norms, reputation, and other preferences that disturb human mind, are extremely harmful to human life."(12/34/4-6)

To summarize, in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi* human nature is associated with a life of health and longevity. To live a life of health and longevity, one needs to take care of both mind and body. To be specific, one should dispel the Confucian conception of human nature, and thus free oneself from concern with moral achievement. One also needs to refute the view that human nature is only physical desires and thus save oneself from

insatiable desires. Maintaining one's mind tranquil and simple and confining one's body only to basic necessities, one will live a life of health and longevity.

### 1.5 Two Perspectives of Human Nature: Principle vs. Substance

So far I have reviewed the development of the concept of human nature from the Warring States period to the Han dynasty in both Confucianism and Daoism. In this part I bring an important theme to a close, which runs through this development, i.e., a contrast between the two understandings of human nature as principle and as substance.

The concept of human nature, as interesting and intriguing as it is, invites disagreement. As shown earlier in this chapter, scholars may debate whether a view is egalitarian or inegalitarian, or whether it highlights the commonality or the individuality of human beings. Especially of interest to this thesis, such a review shows that there are two distinctive perspectives of human nature, i.e., to understand human nature as a principle and as a substance. Mou Zongsan has approached this question in a comparative way.<sup>101</sup> In my view, this distinction between the two perspectives is more fundamental, and all other disagreements mentioned above can be traced to it.

Although the concepts of egalitarianism and commonality are generally associated with Confucianism and their opposites with Daoism, the two understandings of human nature as either principle or substance are not necessarily associated with Confucianism and Daoism respectively. The distinction between

---

<sup>101</sup>According to Mou Zongsan, the good of human nature in Mencius' view is absolute and certain, in the same way that the moral principle operates in Kant's thought, while the good of human nature interpreted in terms of *qi*, as in Wang Chong's case, is just a potential and cannot be necessarily realized. This is one of the main themes of his book *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 臺北：學生書局, 1978).

principle and substance is actually applicable to the whole Chinese philosophical tradition of human nature.

As argued before, it is not clear in the *Analects* whether people are alike in their biological or spiritual aspect. The conceptual ambiguity in Confucius opens the possibility of various interpretations for later thinkers.

The renowned scholar Mou Zongsan compares Mencius with Kant and proposes that Mencius interprets human nature in terms of an absolute moral principle. This approach is valuable, as it introduces a comparative worldview to the understanding of Mencius, and more broadly, Chinese philosophy. However, Mencius' case differs significantly from that of Kant. In other words, Mencius' view of human nature is not a purely metaphysical inquiry but is based empirically on everyday phenomena. Mencius did stress that human nature is the Mandate of Heaven, which can be considered to be a moral principle in its absoluteness and universality. But he also argued long to show that human nature is simply one's sympathetic feelings or senses for the suffering of others. Such feelings or senses operate not purely as abstract principles but are psychological phenomena associated closely with one's physical body. Moreover, the significant role of *qi* in Mencius' thought is also evident. Mencius emphasized that one should nourish one's *haoran zhi qi* (the flood-like *qi* 浩然之氣), which is a crucial part of moral cultivation. The concept of *qi* came to be a popular concept in the Warring States period. Although Mencius did not explicitly address the connection between human nature and *qi*, it is clear from his argument that to nourish *qi* is a fundamental part of nourishing one's nature. As such, Mencius seemed to maintain that human nature is made from the substance of *qi*. Consequently, he seemed to understand human nature as both a principle and a substance. But how



are these two understandings related to each other? Mencius did not address this question. We will see in chapter 2 that Wang Bi did.

As for Gaozi and Xunzi, since they understood human nature as cravings for food and sex and desires of self-preservation respectively, which are generally associated with the physical body, they can be said to hold a substantive view of human nature.

The case of Han Confucianism is similar yet for a subtly different reason. Due to the overwhelming dominance of the theory of *qi* endowment, Han Confucians produced substantive interpretations of human nature. According to them, *qi* is the material from which human beings and human nature emerge. Moreover, *qi* decides whether one's nature is good or bad.

The development of the concept of human nature in early Daoist philosophy also shows a contrast between principle and substance. The *Laozi* centers on the ontological base of human nature and its relation with the *Dao*. As such, its understanding of human nature is that it is a principle, in that the *Dao* is the absolute principle determining human nature. In contrast, in the *Zhuangzi* human nature is rarely traced to its origin. In most passages human nature is defined in terms of health and longevity. This substantive understanding of human nature is stated mainly in the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. The inner chapters may reflect a transitional stage between the two understandings. They are closer to the *Laozi*, as they contain no reference of the term "nature" but use the term *de*; meanwhile an intense concern for a life free of worry and bitterness also pervades the outer and miscellaneous chapters.

The contrast between principle and substance reflects a shift in Daoist concern from the *Dao* to human beings. The *Laozi* is an enquiry into the origin

and the absolute principle of the universe: the *Dao*. It devotes most of its passages to portraying the nature and the power of the *Dao*. Although human beings and human affairs are discussed in the text, one has the impression that this discussion is only for illustrating the power of the *Dao*. Given this, it is not surprising that Laozi's understanding of human nature is quite abstract, since he was largely concerned with the reason for the existence of human beings. However, this abstract understanding seems hard to comprehend. That is, it is unclear how to fuse the abstract nature, as the endowment of the *Dao*, with the physical body. We will see in chapter 2 that Wang Bi produced an innovative explanation of this problem.

However, the authors of the *Zhuangzi* would not confront this problem, as they simply focused their attention on the human world. To be more specific, they were concerned with how to live life in accordance with the *Dao*. The *Dao* here refers to a principle of transformation, which is subtly different from the metaphysical principle in the *Laozi*. Realizing that the world is in constant transformation, people are not disturbed by their losses and gains. Even benevolence and righteousness are transient customs. Consequently, freeing one's mind from prejudice and keeping one's sense organs only for the bare necessities of life, one lives a peaceful life free of worry and bitterness.

Later in the Wei-Jin period, absorbing nutrients from both Confucianism, Han Confucianism in particular, and early Daoism, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang made the contrast in understanding human nature and the *Dao*, as mentioned above, more evident in their respective commentaries on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. This will be explored in the following chapters.

## Chapter 2 Wang Bi: Nature<sup>Dao</sup> and Nature<sup>qi</sup>

Arguably the brightest star in the intellectual circle of the Wei-Jin period, Wang Bi (王弼 A.D. 226-249) represents a new height in the development of Chinese philosophy. Within a short lifespan of 24 years, Wang Bi produced highly significant commentaries on two of the most enduring works of Chinese philosophy, the *Laozi* and the *Yijing*. He also wrote a commentary on the *Analects*, but only a few fragments of that text are extant. His commentary on the *Laozi*, in particular, made Wang Bi legendary during his lifetime, and he has been seen as one of the most important commentators up to the present day.<sup>102</sup>

Just as in Chinese literati painting, what is most individual in a person can only emerge in and through ritualized expression,<sup>103</sup> many Chinese philosophers have to construct their own philosophical thought through interpreting the almost ritualized classics—the *Analects*, the *Laozi*, and the *Zhuangzi*. Wang Bi shows himself to be an innovative and critically independent philosopher, although he works within the tradition of commentarial writing. In his interpretation of the fundamental theme of the *Laozi*, i. e., the *Dao*, Wang Bi developed an elaborate philosophical conception of Nonbeing. His arguments on the nature of Nonbeing, the relationship between Nonbeing and beings, “root and branch” (*benmo* 本末), and “substance and function” (*tiyong* 體用) bestow upon Wei-Jin thought an unparalleled metaphysical depth.

---

<sup>102</sup> For Wang Bi’s biography and other background historical materials, see Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju 北京中華書局, 1980, 1999), 639-648; Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅, *Wang Bi pingzhuan* 王弼評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press 南京大學出版社, 1996), 166-192. Also see Richard J. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 5-20; Rudolf G. Wagner, *The Craft of A Chinese Commentator*, 9-26.

<sup>103</sup> Jiuan Heng, “Ritual and the body in literati painting,” *Analecta Husserliana LXXIII*: 323.

This chapter examines Wang Bi's distinctive ideas of human nature. It is my proposal that Wang Bi understood human nature as consisting of two parts, nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. Nature<sup>Dao</sup> is the differentiation of the *Dao* in each human being, while nature<sup>qi</sup> is the substance that forms human nature materially. The significance of this distinction lies in that it solves a key problem existing in Han Confucianism. Han Confucians generally agreed that human nature is a mixture of good and evil, but they failed to present a convincing explanation of that mixture. They did formulate a theory of *qi* endowment to account for the hybridity of human nature, but, as pointed out in chapter 1, *qi* endowment varies not only in degree but also in kind. In other words, according to this theory, a person is good, because he is endowed with benevolent *qi*; he is more benevolent than others, because he is gifted with more benevolent *qi*. Obviously, this kind of argument is rather circular. However, as we will see later, Wang Bi, by his distinction between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>, was able to answer such questions that faced the Han Confucians clearly and convincingly, i.e., the question of the hybridity of human nature and that of the commonality and diversity of human beings. I will discuss this point at length later.

The first part of chapter 2 begins with an examination of the concept of the *Dao* and that of nature, which aims to show how the former bears decisively on the latter. Then I clarify the role of *qi* in Wang Bi's concept of human nature. This is important because it is widely accepted that Wang Bi represents a complete break with the *qi* cosmology of the Han. However, my examination shows that *qi* still remains important in him, as it is the substance that forms human nature. The second part of chapter 2 focuses on the relationship between nature and feeling. My submission is that in Wang Bi's view, nature<sup>Dao</sup> is beyond

good and evil, whilst feeling is subject to moral judgment. Whether feeling is good or bad depends on whether it is subordinate to nature<sup>Dao</sup>. The last part is mainly built on the debate between He Yan and Wang Bi on whether the sage has feelings. It is about the nature of the sage and whether sagehood is inborn. The sage exceeds the common people in his spirituality (*shenming* 神明). So whether sagehood is inborn comes to be whether spirituality is inborn. I propose that Wang Bi not only attributed spirituality to nature<sup>qi</sup>, which he inherited from his predecessors, but also stressed that it is informed by the *Dao*, which proves to be his own original contribution. As such, spirituality pertains to a full rediscovery of one's nature<sup>Dao</sup> and a thorough comprehension of the *Dao*. As spirituality is based on special refined *qi* and involves a high degree of intelligence, both of which are inborn, sagehood is then inborn.

## **2.1. Nature<sup>Dao</sup>: Human Authenticity and Nature<sup>qi</sup>: Human Substance**

### **2.1.1. The formless and nameless *Dao*: Nonbeing**

Before dealing with Wang Bi's view of nature, it is necessary to look into his conception of the *Dao*. Wang Bi interpreted the *Dao* as Nonbeing, for it is both formless and nameless, and he also interpreted the *Dao* as empty and still, which has a decisive bearing on his view of nature.

The concept of the *Dao* is not exclusive to Daoism, but it holds the central position in Daoist thought, as the concept of *ren* (仁 benevolence) does in Confucianism. In particular, the *Laozi* sketches the fundamental aspects of the *Dao*, which comes to be the chief source of inspiration for later Daoist thinkers. Wang Bi tried to reveal the great meaning hidden between the lines of the *Laozi*, which is, in his words, "to esteem the root and rest the branches (*chongben ximo*

崇本息末).”<sup>104</sup> The root is a metaphor for the *Dao*. Wang Bi made every effort to illustrate the philosophical significance of the *Dao*, the most distinctive and innovative of which is the interpretation of the *Dao* as Nonbeing.

The creativity of the *Dao* is highlighted in the *Laozi*; Wang Bi formulated a detailed explanation of this creativity. In other words, he aimed to give a clear answer to the question: how can the *Dao* create the myriad things? His answer is that the *Dao* is Nonbeing, which is both formless and nameless.

The physical world abounds with things that can be felt by the sense organs. People recognize the existence of things by perceiving their physical properties, forms, colors, smells, and sounds, for example. But Wang Bi found that it is impossible to trace the origin of things within the physical world itself, which leads only to infinite regress. If there is something that qualifies as the origin of things, it must be beyond the physical world and completely different from things in this world. As things are normally construed as having physical properties, the origin of things must be a reality without any such properties.<sup>105</sup> Only then is it capable of “serving as the progenitor and master of things in all their different categories, of covering and permeating everything in Heaven and Earth.”<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Wang Bi jijiaoshi 王弼集校釋, 198; Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 37.

<sup>105</sup> As Wang Bi illustrates,  
If it (the origin of things, the *Dao*) were warm, it could not be cold; if it were the note *gong* (宮), it could not be the note *shang* (商). If it had a form, it could necessarily be distinguished from other things, if it made a sound, it would necessarily belong somewhere among other sounds.  
若溫也則不能涼矣，宮也則不能商矣。形必有所分，聲必有所屬。

Wang Bi jijiaoshi 王弼集校釋, 195; Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Wang Bi jijiaoshi 王弼集校釋, 195; Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 30.

Besides being formless, the *Dao* is also nameless. These two characteristics of the *Dao* are not isolated from each other. The relationship between them is a causal one. Because the *Dao* is formless, it is nameless. According to Wang Bi, the name of a thing is used to define the form of the thing (名以定形).<sup>107</sup> Name and form always emerge concomitantly. If one thing has a form, there must be a name to define this form; similarly, if a name is used, it must point to a form. Since the *Dao* does not have form, it does not have name.

However, in Wang Bi's treatment, the namelessness of the *Dao* takes on greater philosophical complexity. On the opening line of the *Laozi*, Wang Bi commented,

The *Dao* that can be spoken and the name that can be named point to things and describe forms, but neither of them is in constancy.

The *Dao* can neither be spoken nor named.

可道之道，可名之名，指事造形，非其常也。故不可道不可名也。<sup>108</sup>

This quotation suggests that Wang Bi also considered the *Dao* to be unnamable. Then the question that arises is how to understand the *Dao* as both nameless and unnamable.<sup>109</sup>

At first sight, the *Dao* is unnamable may mean that one is unable to give a name to the *Dao*. This understanding holds the incapability of human beings

---

<sup>107</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 63; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 95.

<sup>108</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 1; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> I have benefited from A. T. Nuyen on this question, although we discuss it from different perspectives. Nuyen proposes that the *Dao* is nameless because it is unnamable, not even as "the nameless," and the *Dao* is unnamable because the nature of the *Dao* is paradoxical. See A. T. Nuyen, "Naming the Unnamable: the Being of the *Dao*," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 22 (1995): 487-497.

responsible for the namelessness of the *Dao*. However, I am afraid that this is not Wang Bi's point.

There are indeed some things in the physical world that one cannot name at present. But it is necessary to point out that the namelessness of these things is different from that of the *Dao*. Generally speaking, the physical world consists of two groups of things, those with tangible forms, for example, human beings, animals, and planets, and those without forms, for example, emotions. The former have names in accordance with their forms. As for the latter, the situation is more complicated. Despite being formless, some of them can be named but others cannot. For example, in most cases a person can name the feelings that he or she has experienced, which are normally categorized as joy, anger, sadness and delight. But on some occasions one may feel a mixture of sadness and delight, or of love and hatred. As a Chinese saying goes, one feels like that the five sauce pots are overturned, with the sour, sweet, bitter, hot and salty tastes all mixed up. At this point it is hard to find an appropriate word with which to communicate this complicated feeling. In other words, one cannot give it a name, thus it stays nameless.

However, although a thing in the physical world is nameless at present, this does not mean that it is nameless permanently. A thing is nameless probably for the following reasons: the language in its current stage of development is inadequate to communicate it, or one is not proficient in the language to name it. However, this does not exclude the possibility that it might be named in the near or distant future. With the development of language and human intelligence, a name suited to that thing will be found sooner or later. It is just a matter of time.



In light of this, although some things in the physical world are currently nameless, they are potentially namable.

The case of the *Dao*, however, is completely different. The *Dao* cannot be named because of its nature. Wang Bi says, the name of a thing is determined by the thing itself, whereas the descriptions of it are issued by human beings (名生乎彼，稱出乎我).<sup>110</sup> In light of this argument, that the *Dao* is nameless is also decided by the *Dao* itself. On the one hand, the *Dao* as the origin of beings is beyond the physical world. Since language applies only to the physical world, as Wang Bi seems to hold, the *Dao* is beyond the regime of language. On the other hand, as A. T. Nuyen puts it, the nature of the *Dao* is paradoxical,<sup>111</sup> for example, the *Dao* is both transcendental and immanent, both the weakest and the most powerful, therefore no language can accurately communicate the profundity of the *Dao*. Although various terms are employed to convey the *Dao*, for example, profundity (*xuan* 玄), depth (*shen* 深), greatness (*da* 大), subtlety (*wei* 微), and remoteness (*yuan* 遠), they are only descriptions of this ontological reality. They may help one to comprehend that reality, but can never exhaust its true meaning. Consequently, the namelessness of the *Dao* has nothing to do with the development of language.

To summarize, that the *Dao* is nameless can be understood from two perspectives: (1) the *Dao* is formless, so it is nameless; (2) the nature of the *Dao* cannot be communicated accurately by language, so the *Dao* is nameless. In other words, because the *Dao* is intrinsically unnamable, it is nameless forever.

---

<sup>110</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 197; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 36.

<sup>111</sup> A. T. Nuyen, "Naming the Unnamable: the Being of the *Dao*," 487.

Being formless and nameless, the *Dao* is also interpreted as emptiness (*xu* 虛 or *kong* 空) and stillness (*jing* 靜). In many passages, emptiness is used as a synonym for Nonbeing, since both convey the meaning of being devoid of any physical properties. But one's understanding of emptiness should not stop here. Clearly, "emptiness" is intended primarily to communicate the operative principle of the *Dao*, i.e., the principle of non-action. "Non-action" means not purposively doing something, letting things pursue their proper courses freely and not artificially interfering with them. The principle of non-action shows how the *Dao* deals with its creation.

To illustrate this principle in terms of emptiness, let me take an example. One grows up within a fabric of knowledge and opinions. These form the preconditions for one's judgment. When A meets B, A may assume that B comes from a certain region because of his accent, or that B is a white-collar worker according to his attire, or that B is cheerful as there is always a smile on his face. Before A can make such assumptions, the knowledge about accent, clothes, or the connection between smile and cheerful temperament must have already been formed in A. Only in this way can A judge how B appears. In this regard, A does not keep an empty mind when meeting B.

The case of the *Dao* is quite different. Although esteemed as the creator of the myriad things, the *Dao* does not impose on them. The *Dao* itself is beyond the dichotomy of beautiful and ugly, right and wrong, like and dislike; so it does not make any differentiation among things or show any partiality for certain things. There is no preference in the *Dao*. Contrasted with A, who is full of knowledge and opinions, the *Dao* is empty. Such emptiness, without preferences and therefore contention, is absolutely still. The emptiness and stillness of the *Dao* is

crucial to Wang Bi's understanding of human nature. This will become evident in the following examination.

### 2.1.2. Nature<sup>Dao</sup>: what is authentic in the human being

The character 性 (nature, *xing*) is not found in the *Laozi*, but it occurs 21 times in Wang Bi's commentary. Although Wang Bi, like the author of the *Laozi*, was primarily concerned with Nonbeing (the *Dao*), he kept an eye on Nonbeing's creation: human beings and the myriad things. According to Wang Bi, to keep the physical world in harmony, the only way is to comprehend Nonbeing and return to it. In other words, Wang Bi exalted Nonbeing intentionally for the sake of the physical world. Therefore, rather than placing an overwhelming emphasis on Nonbeing, Wang Bi intended to construct an ideal relationship between Nonbeing and beings.<sup>112</sup> Nonbeing is esteemed for creating beings, but only through beings is the creativity of Nonbeing recognized. In this light, beings are significant in their own right. Given this, Wang Bi cannot but include the issue of human nature within his philosophical horizon, since ideally human nature is a perfect reflection of the *Dao*.

The concept of *de* is the key to understanding the relationship between Nonbeing and beings, or that between the *Dao* and (the nature of) things. Since the *Dao* is the ontological basis for the existence of the myriad things, it follows that the former decides the nature of the latter, or in other words, *xing* derives from the *Dao* in the sense of an ontological foundation.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, the *Dao*

---

<sup>112</sup> This will bear on his understanding of the nature of the sage and his spirituality, which I will discuss in the third part of this chapter.

<sup>113</sup> Qian Mu 錢穆 pointed out that the *Dao* is the principle that makes things what they are (*suoyiran zhi li* 所以然之理), the original principle of things (*benran zhi li* 本然之理), as well as the necessary principle of things (*biran zhi li* 必然之理). See his paper, "Wang Bi Guo Xiang

is not only beyond but also within the myriad things. Thus, the *Dao* present in each thing forms the nature of that thing. At this stage of the argument, the concept of *de* is taken as synonymous with *xing*, since *de* is generally understood as what things receive from the *Dao*. Wang Bi says,

The *Dao* is what things come from; *de* is what things receive. Following the *Dao*, things attain *de*, thus they cannot but esteem the *Dao*; losing the *Dao*, things get harmed, thus they cannot but cherish the *Dao*.

道者，物之所由也；德者，物之所得也。由之乃得，故曰不得不尊；失之則害，故曰不得不貴也。<sup>114</sup>

As argued in chapter 1, the concept of *de* conveys a similar meaning as nature (*xing*) in the *Laozi*. Wang Bi basically followed the *Laozi* in this usage; but a subtle difference is still discernable. The character *xing* (nature) does not occur in the *Laozi*; thus, there is no way to obtain a clear definition of *xing* from it. Now, if *de* is taken to be synonymous with *xing*, as some scholars suggest,<sup>115</sup> the argument would be quite simply that *xing* should be understood as *de* in the sense of what a person is endowed with naturally. However, in Wang Bi's case, as I will show later, since *xing* encompasses two parts, nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>, it is necessary to make clear whether *de* is taken to refer to nature<sup>Dao</sup> or nature<sup>qi</sup>, or both. It is significant that Wang Bi stressed the dependence of *de* on the *Dao*, which seems to suggest that the concept of *de* points to the *Dao* part of human nature. However, one may counter that since the *Dao* creates everything,

---

zhuyilaozhang yonglizi tiaolu” 王弼郭象注易老莊用理字條錄, *Xinya xuebao* 新亞學報, 1.1 (1955): 136.

<sup>114</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 137; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 149.

<sup>115</sup> See footnote 93, chapter 1, p 55.

including the constitutive *qi* of human beings, *de* should also cover the *qi* part of human nature, i.e., nature<sup>*qi*</sup>. The argument presented here is that the distinction between nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> and nature<sup>*qi*</sup>, which sets apart a metaphysical understanding of the *Dao* from a cosmological understanding of it, remains decisive in Wang Bi's thinking. Although the two can never be actually separated, they are conceptually distinct. It is clear that Wang Bi limited the use of *de* to the metaphysical sphere of the *Dao*, as shown above. In this respect, I propose that *de* refers to specifically the endowed *Dao* part of human beings.

The *Dao* defines human nature. Since the *Dao* is *ziran* (naturalness or spontaneity 自然), human nature is *ziran* too.<sup>116</sup> In general Wang Bi took the concept of *ziran* to describe the nature of the *Dao* and that of the myriad things including human beings.<sup>117</sup> But the concept of *ziran* has subtly different meanings when applied to the *Dao*, things, and human beings respectively. In the case of the *Dao*, it primarily points to a metaphysical principle engendering and sustaining the physical world. Meanwhile, the *Dao* is also within the physical world. Especially, when the *Dao* penetrates the sociopolitical scene, *ziran* refers to a principle of non-action, which is a pragmatic method of governing. I will return to this point in chapter 4.

When *ziran* applies to things, it means a principle of development innate in things. There is no clear distinction between human beings and all other things in Daoism; the term “*wuxing*” (the nature of things 物性) is generally used, which

---

<sup>116</sup> In many cases, the *Dao* is defined in terms of *ziran* and *wuwei*. Although *ziran* and *wuwei* can be used as both a noun and an adjective, this difference in word class does not cause any substantive change in the explanation of the *Dao*. In other words, either *ziran* and *wuwei* are synonyms of the *Dao* depending on various contexts, or they describe the attribute or feature of the *Dao*.

<sup>117</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 77; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 105.

encompasses the nature of human beings. Even though, one can still discern a difference between the nature of things and that of human beings with respect to *ziran*. The *ziran* of things pertains to an innate principle or way of development. For example, Wang Bi says, “No stifling the nature of things, then they fulfill themselves”;<sup>118</sup> “things have their constant nature; if one deliberately does something with them, one will lose”.<sup>119</sup> Or as A. C. Graham puts it, the nature of a thing is “its proper course of development during its process of *sheng* (life 生).”<sup>120</sup> A thing will reach its end in accordance with its own principle of development. Any interference with this development, even if it is out of good intentions, is unwelcome.

In the case of human nature, *ziran* pertains to what is authentic in human beings. Wang Bi hardly used the terms “human nature” and “the nature of human beings.” Instead, he employs the terms “authenticity” (*zhen* 真), “the One” (*yi* 一), “the uncarved block” (*pu* 樸), “emptiness” (*xu* 虛 or *kong* 空), and “stillness” (*jing* 靜) to interpret human nature.

The Chinese character *zhen* 真 means what is true, real, genuine, and authentic; its opposite *jia* 假 meaning the false, the wrong, and the unreal. Just as the pairs of “the One” vs. “the many (*duo* 多),” “the uncarved block” vs. superficiality, emptiness vs. fullness, and stillness vs. disturbance make evident, Wang Bi sought to draw a contrast between the true nature of human beings and

---

<sup>118</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 24; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 77; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 105.

<sup>120</sup> A. C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (the Institute of East Asian Philosophies, Singapore, 1986), 10.

what he considered to be the false views of human nature, the Confucian view in particular.

The One is the authenticity of human beings.<sup>121</sup> As Wang Bi observes, One should make the One the master. How could the One ever be discarded? The more one has, the farther one is [from the One], but being diminished gets one closer to it [the One]. When diminution goes as far as it can go, one obtains the Ultimate.

以一爲主，一何可舍？愈多愈遠，損則近之，損之至盡，乃得其極。<sup>122</sup>

To illustrate the opposition between the One and the many, Wang Bi also used the metaphor of a tree.

The way of *ziran* is just like a tree. The more branches a tree has, the farther the branches are from the roots; the fewer branches it has, the closer they are to the root. The more one has, the farther one is from one's authenticity. Therefore one is confused. The less one has, the closer one gets access to one's root. Therefore one obtains authenticity.

自然之道，亦尤樹也。轉多轉遠其根，轉少轉得其本。多則遠其真，故曰惑也；少則得其本，故曰得也。<sup>123</sup>

“The many” is taken to refer to knowledge, desire, fame, self-interest, and all other mundane things that people are normally concerned with. In Wang Bi's

---

<sup>121</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 22; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 65.

<sup>122</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 117; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 135.

<sup>123</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 56; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 89.

view, if one is distracted by these things, one will lose sight of one's nature; if one is clear of them, one maintains one's authenticity.

Wang Bi also used “the uncarved block” (*pu* 樸) to explain the authenticity of human beings. He commented on the *Laozi* 28:

The uncarved block means authenticity. When what is authentic is shattered, many ways and types (of being) are born. It is just like various vessels. Considering that people are in dismissal, the sage appoints officers for them. He takes the good as teachers, and the bad as material (to learn from); he changes their habits and transforms the customs, so as to enable them to return to the One.

樸，真也。真散則百行出，殊類生，若器也。聖人因其分散，故爲之立官長，以善爲師，不善爲資，移風易俗，復使歸於一也。<sup>124</sup>

When the *Dao* declined, there came the discriminations of different works and opinions. To avoid disorder and confusion, the sage invented institutions to manage things and transform people, one part of which was rites and morality. Wang Bi drew a contrast between the *Dao* (the uncarved block) and sociopolitical institutions (the vessels). Since the latter was founded after the *Dao* shattered, they were less valuable than Confucianism claimed. Morality, in particular, did not characterize the authentic nature of human beings, as it was in Confucianism.

The word *pu* (the uncarved block) can be understood in terms of “substance” (質 *zhi*). Both pertain to an original state of something prior to any external work being done to it. Even in modern Chinese, the combination of

---

<sup>124</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 75; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 103.



“substance” and “the uncarved block”, *zhipu* 質樸, is still popularly used to describe a person who is simple, plain, unsophisticated, and unadorned.

Related to this point, Confucius insists that a gentleman should be a perfect blend of *wen* (文) and *zhi* (質). Generally speaking, *wen* refers to elegant manners, proficiency in literature and the arts, whereas *zhi* points to a substance, a kind of raw material that is simple and natural. While a person can cultivate his *wen* through education, his *zhi* is an innate quality that is stable throughout his life and will not be affected too much by environment. According to Confucius, without *zhi*, *wen* will degenerate into meaningless superficiality. The connotation of *pu* in Wang Bi’s writings is similar to that of *zhi* in the *Analects*. However, what Confucius considered to be necessary, i. e., *wen*, is rejected by Wang Bi.

Originally, human nature is simple, which is a perfect reflection of the *Dao* in human beings. It is in simple harmony because it has very few requirements. But with the invention of the various institutions by the sage, people are caught in the strife for fame and profit. To take the example of morality, people initially have no knowledge of good and evil. But once the moral norms are established, they begin to conduct themselves intentionally, in hope of attaining fame and profit. Eventually, the primitive harmony of human nature is ruined. The mind of the human being is crammed with discrimination, judgment, desire, intrigue, and conspiracy. When people get used to it, they take it for granted that this is the “true” state of human nature, but forget what the original and real human nature is. In this context, it is easy to understand why Wang Bi reiterated the significance of the authenticity of human beings.

Besides “the One” and “the uncarved block,” Wang Bi also used the terms “emptiness” and “stillness” to convey what he construed to be the true nature of

human beings. Wang Bi considered human nature to be empty, for it is completely devoid of anything like discrimination, judgment, preference, and desire. Human nature is still in that it maintains the original empty state and is indifferent to things like knowledge, desire, fame, and self-interest. In this regard, Wang Bi held that knowledge and desires do not form a part of human authenticity. An authentic person is an “ignorant” person. However, an ignorant person should not be understood as illiterate or uneducated. On the contrary, in Wang Bi’s view, an ignorant person has attained a thorough comprehension of the *Dao*, which is free of thought and theory. He pays no attention to ordinary knowledge and material achievement. He does have common knowledge, after all, it is simply inconceivable that a normal person is born in a cultural vacuum or he knows nothing about the conventional values of his culture. But being entirely concerned with comprehending Daoist wisdom, he simply attaches no significance to them. As a result, he may not write, read, talk, discuss, or in any other way, the worldly topics, which makes him look ignorant in the eyes of the world. To summarize, an ignorant person in the Daoist sense knows ordinary knowledge but does not care about it. He is only interested in the most profound wisdom of the *Dao*.

According to Wang Bi, being empty and still is not only the true nature of human beings but also a method by which one can discover one’s true nature. He commented on the *Laozi* 16:

That is, “to attain emptiness” is the ultimate [nature] of things; “to maintain tranquility” is the true [nature] of things. Things move and grow. Maintaining emptiness and tranquility, one sees the movement of things in circles: things arise from emptiness; motions arise from tranquility. Therefore, although the myriad things

transform, in the end they return to emptiness and tranquility. This is the ultimate (nature) of things.

言致虛，物之極篤；守靜，物之真正也。動作生長。以虛靜觀其反復，凡有起於虛，動起於靜，故萬物雖並動作，卒復歸於虛靜，是物之極篤也。<sup>125</sup>

Two points need to be noted of the above passage. Firstly, having an empty and still mind, one is sensitive to the *Dao* and is more likely to comprehend it. If one's mind is crammed with desires and prejudices, one is unable to concentrate on the *Dao*. Only an empty mind can fully appreciate the function of the *Dao*, in the same way as a perfect mirror reflects a thing without the least distortion.

Secondly, although human nature is still, it should not be understood as totally static, as human nature tends to “attain emptiness” and “maintain tranquility”. Human nature actually has its own function or ability. I will return to this issue in the second part of this chapter, where I will show that human nature does have a capability, but a limited capability.

To summarize, in Wang Bi's interpretation, human nature has its metaphysical origin in the *Dao*. The *Dao* decides human nature; the *Dao* is *ziran*, so human nature is *ziran*. *Ziran* is what is authentic in human beings. Wang Bi employed the concepts of “the One”, “the uncarved block”, and “emptiness and stillness” to illustrate the authenticity of human beings. By this illustration he tried to dispute the Confucian view of human nature, which crams superfluous notions, such as benevolence and righteousness, into human beings.

### 2.1.3. *Qi* (vital energy): the substance that making human nature

---

<sup>125</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 35-36; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 75.

It has been a widely accepted position that Wang Bi broke with the *qi* cosmology prevalent in the Han dynasty and built up a metaphysical framework based on the concept of Nonbeing,<sup>126</sup> which seems to indicate that *qi* plays no role in Wang Bi's thought. However, this does not stand up to careful scrutiny.

Lin Lizhen has pointed out that the concept of *qi* remains crucial to Wang Bi.<sup>127</sup> On Confucius' famous statement, "By nature people are alike, through practice they are apart", Wang Bi commented that "people are alike in that human nature is neither good nor evil, but they differ in that human nature is either thick or thin."<sup>128</sup> In Lin's view, Wang Bi understood human nature as an endowment of *qi*. People are alike in that *qi* has no moral assets; and they are different, for the endowed *qi* varies from one person to another in both quality and quantity.<sup>129</sup>

It is noteworthy that Lin recognizes the role of *qi* in Wang Bi's conception of human nature, but the plausibility of her argument is weakened for the following reasons. First, her understanding of human nature as an endowment of *qi* fails to address the core of Wang Bi's conception of human nature. I have shown that Wang Bi was mainly concerned with the differentiation of the *Dao* in each human being, which constitutes the nature or authenticity of each human being, in the same way as morality does in the *Mencius*. Although *qi* is a part of human nature, it is not decisive.

---

<sup>126</sup> Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 59-65.

<sup>127</sup> Lin Lizhen 林麗真, "Wang Bi 'xing qi xing' shuo xilun" 王弼 '性其情'說析論, in *Wang Shumin xiansheng bashi shouqing lunwenji* 王叔岷先生八十壽慶論文集 (Taibei: Daan chubanshe 臺北: 大安出版社, 1993), 599-609.

<sup>128</sup> *Wang Bi jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 632.

<sup>129</sup> Lin Lizhen 林麗真, "Wang Bi 'xing qi xing' shuo xilun" 王弼 '性其情'說析論, 602.

Second, it is questionable that *qi* does not have any moral assets, as Lin holds. I instead see the theory of *qi* as an example illustrating one characteristic of Chinese philosophy, i.e., the blending of value and fact. For many Han Confucians, being intelligent or stupid, having civil or martial ability, and being virtuous or not are all determined by the variance in endowment of *qi*. Even though it is unclear how the variance of *qi* (a judgment of fact) results in being virtuous or not (a judgment of value), there is a clear implication that *qi* does have moral assets. As argued in chapter 1, the difference in endowment of *qi* is a difference not only in degree but also in kind. One person endowed with *qi* of benevolence becomes virtuous, while another endowed with *qi* of deviance becomes vicious. Evidently, *qi* does have moral assets within it.

Third, if one approaches human nature merely from the moral perspective of good and evil, as Lin does, one misses the essential point of Wang Bi's interpretation of human nature. That is, human nature as the share of the *Dao* in the human being is beyond good and evil. This point will be examined in detail later.

So far as the role of *qi* in Wang Bi's thought is concerned, two passages are noteworthy. One is his commentary on the *Analects* 17:2, as quoted above. The other is from his commentary on the *Laozi*: 42 and reads,

The birth of the myriad things, I know its master (the *Dao*);  
although they have myriad forms, they are similar in coming out of  
*qi*.

故萬物之生，吾知其主；雖有萬形，沖氣一焉。<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 117; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 135.

Combining this passage with other passages on the *Dao*, one gets Wang Bi's cosmology: the physical world logically originates from the *Dao*, and is materially made from *qi*. Under this cosmology, human nature is a combination of the metaphysical share of the *Dao* and the physical substance of *qi*.

In light of this combination, we get a fresh understanding of Wang Bi's commentary on the *Analects* 17:2. Human nature, as the *de* (receipt or share) of human beings from the *Dao*, is *beyond* good and evil. The Chinese term “*wushan wue* 無善無惡” translates literally as “neither good nor evil.” but Wang Bi used this term not to express neutrality between good and evil. Rather, he intended to show that human nature, in its authentic state as determined by the *Dao*, is beyond the kind of discrimination that good and evil are involved.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, the *qi* part of human nature varies from one person to another both in kind and in degree, which accounts for the differences of human beings.

---

<sup>131</sup> Wang Bi made lengthy discussion to show that both the *Dao* and the sage, who embodied the *Dao*, did not make any discrimination among things. Since human nature is decided by the *Dao*, it is also devoid of any sense or knowledge of good and evil. To take some instances of Wang Bi's discussions, it is said,

The mother of the five teachings is neither bright nor dark, neither kind nor cruel.  
五教之母，不暎不昧，不恩不傷。

Heaven and earth allows things to follow their natural bent and neither engage in conscious effort nor start anything, leaving the myriad things to manage themselves. Thus they “are not benevolent.” The benevolent have to establish institutions and influence behavior, for they are prone to use kindness and make conscious effort.

天地任自然，無爲無造，萬物自相治理，故不仁也。仁者必造化立施，有恩有爲。

This is why the person of superior virtue only functions in accordance with the *Dao*. He does not regard his virtue as virtue.... The person of inferior virtue establishes goodness as the way to keeping things in order.

上德之人，唯道是用，不德其德。... 下德立善以治物。

*Wang Bi jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 195, 13, 93; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 31, 60, 120.

I have examined the concepts of the *Dao*, nature, and *qi* in Wang Bi's thought. To summarize the relationships between them: (1) Human nature consists of two parts, i.e., the part of the *Dao* (henceforth I use nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> to refer to the *Dao* aspect of human nature) and that of *qi* (henceforth nature<sup>*qi*</sup> for the *qi* aspect of human nature). They should not be seen as actually separate but conceptually distinguishable from each other. (2) The *Dao* is the metaphysical basis for human nature, while *qi* is the material constituent of human nature. (3) The *Dao* and *qi* respectively account for the commonality and the multiplicity of human beings. (4) It is the *Dao* part of human nature that basically defines human beings.

## 2.2. The Relationship between Nature and Feeling: Nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> Guides Nature<sup>*qi*</sup>

### 2.2.1. Pervious views of the relationship between nature and feeling

The Chinese character *qing* 情 normally translates as feeling or emotion. But this translation does not exhaust what is communicated by *qing* 情. In different contexts 情 also means “fact,” “nature,” “desires,” “preference,” and “innate tendency.” A. C. Graham proposes that *qing* never means “passion” in Pre-Han literature; rather, it conveys the meaning of “fact,” “genuine,” and “genuinely.” The meaning of passion or desire was not prevalent until much later, when Buddhism became established in China.<sup>132</sup>

However, available evidence in Pre-Han literature does suggest that 情 *qing* means not only feeling but also desire. Graham's explanation of *qing* 情 is

---

<sup>132</sup> A. C. Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Chinese Philosophical Literature*, 59; Chad Hansen, “*Qing* (Emotions) 情 in pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” in *Emotions in Asian thought* edited by Joel Marks & Roger T. Ames (State University of New York Press, 1995), 194.

certainly applicable to Mencius. For example, Mencius said, “as far as one’s real condition (*qing* 情) is concerned, one can be morally good [6A:6].” Probably for this reason, the Qing philosopher Dai Zhen (戴震 1723-1777) stated that the word *qing* in the *Mencius* does not mean feeling, but original substance and fact.<sup>133</sup> However, counter examples are also evident. For example, Xunzi wrote, “the form [of man] shapes and the spirit [of man] generates; like, dislike, joy, anger, sadness, and pleasure are within him, this is what we call his natural *qing* (形具而神生, 好惡喜怒哀樂臧焉, 夫是之謂天情).”<sup>134</sup> A definition of *qing* is also found in the *Liji* 禮記. It reads, “What is human *qing*? It is joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, hatred, and desire. All these are innate.”<sup>135</sup> These passages show clearly that both feeling and desire are constituents of *qing* in pre-Han literature.

Despite the various meanings of *qing* 情, the discussion below confines simply to that of feeling and deviant feeling, i.e., desire. The relationship between nature and feeling is an intriguing question that has attracted a great deal of philosophical attention in the history of Chinese philosophy. Before Wang Bi, three thinkers’ views are most noteworthy. They are Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, and Liu Xiang. Xunzi might be the first to make a clear distinction of nature, feeling, and desire. He said, “Nature is the product of Heaven, feeling is the substance of nature, desire is the response of feeling.” As already discussed in Chapter 1,

---

<sup>133</sup> Dai Zhen 戴震, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字義疏證 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1982), 41.

<sup>134</sup> Xunzi jijie 荀子集解, vol. 11, *On Heaven* 天論篇, 318. Burton Watson, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, 1967, 80; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol.3: 16.

<sup>135</sup> The *Liji* 禮記, annotated by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (Taiwan: Zhonghua shuju 臺灣：中華書局, 1981), 7.



although Xunzi conceptually distinguished nature, feeling, and desire, the three in fact refer to one thing.<sup>136</sup>

Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒) is probably a pioneer to explain nature and feeling in terms of good and evil. According to him, human nature has two aspects, nature and feeling, which correspond to the *yang* and *yin* of Heaven respectively. Because *yangqi* is benevolent and *yinqi* is malevolent, nature is good whereas feeling is bad. This view of nature and feeling was influential in the development of Chinese philosophy. The debate between He Yan and Wang Bi on whether the sage has feelings is believed to stem from their different approaches to this view. I will return to this in the third part of this chapter.

Liu Xiang is probably the first to explain nature and feeling by employing morally neutral concepts: the internal and the external (*neiwai* 內外), motion and stillness (*dongjing* 動靜), and the incipient and the fully realized (*weifa* 未發 *yifa* 已發). He says,

Man's nature is as it is because it is inborn; it remains within his person and is not expressed. His feelings are as they are because they result from contact with things; they take form externally.

性，生而然者也，在於身而不發；情，接於物而然者也，形出於外。<sup>137</sup>

Unlike Dong Zhongshu, who drew a clear line between nature and feeling and held that the former is good and the latter bad, Liu Xiang thought that the two resonate with each other. Since nature is a mixture of good and evil, feeling

---

<sup>136</sup> See footnote 77 in Chapter 1, p.44.

<sup>137</sup> Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, vol.1: 133; *A Source Book*, 295. I thank Lynn for his advice on the translation.

should not be completely evil. In this respect Liu Xiang's view sounds more reasonable in that it acknowledges the role of feeling in one's life. Besides, Liu Xiang envisioned human nature to be active. It intends to make contact with things and to express itself externally. So it is inevitable that inner nature becomes externally expressed feeling. It is also noteworthy that Liu Xiang indicated that feeling is the tendency of nature. The question that arises is why nature has a tendency to respond to things. Liu Xiang did not address this question. Wang Bi provided an explanation, as shown below.

For Wang Bi, the question of the relationship between nature and feeling can be approached from two sub-questions: the relationship between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and feeling and that between nature<sup>qi</sup> and feeling, since human nature has two aspects, the *Dao* and *qi*. As for the first question, my proposal is that nature<sup>Dao</sup> is neither good nor evil, while feeling is subject to moral judgment. Whether feeling is good or bad depends on whether it is subordinated to nature<sup>Dao</sup>. As for the second question, my examination shows that nature<sup>qi</sup> tends towards contact with things, from which feeling generates. Whether the contact of nature<sup>qi</sup> with things, i.e., feeling, is good is similarly decided by nature<sup>Dao</sup>. When nature<sup>qi</sup> drifts with things and is far away from nature<sup>Dao</sup>, feeling degenerates into desire.

### **2.2.2. Wang Bi's view of the relationship between nature and feeling**

#### **(1) the relationship between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and feeling**

Confucius says, "By nature people are alike, through practice they have become far apart." Wang Bi produced a long commentary on this passage. It reads:

- (1) If one does not direct one's feelings with one's innate nature (*xing qi qing* 性其情), how can one conduct oneself properly in the

long run? This is the uprightness (*zheng* 正) of feelings. If the mind strays and loses its authenticity, this is the deviance (*xie* 邪) of feelings. (2) To make feelings closer to nature, this is [the meaning of the saying] to direct one's feelings with one's nature. If one can make one's feelings close to one's nature, it is not a problem to have desires. If one pursues one's desires and drifts with things, this is [why Confucius said that one's feelings are] far away [from one's nature]. If one desires something but does not drift with it, this is [to say that one's feelings are] close to [one's nature]. (3) Being close to one's nature makes one's feelings upright, but it does not mean that nature is upright. Although nature itself is not upright, it can make one's feelings upright. This is like that one feels warm when approaching fire, but fire is not warmness. Although fire is not warmness, it can warm things or make people feel warm. (4) How can fire do it? It is by its *qi*, (which generates) warm airflow. Similarly, how can [nature] make one's feelings upright? It is by principle (*yi* 儀) and stillness (*jing* 靜). (5) However, we also know that some people's nature is thick and others' is thin. Confucius says, "By nature people are alike." If nature is the same from one person to another, there is no need to employ the word "alike". If nature is completely different from one to another, the word "alike" is not supported. The word "alike" indicates that human nature is both similar and different from one person to another, but the similarity of human nature is highlighted. People are alike in that their nature is neither good nor evil, but they are different in that their nature is

either thick or thin. Despite the difference, human nature is not completely different from one to another. In this regard, it is said that people are alike.

(1) 不性其情，焉能久行其正，此是情之正也。若心好流蕩失真，此是情之邪也。(2) 若以情近性，故云性其情。情近性者，何妨是有欲。若逐欲遷，故云遠也。若欲而不遷，故曰近。(3) 但近性者正，而即性非正，雖即性非正，而能使之正。譬如近火者熱，而即火非熱，雖即火非熱，而能使之熱。(4) 能使之熱者何？氣也，熱也。能使之正者何？儀也，靜也。(5) 又知其有濃薄者，孔子曰：“性相近也。”若全同，相近之辭不生，若全異也，相近之辭亦不得立。今云近者，有同有異，取其共是。無善無惡則同也，有濃有薄則異也。雖異而未相遠，故曰近也。<sup>138</sup>

To facilitate the analysis below, I divide the above quotation into 5 sections, as marked by (1)-(5). Here Wang Bi addressed two main questions: the relationship between nature and feeling, or to be specific, between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and feeling in sections (1)-(4), and the implication of the word “alike” in section (5).

On the first question, first of all Wang Bi holds that feeling may be either proper or improper, while nature<sup>Dao</sup> is neither good nor evil. This is simple to understand. Nature<sup>Dao</sup> inherits the characteristic of the *Dao*, which is beyond good and evil. Or, as Wang Bi emphasized, nature<sup>Dao</sup> is not good, although it is able to make other things good. However, feeling is always related to things in the physical world, which is subject to moral judgment. I will revisit this point shortly.

---

<sup>138</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 632. Lynn makes instructive suggestion on the translation of this difficult piece of passage.

Second, whether feeling is proper or improper depends on whether it is under the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>. When feeling is close to nature<sup>Dao</sup>, even desire may not be disregarded. Here Wang Bi did not point out where desire comes from. But in light of the views of Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, and Liu Xiang, Wang Bi probably agreed that desire describes the response of feeling to things. Desire is not necessarily bad. If one is fully informed by the *Dao*, one can keep one's desire proper. In other words, when one gets closer to one's nature<sup>Dao</sup>, one's feeling and desire will not be excessive.

Third, although nature<sup>Dao</sup> is not good in the same way as it is not bad, it can make feeling upright by its principle (*yi* 義) and stillness (*jing* 靜). The words “principle” and “stillness” relate nature<sup>Dao</sup> to its origin: the *Dao*. As argued earlier, the *Dao* is both a metaphysical principle and a pragmatic principle that things should accord with. As a practical principle, it means no interfering with things and being clear of discriminations. Since the *Dao* defines human nature, in its original stage human nature is also empty and still. That is, human nature<sup>Dao</sup> does not discriminate beauty from ugliness, good from bad, etc. Consequently, it guards feeling from being distracted by things like beauty, wisdom, fame and profit and prevents feeling from degenerating into uncontrollable desires.

However, the questions that arise are: how is it possible for nature<sup>Dao</sup> to influence feeling, since it is determined by the *Dao* that does not impose on things, and how can nature<sup>Dao</sup> account for the goodness or badness of feeling, since it is itself beyond good and evil? Regarding the first question, although the authentic human nature is empty and still, this does not mean that it is static and incapable. Nature<sup>Dao</sup> is able to guide feeling, because the power of the *Dao* penetrates the universe. Through non-action, the *Dao* makes the myriad things complete; being

still, it manages all kinds of motions; maintaining empty, it sustains the multiple things; staying lower, it conquers the highest; remaining weak, it defeats the strongest. The *Dao* serves as a shining example for the human being. The ruler models himself after the *Dao*, in order to rule his nation; the common people model themselves after the *Dao* to live a harmonious life. The *Dao* does not coerce people, but it exerts an influence on people. Nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> influences feeling in the similar way. Nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is an ideal model for feeling to follow. However, the influence of a model is limited, for others do not necessarily follow the model. As such, although nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> can influence feeling, it is not in total control of feeling. This explains why in many cases feeling degenerates into desire.

A possible explanation of the second question may be gathered from a passage in the *Lunyu jijie yishu* 論語集解義疏 by Huang Kan (皇侃). It reads,

There are various explanations of nature and feeling. I just follow an old one. That is, nature is inborn and feeling is completion. Nature is what human beings have when they are born, thus it is construed as “inborn”; feeling exists as desire is aroused and moves and reveals itself externally, thus feeling is construed as “completion.” Although nature is neither good nor evil, it is either thick or thin. Feeling is one’s longing for things, so it is either deviant or upright. Since nature is what the human being originally has and it has not yet involved function, it should not be considered as bad. Nor should it be considered as good. Therefore, it is said that nature is neither good nor evil. Why I know this, because the notions of good and evil always apply to things and through things they come to be recognized. Thus the *Laozi* says, “People know

that (an object of) beauty is beautiful, but they do not know that it is beautiful in the light of ugliness; they know that goodness is good, but do not know that goodness is good in the light of badness.” All these notions are discussed in reference to things. Feeling is either deviant or upright, as feeling points to things. If one allows his feeling to drift without control, it is deviant; if the tendency of feeling accords with principle, then feeling is upright. Therefore, people have to say that feeling is either deviant or upright.

然性情之義，說者不同。且依一家舊釋云：性者，生也。情者，成也。性是生而有之，故曰生也。情是起欲動彰事，故曰成也。然性無善無惡，而有濃薄。情是有欲之心，而有邪正。性既是全生而有，未涉乎用，非為不可名為惡，亦不可目為善，故性無善無惡也。所以知然者，夫善惡之名，恆就事而顯，故《老子》曰：“天下以知美之為美，斯惡已；已知善之為善，斯不善已。”此皆據事而談。情有邪正者，情既是事，若逐欲流遷，其事則邪。若欲當於理，其事則正。故情不得不有邪有正也。<sup>139</sup>

Huang Kan wrote this passage right before he cited Wang Bi's commentary on the *Analects* 17:2. According to Wang Baoxuan, since Huang Kan used Wang Bi's commentary as his main illustration, he would agree with Wang on the issue

---

<sup>139</sup> Huang Kan 皇侃, *Exegesis of the Commentaries on Analects (Lunyu jijie yishu 論語集解義疏)*, in *Shisanjing zhushu buzhen* 十三經註疏補證 edited by Yang Jialuo 楊家駱 (Taipei: shijie shuju 臺北: 世界書局, 1990), vol.14: 176; Lo Yuet keung, “The Formulation of Early Medieval Confucian Metaphysics: Huang Kan's (488-545) Accommodation of Neo-Taoism and Buddhism,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, Kaiwing Chow, et al eds. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp.57-83; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 53.

of nature and feeling. Given this consideration, the above passage is helpful in explaining Wang Bi's position of nature and feeling.<sup>140</sup>

As the above passage shows, nature points to an internal and intact state of the human being, while feeling pertains to an externalized response of the human being to things. Feeling is construed as belonging to the world of things, as it is an externalization committed to concrete things.

The discussion of nature and feeling reveals a contrast not only between the internal and the external, and between stillness and motion, but also between the natural and the social. Of especially significance to this thesis, the latter contrast is closely related to the debate over the relationship between *ziran* (naturalness and spontaneity 自然) and *mingjiao* (rites 名教), which is one of the burning issues of Learning of the Profound. Generally speaking, in the Wei-Jin context naturalness refers to the *Dao* and the primitive state of human beings and things, while rites refer to social institutions and conventions, the Confucian moral doctrine in particular. Wang Bi would further explain naturalness by analogy with the root (*ben* 本) and rites with the branch (*mo* 末); since rites (things) generate from naturalness (the *Dao*), their existence should not be disregarded. I will return to this question in chapter 4. So far as the issue of nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> and feeling is concerned, while nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is undoubtedly naturalness, feeling, as Wang Bi seemed to indicate, to some extent is social phenomena. For example, although the feeling of happiness is itself universal, the way to express it varies from one culture to another.

The third question concerning Wang Bi's commentary on the *Analect* 17:2 is: despite nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> being neither good nor evil, can it not be envisioned as *good* in

---

<sup>140</sup> *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 387; also see *Wang Bi pingzhuan* 王弼評傳, 323.



the light of its capacity to make feeling upright? The answer to this question may involve a clarification of the notions of good and bad, which are generally used as moral terms. However, there are cases in which “good” and “bad” do not have any moral connotation. When one says that this is a good computer, it means such things as that the computer has large storage, operates speedily, and has strong immunity to viruses. In other words, people decide whether a computer is good by looking at whether it functions well. Normally, when “good” is used to describe a thing, it takes on no moral dimension. “Good” may also be used to qualify a human being in an amoral way. For example, John is said to be a good teacher. This is not necessarily a moral judgment of John. Rather, it is more likely about the skills, the training, or the accomplishments that John has as a teacher, such that he can organize his lectures logically, express his ideas eloquently, inspire students to think deeply, his students get high scores, and so on.

In light of the above argument, the usage of “good” and “bad” can be classified into two senses, i.e., in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. In the case of the former, “good” means objective utility and benefit; in the case of the latter, it means accordance with the moral regulations and rites. Two elements determine the sense in which “good” is used: moral agent and moral intention. Having them in the context, “good” is used in a narrow sense; otherwise it is used in a broad sense. Given this classification, the *Dao* can be said to be good, as it creates and sustains the myriad things; but the *Dao* is good in a broad sense not in a narrow sense.<sup>141</sup> Good and bad in a narrow sense pertain to Confucian morality in the

---

<sup>141</sup> For example, it is said in chapter 8 of the *Laozi*,  
居善地, 心善淵, 與善仁, 言善信, 正善治, 事善能, 動善時。

Goodness in position depends on location; goodness in heart depends on profundity; goodness in association depends on benevolence; goodness in words depends on sincerity; goodness in affairs depends on ability; goodness in action depends on timeliness.

context of the *Laozi* and Wang Bi's commentary on it. Returning to the question raised above, nature<sup>Dao</sup> may be envisioned as good in that it makes feeling upright, but this does not contradict Wang Bi's view that nature<sup>Dao</sup> cannot be envisioned as good or evil in the Confucian sense.

## (2) the relationship between nature<sup>qi</sup> and feeling

I have analyzed Wang Bi's position on the relationship between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and feeling. Then the question is how did Wang Bi deal with the *qi* part of human nature, nature<sup>qi</sup>, or what is his view of the relationship between nature<sup>qi</sup> and feeling, since nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup> are never separate and only distinguishable conceptually. Another related question is where does feeling come from? The answers will be explored in this section.

Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, and Liu Xiang provided their respective views as to the origin of feeling, as examined earlier. Dong Zhongshu held that both nature and feeling are endowed by Heaven. In contrast, Xunzi and Liu Xiang agreed that feeling is the response of human nature to things. That is, feeling generates out of the contact of one's nature with things. This view was widely adopted by the Daoists in the early years of the Han dynasty. Generally, they thought that nature is still, while feeling is active. When nature responds to external things, it becomes feeling.

Wang Bi inherited this view and formulated his theory of nature and feeling. He agreed with his predecessors that feeling stems from nature. But the question is, since nature consists of two parts, the *Dao* and *qi*, from which part does feeling arise?

---

Wang Bi commented that people should always be in accordance thus with the *Dao*. Evidently, the *Dao* is a natural goodness. See *Wang Bi jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 20; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 64.

Evidently, the answer is not nature<sup>Dao</sup>. Because nature<sup>Dao</sup> is devoid of any physical properties, there is no way that nature<sup>Dao</sup> contacts with things. On the other hand, *qi* is proactive and in ceaseless transformation.<sup>142</sup> So it always happens that the contact of nature<sup>qi</sup> with things results in feeling. Even the sage, in Wang Bi's view, is no exception. In this sense, nature<sup>qi</sup> can be considered to be an innate biological and psychological determinant, and one of its key expressions is feeling, as the inner *qi*-constituted nature comes into contact with external stimuli. This also answers the question raised earlier: why does nature have a tendency to respond to things?

Nature<sup>Dao</sup> guides nature<sup>qi</sup>, and whether feeling is proper depends on whether the contact of nature<sup>qi</sup> with things is under the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>. When the contact is under the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>, feeling generating from this contact is upright. When nature<sup>qi</sup> drifts with things and strays far away from nature<sup>Dao</sup>, the resultant feeling is deviant. At this point, feeling degenerates into desire. Feeling and desire pertain to the different stages of the transformation of nature<sup>qi</sup>, or in other words, *qi* is the substance from which feeling and desire are made. In this regard, nature<sup>qi</sup>, feeling, and desire are various descriptions of one thing, in a way similar to what we find in the *Xunzi*.

Up to this point I have analyzed Wang Bi's view of the relationship between nature and feeling. To summarize, nature<sup>Dao</sup> is the decisive core of human nature, and nature<sup>qi</sup> is the substantive constituent of human nature. Despite being still, nature<sup>Dao</sup> is able to influence nature<sup>qi</sup>. However, since nature<sup>Dao</sup> is a non-action

---

<sup>142</sup> Zhang Dainain 張岱年, *Zhongguo gudianzhexue gainianfanchou yaolun* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論 (Beijing: zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe 北京: 中國社會科學出版社, 1989), 30-35. English version is available under the title *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, translated and edited by Edmund Ryden (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2002), 46-57.

entity, its influence is limited. On the other hand, nature<sup>qi</sup> is active and tends towards contact with things. It may be influenced by nature<sup>Dao</sup>, or may wander with things and diverge from nature<sup>Dao</sup>. Both feeling and desire refer to the response of nature<sup>qi</sup> to things. When this response is under the influence<sup>143</sup> of nature<sup>Dao</sup>, the resultant feeling is good; when this response is free of the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>, the resultant feeling is bad.<sup>144</sup> This bad feeling is also called “desire”.<sup>145</sup>

The paradoxical nature of *qi* in Wang Bi’s view of human nature is discernable. On the one hand, *qi* is the necessary constituent of human nature; on the other hand, it is also on many occasions the obstacle to rediscovering the share of the *Dao* in human nature. It is not clear whether Wang Bi’s view of human nature anticipated the dichotomy of nature of Heavenly principle (*tianli zhi xing* 天理之性) and nature of *qi* endowment (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性) in Zhu Xi’s (朱熹 1130-1200) thought. However, his position on the relationship between nature and feeling has much bearing on Cheng Yi’s (程頤 1033-1108) view of the same question. Tang Junyi proposes that Cheng Yi’s view could be traced to Li Ao’s (李

---

<sup>143</sup> More needs to be said on “influence”, since it is vital to the relationship between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. Nature<sup>Dao</sup> can influence nature<sup>qi</sup> in that each person has his or her share of the *Dao* in his or her nature. Only the sage presents perfectly the *Dao* in his entire mode of being. Ordinary people may be distracted by external things and thus lose sight of the *Dao*. However, because of the share of the *Dao*, even a bad man has a sense of what is right and wrong and what he ought to do. This makes possible for him to be drawn close to (近) the sage, or to return to (返) his *Dao* nature that has been neglected.

<sup>144</sup> While Wang Bi rejected a moral understanding of the *Dao*, he stressed that feeling is subject to moral judgment. As quoted earlier, he employed the characters *zheng* 正 (upright) and *xie* 邪 (deviant), instead of the frequently used 善 (*shan* good) and 惡 (*e* bad) by Confucians, to explain the issue of feeling. While there is room for arguing whether *zheng* and *xie* can be explained in terms of good and bad, it is evident that *zheng* and *xie* are indeed evaluative terms.

<sup>145</sup> Bad feeling is desire in the sense that it refers to one’s obsession with something. As Wang Bi made it clear, deviant feeling means that one simply follows one’s desire and drifts with things (逐欲遷), and wanders off and loses one’s authenticity (流蕩失真).

翽 772-841), and further to Wang Bi's.<sup>146</sup> In recent years, many scholars have realized that Wang Bi's discussions of nature and feeling has significant bearing on the philosophical thought of the Song dynasty.<sup>147</sup>

### 2.3. The Ideal Sage: His feelings and Spirituality

The Han system of official appointment was based on the evaluation of a candidate's moral cultivation. With the corruption of Confucian state ideology towards the end of Han, this evaluation came to focus more and more on a candidate's personality, character, disposition, and capacity. In addition, the evaluation of real persons came to be replaced by discussions of more general topics, such as the various characteristics of human beings, and the personality of the sage.<sup>148</sup>

The question of whether the sage has feelings received significant attention in the Wei-Jin period. The debate over this question reflects Wei-Jin thinkers'

---

<sup>146</sup> Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun yuanjiao pian* 中國哲學原論原教篇 (Taipei: xuesheng shuju 臺北: 學生書局, 1984), 184. For an analysis of the connection between Wang Bi's position of nature and feeling and Cheng Yi's, see Zhou Daxing 周大興, "Wang Bi's 'xing qi qing' de renxing yuanjinlun" 王弼 '性其情' 的人性遠近論, 361-370.

<sup>147</sup> Meng Penyuan 蒙培元, *Zhongguo xinxing lun* 中國心性論 (Taipei: xuesheng shuju 臺北: 學生書局, 1990), 185-194; Jiang Guozhu 姜國柱 and Zhu Kuiju 朱葵菊, *Zhongguo lishishangde renxing lun* 中國歷史上的人性論 (Beijing: zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe 北京: 中國社會科學出版社, 1989), 75-77; Xu Kangsheng 許抗生, *Weijin xuanxue shi* 魏晉玄學史 (Xi'an: shanxi daxue chubanshe 西安: 陝西大學出版社, 1989), 123-128.

<sup>148</sup> The intellectual movement towards the end of the Han dynasty is usually referred to as *qingyi* (Pure Criticism 清議). *Qingyi* is thought to be practically or politically oriented, for its criticism of the socio-political problems, leaving aside its contribution to the Han system of official appointment in terms of character-evaluation. Intellectual discussions in the Wei-Jin period are usually termed *qingtan* (Pure Conversation 清談). As the term indicates, *qingtan* is thought to center on purely philosophical topics. However, in recent year, many scholars have pointed out the political dimension of *qingtan*. As shown in this thesis, the topics of *qingtan* are broad including both philosophical and socio-political issues. See Tang Changru 唐長孺, "Qingtan yu qingyi" 清談與清議, in *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi luncong*, 289-297; Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅, *Zhongguo wenhua de qingliu*, 90.

concern with the personality and the nature of the sage, the distinction between the sage and the common people, and whether sagehood is attainable.

This part is mainly built on the debate between He Yan and Wang Bi on whether the sage has feelings. I try to show Wang Bi's insights into the nature of the sage, which contrasts with the popular view in his time. Specifically, my analysis focuses on Wang Bi's interpretation of the similarity and difference between the sage and the common people, and his expectation of the latter, despite that sagehood is ultimately inborn.

### **2.3.1. He Yan: The sage does not have feelings**

The text of the debate between He Yan and Wang Bi reads,

He Yan held that the sage does not have the feelings of joy, anger, sadness, and pleasure. His argument was so convincing that Zhong Hui and others followed him and elaborated on it. But Wang Bi disagreed with them. He said, "The sage exceeds the common people due to his spirituality (*shenming* 神明). However, like the common people, the sage also has the five feelings. Because of his flourishing spirituality, the sage is able to comprehend the chaos and reach Nonbeing; because of the five feelings that the sage has like the common people, he cannot but respond to things with joy and sadness. However, the feelings of the sage respond to things but are not bound by them. Now, if one thinks that the sage does not respond to things, for he is not bound by things, how one misses the mark."

何晏以爲聖人無喜怒哀樂，其論甚精，鍾會等述之。弼與不同，以爲：“聖人茂於人者神明也，同於人者五情也。神明

茂，故能體冲和以通無；五情同，故不能無哀樂以應物。然則，聖人之情，應物而無累於物者也。今以其無累，便謂不復應物，失之多矣。”<sup>149</sup>

The available literature suggests that He Yan's view enjoyed greater support than Wang Bi's in the Wei-Jin period. For example, Zhong Hui and others were convinced by He Yan. Other evidence is also found in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語. Wang Rong (王戎 234-305), the influential minister of the Jin dynasty, stated that “the sage does not have feelings while the lower people cannot be said to have feelings [because of their indulgence in desires]; feelings are found just in people like us.”<sup>150</sup> When asked whether the sage has feelings, Wang Xiu (王脩 ca. 335-358), too, made a direct negative reply.<sup>151</sup>

One passage from He Yan is helpful in explaining his view. Confucius said that Yan Hui never vented his anger on others. He Yan commented on it:

The common people give full rein to their feelings, and their joy and anger thus run counter to the principle. Yan Yuan follows the *Dao*, and his anger does not exceed what is proper. To vent one's anger on others is to drift with one's feelings. If one can make one's anger accord with the principle involved, it is easy for one to not drift with feelings.

---

<sup>149</sup> *Wang Bi jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 640. cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 13.

<sup>150</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 349; cf. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 347.

<sup>151</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 131; cf. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 129.

凡人任情，喜怒違理。顏淵任道，怒不過分。遷者移也，怒當其理，不移易也。<sup>152</sup>

It seems that He Yan also maintained a view of the three grades of human beings, though the classification was made in terms of feeling. The sage has no feelings, the common people indulge in their feelings, and between them are the worthies such as Yan Hui, and the intellectual elite, for example, He Yan and Wang Rong who can perfectly express their feelings.<sup>153</sup>

Some scholars observe that He Yan was influenced by the view dominating early Han Daoism: nature is good and feeling is evil; nature is still and feeling is active. Since feeling is evil, it is hard to imagine that the sage has feelings. Besides, since the sage maintains tranquility and is never disturbed by things, there is no way that feelings arise in the sage.<sup>154</sup> Other scholars propose that the debate between He Yan and Wang Bi reveals their divergence in viewing the relationship between the sage and the secular world. It was a common view in the Wei-Jin period that one's feelings result from one's contact with things. In this context, He Yan's view implies that the sage never responds to things. Consequently, the sage is absolutely *transcendent* of the secular world. However, under Wang Bi's interpretation, the sage does respond to things. This allows the sage to be *within* the secular world and exert his influence on the common people.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> He Yan 何晏, *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解, in *Lunyu zhengyu* 論語正義 edited by Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, in *Zhuzi jichang* 諸子集成, vol.1: 32.

<sup>153</sup> Tang Yongtong has a detailed analysis of this question, see "Wang Bi shengren youqing lun" 王弼聖人有情論, in *Tang Yongtong xueshu lunwenji* 湯用彤學術論文集, 255.

<sup>154</sup> Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 374.

<sup>155</sup> Alan K.L Chan, *Two Visions of the Way*, 36.



Of special interest to this thesis, the debate on whether the sage has feelings is related to the question how sagehood should be understood, is it inborn, or can it be acquired through effort? It is clear that He Yan viewed sagehood as inborn. Since feeling generates out of the contact of nature with things, the lack of feelings in the sage implies that he has a special inborn nature. Wang Bi disagreed with He Yan in this respect. According to him, the sage has feelings just as the ordinary people, but he excels in his spirituality. In this context, how sagehood should be understood comes to be how the sage's spirituality should be understood. If this spirituality is inborn, sagehood is inborn, and vice versa. Alan Chan understands the spirituality of the sage as "complete self-realization and spiritual enlightenment,"<sup>156</sup> which is attainable. However, I try to show below that Wang Bi viewed sagehood as inborn, in that the potential (or capacity) for sagehood is inborn. But the comprehension of the *Dao* involves various levels; although only the sage can reach the highest level, Wang Bi appreciated the common people's effort in trying to approximate the sage.

### **2.3.2. Wang Bi: The sage has feelings**

The main points of Wang Bi's view are: the sage has feelings like ordinary people; the sage responds to things but is not bound by them; the sage is able to do this, because he exceeds ordinary people in his spirituality.

As Wang Bi put it, joy, fear, sadness and pleasure are natural to people,<sup>157</sup> and cannot be discarded. The sage is no exception in this respect. Wang Bi wrote to a friend:

---

<sup>156</sup> Alan K.L Chan, "Zhong Hui' *Laozi* Commentary and the Debate on Capacity and Nature in Third-Century China," *Early China*, 28-29 (2003-2004): 146.

<sup>157</sup> *Wang Bi jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 625.

One might be intelligent enough to pursue the ultimate and trace the subtle, but cannot get rid of his innate nature. Although the capacity of Yan Hui was well within Confucius' grasp, he was still happy to meet Yan Hui, and sad when Yan Hui died. You often laugh at others for failure to make their feelings accord with the principle. Now, you know that naturalness cannot be gotten rid of. Although I have known you well, I miss you much if I do not see you for ten or fifteen days. Therefore, Confucius' feeling for Yan Hui is not a serious fault.

夫明足以尋極幽微，而不能去自然之性。顏子之量，孔父之所預在，然遇之不能無樂，喪之不能無哀。又常狹斯人，以為未能以情從理者也，而今乃知自然之不可革。足下之量，雖已定乎胸懷之內，然而隔踰旬朔，何其相思之多乎！故知尼父之於顏子，可以無大過矣。<sup>158</sup>

Confucius has been esteemed as the sage from the Han dynasty onward. His prestigious position was unchallenged even in the Wei-Jin period when the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* prevailed. Wei-Jin thinkers would debate on the position of Laozi, but they unanimously held Confucius as the sage.<sup>159</sup> In the above passage, Wang Bi gave an example to illustrate the sage's feelings. Unlike He Yan, who separated the sage from the ordinary people, Wang Bi bridged the two. The sage has feelings just like any ordinary person.

---

<sup>158</sup> Wang Bi jijiaoshi 王弼集校釋, 640.

<sup>159</sup> Shishuoxinyu 世說新語, 107, 108; cf. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 101.

Although the sage interpreted in this way is familiar and friendly to ordinary people, he is still different from them. Both the sage and ordinary people respond to things, and the feelings of both generate from this response. However, the sage is able to remain unbound by things, whereas ordinary people may be distracted by things. In light of the analysis in the previous part, the nature<sup>qi</sup> of the sage contacts things yet this contact stays under the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>, whereas when the nature<sup>qi</sup> of ordinary people comes into contact with things, it drifts away from nature<sup>Dao</sup>. In the passage cited above, it is said that people should make their feelings accord with principle. Now it is clear that this principle refers to the *Dao*, or more precisely, nature<sup>Dao</sup>.

One question needs to be clarified at this point: whether Wang Bi was inconsistent in his views concerning the sage's feelings. According to Wang Baoxuan, when Wang Bi commented on the *Laozi*, he thought that the sage does not have feelings, which may be influenced by a view dominating the Han-Wei period that feelings and desires should be eliminated; but when he commented on the *Analects* and the *Yijing*, he changed his mind and believed that the sage has feelings, for feelings and desires are acknowledged in Confucianism as long as they are regulated by principle.<sup>160</sup>

According to Lin Lizhen, Wang Bi is a gifted philosopher, and is not likely to have changed his view on this issue in his short lifespan.<sup>161</sup> Now the question of Wang Bi's consistency turns on his commentary on the *Laozi*, since it is believed that Wang Bi rejected feelings when commenting on this work. My suggestion is

---

<sup>160</sup> Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 379-383; Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭 also suggested that Wang Bi was inconsistent in his views of feeling. See his book *Zhongguo zhixueshi* 中國哲學史 (Taiwanshangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1993), vol. 2:607; *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated by Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952-53), vol.2: 189.

<sup>161</sup> Lin Lizhen 林麗真, "Wang Bi 'xing qi qing' shuoxilun" 王弼 '性其情'說析論, 600.

that Wang Bi did not discard feelings as a whole but only the unnatural feelings brought on by Confucian rites.

First of all, it is necessary to point out that Laozi and Zhuangzi disparaged only the “unnatural” feelings of human beings. Both hold that human feelings are simple and few in their original states. But the establishment of the Confucian rites causes them to become superficial and excessive. When one’s longings for “valuable” things accumulate, one may resort to deceitful methods. Eventually, the simplicity of human feeling is ruined. The *Laozi* 19:1 reads, “get rid of benevolence and do away with righteousness, and people will return to filial piety and compassion.” Obviously, Laozi did not reject filial piety and compassion, so long as they flow naturally from one’s inborn affections for one’s parents and fellow human beings. But he severely criticized the false filial piety and compassion that people intentionally expressed for various purposes driven by self-interest.

In the utopia that Laozi pictured, people have simple and natural feelings, but they do not have the slightest *knowledge* of filial piety, brotherly love, and compassion, which, in the Daoist context, damages the primitive harmony of human community. Wang Bi is sensitive to this subtle implication of Daoism. From the *Zhuangzi* he borrowed the example of fishes: fishes wet one another with their spit to survive, after they are thrown out of the sea. When fishes live freely in the water, they do not have any idea of the virtue of supporting each other; only after they are isolated from the water, do they know such a virtue.<sup>162</sup> The knowledge of virtue indicates that paradise is already lost.

---

<sup>162</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 43.

Wang Bi's view that the sage has feelings can be explained in light of his view of the relationship between nature and feeling. Since nature<sup>qi</sup> is what each human being is endowed with and since it is prone to contact with things, the sage cannot but have feelings. However, as the sage's nature<sup>qi</sup> is always close to his nature<sup>Dao</sup> and under the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>, his feelings are always in accordance with the *Dao*. Or in other words, his feelings remain simple and authentic. These feelings, for both Laozi and Wang Bi, cannot be discarded, as they are natural.

More evidence for supporting natural feelings is found in Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi*. He used the term "be free of knowledge and desire" (*wuzhi wuyu* 無知無欲) rather than "be free of knowledge and feelings" (*wuzhi wuqing* 無知無情) to describe the authenticity of human beings. "Desire" is generally understood as deviant feelings, or in Daoist terms, artificial feelings. In view of this, the term "be free of knowledge and desire" indicates that without Confucian knowledge one is free from artificial or deviant feelings, but not feelings as a whole.

### 2.3.3. On spirituality and whether sagehood is inborn

The concept of spirituality (*shenming* 神明) is the key to understanding not only the sage's feelings but also whether sagehood is inborn. It makes the sage's feelings distinguishable from those of the common people, and ultimately accounts for the sage's difference from the common people. Whether ordinary people have promise to become a sage depends on whether this spirituality is attainable either through education or by other methods.

Before Wang Bi, the concept of *shenming* 神明 had been addressed in classics like the *Zhuangzi*, the *Xunzi*, the *Yizhuan*, the *Guanzi*, the *Huainanzi*, and

Heshangdong's commentary on the *Laozi*. Its meanings vary according to context,<sup>163</sup> which can be classified into three types. *Shenming* may mean divinity or the profundity of the divinity. To give an example, it is said in the *Yizhuan*, “Nearby, adopting reference from his own person, and afar, adopting reference from other things, [Pao Xi 庖犧]<sup>164</sup> thereupon made the eight trigrams in order to become thoroughly conversant with the virtues inherent in the numinous and the bright (*shenming*) and to classify the myriad things in terms of their true, innate nature.”<sup>165</sup> Considering the mythological origin of Chinese culture, “the numinous and the bright” here is more likely referring to supernatural powers or agents.

*Shenming* is also taken to mean human spirit, which is used interchangeably with another word *jingshen* (spirit 精神).<sup>166</sup> Up to Wang Bi's time human spirit had been defined as a kind of essential or refined *qi* (精氣), which can be dated

---

<sup>163</sup> Edward J. Machle, “The mind and the ‘*shen-ming*’ in Xunzi”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 19 (1992): 361-386; Xu Kangsheng 許抗生, “Chudu ‘taiyi shengshui’” 初讀 “太一生水,” *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究, vol.17: 310-312; Zhang Dainian 張岱年, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論, 95-96.

<sup>164</sup> Pao Xi 庖犧 also names Fu Xi 伏羲. He is the mythological ancestor of the Chinese people and the founder of Chinese civilization. He is said to have invented the hexagrams and to have been the first to domesticate animals.

<sup>165</sup> Huang Shouqi and Zhang Shanzhi, 黃壽祺，張善之，*The Zhouyi with Translation and Annotation* 周易譯注 (shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社，1989), 572; Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes, A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 77. Translation altered slightly.

<sup>166</sup> Zhang Dainian 張岱年, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論, 95. The evidence he cited there reads,

One exhausts one's spirit (*shenming*), but does not know that things are the same.  
勞神明爲一，而不知其同也。

The mind is the ruler of the body and the master of the spirit (*shenming*).  
心者形之君也，而神明之主也。

For the original texts, see Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 10; *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 41; Xunzi jijie 荀子集解, vol. 15, *On dispelling misconceptions* 解蔽篇，333; Burton Watson, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, 129; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol.3, 105.

back to the Warring States period.<sup>167</sup> Human spirit conceived in this way is the core or essence that defines human being and activates the physical life. In other words, human spirit is independent of and contrasts with the human physical form (*xing* 形). One's physical form or body is only an inanimate container or dwelling; it is given life when being filled with refined *qi*. If this kind of *qi* dissipates, one dies.

Han thinkers followed and developed this notion of human spirit. To take a few examples, Dong Zhongshu says,

The clarity of *qi* is its essence (*jing*), a person with such clarity is a worthy. The valuable thing for nourishing one's body is to accumulate such essence; the right way to govern the nation is to accumulate such worthies.

氣之清者為精，人之清者為賢，治身者以積精為寶，治國者以積賢為道。<sup>168</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup> Passages from the *Guanzi* read,

It is ever so that the vital essence (*jing*) of things is what gives them life. Below it gives life to the five grains; above it creates the ranked stars. When floating between heaven and earth, we call it ghosts or spirit. When stored in the breast, we call it sageliness.

凡物之精，此則為生，下生五穀，上為列星，流於天地之間，謂之鬼神；藏於胸中，謂之聖人。

The vital essence (*jing*) is the essence of the vital energy (*qi*).  
精也者，氣之精者。

For Chinese texts see Yan Changyao 顏昌曉, *Guanzi jiaoshi* 管子校釋 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe 嶽麓書社, 1996), 396, 400; English translation is *Guanzi: political, economic, and philosophical essays from early China: a study and translation* by W. Allyn Rickett (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 39, 43. Translation is altered slightly.

As for the issue of the relationship between human spirit and *qi*, see Zhang Dainian 張岱年, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論, 93; Li Ran 李冉, "Zhongguo zhexue de qilun yu rujiao" 中國哲學的氣論與儒教, *Zhenxue yanjiu* 哲學研究, 8 (2003): 66-72.

<sup>168</sup> Lai Yanyuan 賴炎元, *Chunqiu fanlu jinzhū jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯, 173.

It is said in the *Huainanzi*,

The physical form of the body is the dwelling of life; *qi* is what fills life; spirit is the controller of life.

夫形者, 生之舍也; 氣者, 生之充也; 神者, 生之制也。<sup>169</sup>

Passages from Heshang Gong's commentary on the *Laozi* read,<sup>170</sup>

The reason that a human being is alive is that he or she possesses spirit.

人之所以有生者, 以有精神。<sup>171</sup>

If one could embrace the One, so that it does not escape the body, then one would live long. The One is what the *Dao* produced in the beginning; it is the refined *qi* of the Great Harmony.

人能抱一使不離於身, 則長存。一者道使所生, 太和之精氣也。<sup>172</sup>

Besides meaning human spirit, *shenming* is also taken to refer to the spirit of heaven and earth.<sup>173</sup> It is difficult to give a clear definition of the spirit of heaven and earth. It may pertain to the wonders of nature, or the principle sustaining the cosmos, or the profound character of the universe. What is clear now is: since *qi* is the essential element constituting the universe, there is something common between the spirit of heaven and earth and that of a human being. Therefore, it is said in many classics that one can comprehend and even be at one with the spirit of

<sup>169</sup> Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋, vol. 1:124.

<sup>170</sup> Alan Chan discusses the issue of *qi* and spirit in Heshang Gong's commentary on the *Laozi*. See his book, *Two Visions of the Way*, 125-133.

<sup>171</sup> Wang Ka 王卡, *Laozi Daodejing Heshang Gong zhangju* 老子道德經河上公章句, (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1993), 279.

<sup>172</sup> Wang Ka 王卡, *Laozi Daodejing Heshang Gong zhangju* 老子道德經河上公章句, 34; Translation is cited from Alan Chan's book *Two Visions of the Way* and altered slightly. See *Two Visions of the Way*, 130.

<sup>173</sup> Zhang Dainian 張岱年, *Zhongguo gudian zhexue gainian fanchou yaolun* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論, 95-96.



heaven and earth through certain methods of cultivation.<sup>174</sup> At this point, the concept of *qi* is most critical in that it makes possible the unity of Heaven and human beings (*tianren heyi* 天人合一).

Turning to Wang Bi, however, he produced a different interpretation of *shenming*, which once again proves him to be an innovative heir to the tradition. In summary, he understood *shenming* as the sage's unique intelligence, i.e., his ability to comprehend the *Dao*. This kind of *shenming* is not only defined in terms of *qi*, but also and most importantly, is informed by the *Dao*. In other words, the sage's *shenming* is a perfect interaction between his nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> and nature<sup>*qi*</sup>.

In Wang Bi's writings, *shenming* 神明 is used interchangeably with two other terms: *jilan* 極覽 and *xuanlan* 玄覽. The three compounds have the same grammatical structure, i.e., the first character is used as an adjective to qualify the second, a noun, in each compound. *Ming* 明 means sharp-eyedness, clear sight, and an ability to see clearly and deeply, and *lan* 覽 has a similar meaning of to look

---

<sup>174</sup> To take some instances, it is said in the *Zhuangzi*,  
He came and went alone with the pure spirit of heaven and earth, yet he did not  
view the ten thousand things with arrogant eyes.  
獨與天地精神往來，而不敖倪於萬物。

Xunzi maintained that one could understand the profundity of the universe through education.

If a common man in the street devotes himself to learning, concentrates his mind and will, and thinks deeply and examines things carefully, continues his efforts and accumulates good acts unceasingly, he can understand the spirit (*shenming*) and penetrate heaven and earth.

今使塗之人伏術爲學，專心一志，思索孰察，加日懸久，積善而不息，則通於神明，參於天地矣。

Cf. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 373; *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, vol. 17, on the evilness of nature 性惡篇, 340; Burton Watson, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, 167; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vol.3, 159.

at or view something. *Shen* 神, *ji* 極, and *xuan* 玄 describe how profound, deep, and ineffable this sight is.<sup>175</sup>

If *shenming* means a clear sight of something, what is the object of this sight? As Wang Bi made clear, *shenming* is not directed to external things but to the *Dao*. *Ming* does not mean that one is sharp-eyed or clear-sighted in understanding physical objects. It pertains to one's understanding or comprehension of the *Dao*; as Wang Bi agreed with Laozi, to know constancy is *ming* (知常曰明).<sup>176</sup> Literally, *ming* conveys that to uses one's eyes to look, to see, to watch, to observe, to examine physical things. But the *Dao* is devoid of any physical properties. It cannot be seen, be heard, or be touched.<sup>177</sup> To understand the *Dao* does not involve one's sense organs. Rather, as they are prone to be distracted by external things, which will block one's sight of the *Dao*, one should refrain from using

---

<sup>175</sup> *Shenming* 神明, *jilan* 極覽, and *xuanlan* 玄覽 can also be read in other ways, given that the Chinese characters concerned belong to more than one word class. It is possible to treat the two characters in each compound both as nouns. The three compounds may then mean “a clear sight of the ineffable”, “vision of the ultimate”, or “vision of the profound.”

It is also possible that the first character is used as nouns and the second as verbs in each compound. With the nouns turning to be the objects of the verbs, the three words come to mean “to see clearly the ineffable”, “to look at the ultimate”, or “to look at the profound.”

A third alternative is that *shen* 神, *ji* 極, and *xuan* 玄 are used as advs to qualify *ming* 明 and *lan* 覽 as verbs, then the three terms mean “to see deeply”, “to view ultimately”, or “to watch insightfully.”

The various readings of *shenming* and its two synonyms actually convey the similar meaning, i.e., *shenming* is a distinguishing sight, vision or understanding either for its object or for its method. Consequently, the various ways of reading *shenming* will not affect the argument of this thesis.

<sup>176</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 36, 146; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 76, 156.

<sup>177</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 31, 41, 126, 146; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 72, 78, 141, 156.

one's sense organs and keep clear of the luxuries that please one's sense organs. This is why the sage does not provide for the eye.<sup>178</sup>

The distinguishing nature of the *Dao* determines the method of pursuing *shenming*, i.e., the method of self-cultivation to understand the *Dao*. As one already has the differentiation of the *Dao* in one's nature, to cultivate oneself simply means to return to one's nature<sup>*Dao*</sup>, of which one has lost sight as a result of indulgence in external things. Or to understand the *Dao* simply means to rediscover one's nature<sup>*Dao*</sup>, which has been covered with layers of misconceptions. So, the approach of self-cultivation is inward (*xiangnei* 向內 or *qiunei* 求內) not outward (*xiangwai* 向外 or *qiuwai* 求外), as Wang Bi's distinction between *nei* 內 and *wai* 外 stresses.<sup>179</sup>

Wang Bi also proposed some concrete methods of self-cultivation. For example, it is to maintain a tranquil and empty mind by removing the misconceptions of human nature and unnatural feelings, and to comprehend the function of the *Dao* with a tranquil and empty mind. To take some examples, Wang Bi says,

Can you cleanse away the misleading and the specious and so attain vision capable of grasping the ultimate and the subtle, not allowing things to get in the way of its brightness or flaw its numinous power? If so, it will be one with mystery from beginning to end.

---

<sup>178</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 28; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 70.

<sup>179</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 125, 144; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 140, 155.

滌除邪飾，至於極覽，能不以物介其明，疵其神乎？則終與玄同也。

180

With emptiness and quietude, one observes their eternal return [to  
the *Dao*]

以虛靜觀其反復。<sup>181</sup>

Based on the above argument, I consider *shenming* in Wang Bi's writings to refer to the sage's spirituality.<sup>182</sup> This spirituality is characterized by a high degree of intelligence. This special kind of intelligence should not be equated with practical skills or know-how, with which one is able to do certain things or solve certain problems. To be more precise, *shenming* pertains to the sage's ability to comprehend the *Dao*, to be at one with the *Dao*, and to embody the *Dao* naturally in his entire mode of being.

Now the question is whether spirituality is inborn or attainable through practice. Basically, Wang Bi thought that this spirituality is inborn, as the *qi*

---

<sup>180</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 23; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 66.

<sup>181</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 36; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 75.

<sup>182</sup> Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 proposes that the comprehension of the *Dao* is a kind of mystical spirituality devoid of any desires and misconceptions. Livia Kohn thinks that Wang Bi represented the continued development of the Chinese mystical tradition, which originated from the early Daoist philosophy of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. She interprets Wang Bi's view of sagehood within this mystical framework.

The issue of mysticism needs careful examination, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I would like to consider Wang Bi to be a rationalist in light of his strong socio-political concerns. The core concept of his philosophy, i.e., the *Dao*, is not mystical. It pertains to the ontological reality. When applied to socio-political field, it turns to be a policy of non-action, which includes many pragmatic methods of governing. As for self-cultivation, it is not a completely ineffable enlightenment. As shown in the thesis, Wang Bi proposed some methods of self-cultivation, to reduce desires and to get rid of misconceptions, for example, which are neither mystical nor abstract. As for the sage, who represents the culmination of self-cultivation, Wang Bi emphasized that he is paragon for the common people. This indicates that the sage's teachings and behavior, at least some part, are understandable so that the common people can imitate the sage. If sagehood is simply a mystical spirituality, how can the common people follow the sage?

*Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 24; Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 60-62.

endowment that accounts for the sage's intelligence is inborn. It is a popular view in the Han dynasty that *qi* endowment accounts for one's morality, capacity, disposition, and fate. Since Wang Bi followed this view and attributed the differences among human beings to their endowed *qi*, he would likely understand the sage's spirituality as an intellectual capacity, generated from his endowment of *qi*. In this respect, spirituality is constitutive of the sage's nature.<sup>183</sup>

A comparison between Mencius and Wang Bi might be useful for understanding this intelligence. Mencius defined sagehood in terms of moral cultivation. If a common person directs his or her attention persistently to the four moral sprouts and nurtures them properly, he or she has the promise to become a sage.<sup>184</sup> In contrast, sagehood in Wang Bi's writings involves an ability to understand the *Dao*. To take an example from Wang Bi, the sage, like ordinary people, experiences fortune and misfortune too. However, unlike ordinary people, who are invariably disturbed by their sense of gains and losses, the sage is able to realize the interchangability between fortune and misfortune, and eventually be free of worry and bitterness.<sup>185</sup>

However, the sage's spirituality should not be understood as completely decided by his *qi* endowment. The special nature of the sage's spirituality lies in that it is informed by the *Dao*. In this respect, spirituality is also closely related to nature<sup>Dao</sup>. I understand spirituality as a perfect interaction between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. The sage is endowed with special refined *qi*, which facilitates him to

---

<sup>183</sup> This indicates that if Wang Bi had took part in the debate over the relationship between nature and capacity (*caixing* 才性), he would align himself with Fu Gu (傅 嘏 209–255) and Zhong Hui (鍾 會 225–264), who held that nature and capacity are identical or correlated with each other.

<sup>184</sup> Kwong-loi Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 149-158.

<sup>185</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 152; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 161.

discover his nature<sup>Dao</sup>. Meanwhile, although nature<sup>Dao</sup> is tranquil, it is not static. As discussed earlier, nature<sup>Dao</sup> is a code (*yi* 儀) or principle (*li* 理), which can exert an influence on one's *qi*. In the sage's case, since he is endowed with special refined *qi*, which is naturally in tune with the *Dao*, his nature<sup>Dao</sup> can exert a dominant influence on his *qi* so that it regulates the latter completely. As a result, the sage's *qi* never drifts with external things. With no external disturbance, the sage can concentrate on comprehending his nature<sup>Dao</sup> and achieve a thorough understanding of the *Dao*.

The argument up to this point suggests that Wang Bi produced a balanced interpretation of *shenming*. As discussed earlier, before Wang Bi *shenming* had been defined in terms of refined *qi*. Wang Bi inherited this notion, but he stressed that refined *qi* is informed by the *Dao*. In other words, *shenming* is a perfect interaction between *qi* and the *Dao*. This is consistent with his view of the relationship between Nonbeing and beings. Nonbeing is the origin, but it cannot be made manifest or flourish without beings. *Qi* belongs to beings and the power of the *Dao* is perceivable through it. Consequently, a balanced approach to the sage's ideal nature reflects a balanced view of Nonbeing and beings. This balanced approach becomes more evident when Wang Bi discussed the relationship between naturalness (*ziran* 自然) and the rites (*mingjiao* 名教), to which I will return in chapter 4.

However, despite the inbornness of sagehood, Wang Bi appreciated a common person's effort to try to rediscover his or her nature<sup>Dao</sup> and to understand the *Dao*. He did not imply that the sage possesses this spirituality even as a child, nor did he say that normal people would never get close to it. If these were the case, one may wonder the point of Wang Bi's lengthy discussion that nature<sup>Dao</sup>

should regulate nature<sup>qi</sup>. In my view, Wang Bi formulated his theory not only for the ruler, as Wagner suggests,<sup>186</sup> he did it also for the general reader. To restore order in society is not completely in the hands of the ruler. It also depends on each individual rediscovering his or her nature, which is the share of the *Dao*. Given this consideration, it would be strange that Wang Bi simply stressed the inbornness of this spirituality in a work written also for ordinary readers to communicate the meaning of the *Dao*. As shown above, Wang Bi did discuss the methods of self-cultivation, which is crucial for one to rediscover one's nature<sup>Dao</sup>. This suggests that in Wang Bi's view, even the sage's spirituality is the result of a long process of self-cultivation. And the common people can improve their understanding of the *Dao* through certain methods of self-cultivation. In light of the above discussion, I think that Wang Bi appreciated one's effort in trying to attain this spirituality. However, the sage *finally* achieves this spirituality, while the common people do not. They may improve their understanding of the *Dao*, but they cannot achieve the thorough comprehension of the *Dao* as perfect as that of the sage.

One point needs to be made clear. To attain sagehood, practice is necessary but not sufficient. The common people can improve their understanding of the *Dao* through practice, but practice alone is not enough to bring in the spirituality as perfect as the sage's. Because of their inadequate endowment of *qi*, they lack a high degree of intelligence, which is both necessary and sufficient for one to comprehend the *Dao*.

The intellectual ability of understanding the *Dao* involves various levels. Although only the sage reaches the highest level, the common people are encouraged to approximate it. It is not the case that either one fully comprehends

---

<sup>186</sup> *The Craft of A Chinese Commentator*, 168.

the *Dao* or one does not have any knowledge of the *Dao*. One can actually make a progressive understanding of the *Dao* through self-cultivation, the culmination of which can be said to approximate the sage's spirituality.

A common person's understanding of the *Dao* is different from that of the sage. As Wang Bi illustrates, the sage can be compared to the numinous powers (*shen* 神), as both share the same *Dao* and they unite to revert to it.<sup>187</sup> The sage's spirituality benefits all creatures under Heaven. But a common person's understanding of the *Dao* benefits himself only, i.e., entail him a full lifespan free of damage and bitterness (*quanshen* 全身 or *quansheng* 全生). When one comprehends the *Dao*, one's specific capacity can be fully utilized. But the sage, being at the one with the *Dao*, is able to let all capable persons subordinate to him.<sup>188</sup>

In his commentary on the *Analects*, Wang Bi drew a clear line between a gentleman and the sage. He says,

A gentleman<sup>189</sup> responds to things only after they fully develop, watches things when things take shape, chooses the right place to conduct himself, and depends on study to comprehend the whole situation; therefore he does not enter and serve a state ruled by a

---

<sup>187</sup> Wang Bi *ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 158; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 165.

<sup>188</sup> Wang Bi *ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 81; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 108-109.

<sup>189</sup> In Lou Yulie's *Wang Bi jijiaoshi* the subject is "Confucius". I replace it with "a gentleman" according to Tang Yongtong's explanation. If a person deals with things only after the transformation of them comes to be evident, he cannot be said to be at one with the *Dao*. It is impossible that Confucius falls into this category, since he was esteemed as the sage in the Wei-Jin period. The person conducting himself in this way, for example, Yan Hui, is called gentleman (君子 *junzi*) inferior to the sage.

Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, "Wang Bi zhi Zhouyi Lunyu xinyi," 王弼之周易論語新義, in *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 101; it is translated by W. Liebenthal as "Wang Bi's New Interpretation of the I Ching and Lun-yu," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 124-61.



person of bad repute. The sage, however, reaches the remote and considers the subtle, his responses to things and his transformations are miraculous, the dirty cannot stain his pureness, and the vicious cannot damage his nature. Therefore he is able to avoid danger without hiding himself, and get rid of things without being present.

君子機發後應，事形乃視，擇地以處身，資教以全度者也，故不入亂人之邦。聖人通遠慮微，應變神化，濁亂不能汙其潔，凶惡不能害其性，所以避難不藏身，絕物不以形也。<sup>190</sup>

As the above quotation shows, a gentleman has to accumulate knowledge and copes with things prudently. The sage, because of his spirituality, is able to deal with whatever situations naturally and effortlessly. Confucius once sighed that if it is impossible to meet a sage, it is good to meet a gentleman. Wang Bi seemed to hold a similar view: to be a gentleman is a difficult yet attainable task, but to become a sage without the necessary endowment is impossible.<sup>191</sup>

In summary, sagehood is inborn in that the sage's spirituality is inborn, for the practice of self-cultivation is necessary but not sufficient for attaining spirituality. The spirituality has its origin in the sage's nature. That is, the sage is endowed with special refined *qi*. This kind of *qi* provides a favourable condition for the sage to rediscover his nature<sup>Dao</sup>. The sage's *qi* endowment accounts for his high degree of intelligence, with which he is able to comprehend the profundity of the *Dao* and embody the *Dao* naturally in his entire mode of being.

---

<sup>190</sup> Wang Bi jijiaoshi 王弼集校釋, 632.

<sup>191</sup> Wang Bi ji jiaoshi 王弼集校釋, 34, 182; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 74, 181.

So far I have examined Wang Bi's conception of human nature, his view of the relationship between nature and feeling, and his understanding of the ideal nature of the sage. To summarize the main point of my examination, Wang Bi inherited certain insights from Han Confucianism and formulated a fresh interpretation of human nature. He considered human nature to be consisting of nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. Nature<sup>Dao</sup> is the differentiation of the *Dao* in each human being and defines what is authentic in each human being. Nature<sup>qi</sup> is the substance that forms human nature, and feeling is generated from the contact of nature<sup>qi</sup> with things. Whereas nature<sup>Dao</sup> is neither good nor evil, nature<sup>qi</sup>, or its contact with things, i.e., feeling, is subject to moral judgement. Whether feeling is good or not depends on whether it is under the influence of nature<sup>Dao</sup>. In contrast with the common people, whose feelings may drift with things, the sage's feeling is always proper. This is because of the sage's spirituality. Spirituality pertains to the sage's capacity to comprehend the *Dao* and his being at one with the *Dao*. It is a balanced interaction between his nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. As the sage is endowed with special refined *qi* and a high degree of intelligence, he is able to develop his spirituality through self-cultivation. In this respect, I propose that Wang Bi considered sagehood to be inborn, in that the potential or capacity for sagehood is inborn. However, Wang Bi appreciated the common people's effort to rediscover their nature<sup>Dao</sup>. Although their understanding of the *Dao* is not as perfect as that of the sage, it is sufficient for them to live a fulfilling life and is necessary for a harmonious society.

### Chapter 3 The Limits of Nature and Self-Knowledge

Guo Xiang (郭象 A.D.252? -312) is a major figure in Wei-Jin intellectual history.<sup>192</sup> He is remembered in the history of Chinese philosophy especially for his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. His contemporaries thought highly of him as second only to Wang Bi.<sup>193</sup> In the Zhengshi era, Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi*, together with He Yan's work on the *Laozi*,<sup>194</sup> made "Laozi and Zhuangzi so prevalent that they rivaled Confucius."<sup>195</sup> Slightly later, with the appearance of the commentaries on the *Zhuangzi* by Xiang Xiu (A.D.227-280) and Guo Xiang,<sup>196</sup> "Confucian and Mohist words came to lose their appeal while Daoist

---

<sup>192</sup> Tang Yijie 湯一介 collects the various biographies of Guo Xiang and other historical documents about him from various sources in his book, which is very helpful. See *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin xuanxue* 郭象與魏晉玄學, 307-321.

Despite his important contribution to Wei-Jin philosophy, Guo Xiang has received less attention from Western researchers. Brook Ziporyn has published a book entitled *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), which is the first book-length study of Guo Xiang in English.

<sup>193</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 112; cf. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 578.

<sup>194</sup> A passage from *Shishuoxinyu* reads, He Yan went to see Wang Bi when he completed his commentary on the *Laozi*. However, after reading Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi*, He Yan was convinced by its profundity and accuracy. He said, "it is with a man like this that one can discuss the relationship between Heaven and human beings". He then revised his commentary as two treatises on the *Dao* and *de*.  
何平叔注《老子》始成，詣王輔嗣，見王注精奇，逾神伏，曰：“若斯人，可與論天人之際矣！”因以所注為道、德二論。

This seems to indicate that He Yan was so convinced by Wang Bi's commentary that he had to present his own commentary in a different way. See *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語, 107; cf. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 101.

<sup>195</sup> Wang Yunxi 王運熙 and Zhou Feng 周鋒, *Wenxindiaolong yizhu* 文心雕龍譯注 (Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1998), 157.

<sup>196</sup> As is well known, Guo Xiang has been accused of having plagiarized from Xiang Xiu's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. The charge was first recorded in *Shishuoxinyu* (111-112; *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 105-6) and followed by later historians without question until the Qing dynasty. Based on the biography of Xiang Xiu in the *History of the Jin Dynasty*, which indicates that Guo Xiang paraphrased Xiang Xiu's commentary and extended it (*History of the Jin Dynasty: Biography of Xiang Xiu* 晉書·向秀傳, 1374), the Qing scholar Qian Zeng 錢曾 (1629-1701), and later Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917) and Wu Chengshi 吳承仕 (1885-1939), proposed that although Guo Xiang is indebted to Xiang Xiu, his commentary is not a complete

words became popular.”<sup>197</sup> If Wang Bi, with his associates, were the pioneers of the *xuanxue* revolution, then Guo Xiang provided the concluding chapter to it. The two philosophers are most representative of this unique development in Chinese philosophy of the Wei-Jin period.

Guo Xiang derived insight from both the *Zhuangzi* and the entire classical and Han tradition to arrive at a coherent view of human nature. It is my proposal that by his innovative concept of *xingfen* (the limits of nature 性分), as by the distinction between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup> in Wang Bi’s case, Guo Xiang was able to answer the question of the origin of good and evil. As opposed to the Han Confucian view that evil is an innate part of human nature, Guo Xiang believed in the natural good of human nature. Evil, in his view, is produced externally by trying to exceed one’s limits of nature. So the most important thing is to develop self-knowledge of one’s limits. This self-knowledge, in its perfect version, is a mindset of freedom and spontaneity. The external distinction between Confucian and Daoist behavior then dissolves with such a mindset.

This chapter explores Guo Xiang’s view of human nature and the sociopolitical implications of his view. In the first part, I inquire into what the concept of nature refers to concretely in Guo Xiang’s commentary. The inquiry suggests that Guo Xiang maintained a comprehensive view of human nature and

---

copy of the latter’s. In other words, Guo Xiang offered his own ideas also in interpreting the *Zhuangzi*. Since then, scholars are generally more sympathetic towards Guo Xiang and agree that Guo developed Xiang Xiu’s ideas and in so doing contributed significantly to Profound Learning.

Both Tang Yijie 湯一介 and Su Xinwo 蘇新濤 make clear summaries of the discussions on this issue. See their respective books *Guo Xiang and Wei-Jin philosophy* 郭象與魏晉玄學, 127-148; *The Philosophy of Guo Xiang* 郭象莊學平議 (Taiwan: xuesheng shuju 臺灣學生書局, 1980), 12-17.

<sup>197</sup> Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, Biography of Xiang Xiu 向秀傳, in *History of the Jin Dynasty* 晉書 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1962), vol.5: 1374.

he understood it to refer principally to life, physical features, capacity and feelings. Benevolence and righteousness form an indispensable part of human nature, only if they pertain to natural feelings rather than moral norms and the artificial expressions of moral norms. Then I examine Guo's innovative and intriguing conception of *xingfen* (the limits of nature 性分) and the related distinction between *xingfen zhi nei* (within the limits of nature 性分之内) and *xingfen zhi wai* (beyond the limits of nature 性分之外). In this part, I explain *xingfen* in terms of capacity (*cai* 才) and feelings (*qing* 情), in hope of giving a clear idea of what *xingfen* is. It is my submission that Guo Xiang was overwhelmingly concerned with developing a mode of self-knowledge, i.e., a consciousness of one's natural limits. This self-knowledge is attainable through one's life experiences and comprehension of Daoist wisdom. The last question of this part concerns whether Guo Xiang is a "fatalist." I suggest that the answer depends on the sense in which the concept of fatalism is used. I understand Guo Xiang as a fatalist in an objective sense. Subjectively, he is surely not a fatalist, in that self-knowledge is a positive affirmation of who one is and that happiness is not based on external conditions but on one's inner state of mind. The last part of this chapter explores the sociopolitical implications of Guo Xiang's view of human nature. The first question concerns the ideal society in which each person possesses the self-knowledge of his or her limits. Then I examine the issue of non-action. It is my proposal that in Guo Xiang's interpretation, non-action is not a set of rigid ethical requirements; rather, it pertains to a mindset of freedom and spontaneity. Finally, I address the question whether Guo Xiang is an anarchist, as this issue is directly associated with his understanding of non-action.

### 3.1. A Comprehensive View of Nature

Chinese philosophers generally agreed that nature is what human beings are endowed with naturally. However, they diverged in what nature refers to substantively. By Guo Xiang's time, various views of human nature had been formulated. Guo Xiang integrated these views into his philosophical system and arrived at a comprehensive view of human nature. Of utmost significance is that he interpreted the Confucian term *renyi* (benevolence and righteousness) in a Daoist way, and in so doing sought to reconcile Confucianism with Daoism.

#### 3.1.1. Self-transformation: the denial of the *Dao* as the creator

The relationship between Nonbeing and Being gave rise to a fundamental debate in Wei-Jin intellectual history. The debate centered on whether Nonbeing can produce Being. Some intellectuals in the early Wei period, He Yan and Wang Bi for example, stated that Nonbeing produces Being. Others in the later Wei and early Jin period disagreed, of whom the representatives were Guo Xiang and Pei Wei (裴頠 267-300).<sup>198</sup> They held that Nonbeing cannot produce Being and that Being produces itself.

In sharp contrast with Wang Bi, who highlighted the ontological significance of the *Dao*, Guo Xiang did not specify the creativity of the *Dao*, nor did he mention the common origin of human nature. He formulated a theory of "self-transformation" (*duhua* 獨化), which forms the basis of his philosophy, and is also the starting point from which I begin the exploration of his concept of nature.

---

<sup>198</sup> Pei Wei wrote an essay "Esteeming Being" *Chongyoulun* 崇有論 to refute that Nonbeing produces Being. He said, "Ultimate Nonbeing cannot produce Being; therefore, Being comes into being by itself spontaneously (夫至無者, 無以能生。故始生者, 自生也。). Chinese text is cited from Liu Dajie 劉大傑, *WeiJin sixiang lun* 魏晉思想論 (shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1998), 48.

Guo Xiang stressed that the *Dao* cannot create Being and Being comes to be of itself. He says,

Since Nonbeing is just that, Nonbeing, it cannot generate Being.

As Being has not yet been generated, it cannot cause generation.

What, then, does this generation? Things generate themselves spontaneously.

無既無矣，則不能生有。有之未生，又不能爲生。然則生生者誰哉？塊然而自生耳。<sup>199</sup>

In Wang Bi's view, despite lacking any physical features, the *Dao* does "exist" in the sense that it is the fundamental principle of all life, pervasive, ever-present and sustaining all processes in the universe. Guo Xiang, however, conceived of Nonbeing as an absolute non-existence. In Wang Bi's thought, the *Dao* creates all things; the latter in turn have a share in the nature of the *Dao*. But Guo Xiang rejected such a creator-creature relationship. Beings are produced not on account of any external agent or act of will but by themselves spontaneously without any intention. Once things come into being, their nature is formed spontaneously.

The theory of self-transformation is not only about the self-generation of things, but also about the ceaseless transformation of things, which is also natural, as there is nothing external making things transform in this way or that way (非有使然也).<sup>200</sup> Guo Xiang says,

---

<sup>199</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju 上海：中華書局, 1935), vol. 151: 8; I benefit much from Richard J. Lynn's suggestion on the translation of Guo Xiang's text, see his *Zhuangzi: A New Translation of The Sayings of Master Zhuang As Interpreted by Guo Xiang* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming)

<sup>200</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 89.

As for the strength of strengthlessness, none is stronger than transformation. ... Such strength not stopping for even a moment, suddenly the new things happen. The myriad things in the universe change ceaselessly. The world is totally new, but people think of it as the old one. The boat moves every day, but people see it as remaining in one place; the mountain changes every day, but people consider it as the same as what it was before. ... Thus the I who existed before is no longer the I who exists now. I always go away with the present, and do not hold on to the past.

夫無力之力，莫大於變化者也。.....故不暫停，忽已涉新，則天地萬物無時而不移也。世皆新矣，而目以為故。舟日移矣，而視之若舊；山日更矣，而視之若前。.....故向者之我，非複今我也。我與今俱往，豈常守故哉？<sup>201</sup>

Although Guo Xiang did not take the *Dao* to refer to an ontological reality, he did understand the *Dao* as a principle of self-transformation, a principle of following the nature of a thing. Most importantly, as we shall see, the *Dao* is also taken to refer to the state of mind when a person comprehends and follows the above principles naturally in his/her entire mode of being. Consequently, the *Dao* in Guo Xiang's view is not beyond the physical world, but *within* it; the *Dao* is not an independent reality, but a perfect property *intrinsic* to things and human beings. This view is different from Wang Bi's, who hold that the *Dao* is both *beyond* and *within* the physical world, and is both a *transcendental* reality and *dependent* on things. I will revisit this issue in chapter 4.

---

<sup>201</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 31; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.



### 3.1.2. The meaning of nature (*xing*) in Guo Xiang's *Zhuangzi* commentary

Chinese philosophers generally defined nature as what human beings are endowed with naturally. However, the question is that this definition does not tell us what nature means. In other words, the definition is a *formal* definition; *xing* is a general, *umbrella* term, which leaves us wondering about its content. Before Guo Xiang, there had been various attempts to solve the question; for example, Gaozi explained nature as human need for food and sex; Mencius saw nature as moral potential; and Zhuangzi, as life. Deriving insights from his predecessors, Guo Xiang brought out a comprehensive answer to the question. In contrast to Wang Bi, whose interpretation of nature is quite abstract, Guo Xiang took nature to refer concretely to four main sets of human phenomena: namely, life, physical features, capacity, and feeling.<sup>202</sup>

#### (1) Life

Guo Xiang often put the characters *xing* 性 (nature) and *ming* 命 (life or fate) together, using the compound *xingming* 性命 (life) to refer to nature. In these cases, nature means life. For example, he says, “Be satisfied with what one is naturally and be at ease with one’s nature (life) (足于天然而安其性命) (2:9)”;

“one obtains from fully utilizing one’s nature (life) (取於盡性命之極) (11:3).”

#### (2) Physical features

Nature is also taken to refer to physical features or properties. As Guo Xiang illustrates, borrowing from the *Zhuangzi*, by nature, a crane’s legs are long while a duck’s are short. The former should not be shortened or the latter

---

<sup>202</sup> This does not mean that *xing* 性 equates with *xingming* 性命 or *xingqing* 性情. Rather, since *xing* 性 is an abstract or ambiguous concept, I try to work out what it is, with evidence from the texts, by explaining it in terms of *ming* 命, *qing* 情, and *cai* 才.

extended, as this will damage their nature.<sup>203</sup> The Great Cedrela (*dachun* 大椿) lives long and the mushroom, short; both are determined by their nature. The nature of a square is different from that of a circle. Similarly, the nature of bitter taste is far from that of sweet taste.<sup>204</sup>

### (3) Capacity

Due to certain properties, a thing is capable of doing certain things. Thus, nature is also defined in terms of capacity (*cai*). Thanks to their respective biological features, fish can swim and birds can fly. Guo Xiang borrowed the example of a horse from the *Zhuangzi*. The horse's hoof can stand frozen snow and its fur can resist strong wind. It feeds only on grass and water, and needs no special shielding. Because of these properties, as Guo Xiang further suggested, which shows clearly his divergence from the *Zhuangzi*, horses can be used for transportation.<sup>205</sup>

Another example from the *Zhuangzi* involves Li Zhu (離朱) and Shi Kuang (師曠). They turned out to be a great painter and musician respectively. Although Guo Xiang did not appreciate their accomplishments, for their work, in his view, distracted people's sight and hearing, he did admit, "Li Zhu and Shi Kuang have keen ears and sharp eyes by nature (離曠性聰明)."<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 39-40.

<sup>204</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4, 24.

<sup>205</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 41. While the text describes the biological features of a horse to indicate that they should be followed, Guo Xiang made a piece of anthropomorphic and social commentary on it: a horse does not mind being ridden and it simply contempts glory and wealth.

<sup>206</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 39.

Nature is also taken to refer to moral capacity, which is especially of interest to this thesis. Guo Xiang commented on two virtuous persons in the *Zhuangzi*:

Zeng Shen (曾參) and Shi Qiu (史鱣) are by nature good at being benevolent (性長於仁); those who are not good at being benevolent by nature always admire these two. However, if people become benevolent out of admiration, their benevolence is already artificial.

夫曾史性長於仁耳。而性不長者，橫復慕之。慕之而仁，仁已偽矣。<sup>207</sup>

Two points are noteworthy here. (1) Nature encompasses a moral capacity. (2) The moral capacity is different from one person to another. In other words, some persons are more capable than others to be good. Daoism saves its most vitriolic critique for the Confucian view of human nature. But Guo Xiang did not completely reject the Confucian view, though as a commentator he was supposed to confine himself to the *Zhuangzi* text. Confucians and Daoists have argued bitterly on the issue of the relationship between human nature and morality. As I will show later, Guo Xiang actually produced a highly complex explanation of this issue, which is indicative of his indebtedness to both Daoism and Confucianism.

#### (4) Feelings

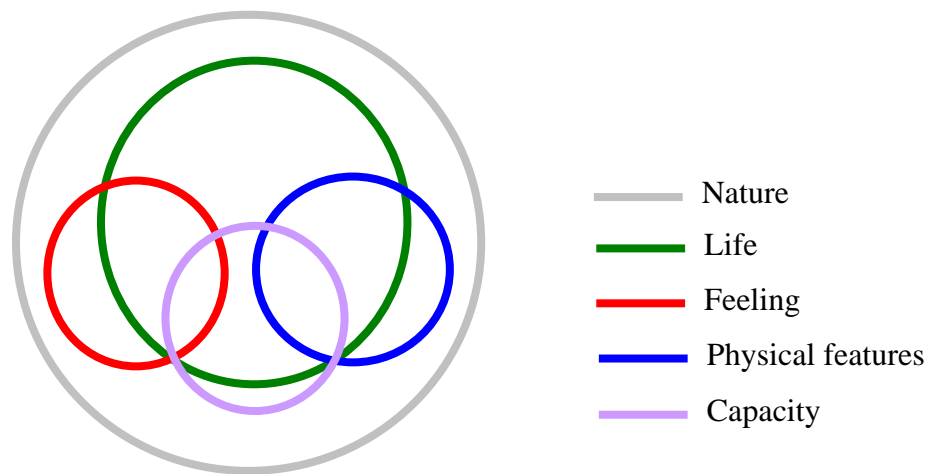
Guo Xiang took the compound 性情 (*xingqing*) to refer to the emotional assets of the human being, as contrasted to intelligence or cognition.

---

<sup>207</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 39.

Consider the following examples from Guo's commentary: it is because this man's nature and feelings are different from others (此蓋性情之異者) (2:4); this is to artificially change his nature and feeling (斯矯其性情也) (12:9); to take nature and feeling as fundamental (以情性爲主也) (13:3).

To summarize, in Guo Xiang's understanding, *xing* encompasses life, physical features, capacity, and feeling. There are overlaps between these subsets. Diagrammatically, the following obtains:



Besides these, *xing* may encompass other constituents, given that Guo Xiang interpreted *xing* in a comprehensive way. One of them might be character or composition, in the light of the popular practice of appreciating personality in the Wei-Jin period.<sup>208</sup> Guo Xiang never remarked that *xing* encompasses only these four parts. I address these four, simply because Guo Xiang discussed them at great length.

<sup>208</sup> *Shishuoxinyu* 世說新語 consists of the stories, conversations, and short characterizations of the famous men in the Wei-Jin period. A theoretical and systematic inquiry into personality is Liu Shao's work *On Personality* (*Renwuzhi* 人物志). It formulates a theory of appointing officials according to their characters and compositions. English translation of the text is available: J.K. Shryock, *The Study of Human Abilities: The Jen Wu Chih of Liu Shao*, American Oriental Series, vol. 11 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1937; reprint, New York, 1966).

That the four constituents overlap is easy to understand. Life can be seen as a form of capacity and has both physical and emotional dimensions. Capacity can be seen as physical or emotive; the latter finds expression in a person's competence in dealing with human relationships. There does not appear to be any overlap between feeling and physical features. However, Guo Xiang was not a modern analytic philosopher; the point here is not to provide an analytic account of these constituents of nature but rather to show how nature can be understood concretely from these perspectives.

### **3.1.3. Whether benevolence and righteousness are the nature of the human being**

The analysis so far has shown that Guo Xiang basically maintained a Daoist approach to human nature. On the one hand, he interpreted nature in a negative way, especially in arguing that nature was not what Confucians had conceived it to be. On the other hand, he explained nature in a positive way, referring it substantively to life, physical features, capacity and feelings. Clearly, these references are used not in the Confucian moral sense.

However, as mentioned above, Guo Xiang was not free of the influence of Confucianism. As a matter of fact, it is hard to locate Wang Bi, Guo Xiang and other major Wei-Jin thinkers in either the Daoist or the Confucian school. Guo Xiang did not completely dispel the Confucian idea of human nature signified by the terms benevolence and righteousness. In some instances, he seemed to adopt a Mencian view and clearly stated that benevolence and righteousness are a part of human nature.

Benevolence and righteousness rightly belong to the nature and feeling (*xingqing* 性情) of human beings; one should just follow

them. One who fears that benevolence and righteousness do not belong to human nature may be said to worry too much!

夫仁義自是人之情性，但當任之耳。恐仁義非人情而憂之者，真可謂多憂也。<sup>209</sup>

Guo Xiang reiterated the same theme elsewhere in his commentary:

Benevolence and righteousness rightly belong to human nature. But from the three sage-kings onward, people have joined in making lots of noise about this. Consequently, they have ignored nature and sought to observe the traces [the rites],<sup>210</sup> as if whatever they do is not enough. Is this also not worrying too much?

夫仁義自是人情也。而三代以下，橫共囂囂，棄情逐迹，如將不及，不亦多憂乎。<sup>211</sup>

At this point, one might conclude that Guo Xiang tried to reconcile Daoism and Confucianism in his conception of human nature. However, the fact is that his view of benevolence and righteousness is far more complicated than the above passages suggest.

As shown above, Guo Xiang affirmed benevolence and righteousness as a part of inborn nature. However, in other passages he took benevolence and righteousness to refer to the artificial moral institutions favored by Confucians.

In chapter 14 of the *Zhuangzi* it is said,

---

<sup>209</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 40; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

<sup>210</sup> Brook Ziporyn makes a detailed analysis of the terms of “the traces (迹 *ji*)” and “what leaves the traces (所以迹 *suoyiji*)”. I will come to them shortly. *The Penumbra Unbound*, 31-61.

<sup>211</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 40; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

Benevolence and righteousness are like the temporary and coarse huts of the past kings. One can store in it for one night, but must not stay in it for long, for one would incur much blame when being seen there.

仁義先王之蘧廬也。止可以一宿，而不可久處，觀而多責。<sup>212</sup>

Guo Xiang commented on this passage as follows:

Benevolence and righteousness belong to human nature. Human nature changes and varies from the past to the present. If one stops briefly in them and then goes on one's way, one will remain inconspicuous. If one gets stuck on one aspect of them, he becomes conspicuous, such conspicuousness leads to artificiality, and such artificiality leads to much blame.

夫仁義者，人之性也。人性有變，古今不同也。故遊寄而過去則冥，若滯而系於一方則見，見則僞生，僞生而責多矣。<sup>213</sup>

Guo Xiang followed Zhuangzi in describing benevolence and righteousness metaphorically as “temporary accommodation.” This metaphor indicates that benevolence and righteousness are not only changeable but also external to human beings. In light of this, it is highly possible that Guo Xiang was talking about the normative dimension of benevolence and righteousness.

Guo Xiang invented the term *ji* (traces, or footprints 迹) to demonstrate the transience and dependence of Confucian rites among other things. Chapter 14 of the *Zhuangzi* says,

---

<sup>212</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 62; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

<sup>213</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 62; Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

The six classics are like the footprints left by the past kings, and they are not that by which the past kings left footprints. Now what you say is just like footprints. Footprints are made by shoes, but are they the shoes themselves?

夫六經先王之陳迹也，豈其所以迹哉。今子之所言猶迹也。夫迹，履之所出，而迹豈履哉？

Guo Xiang's comment reads,

What leaves the traces is the true nature. For those following the true nature of things, their traces are the six classics. Today, when people deal with things, they should consider *ziran* to be the shoes and the six classics to be the traces.

所以迹者真性也。夫任物之真性者，其迹則六經也。況今之人，則以自然為履，六經為迹。<sup>214</sup>

According to Guo Xiang, both moral norms and the classics bearing the sage's teachings are the traces that the sage left behind.<sup>215</sup> In the past, the sage instituted regulations to manage the human world. They were merely the convenient means employed by the sage-king. With the change of the environment, the regulations became outdated.<sup>216</sup> Then people should not hold on

---

<sup>214</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 63; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

<sup>215</sup> Some researchers have made insightful arguments on the issue of "traces" in Guo Xiang's commentary. Mou Zousan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 187-195; Tang Yijie 湯一介, *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin xuanxue* 郭象與魏晉玄學, 250-253; Brook Ziporyn, "The Self-so and Its Traces in the Thought of Guo Xiang," *Philosophy East and West*, 43.3 (July 1993): 511-540.

<sup>216</sup> Guo Xiang says,  
As for propriety and righteousness, when applied in the proper time, they are like the beauty of Xi Shi; but when they become outdated and are still preserved, they are like the ugly.  
況夫禮義，當其時而用之，則西施也。時過而不棄，則醜人也。



to them permanently. Rather, they should comprehend the true nature, i.e., *ziran* of the sage, which is the constant root (*ben*) that underlies all changes.

We can now see the complexity of Guo Xiang's argument of human nature. To summarize, (1) in most passages Guo Xiang interpreted human nature from an amoral perspective, referring it to life, physical features, capacity, and feelings, while in others he interpreted human nature in moral terms as benevolence and righteousness. (2) In some passages Guo Xiang affirmed benevolence and righteousness to be a part of inborn nature and universal, elsewhere he indicated that they are simply the transient moral institutions favored by Confucians.

Now the question is whether Guo Xiang is inconsistent, or the *Zhuangzi* is inconsistent and therefore Guo Xiang as a commentator has to do justice to both these views, despite their apparent contradictoriness? It is possible that Guo Xiang's inconsistency is partly caused by the text of the *Zhuangzi* itself.<sup>217</sup> However, I would like to propose that Guo Xiang saw the *Zhuangzi* as a coherent text, or even if he realized the inconsistency in it, as a prominent commentator and philosopher he would try to provide a coherent interpretation of it. I make this proposal because commentarial writing is the most fundamental method of doing philosophy in traditional China. Philosophers constructed their own ideas through commenting on the classics. In this regard, the commentary itself can be seen as an independent work reflecting the thought of the commentator. In my view, Guo

---

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 62.

<sup>217</sup> Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 proposes that the inner chapters were composed earlier than the outer and miscellaneous chapters, as there is an evident discrepancy between the two in language and ideas. For example, he points out that the characters *Dao* 道 and *de* 德 were used separately in the inner chapters, but they are used as a compound *daode* 道德 in the outer and miscellaneous chapters. Since compound normally occurs later than the single character in the development of language, this proves that the inner chapters are earlier than the outer and miscellaneous chapters. See Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, *Philosophy of Zhuangzi and Its Development* 莊子哲學及其演變, 5-20, William E. Savage, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, 18-39.

Xiang considered the *Zhuangzi* to be a reservoir of insight and truth and he tried to reveal its profound meaning. Can the apparent inconsistency in Guo Xiang's view of human nature, then, be resolved?

First, the fact that Guo Xiang employed both amoral and moral language to describe nature need not be contradictory. Nature is what human beings are endowed with naturally, including physical features, capacity, moral potential, and feelings. Since Guo Xiang adopted a comprehensive understanding of human nature, depending on context he could highlight different aspects of nature in his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. This is different from Mencius who excluded non-moral aspects from his conception of human nature.<sup>218</sup> Guo Xiang is also different from Gaozi who explicitly excluded moral assets from his definition of nature.<sup>219</sup> To Guo Xiang, both the amoral and moral constituents must be taken into account in an understanding of human nature, though he was mainly concerned with the amoral dimensions of human nature.

With respect to the second contradiction mentioned above, since the term of benevolence and righteousness has different meanings dependent on the context, the contradiction will not hold true. In some passages the term refers to the

---

<sup>218</sup> The *Mencius* 7B:24 reads,

Mouth is concerned with tastes, eyes are concerned with colors, ears are concerned with sounds, noses are concerned with smells, and four limbs are concerned with ease, this is human nature, yet therein also lies the Decree. That is why the gentleman does not describe it as nature. Benevolence pertains to the relation between father and son, righteousness to the relation between the ruler and the subject, the rites to the relation between guest and host, wisdom to the good and wise man, the sage to the way of the Heaven, this is the Decree, but therein also lies human nature. That is why the gentleman does not describe it as Decree.

口之於味也，目之於色也，耳之於聲也，鼻之於嗅也，四肢之於安逸也，性也，有命焉，君子不謂性也。仁之於父子也，義之於君臣也，禮之於賓主也，知之於賢者也，聖人之於天道也，命也，有性焉，君子不謂命也。

D.C.Lau, *Mencius*, Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1984, 295. Translation altered.

<sup>219</sup> *Mencius* 6A:4, 225.

natural affections of human beings, while in others it refers to moral regulations or institutions. While natural affections are innate and universal, moral regulations or institutions are external and changeable.

When benevolence and righteousness refer to natural affections, they are certainly the nature of each human being. Neither Wang Bi, as shown in chapter 2, nor Guo Xiang rejected human feelings as a whole; rather, they valued the natural feelings of human beings. In Guo Xiang's case, natural feelings are valuable for being natural, not for being benevolent or righteous. Benevolence and righteousness are only the invented names for them. The names would change, but natural feelings themselves are permanent. Clearly, although Guo Xiang retained the standard term of "benevolence" and "righteousness", he highlighted the naturalness of feelings. When benevolence and righteousness signify moral regulations or institutions, Guo Xiang was cautious with them. He acknowledged their value as a means by which the sage-king managed the world. But as they were invented for specific purposes and applicable to specific contexts, they were subject to change. People thus should not hold on to them uncritically.

To summarize, Guo Xiang formulated a comprehensive understanding of human nature as life, physical features, capacity, feeling, and moral potential. By benevolence and righteousness, Guo Xiang in some passages referred to the natural affections that each person originally has, which falls within the scope of nature. However, when referring to moral regulations or institutions subject to change, benevolence and righteousness have no place in human nature.

### **3.2. The Limits of Nature and Self-knowledge**

In this part, I try to grapple with the core and the most intriguing part of Guo Xiang's theory of human nature: the conception of *xingfen* 性分 (the limits of

nature). Guo Xiang assumed a clear line between what is within the limits of nature (*xingfen zhi nei* 性分之內) and what is outside the limits (*xingfen zhi wai* 性分之外), and emphasized that people should not transgress their limits. However, the question is how people can know the limits of their nature. Although a direct answer is not available in Guo Xiang's commentary, there are indirect evidences that one can gather to figure out a reasonable explanation. I propose that a mode of self-knowledge is the key to knowing one's limits. It is a consciousness that one can achieve through one's life experience and comprehension of the *Dao*. It is never independent of a comprehensive consideration of one's particularities, context and other specific conditions.

### 3.2.1. *Xingfen* (性分): the limits of nature

The idea of *xingfen* is arguably the most important and distinctive contribution that Guo Xiang made to the Chinese philosophy of human nature. There are other synonymous terms in Guo Xiang's commentary, such as *wuji* (物極), *xingji* (性極), and *benfen* (本分). To cite some passages from Guo Xiang,

Each thing has its own nature; the nature of each thing has its own limits.

物各有性, 性各有極。<sup>220</sup>

Both the big and the small accord to the limits of their nature respectively.

[小大] 各據其性分。<sup>221</sup>

What a person is endowed with is limited.

---

<sup>220</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4; Yu-lan Fung, *Chuang-tzu: A New Selected Translation with An Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*, 30.

<sup>221</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 11.

所稟之分，各有極也。<sup>222</sup>

There is an original limit to what a person is endowed with, which can neither be escaped nor increased.

天性所受，各有本分，不可逃，亦不可加。<sup>223</sup>

Two related terms are *xingfen zhi nei* (性分之內 within the limits of nature) and *xingfen zhi wai* (性分之外 outside the limits of nature), which also occur frequently in Guo Xiang's commentary. They demonstrate a clearer picture about the idea of *xingfen*. It is as if a circle is drawn around a person. The activities of the person must be limited within the circle and should not transgress it. The circle is where the limits of the person's nature are. It decides what people can and cannot do.

Two points are noteworthy of the above quotations. (1) No external agent or act of will accounts for the limits of nature, and they are self-so when things come into being. (2) The limits are fixed and cannot be changed. People should accept the fact of their natural limits. To provide a better understanding of *xingfen*, I will interpret it in some detail in terms of *cai* (capacity 才), since *cai* is a major constituent of nature and has been discussed the most by Guo Xiang.

Before that, I need to clarify the relationship between what one can do and what one does actually in life, as the two will be mentioned frequently in the argument below. In common understanding, one's capacity defines what one can do and not necessarily what one does actually. One's capacity is natural endowment, while one's actual doing or social position is also decided by

---

<sup>222</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 17.

<sup>223</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 18.

circumstances, for example, family and education background. Now, from the perspective of Western philosophy, this forms a contrast between “natural” and “social”. However, the point is that this contrast does not exist in Guo Xiang’s worldview, in the same way that the contrast between fact and value is not recognized by many ancient Chinese philosophers. As I will discuss at length later, the idea of *yu* 遇 (what one meets with) blurs the distinction between “natural” and “social”. What one meets with during one’s life is natural, so one should accept it in the same way as one accepts any other natural objects or occurrences, as if it is the Decree or one’s fate. In my understanding, it is not “social” but “artificial” that forms a contrast with “natural” in Guo Xiang’s worldview. “Artificial” always points to a desire-driven, intentional, and purposive mind and activities induced by that mind.

### **3.2.2. An illustration of *xingfen* in terms of *cai* (capacity)**

Each person has specific capacities, be they physical or intellectual, and this usually determines what he or she can do and in Guo Xiang’s understanding, does. As Guo Xiang illustrates, the sage was able to be at one with the *Dao*, able to implement the policy of non-action and fully utilize other people’s capacities; so he became the ruler. The worthies were able to deal with the affairs in some specific fields successfully; they became ministers and officials of various ranks. To take some instances from our own lives, a person may be good at communicating with others, or organizing a team to work together effectively; he or she may be capable of making an eloquent appeal for support, or administer the office routine in perfect order. If these capacities are properly trained and unfavorable circumstances are excluded, he or she may come to be a salesperson, a manager, a politician or a lawyer, and a secretary respectively.

Capacity also varies from one person to another in degree, which determines the positions people hold. For example, Mr. Yang Chen is a member of the national soccer team of China. Although he is a good soccer player in China, no one would compare him with the Brazilian Ronaldo. Obviously, Yang Chen has still a long way to go to rank among the world-class soccer players.

Consequently, a person's position in society is decided by the kind and the level of his or her capacity. Of course, this is an ideal assumption that may not hold true in the complicated world. But the point remains that for Guo Xiang there is a necessary connection between capacity and social role, which forms the context in which one may approach the concept of *xingfen* in terms of *cai*.

Now, given that each person is doing a specific job and holds a specific position determined by his or her capacity, the question is should he or she always be satisfied with the current state of affairs? In other words, does recognizing the limits of one's nature mean never to long for promotion, progress or change? For example, should a current senator or minister seek to become the president? Should the Chinese soccer player Yang Chen dream of becoming one of the world-class soccer players? To take an extreme example, a man is unable to finish the work as his colleagues do, for he is stupid and clumsy. So the man just accords to his nature and continues to work ineffectively?

On this issue Guo Xiang seems at first glance to be inconsistent. On the one hand, he insisted that even a slow horse is useful after being trained properly. If people abandon the horse for its slowness, or simply let the horse remain what it is, they are not utilizing the nature of the horse.<sup>224</sup> Clearly, Guo Xiang encouraged people to make progress with their work. On the other hand, one notices a

---

<sup>224</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 41.

recurring theme running through Guo Xiang's commentary: one's desire in becoming like others always result in confusion and suffering. Guo Xiang lamented how wrong it is that a subject or a concubine intends to change their respective positions, and longs for the position of the ruler or the wife, respectively.<sup>225</sup> They transgress the limits of their nature in the same way as a mantis does in trying to stop an oncoming chariot by its forelegs. The mantis is doing what it cannot do, as the task exceeds its capacity. Consequently, the impracticable ambition of stopping a running chariot makes the mantis the joke of others.<sup>226</sup>

However, a careful examination suggests that Guo Xiang may not be self-contradictory. The capacities with which people are endowed are different both in kind and in degree. While the former difference is fixed, the latter can be reduced through effort. Ideally, what one does is decided by one's capacity, which is unchangeable. This is the limits of one's nature and one should stay within it. As Guo Xiang stressed, the sage ascended the throne and the worthies were appointed as ministers due to their respective capacities. Both the ruler and the ministers should concentrate on their own duties rather than have a hand in others.<sup>227</sup> Let me apply Guo Xiang's concept to contemporary life. A boy with swimming talent has been focusing on swimming training and has the promise to win the world championship. This, in Guo Xiang's term, is what the limits of his nature determine. However, when the boy sees the great popularity of a famous soccer player, he changes his mind and hopes to become a soccer player too. This is

---

<sup>225</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 9.

<sup>226</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 22.

<sup>227</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 9.



definitely undesirable, according to Guo Xiang, as the boy tries to do something out of admiration or desire, which is unnatural. The boy makes an unwise decision, for he gives up the prospective success in swimming and begins a career that, because he does not have any talent for it, is doomed to end in failure. Also, his natural talent for swimming would be put to waste, which deprives not only him but also society of potential benefits.

Although the endowed capacity cannot be changed in kind, it can be changed in degree through practice. One's capacity is innate, but one needs to practice it continuously to become capable (言物雖有性，亦須數習而後能耳).

<sup>228</sup> The endowed capacity is simply a potential, and it is realized through continued practice. Practice improves one's capacity, making a capable person more capable. Even a slow horse can become considerably fast through proper training.

When discussing *xingfen*, in nine cases out of ten Guo Xiang used the character 安 *an*. 安 usually translates as “to be comfortable with, to be at ease with, and to be satisfied with”. It does not mean that a man is always happy with his states, both good and bad. Nor does it suggest a lazy acceptance of the current state and doing nothing to make progress. Rather, it implies that a person accomplishes his work skillfully, as a result of practicing his capacity over a long period of time. As a Chinese saying goes, more practice makes one more skillful (*shu neng sheng qiao* 熟能生巧). Cook Ding's amazing skill is an accumulation of daily practice.<sup>229</sup> Each position has its requirements. The person in a particular

---

<sup>228</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 75.

<sup>229</sup> The story of Cook Ding is primarily about Ding's comprehension of the *Dao*, which accounts for his amazing skill. However, it is simply unintelligible if his comprehension has nothing to do with his daily practice of butchering skill. In other words, it is not that Ding derived

position has to practice his capacity to meet its requirements. Consequently, continued practice makes the person more competent. He does his work successfully yet effortlessly; that is why he enjoys his work.

Therefore, to maintain within the limits of one's nature does not mean to be simply satisfied with one's current state and make no progress. Guo Xiang encouraged people to fully utilize their capacities through practice, which will give them a sense of self-sufficiency. Only after a man is able to do his work skillfully and effortlessly, can he be said to be comfortable with (安) his position.

The notion of practice needs to be especially noted, not only for its important role in realizing one's nature, but also for its special connotation in Guo Xiang's worldview. It is noticeable that a contrast between *xi* (practice 習) and *xue* (to learn, to study 學) was made in Guo Xiang's commentary. For example,

Whatever one is able to do, although he does it, it is not deliberate, though he practices it, he does not study how to do it, though he talks about it, he does not dispute about it.

凡所能者，雖行非爲，雖習非學，雖言非辯。<sup>230</sup>

Guo Xiang would use the character *xi* 習 to suggest that one practice what one has already. For example,

---

his insights into the *Dao* suddenly from nothing, and then his skill improved remarkably. Rather, an understanding of the *Dao* and the daily practice of skill interact with each other. As the story suggests, when Ding just began his career, what he saw was the whole ox; three years later, he saw only parts of it; now he meets the subject with his spirit instead of his sight. Clearly, Ding practiced his skill daily, and gradually developed his understanding of the *Dao*. After a long term of practice and understanding, one day he suddenly attained a through comprehension of the *Dao*. From then on, his skill had been absolutely unique. Although his amazing skill today is mainly due to a comprehension of the *Dao*, it is also dependent on an accumulation of daily practice. See Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 17.

<sup>230</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 93; Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

Although the nature (capacity) of the thing is innate, it has to be practiced repeatedly to become capable.

言物雖有性，亦須數習而後能耳。<sup>231</sup>

It is by practice that one completes nature, and then nature looks like spontaneity.

習以成性，遂若自然。<sup>232</sup>

That thing has that particular nature, so let it practice it.

彼有彼性，故使習彼。<sup>233</sup>

Since *xue* 學 is an emblem of Confucianism (Guo Xiang termed Confucianism as mundane learning *suxue* 俗學),<sup>234</sup> Guo Xiang would interpret it as learning something *external painstakingly, intentionally, deliberately*, or learning from *somebody else's* example in *admiration*, while in the case of *xi* 習 one simply *practices* what is *innate* in oneself. As practice is natural, Guo Xiang emphasized that teaching or training should follow (*yin* 因) one's nature.<sup>235</sup> It should aim to develop what people have innately rather than instill something external into them.

However, it must be pointed out that the practice of capacity only leads to the improvement or the strengthening of capacity. It cannot change capacity in kind. For example, despite the tough soccer training a gifted swimmer yet poor soccer player received, he has no promise to become a successful soccer player.

---

<sup>231</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 75.

<sup>232</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 75.

<sup>233</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 124.

<sup>234</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 66.

<sup>235</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 109.

In this regard, I propose that Guo Xiang considered sagehood to be inborn, as the nature of the sage is different from those of the common people. Guo Xiang stated, “The special endowment of the proper *qi* of *ziran* is extremely rare. Among things only pine trees are endowed with it; among people only the sage is endowed with it (言特受自然之正氣者至希也。下者則唯為松柏，上者則唯有聖人).<sup>236</sup> Consequently, whatever endeavor a common man makes to practice his nature; his capacities are always bound by the limits of his nature, that is to say, he has no promise to become a sage.<sup>237</sup>

To summarize what I have argued about *xingfen*, the nature of each person has its limits; one should maintain within one’s limits and not transgress them. To be more specific, the kind of capacity one is endowed with is unchangeable, and it determines the most suitable work for one. Any *horizontal* comparison with others or effort to make *horizontal* moves is undesirable. However, one can improve one’s capacity in degree through practice. This is a *vertical* move in that it is a development to oneself within one’s limits. It is also natural in that no

---

<sup>236</sup> Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 25.

<sup>237</sup> Guo Xiang says,  
If people want to become worthies, will they realize it? If people make effort to become sages, will they attain it? Certainly they will not.  
欲賢可以得賢，為聖可以得聖乎？固不可矣。

With respect to the relation between the sage and the common people, Guo Xiang seems to hold a view similar to Wang Bi’s. The sage lives in the secular world and he looks like the common people in physical body and feeling expression. But the sage has a kind of spirit, which distinguishes him eventually from other people. For example, Guo Xiang says,

The physical form of the sage is not different from those of the common people, therefore his hearing and sighting will deteriorate too. But his spirit stays intact from beginning to end.

聖人之形，不異凡人，故耳目之用衰也。至於精神則始終常全耳。

Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 20, 100.

desire, comparison, or intention is involved and the improvement is simply a natural result of a full utilization of one's capacity. I will return to this point later.

### 3.2.3. *Xingfen* in terms of *qing* (情)

The character *qing* 情 occurs frequently in Guo Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. It is identified as a key ingredient of nature and as such, an analysis of *xingfen* should also see how it is related to *qing* 情. The word *qing* 情 usually translates as feeling or emotion. But this translation fails to convey the complexity of *qing* 情 in the commentary. I collect Guo Xiang's usages of *qing* and classify them into four groups.

#### (1) Nature

*Qing* 情 (*qing*) and nature (性 *xing*) are often used interchangeably in Chinese philosophical writings. Guo Xiang also took *qing* 情 as synonymous with *xing* 性 in many passages of his commentary. There 情 does not refer substantively to feeling or emotion, but is a more comprehensive term meaning what one has or is originally, which includes feeling (emotion), life, physical features, and capacity. For example, Guo Xiang said that the ten thousand things have the ten thousand natures (萬物萬情) (2:2); and that each thing follows its nature (各隨其情) (18:1).

#### (2) The Regular or Common State

In some passages *qing* means the regular or common state of people. It is a derivative of meaning (1). If a person maintains what he or she is endowed with originally, this is his or her regular or common state. Examples of this usage include the following: when times change, the common customs change too (時變

則俗情亦變) (27:6); this is the common state of the common people (此百姓之大情也) (32:1).

### (3) Desire, Preference, and Intention

Probably influenced by early Han Daoists and Liu Xiang, Guo Xiang also took *qing* to refer to obsessive feelings, uncontrolled desires, individual preferences, favors, or intentions.<sup>238</sup> Evidence is available, for example in such passages as: one has the intention to become the sage and the worthies, but cannot obtain it (有情於爲聖賢而弗能也) (5:7); the feelings of favor and disfavor (夫好惡之情) (5:7); the turbulences caused by desires (情欲之所蕩) (8:3).

### (4) Judgment, Opinion, and Discrimination

Guo Xiang also took *qing* to refer to judgment, opinion, and discrimination resulting from the limited knowledge or the arrogance of human beings. To cite some examples: because people are bound to their own perspectives, [no one can be impartial] (由彼我之情偏) (2:10); without discrimination one is definitely impartial (無情至平) (5:4); right and wrong is what is meant by *qing* (以是非爲情) (5:2).

Relating the above classification of *qing* to the concept of *xingfen*, it is clear that *qing* belonging to groups (1) and (2) falls within the limits of nature, and is in harmony with nature, while *qing* belonging to groups (3) and (4) transgresses the limits, and should be purged.

---

<sup>238</sup> Guo Xiang says,  
Human beings are born tranquil; this is their nature. They move in response to things; this is the desiring of nature. Things come to distract human beings relentlessly, and human beings indulge in desires without control. This will distinguish Heavenly principle.

人生而靜，天之性也。感物而動，性之欲也。物之感人無窮，人之逐欲無節，則天理滅矣。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 29.

### 3.2.4. Self-knowledge: consciousness of *xingfen*

A Chinese saying goes, “a content man is always happy 知足常樂.” Though many people today *acknowledge* the wisdom connoted in the saying, they feel hard to *live* a life like that. Although they may realize that they are never satisfied in chasing after vainglory and success, they feel that in a fiercely competitive world, they have to forge ahead. Guo Xiang’s resolution is simple: each person has his or her limits, so they should just stay within their limits and be comfortable with them. But, the question is do the common people have any idea of *xingfen*? Do they know where their limits lie? Apparently, the situation is not optimistic; there is a sense of urgency in Guo Xiang’s commentary in emphasizing the need for such self-knowledge.<sup>239</sup>

This mode of self-knowledge, in my understanding, is a consciousness of *xingfen*. In other words, it is an affirmation of who one is and the limits of one’s nature. Having this mode of self-knowledge, one devotes oneself to what one is good at, improves one’s capacity through practice and attains a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from within.

This self-knowledge is free of thought and theory, and one can develop it from one’s life experience and comprehension of the *Dao*. That is, one gradually develops a consciousness based on what one has experienced in life happily, sadly, angrily, and bitterly, etc. In the early stage of development, it may not be called a consciousness but only some vague sense as to what one can and cannot do. With the accumulation of experience, some of which may be the repetition of some

---

<sup>239</sup> A Chinese idiom perfect for the English word self-knowledge is 自知之明 *zizhi zhiming*, meaning that know one’s limitation, have a clear estimation of oneself, or know one’s strengths and weaknesses. The etymology of 自知之明 is not the concern here. Although the Chinese idiom does not occur in Guo Xiang’s commentary, the idea of developing the wisdom of knowing oneself is evident in it.

especially happy or sad experiences in the past, what was a dim awareness becomes a clear consciousness of one's limits.

One usually gets a sense of limits by noticing the difference between oneself and others in physical capacity. To take an example from Guo Xiang's commentary, the *peng* bird has huge wings and can fly about ninety thousand miles; a small bird can only fly to the branches of a normal tree. The small bird may admire the *peng* and try to fly as high as it does. But its effort ends in failure. The repetition of this failure makes the small bird finally realize that it can never fly as high as a *peng*, for it does not have the huge wings.

To take an example today, many jobs or positions require specific physical features. One must be tall and strong to be a professional basketball player, and one must have a special figure meeting very strict standards to be a ballet dancer. So, if you are not gifted with such physical attributes, you have no promise to become a successful basketball player or a ballet dancer.

The difference in intellectual capacity is not difficult to be discerned either. To be a professor in university, one must hold a doctoral degree. A worker, who receives only elementary education, knows the gap between him and a professor. To take an example from Guo Xiang's commentary, the worthies are unable to be identical with the *Dao* and unable to implement the policy of non-action as the sage does, so they become the ministers while the sage ascends the throne.

However, the fact is that not everyone accepts one's limits *happily* and then, as Guo Xiang hopes, does not admire others and just concentrates on what one can do and does. The small bird may come away from the comparison with a passive resignation that it is just not good enough. There is no contentment involved. A farmer may persist in trying to become a minister. The difference he



recognizes between him and a professor may actually motivate him to learn. The questions that arise are: how can one get an affirmative knowledge of oneself, how can a determined person know where his or her limits lie, and if a worker, for example, is intelligent and persists in trying to become a minister, does he transgress his limits?

The recognition of one's difference from others does not necessarily yield self-knowledge. This is why Daoist wisdom is necessary. Daoist wisdom is broad, including comprehending the principle of ceaseless transformation and that of naturalness, to which I will return later. Now suffice it to say that Daoist wisdom also involves understanding the root cause of one's unhappiness, which is desire. Guo Xiang employed the Chinese character *zhi* 志, which translates as will or determination, to convey this idea. People are distracted by external things and determined to obtain them. Strong will or determination to do something results in the transgression of one's limits.<sup>240</sup> Guo Xiang sighed, how sad that people are bound (*lei* 累) by external things.<sup>241</sup> Desire can never be satisfied, for it grows incessantly. When a man earns ten thousand dollars, he begins to think of earning fifty thousand; when earning fifty thousand, he wants to become a millionaire. Following his insatiable desires, the man loses sight of the limits of his nature. Worse, desire makes people dependent on external things. Their joy and sorrow rely completely on the gain and loss of external things. This is counter to Guo Xiang's understanding of human beings as independent and free.

---

<sup>240</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 9.

<sup>241</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4.

Daoist wisdom also involves a positive affirmation of who one is and the limits of one's nature. One's life span<sup>242</sup> and one's physical energy are limited, which indicates that one cannot be perfect in every way. One may find from past experience that one accomplished certain work easily, but failed to complete others even with tremendous effort. This makes one realize one's own strengths and weaknesses. Ideally, this realization does not evoke a negative feeling in people. To take the example of the *peng* and the small bird, in comparison with the former, the small bird not only knows its own limits, but also gets a sense of the *peng*'s limits. Despite that the *peng* flies amazingly high, it relies on the wind to take off and the lake to perch due to its large shape. Without these conditions, the *peng* is unable to fly. Although the small bird can only fly to the branches of a normal tree, it can start and stop flying flexibly. Now the small bird has a clear knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. Also it gets to know that every other has its limits. With this knowledge, the small bird is neither ashamed of flying low nor conceited on account of its agility.

A positive affirmation of who one is also gives one a sense of self-sufficiency. Knowing his strengths and weaknesses, a man devotes himself to perfecting what he can do. His capacity improves gradually through continued practice. He feels a sense of self-satisfaction through fully utilizing his capacity. Meanwhile, he does not envy other work that he is not good at. He does not seek

---

<sup>242</sup> By the time of Guo Xiang, religious Daoism was well established. There was an attempt to attain immortality by means of religious Daoist cultivation. Many Wei-Jin intellectuals tried to lengthen their life spans by taking certain medicinal substances, controlling the inhalation and exhalation of *qi*, and eating special food. This indicates that people at that time realized the limitation of life span. However, few people would naïvely expect an evergreen life by means of nourishing life. As Guo Xiang clearly stated, to nourish life is not to attain an excessively long life, it is to live one's full span in accordance to the *Dao* (養生非求過分，蓋全理盡年而已矣。Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 17.) This suggests that to nourish life is primarily to live one's allotted span, given that many people indulged in desires and died much younger than they were expected, and then to extend one's allotted span to a certain extent.

any horizontal moves from his current position to those of others. Consequently, there is no way unhappiness would result.

Now turning to the question: if one persists in trying to become like others, does one transgress one's limits in Guo Xiang's view? For example, what if a farmer having the talent wants to become a minister? The farmer does not have a chance to go to school, but he likes to learn and has the intellectual capacity. Should he be content with his life as a farmer or should he pursue his "dream" of becoming a minister? This is related to the contrast between what is "natural" and what is "social" mentioned earlier, to the point that what one can do is not necessarily what one does actually. I think to this insistent farmer, Guo Xiang's response would be negative.

As a matter of fact, social hierarchy was not strictly observed during the turbulent Wei-Jin period. A capable man in a lower position could take a number of opportunities to realize his capacity. Cao Cao declared to recruit capable people regardless of their family background and moral cultivation. If a person from a poor family was intelligent and well versed in clarifying names and analyzing principles (*bianming xili* 辨名析理), he would receive a warm welcome from the intellectual circle normally consisting of the descendants of noble families and became a member of that circle, and would be recommended to certain administrative position. Given this context, if a farmer thinks that he is intelligent and should assume the duty of a minister, but he actually does farming, this, according to Guo Xiang, simply suggests that his current life has its basis in his nature.

It is also possible that one's current life is completely due to his misfortune. An excellent university student in law school has the promise to become a

successful politician. But he has to leave off his study because of a family financial crisis and begins to do farming work. Should this former student be content with his current life or should he pursue his dream of becoming a minister?

As mentioned earlier, what one can do is not necessarily what one does actually. Guo Xiang had to make an account of this discrepancy. The key is the notion of *yu* (遇). One comes across the character *yu* frequently when reading Guo Xiang's writings. In most passages *yu* means what one meets with throughout one's life. The meaning is neutral in that whatever happens to one by chance may be either good or bad. In other cases, as opposed to the term *buyu* (不遇), *yu* means that one's capacity is recognized by the ruler or the superior officers and one is assigned to a suitable position. Whenever Guo Xiang discussed the issue of *yu*, he employed the adjectives like *an* (be comfortable with 安), *jing* (calm 靜) and *zu* (be satisfied with 足) to qualify *yu*. In other words, he suggested that people should feel at ease with whatever happens to them, good or bad.<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> To take some instances from Guo Xiang, he says,

The cook and the men attending to the sacrificial utensils felt at ease with what they were assigned to; birds, beasts and all other things were all satisfied with what they had received; both Yao and Xu You stayed calm with what they had met. This is the most valuable under heaven.

庖人屍祝各安其所司，鳥獸萬物各足於所受，帝堯許由各靜其所遇，此乃天下之至寶也。

The sage always felt at ease with what he met, and he was open-minded and would not adhere to certain things.

所遇即安，豁然無滯。

One will not feel unsatisfied with whatever one meets.

當所遇無不足也。

People feel comfortable and sufficient with whatever they meet.

當其所遇，無不自得。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 5, 32, 14, 34.

The notion of *yu* (遇) is closely related with that of transformation (*hua* 化). Everything is in ceaseless transformation. A man is unlucky today, but tomorrow something fortunate may happen to him. You feel happy with what you have achieved now, but you do not know that you may lose it in near future. Currently Jack is a farmer, but who knows that one day he may become a minister, if he has the capacity! Conversely, it is also possible that a current minister becomes a farmer one day. A person is sad for the death of his beloved, but actually death is simply the dispersal of *qi* constituting his beloved. What one meets with at any given time, either good or bad, is simply temporary; there is no need to be fixated on them. A smart person will accept what he is given, feeling neither joy nor sorrow (故任其所受，而哀樂無所錯其間矣).<sup>244</sup>

The notion of *yu* (遇) implies the unpredictability of one's life in a continuously transforming world, which accounts for the discrepancy between what one can do and what one does actually. It also implies the human being's dependence on the external world, or the latter's impact on the former. Later we will see how Guo Xiang tried to eliminate this impact and to save human beings from bondage to any external things. Now another important point needs to be noted. To emphasize the inevitability of change in the universe and in one's life, Guo Xiang would go so far as to suggest that what happens to one is already pre-determined. At this point, he directly used the character *ming* (fate or decree 命), which introduces an element of fatalism.

---

<sup>244</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 18.

Transformation is just what is meant by *ming*<sup>245</sup> in that nobody can resist change. People may welcome change or reject it, but no matter what their attitudes are, change continues. *Yu* (遇) reflects a kind of transformation. One undergoes various situations throughout one's lifespan. One may be unable to predict what one will meet with in the either distant or near future, but what one will meet with is destined to happen.<sup>246</sup>

Both transformation and what one meets with are self-so, i.e., *ziran*. As argued in the first part of this chapter, transformation is self-transformation in that no external agent or power accounts for it. Things change naturally; what a person meets with at any given time and in any given place is simply a temporary result of one moment of change. So what one meets with is also self-so.<sup>247</sup> To things

---

<sup>245</sup> To quote a piece of passage from Guo Xiang,  
To take transformation as fate, one will not run counter to it.  
以化爲命，而無乖忤。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 24.

<sup>246</sup> For example, Guo Xiang says,  
Although heaven and earth are vast and the myriad things are multiple, what I have met is appropriately so. Even the divinities of heaven and earth, the sages and worthies of the state, and the ultimately knowledgeable cannot make it so. Therefore, for what one does not meet with, one cannot meet; for what one meets with, one cannot but meet.... Therefore, one takes everything to be naturally proper.

天地雖大，萬物雖多，然吾之所遇適在於是，則雖天地神明國家聖賢絕力至知而弗能爲也。故凡所不遇，弗能遇也；其所遇，弗能不遇也。……故付之而自當矣。

A completely capable person just follows what he meets with.  
才全者，隨所遇而任之。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 27, 27.

<sup>247</sup> Evidence from Guo Xiang's commentary reads,  
Order or disorder, success or failure, and to be valued or not, all these are not made but naturally so.

治亂成敗，遇與不遇，非人爲也，皆自然耳。

Each person has his or her experience. But they do not realize that this is naturally so by his or her fate.

各有所遇，而不知命之自爾。

endowed with the most valuable asset of being self-so, what people can do is simply to accept and follow them.

Now it is clear why Guo Xiang emphasized that one should feel at ease with whatever one meets. First, as things are in ceaseless transformation, what one meets with is only temporary. Therefore there is no point in shedding laughter or tears over them. Second, what one meets with, which represents a kind of transformation, is naturalness. Naturalness takes on the highest value and equates with the decree of heaven or fate. People should accept and follow naturalness, with neither superficial intentions nor artificial feelings.<sup>248</sup>

Guo Xiang's argument reflects his deep concern of freeing people from unhappiness, which, according to him, results from their feelings and desires for external things. As shown in the previous chapters, it is a popular notion in the Han-Wei period that feelings generate from one's contact with things. Obsessive feeling names desire. Like Wang Bi, Xi Kang and other Wei-Jin philosophers, Guo Xiang is cautious with feeling, for feeling is prone to degenerate into desire, and makes people bound by external things. When one desires something, one is desperate to obtain it. Once obtaining the thing, one is afraid of losing it. When losing it, one is heart-broken. Desire causes one anxiety and bitterness. It also

---

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 29, 25.

<sup>248</sup> A passage from Guo Xiang makes this point clear. He says, Knowing fate means that one remains tranquil even if one knows that one cannot do anything with certain situation. Then one feels neither happy nor sad. It is simply easy to be not disturbed by external things. So one just takes what one meets with as one's fate unconsciously, and does not concern oneself with what one meets; one becomes at one with the ultimate properness, neither joy nor sorrow is involved.

知不可奈何者命也，而安之，則無哀無樂，何易施之有哉。故冥然以所遇為命，而不施心於其間；泯然與至當為一，而無休戚於其中。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 21.

makes people dependent on external things, which is obviously counter to Guo Xiang's understanding of the freedom of human beings.

Consequently, to be free and happy is to remove one's desires for external things.<sup>249</sup> To put it in Guo Xiang's terms, a free person is one who is not dependent on (*wudai* 無待), not bound by (*wuxi* 無系), or does not fasten to (*wuzhi* 無執) external things. He just accepts whatever happens to him and does whatever allotted to him spontaneously, i.e., without any desire, determination, or purpose. Just as the example of the *peng* indicates, it flies high not because it admires the high and remote place but simply flaps its wings and flies high. All these happen naturally, and they are not achieved through painstaking efforts (非數數然求之也).<sup>250</sup> If one desires something and is determined to attain that thing, one runs counter to the principle of naturalness. As shown earlier, in Guo Xiang's view, if one tries to become benevolent and righteous *out of admiration*, one is already superficial.

In light of the above argument, it is clear that a farmer's insistence to become a minister is undesirable. To be a farmer is a person's *yu* (遇); he should feel at ease with what he meets with, as it is just self-so. But the current farmer is not happy with his position and is determined to become a minister. Harboring

---

<sup>249</sup> As Guo Xiang observed, Each person has his or her allotment, which cannot be altered by desire and admiration. Then one's bondage to desire and admiration can be removed. Unhappiness results from one's bondage; once bondage is removed, there is no way unhappiness engenders. Without unhappiness, everyone will feel comfortable with one's life.  
各有定分，非羨欲所及，則羨欲之累可以絕矣。夫悲生於累，累絕則悲去，悲去而性命不安者未之有也。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4.

<sup>250</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 3, 4.



strong desire and determination, he is doing something unnatural, which will cause him anxiety and frustration.

However, another point needs to be noted regarding the issue of desire. Guo Xiang encouraged people to make vertical change, i.e., to practice one's capacity and make progress with it. One may wonder whether desire or admiration is involved in this process. As the above example of *peng* indicates, the vertical move does not result from one's desire for external things. It is simply what comes out of naturalness. One simply utilizes one's capacity to do what one is good at. As one is good at it, one enjoys it. When one enjoys it, one does it more. The more one does, the more one practices one's capacity. The more skillful one becomes, the more enjoyable one feels with one's work. Evidently, this is a natural progression in that no desire, deliberation and purpose are involved. If some material reward is granted to the person in this progression, it is simply the by-product of a full utilization of his capacity.

In light of the above discussion, there may be another scenario for the farmer. The farmer focuses on his farming work and concentrates on comprehending Daoist wisdom. He gradually develops knowledge of the limits of his nature and attains a full comprehension of the *Dao*. Due to this comprehension, the farmer is able to do his work with extraordinary skill, in the same way as Cook Ding does. As situation always changes, he may be recommended to an administrative position for his competence. Since he always feels comfortable with the current work and concerns himself with comprehending the *Dao*, he does each work assigned to him successfully. At last he is promoted to a ministerial position. A farmer becomes a minister at last. But the most important point is that the whole process is not planned. Rather, it happens

naturally. Being a minister is simply a by-product of his fully utilizing his capacity.

Up to now I have shown how one can develop a self-knowledge from both one's life experience and comprehension of Daoist wisdom. Now the question is, can one's self-knowledge tell accurately where one's limits lie? My proposal is that self-knowledge is not a precise meter telling where one's limits lie. Rather, it is a comprehensive understanding of oneself, which is dependent on one's particularities, context, and other specific conditions. For example, in the context of Wei-Jin, when nourishing life was popular, how long should one hope to live? Having attained a consciousness of one's limits, one would base one's expectation on a comprehensive consideration of both genetic and environmental elements. For example, a man noticed that both his parents and relatives lived to the age of sixty to seventy, and the fellow people in his hometown had an average lifespan of sixty-three. In addition, given the progress in medical technology and the development of Daoist methods of nourishing life in his time, the man expected a lifespan of sixty-five to seventy-five years. He would not long for a life span of more than 100 years, which was obviously beyond his limits.

To summarize, self-knowledge is a consciousness of one's limits. It is attainable through one's life experience and comprehension of Daoist wisdom. As life experience does not necessarily translate into practical insights, Daoist wisdom is needed. Daoist wisdom involves understanding the root cause of one's unhappiness, which is desire. It also involves a positive affirmation of who one is and the limits of one's nature. Self-knowledge encompasses an acceptance of one's fate, i.e., what one meets with during one's life, which is seen as a kind of transformation and natural. One is encouraged to make progress with one's work

determined by not only one's capacity but also one's fate. So if one wants to shift to another social position, one transgresses one's limits of nature.

A related question is whether Guo Xiang is a fatalist. The answer depends on the sense in which the term "fatalist" is used. Specifically, the question can be approached from either a subjective or objective perspective. Here the distinction between "subjective" and "objective" lies in whether the evaluation is made by the person himself or by others, whether this evaluation depends on that person's inner mental or psychological state or whether it emphasizes the substantial changes in that person's material life.

From Guo Xiang's perspective, I am afraid that he would reject such a label. Each person has his/her natural limits, which is an undeniable fact. The most important thing is to develop a clear knowledge of one's limits. As a result, one will not waste one's time on what is beyond one's limits, but focus on what one is good at and makes achievements in that specific area, out of which a sense of self-satisfaction and equality arises. Clearly, in Guo Xiang's view, although one's limits are pre-determined, this does not give one an excuse for doing nothing. Even a slow horse, as Guo Xiang illustrated, when properly trained, can run at considerable speed and is of some use.<sup>251</sup> To recognize the limits does not necessarily lead to a fatalist worldview. The key is whether human effort is necessary and appreciated. Guo Xiang urged people to develop self-knowledge and encouraged them to practice their capacities and make progress with them. In this respect, Guo Xiang cannot be said to be a fatalist.

Also in sharp contrast with a fatalist worldview, which always involves a negative feeling of one's life and a passive retreat from society, Guo Xiang's view

---

<sup>251</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 41.

of self-knowledge is a positive affirmation of who one is. It is impressive that people, who develop a clear knowledge of their respective limits, are active and happy in Guo Xiang's portrait. As will show later in the next part, attaining self-knowledge, a person retains his/her individuality and feels self-sufficient and equal with every other. From this perspective, it is also hard to consider Guo Xiang to be a fatalist.

However, looking at the question from an objective perspective, it is easy to discern the fatalistic feature of Guo Xiang's view. The notion of *yu* (遇) indicates human beings' dependence on the external environment. Whatever a person meets with during his life are always self-so, so he should feel comfortable with them. Guo Xiang's argument implies that people actually cannot do anything substantive to change the external environment or to reduce its impact on them. What they can do only is to change themselves, or more precisely, change their worldview or mindset. As a result of this change, they accept whatever happens to them as their fate calmly.

Actually, in proposing that change is possible, Guo Xiang seems not to be a fatalist. Things always change, and what one meets with changes too. A person is a farmer this year, but this does not necessarily mean that he remains a farmer in future years. He may turn out to be a minister, who knows. However, Guo Xiang went on to emphasize the inevitability of change. Change is naturalness; naturalness is endorsed with a self-evident value of necessity (*biranxing* 必然性). That is, what one meets with during one's life is out of one's control and it happens whether one likes it or not. One cannot do anything with what one meets with except accepting it. This gives a sense of fatalism to Guo Xiang's philosophy.

Evidently, an “either-or” answer is not applicable to the question of whether Guo Xiang is a fatalist. To summarize my discussion, if fatalism pertains to a subjective mental state, which typically involves a negative feeling in human beings, Guo Xiang obviously does not fall into that category. As shown before, by developing a self-knowledge of one’s limits and comprehending the *Dao*, one enjoys whatever one meets with and feels as equal and sufficient as anyone else. However, if fatalism points to the objective phenomenon that one cannot do anything proactively to change one’s life in a substantive way, then Guo Xiang, for the reasons mentioned above, can be labeled as a fatalist.

The question of fatalism is also related to the question of freedom. For my current argument, I narrow the application of the concept of freedom to personal life, leaving its socio-political aspects to another examination. Now whether Guo Xiang is a fatalist comes to be whether one has the freedom of changing one’s life, and to what extent that one can change one’s life. Guo Xiang indicated that a sense of freedom and happiness is not based on external conditions, for example, fame and material achievements, but on one’s inner mindset. If freedom is understood as related to external things, i.e., the more one has, the freer one is, then even Liezi, as Guo Xiang observed, who can fly like the wind, cannot be said to be free, for he is still dependent on the wind to fly.<sup>252</sup> If freedom is understood as an attitude of self-sufficiency, a small bird can be said to be free, even if it can only fly from one branch of a normal tree to another. A millionaire would be unhappy that he could not live a life as luxurious as a billionaire whilst a blue collar worker may enjoy his life. If one relies heavily on external things, one will be engrossed in pursuing them and then become a slave of one’s insatiable desires

---

<sup>252</sup> Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4-5.

for external things. However, one can be the master of one's life, if one develops knowledge of one's limits and utilizes one's capacity, which forms the inexhaustible resource of one's happiness and freedom. This is probably the point of Guo Xiang's understanding of freedom. Materially conditioned freedom is actually a bond; a free mindset entails ultimate freedom, i.e., a freedom based on a clear knowledge of one's limits.

Brook Ziporyn proposes that Guo Xiang is definitely not a fatalist. However, I find that his argument is not fully convincing. According to him, when Guo Xiang discussed the fixity of nature, he actually meant that one's nature cannot be changed, not that it cannot change.<sup>253</sup> It is noteworthy that Ziporyn understands the change of nature as a change in kind. To use his terminology, one's "determinacy" is always changing into a new determinacy.<sup>254</sup> However, as pointed out before, Guo Xiang used the character *xi* 習 rather *xue* 學 to stress that capacity-encompassing nature should be practiced or followed. *Xue* 學 means to learn something new purposively, while *xi* 習 means to practice, to follow, or to go over what one has originally. The continued practice may improve one's capacity, but cannot change it into another one. Obviously, if nature is changeable, it changes in degree and not in kind.

In Ziporyn's interpretation, nature is changeable also because things are always vanishing into another thing (*yu wu ming* 與物冥). *Ming* 冥, according to Ziporyn, means to become into, to change into (another thing).<sup>255</sup> However, I

---

<sup>253</sup> Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*, 144.

<sup>254</sup> Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*, 144.

<sup>255</sup> Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*, 65-83

would understand *ming* 冥 as a subjective mindset or psychological state rather than an objective activity. I will return to this point shortly.

Guo Xiang stressed the distinction between *xingfen zhi nei* (what within the limits of nature) and *xingfen zhi wai* (what outside of the limits). He drew a clear line between one thing and another. Actually, in Guo Xiang's view, an ideal society is where each individual retains his or her distinctiveness and feels content with who he or she is. It is absolutely undesirable that one envies or admires others, and needless to say, wants to change to become like another.

Of utmost importance, the character *ming* 冥 does not refer to an activity but a mental state. *Ming* 冥 literally means dark and obscure, from which derives the meaning of being indistinguishable or equality in the Daoist context. As shown in chapter 1, Dong Zhongshu used *ming* 冥 to suggest that the common people need to be educated. In contrast, in the Daoist context *ming* 冥 was esteemed as an ideal state of human beings: having no knowledge of the distinctions, for example, between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and superior and inferior, and thus making no judgments and comparisons. In Guo Xiang's writings, there is another character *qi* 齊 conveying a meaning similar to that of *ming* 冥. The term *qiwu* (literally meaning to equalize things 齊物) may shed light on the implication of the phrase *yu wu ming* 與物冥. Obviously, when Zhuang Zhou and Guo Xiang used the term of *qiwu* 齊物, they did not mean that people are actually *able* to eliminate the physical differences among things and as a result all things turn out to be identical. Rather, it is more plausible to interpret the term in a way suggesting that people treat the myriad things equally, *as if* there is no difference among them. Similarly, *yu wu ming* 與物冥 does not mean vanishing

(changing) into things. Rather, it refers to a mental state that one does not realize any distinction between oneself and any other thing, as if they are alike.<sup>256</sup> To use Guo Xiang's words, a person attaining this mental state is one who forgets oneself (*ziwang* 自忘 or *wangwo* 忘我) or show no intention or partiality (*wuxin* 無心). But meanwhile, he still remains who he is and is distinct from others substantively.<sup>257</sup> By realizing the self-sufficiency of one's nature and seeing no difference between oneself and others, one is in perfect harmony with others and finds no need to become like others.

### 3.3. The Sociopolitical Implications of Guo Xiang's View of Human Nature

In general, the various theories of human nature in the history of Chinese philosophy serve as the base of various sociopolitical policies. For example, if the view that human nature is good is widely accepted, the government would attach more emphasis on virtue and establish institutions to encourage moral cultivation.

---

<sup>256</sup> For example, it is said in Guo Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, Forgetting the distinction between others and me, and equalizing the differences among the myriad things.  
遺彼忘我，冥此群異。

Therefore one will follow one's nature straightly and make oneself indistinguishable from whatever one meets with.  
故將任性直通，無往不冥。

Inward, one's mind and spirit run randomly; outward, one's ears and eyes are exhausted and lost in external things. This is because one locates oneself in some inappropriate place and fails to merge with things. If one does not merge oneself with things, how is it possible for one to stay in step with all the changes of the human world?  
心神賓士於內，耳目竭喪於外，處身不適而與物不冥矣。不冥矣而能合乎人間之變應乎？

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4, 10, 20, 20; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

<sup>257</sup> As Guo Xiang observes,  
As for a person who merges with things, although he undergoes the most drastic changes, he will never fail to be himself.  
與物冥者，雖涉至變，而未始非我。

Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 13; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.



If the view that human nature is evil is accepted, the government would seek to formulate legal and moral norms to place constraints on people. If human nature is *ziran*, i.e., in natural order, no artificial policy but that of non-action would be implemented, as both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang maintained. There is a close connection between a thinker's view of human nature and his view of sociopolitical issues. As one will see below, Guo Xiang is no exception.

In this part I explore the sociopolitical implications of Guo Xiang's view of human nature. I first portray the ideal society founded on that everyone has developed self-knowledge. It is an equal and stable society where each individual person is self-sufficient. This makes the policy of non-action possible. Then I address some questions related to non-action. Does non-action refer to a set of behavioral rules or a kind of mindset? Is Guo Xiang an anarchist?

### **3.3.1 The ideal society based on self-knowledge**

Following the previous parts, let us see what a society will be like if each person in it has attained self-knowledge. I try to piece together a picture of it with evidences gathered from Guo Xiang's writings. It is an ideal society where the distinctiveness of each person is respected; each person feels self-sufficient and equal with others in that he/she obtains a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from fully utilizing his/her nature; because of this sense of self-satisfaction and equality, the society enjoys stability and peace.

#### **(1) Individuality**

Modern scholars often employ the concepts of individuality and commonality to characterize the Daoist and Confucian understanding of human

nature respectively.<sup>258</sup> According to them, in conceiving human nature as moral assets, Confucianism is overwhelmingly concerned with the commonality of nature. On the other hand, exploring human nature from a naturalist perspective, Daoism emphasizes the individuality of nature. There is some truth to this characterization, but it still needs careful reexamination.

As key concepts in Chinese philosophy normally have various connotations, it would be safer to interpret them from within their context than to make a generalization of them. It should also be clear which connotation(s) is (are) highlighted. For example, the concept of the *Dao* is equally significant to both Confucians and Daoists. But the former approach the *Dao* from a moral perspective, whereas in sharp contrast, the latter emphasize the *Dao* to be completely devoid of any moral meaning. In view of this, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of the core term “*ziran* (自然)” in various Daoist texts. As argued previously, *ziran* in the *Laozi* and Wang Bi’s commentary on it primarily refers to the *Dao*, the metaphysical reality and a principle of generation. In the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* likely composed by Zhuang Zhou himself, besides a principle of transformation, *ziran* also refers to the mind of the person who has comprehended Daoist wisdom.<sup>259</sup> In the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, *ziran* refers to the natural assets of human beings, such as life, physical

---

<sup>258</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 1-8; Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanyun: on Nature* 中國哲學原論[原性篇], 2; Zhuang Yaolang 莊耀郎, *Guo Xiang xuanxue* 郭象玄學, 109-110.

<sup>259</sup> In chapter 7 of the *Zhuangzi* (*In Response to Kings* 應帝王), when asked the way of managing the state, Wu Ming (a person without name) replied that there is no need to manage the state. One should with one’s heart roam in the realm of the flavorless, merge one’s *qi* with the dark and dim, and abide by naturalness (*ziran*) where there is no room for self-interest or partiality. If the ruler can achieve this, the state will be in order (遊心於淡，合氣于漠，自然而無容私焉，而天下治矣). The text of this passage can be found in Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, p. 36. For similar descriptions or stories of the mental state of the Daoist sage, *ibid*, p.5 and p.38.

features, and capacity. Some scholars interpret Daoism from a naturalistic perspective.<sup>260</sup> However, this interpretation is only applicable to the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, in that the term “naturalist” and “naturalism” in its English context primarily points to a biological perspective. Laozi and Zhuangzi were more interested in the metaphysical dimension and the spiritual sphere of *ziran*. In light of this, it is clear that a “naturalistic” approach misses some fundamental points of Daoist philosophy.

Second, it is an overgeneralization that Daoism concentrates entirely on the individuality of nature. Laozi is evidence that the opposite is the case, as shown in chapter 1. Wang Bi followed Laozi in this respect, though basically I would categorize him as neither Daoist nor Confucian. As argued in chapter 2, Wang Bi was primarily concerned with nature<sup>Dao</sup>, the share of the *Dao* in human beings. By this share all people are alike.

Turning to Guo Xiang, however, all evidence shows that he was concerned with the individuality of human nature. His theory of self-transformation denies completely an absolute origin, to which all things can be traced. Guo Xiang said, “Each thing has its own nature, the nature of each thing has its own limits (*wu ge you xing* 物各有性, *xing ge you ji* 性各有極).”<sup>261</sup> The character *ge* 各 in its Chinese context is an adverb and may translate as “individually”, “uniquely” or “respectively”. In a great many cases Guo Xiang used 各 to qualify the concept of nature, indicating his emphasis on the uniqueness of each thing.

---

<sup>260</sup> Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖, *Wei Jin de ziran zhuyi* 魏晉的自然主義, Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 臺北:商務印書館, 1970.

<sup>261</sup> Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 4; Yu-lan Fung, *Chuang-tzu: A New Selected Translation with An Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*, 30.

The concept of *xingfen* also reflects the differences of human beings. It draws a line between what one is and is not. One developing a consciousness of one's limits knows that each thing has its own limits. As a result, ideally, each person's distinctiveness is recognized and shown respect.

Guo Xiang's view of non-action may be understood in light of the individuality of human beings. People are different, so it is hard to find an administrative policy applicable to all of them. A policy effective in one community may turn out to be futile in another. Consequently, the smartest strategy is not to make any policy, and let things follow their own courses as determined by their natures.

The individuality of human beings alone is not enough to account for the policy of non-action. Most important, Guo Xiang believed that things would develop properly without any external force.

## (2) Self-sufficiency

Confucianism explains human nature as moral potential, and Daoism of the *Laozi* interprets it as tranquility and emptiness. Despite the disagreement in explanation, both show a confidence in the human being and his nature. For example, Mencius maintained that the common people can become like Yao and Shun; Laozi claimed that people will live a free and peaceful life if they return to their authentic nature. However, some modern Confucian scholars propose that Confucianism shows more respect than Daoism for the dignity of the human being, for it values highly the moral potential of the human being.<sup>262</sup> This proposal has

---

<sup>262</sup> Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 1-8; Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuannun: on Nature*, 中國哲學原論(原性篇), 2; Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *History of the Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature: the pre-Qin Period* 中國人性論史(先秦篇), 161-199.

gained generous support. But I would like to propose a different understanding of this issue.

Both Confucians and Daoists aimed at harmony among the people and harmony between people and their environment, but they diverge with respect to the method of achieving that harmony. Confucians made effort to strengthen the rites, as an attempt to build up a good environment for nourishing the moral seeds in human beings. In contrast, Daoists tried to strip away the rites imposed on human beings as much as possible to uncover the original simplicity of the human being. This contrast indicates two subtly different attitudes towards human nature. Confucians might suspect whether a person could become good in the end without external aid, for moral nature is only a potential and may not reach fruition. So they placed tremendous emphasis on rites, which, hopefully, would be an effective method to help people develop their moral potential. In contrast, Daoists showed strong confidence in human nature. They based the order of the world on human nature. Once the rites that distort the true nature of the human being were washed off, they believed, everyone will rediscover his or her true nature and natural harmony will be restored.

Guo Xiang is optimistic about the original nature of the human being. He says,

If one contrasts things on the basis of physical form, then Mount Tai is larger than an autumn hair. If each thing accord to the limits of its nature, and fulfils its limits, then things with larger forms are not superabundant while things with small forms are not insufficient. If each thing is comfortable with its nature, then an autumn hair will not find even its small size small, and Mount Tai

will not find even its large size large.... Without any sense of large and small, without longevity and dying young, thus a cicada will not covet the Great Cedrela but enjoy self-fulfillment, and a quail will not think highly of Heaven's pool but enjoy self-sufficiency. If one feels comfortable with what one has naturally and enjoys one's life, even Heaven and Earth cannot be said to live long, but are formed at the same time as me; even the myriad things cannot be said to be different, but achieve self-fulfillment the same as me.

夫以形相對，則泰山大於秋毫也。若各據其性分，物冥其極，則形大未為有餘，形小不為不足。苟各足於其性，則秋毫不獨小其小，而大泰不獨大其大矣。...無小無大，無壽無夭，是以螻蛄不羨大椿，而欣然自得；斥鷃不貴天池，而榮願已足。苟足於天然，而安其性命，故雖天地未足為壽，而與我並生；萬物未足為異，而與我同得。<sup>263</sup>

It is clear from the above passage that each thing is self-sufficient. One can live a proper life decided by one's nature without any external help. One's self-sufficiency comes from a full utilization of one's nature. One is happy with who one is and will not be disturbed by who one is not. Consequently, each person is tranquil and happy. The self-sufficiency of people is of great significance, as it gives people not only a sense of self-satisfaction but also a sense of equality.

### **(3) Equality**

---

<sup>263</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 11; Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*. Translation altered.

In the *Zhuangzi*, to make distinctions between, for example, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, good and bad,<sup>264</sup> is a futile and meaningless effort. There is no absolutely impartial criterion to assess things;<sup>265</sup> thus people have to treat things equally.

Guo Xiang, however, offered a different interpretation of equality. That is, in view that each person fully utilizes his or her nature, enjoys his or her life, and sees no difference from others, all persons are equal. Guo Xiang says,

The big bird flies away each time for half a year, and perches at Heaven's pool; the small bird flies half a day, and dashes against an elm and stops. Comparing their capacities, they are different; enjoying their natures, they are alike.

夫大鳥一去半歲，至天池而息。小鳥一飛半朝，搶榆枋而止。

此比所能則有間矣，其於適性一也。<sup>266</sup>

Both Zhuangzi and Guo Xiang tried to abolish evaluative judgment. But there is difference between them. For Zhuangzi, since nobody is able to claim truth for his or her knowledge, things including human beings have to be treated equally. According to Guo Xiang, however, the self-sufficiency of nature accounts for equality. People are equal primarily because they utilize their nature and enjoy their lives equally. The differences in physical features and other

---

<sup>264</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 13.

<sup>265</sup> Zhuang Zhou demonstrated how absurd it is to apply the value-laden terms to things and people. For example, now A argues with B, and third party C acts as the referee. If C appreciates A's position, he cannot be just to B. If C agrees with B, he cannot maintain impartial to A. If C disagrees with both A and B, his judgment on them will be irrelevant. If C agrees with both A and B, there would be no need C as referee. Consequently, the question whether A or B is right remains unsolved, for it is impossible to find a relevant yet impartial referee

<sup>266</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 3; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

aspects do not evoke either arrogance or negative feeling in them. Their sense of self-satisfaction makes them *feel* equal with others. As Guo Xiang made it clear,

A crossbeam is horizontal and a pillar is vertical; Li is ugly and Xi Shi is pretty. Equality does not necessarily mean that things must have similar forms and similar measures. This is why the horizontal and the vertical, the pretty and the ugly, the lenient and the amazingly facile, the weird and the pernicious are cited. If things are “so” as what they ought to be “so”, are “suitable” as what they are suitable for, despite their various forms, all of them equally fulfill their nature.

夫莛橫而楹縱，厲醜而西施好。所謂齊者，豈必齊形狀同規矩哉。故舉縱橫好醜，恢詭譎怪。各然其所然，各可其所可，則形雖萬殊，而性同得。<sup>267</sup>

Some scholars propose that Learning of the Profound in the Wei-Jin period contributes an inegalitarian view of human nature,<sup>268</sup> in comparison with a general notion that Confucianism represents an egalitarian view of human nature, as it concentrates on the moral potential common to all and gives each one the promise of becoming a sage. However, this interpretation may not be applicable neither to Wang Bi, given his primary concern with the differentiation of the *Dao* in all human beings, nor Guo Xiang. Guo Xiang’s view that things are equal is based on his view that each individual thing is different from another. In other words, when Guo Xiang proposed the idea of equality, he had already taken

---

<sup>267</sup> Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 10; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

<sup>268</sup> Zongsan 牟宗三, *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理, 1-8.



diversity into consideration. This is clearly different from Mencius, whose notion of equality derives directly and logically from his view of a moral nature shared by all people.

Guo Xiang started from the diversity of the phenomenal world, followed the idea of the self-sufficiency of nature, and arrived at the idea of equality.

#### **(4) Stability**

A person, who develops a sense of self-satisfaction and equality by fully utilizing his or her nature, will not admire or covet others. Since each person feels as “good” as all others, there will be no cause for social instability. Guo Xiang says,

Whosoever fulfills his true nature and functions in terms of spontaneous action, even though he is a slave, will be indifferent to all denigration and praise and remain content with his own lot. Therefore, whether this person knows this or not, either way he will remain completely at ease. However, if the way of hoping favor is introduced, the inferior usurps the superior, things lose authenticity and people forget their original nature, then surrounded by denigration and praise, people will not know how to conduct themselves.

凡得真性用其自爲者，雖復皂隸，猶不顧毀譽，而自安其業。  
故知與不知皆自若也。若乃開希幸之路，以下冒上，物喪其  
真，人忘其本，則毀譽之間，俯仰失錯也。<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 9; Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*. Translation altered.

Unlike Zhuangzi, who disparaged social institutions, Guo Xiang showed himself a conservative thinker in defending the existing social hierarchy. In his view, the existing social framework should be observed, as everyone's position in it is determined by one's nature and limits. Here, Guo Xiang faced the same problem as Confucians did: the discrepancy between "ideal" and "reality". Ideally, one's nature decides one's position. But actually one's position is not necessarily decided by one's nature. Guo Xiang produced an account of this discrepancy, which is the notion of *yu* (what one meets with 遇). The notion legitimates that one's current situation is simply natural and thus acceptable. Guo Xiang's conservative position in this respect may be understandable, if one takes into consideration the long period of turbulence in Wei-Jin times. Deeply concerned with the instability of society, he strongly criticized those who were dissatisfied with their current positions and sought change.

### 3.3.2. The possibility of non-action (*wuwei*)

Now let us see what Guo Xiang developed from his portrait of an equal and stable society where each individual person is self-sufficient. Since each one is able to live a happy life by oneself and the society is then in natural order, Guo Xiang strongly advocated the implementation of the policy of non-action.

#### (1) Non-action: a mindset of freedom and spontaneity

The concept of non-action is addressed both in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* at great length. There, non-action is primarily a complete denial of the Confucian method of governing. As Liu Xiaogan rightly points out, "non-action is a set of methodological principles contrary to consensus and conventions."<sup>270</sup> For

---

<sup>270</sup> Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, "Naturalness (*ziran*) and Non-action (*wuwei*): Their Ancient Meaning and Significance Today" 老子之自然與無為——古典意含與現代意義, in *Zhongguo wenzheyanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊, 10 (March 1997): 39.

example, non-action means not to esteem benevolence and righteousness and not to encourage people to become virtuous.

Wang Bi basically followed this approach in his interpretation of non-action. Furthermore, he traced non-action to Nonbeing, the ontological reality that engenders and sustains the universe. This provides the metaphysical basis for non-action.

Non-action, in Wang Bi's view, never refers to an absolutely static state, meaning to do nothing at all. Rather, it is a fundamental government principle that the ruler should observe. It involves pragmatic guidelines as to what the ruler should and should not do. In a positive sense non-action requires that the ruler follows (*yin* 因), yields to (*shun* 順), or accords with (*fa* 法) the nature of things. In a negative sense non-action refutes common knowledge and conventions, Confucian rites, in particular. For example, if a person would like others to know his accomplishment, normally he is supposed to advertise it. But the sage never claimed credit for himself and he attributed the success to the myriad things themselves. The common people value the strong and powerful, but the sage held on to the gentle and weak.

Although non-action, in Wang Bi's interpretation, is basically a governing principle, in some cases it also pertains to the ruler's mental state. For example, the ruler should do things with no partiality (*wusi* 無私), no preference (*wuqing* 無情), and no intention (*wuyi* 無意). To do things purposively or deliberately runs counter to non-action. Non-action also refers to the ruler's self-effacing modesty. He is neither aggressive nor assertive.

Though Guo Xiang followed the understanding of non-action as an administrative policy in some cases, most distinctively, he interpreted non-action

as referring to a mindset of freedom and spontaneity. Like Wang Bi, who aimed to uncover the ancient wisdom in the *Laozi*, Guo Xiang sought to reveal the insights underlying the *Zhuangzi*, which is, in his words, the way of “inner sageliness and outward kingliness (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王).<sup>271</sup> Evidently, Guo Xiang attempted to reconcile inner enlightenment, which is normally considered to be the ideal of Daoism, and worldly achievement, for example, the Confucian goal of social peace. If non-action is understood as a set of behavioral codes, it will be hard for a person to meet both Confucian and Daoist standards. Guo Xiang brought out his solution. Non-action pertains to a mindset of freedom and spontaneity. The person attaining this mindset can be said to be at one with the *Dao*.

Two quotations from Guo Xiang’s commentary are enough to make this point clear.

Non-action is not folding one’s arms and keeping silent; beyond the mundane does not mean that one lives in the mountains and forests in seclusion.

所謂無爲之業，非拱默而已；所謂塵垢之外，非伏于山林也。<sup>272</sup>

Although the sage might be found at the imperial court, his mind feels no different from what he feels in the midst of mountains and forests. How could ordinary people realize this? Merely seeing that the sage has a yellow carriage canopy over his head and has a jade seal hung at his belt, they conclude that this is enough to disturb his mind; seeing that the sage crosses the mountains and

---

<sup>271</sup> Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 1.

<sup>272</sup> Guo Xiang’s Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 34.

rivers and is engaged with mundane affairs as others, they assert that this is enough to wear out his spirit. How could they know that the ultimate person can never be exhausted?

夫聖人雖在廟堂之上，然其心無異于山林之中，世豈識之哉？  
徒見其戴黃屋，佩玉璽，便謂足以纓拔其心矣；見其曆山川，  
同民事，便謂足以憔悴其神矣，豈知至至者之不虧哉？<sup>273</sup>

Non-action does not point to the external behaviors of Daoists, for example, in retreating from society and living in seclusion, in contrast with the Confucian engagement with worldly affairs. To distinguish Daoists from Confucians in terms of external behavior is entirely misleading, for it directs one's attention to traces (*ji* 迹) rather than what leaves the traces (*suoyiji* 所以迹). Non-action refers to the mindset of a person, who has comprehended and is at one with the *Dao*. He understands the principle of self-transformation, follows whatever he meets with, and does whatever is assigned to him. He does not have any desire, plan, intention, or purpose. What is normally agreed to be either Daoist or Confucian behavior is simply what this person happens to do spontaneously in a given context, which forms his traces (*ji* 迹). His mindset is what leaves those traces (*suoyiji* 所以迹). In a sense, both Confucian and Daoist doctrines are only traces. It is meaningless to concern oneself with the distinction between the two, in particular, their different external behaviors. The key is to see whether a person has attained the mindset of non-action. If he does, even if he is busily engaged with mundane affairs, he remains *wuwei* (non-action). If he does not, even if he lives in the mountains as a recluse, he cannot be said to be *wuwei*.

---

<sup>273</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 5; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.

Worse, in the latter case, as the person tries to show his aloofness deliberately, he is actually, to use Guo Xiang's words, a member of the mundane world (*suzhong zhi yiwu* 俗中之一物).<sup>274</sup> Guo Xiang reconciled Confucianism with Daoism by his idea of non-action. A person can easily commute between the field of nature (*ziran* 自然) and that of the rites (*mingjiao* 名教), if he or she achieves the mindset of non-action.

## (2) Whether Guo Xiang is an anarchist

As one may notice, although a consciousness of the limits of nature makes possible the policy of non-action, it may also lead to anarchism. If each person focuses on his or her work and the giant machine of society works naturally and perfectly, in the same way as each organ functions well and the body is healthy, is it necessary to have a ruler? Is Guo Xiang an anarchist?<sup>275</sup>

Related discussions of the question of anarchism were found towards the end of the Han dynasty. Renowned Han thinkers, such as Zhongchang Tong 仲長統 (A.D. 180-220), called the legitimacy of the ruler and government into question.<sup>276</sup> They criticized the ruler and government as selfish and as causing suffering to the people. This critical view was inherited by some Wei-Jin thinkers, who clearly stated their anarchistic positions. For example, Ruan Ji 阮籍 claimed

---

<sup>274</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 5.

<sup>275</sup> On this problem I benefited from the research of the following scholars: Tang Yijie 湯一介, *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin xuanxue* 郭象與魏晉玄學, 168-170; Zhuang Yaolang 莊耀郎, *Guo Xiang xuanxue* 郭象玄學, 223-234; and Ames, Roger T, "Is Political Taoism Anarchism?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 10.1 (1983): 27-47.

<sup>276</sup> Zhong Changtong 仲長統, *Changyan* 昌言, in Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quanhouhan wen* 全後漢文, vol. 88: 949.

that without the ruler and officials the myriad things will be in order.<sup>277</sup> Bao Jingyan 鮑敬言 attacked the detrimental monarch and expressed his admiration for the anarchistic community in the remote past.<sup>278</sup> These suggest that anarchism gained considerable popularity during the Han-Wei period.

However, Guo Xiang did not subscribe to this view. Firstly, as my earlier argument indicates, he defended the existing social hierarchy. In his view, the social hierarchy is self-so and thus reasonable, for each person's place in it is determined by his/her nature and fate. As he put it, the ruler and the subject, the superior and the inferior, and relatives and strangers, all these are self-so by the principle of Heaven.<sup>279</sup> People should not disrupt this order but thrive in their allotted place in society.

Guo Xiang also clearly stated that a ruler is definitely necessary. He says, When thousands of people gather, without one person being the ruler the gathering either will be in disorder or will disperse. Therefore, though a nation may have many worthies, it cannot have many rulers; a nation may have no worthies, but it must have a ruler. This is the way of Heaven and human beings that must be followed.

千人聚，不以一人爲主，不亂則散。故多賢不可以多君，無賢不可以無君，此天人之道，必至之宜。<sup>280</sup>

---

<sup>277</sup> Chen Bojun 陳伯君, *Ruan Ji ji jiaozhu* 阮籍集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京:中華書局, 1987), 170. Donald Holzman, *Poetry and Politics, The Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D. 210-263* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 195-196.

<sup>278</sup> Ge Hong 葛洪, *Paopuzi* 抱樸子, vol. 4: 190-192.

<sup>279</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 9.

<sup>280</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 21.

A ruler is needed for implementing the policy of non-action. Since non-action does not equate with total inactivity, the question that arises is what is the role of the ruler? I take a passage from Guo Xiang to explain.

A worker employs non-purposeful action in cutting wood, and employs purposeful action in using his axe; a ruler employs non-purposeful action in dealing with state affairs himself, and employs purposeful action in appointing a minister. A minister deals with things and a ruler makes use of the minister; this is like an axe can be used to cut wood and a worker uses his axe. Each one utilizes one's capacity, which is naturally-so by the way of Heaven and is not deliberate. If a ruler does the job of a minister, he cannot be said to be a ruler; if a minister plays the role of a ruler, he cannot be said to be a minister. Each carries out his own duty, then both the superior and the inferior accomplish their task. Consequently, the principle of non-action is realized.

夫工人無爲于刻木而有爲於用斧，主上無爲於親事而有爲於用臣。臣能親事，主能用臣；斧能刻木而工能用斧；各當其能，則天理自然，非有爲也。若乃主代臣事，則非主矣；臣秉主用，則非臣矣。故各司其職，則上下鹹得而無爲之理至矣。<sup>281</sup>

It is clear from the above quotation that by non-action Guo Xiang means appropriate action, i.e., one performs one's duty as required by one's position. So far as the ruler is concerned, his duty is to appoint officials and to oversee the implementation of the policy of non-action. Thus the non-action of the ruler

---

<sup>281</sup> Guo Xiang's Commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 郭象<莊子>注, 57; cf. Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*.



should be understood in the sense that he does not take part in the routine work of daily government; rather, he is concerned with the more important matters such as the appointment of officials and formulating state policies that affect the well being of the nation as a whole.

I have examined Guo Xiang's view of human nature and its socio-political implications in this chapter. In summary, Guo Xiang rejected an ontological reality as the metaphysical reason for the existence of human beings. The nature of human beings forms naturally when human beings come into being. Guo Xiang inherited the insight of previous thinkers and arrived at a comprehensive view of human nature. He took human nature to refer to concrete human phenomena: life, physical features, capacity, and feeling, including the natural feelings of benevolence and righteousness. The nature of each human being has its limits; one should maintain within one's limits. The desire for things beyond one's limits is the root cause of one's bitterness. As such, the most important thing is to develop a consciousness of one's limits. It is a positive affirmation of who one is and a clear knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses, which can be achieved through one's life experiences and comprehension of Daoist wisdom. This raises the question whether Guo Xiang is a fatalist. The answer depends on the sense in which the concept of fatalism is used. It is my submission that Guo Xiang is a fatalist objectively. But subjectively, he does not fall into this category, for self-knowledge, in his view, is a positive affirmation of who one is and happiness is not based on external conditions but on one's inner mindset. When developing self-knowledge, a person retains his or her distinctiveness and enjoys self-sufficiency and freedom; consequently, society enjoys stability. Society conceived in this way makes possible the implementation of the policy of non-

action. However, non-action should not be understood as a set of behavior codes; it pertains primarily to the sage ruler's mindset of freedom and spontaneity. The sage ruler is necessary in that he is not only the shining example for the people but also the guarantee that the policy of non-action would be perfectly implemented.

## Chapter 4 Wang Bi and Guo Xiang Compared: Inheriting from and Going beyond Han Confucianism

Learning of the Profound in the Wei-Jin period is a direct response to the failure of Han Confucianism.<sup>282</sup> As argued in this thesis, it shows an apparent shift from Han Confucianism in both research interest and method of interpretation. Scholars have pointed out that Learning of the Profound is notably this-worldly in orientation. Wang Baoxuan, for example, interprets *Zhengshi xuanxue* (正始玄學)<sup>283</sup> as a theoretical justification of the political reform in the *Zhengshi* era (正始 A.D. 240-249).<sup>284</sup> My previous discussions of Wang Bi and

---

<sup>282</sup> In his pioneering research on Wei-Jin philosophy, Tang Yongtong proposes that Wang Bi was influenced by the Jingzhou (荊州) school. Jingzhou (now Xiangyang 襄陽, Hubei province) replaced Luoyang (洛陽) as the cultural center towards the end of the Han dynasty. Under the support of the governor Liu Biao (劉表 A.D. 142-208), many renowned scholars gathered in Jingzhou, including Song Zhong (宋衷 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century), Wang Can (王粲 A.D. 177-217), and Wang Su (王肅 A.D.195-256). They interpreted the classics in a new way, i.e., emphasizing to uncover the fundamental meaning and principle of the texts rather than confining rigidly to the textual words. Wang Bi may be inspired by this innovative method of interpretation, as his clan has a close relationship with the scholars of the Jingzhou school. Some scholars maintain that the seeds of Learning of the Profound were planted even earlier, by Han Philosophers such as Yan Zun (嚴遵 B.C. 59-24), Yang Xiong (楊雄 B.C. 53-18), and Wang Chong (王充 27-79), for they refuted a personified Heaven, with which Han Confucianism is notably associated, and highlighted the natural order of the *Dao*. See Tang Yongtong, “Wang Bi zhi *Zhouyi Lunyu* xinyi” 王弼之周易論語新義, in *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao*, 76-79; Walter Liebenthal, trans. “Wang Bi’s New Interpretation of the I Ching and Lun-yu,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 124-130; Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han*, 88-89.

<sup>283</sup> Tang Yongtong thinks that the development of Wei-Jin thought consists of four stages: *Zhengshi* (正始), *Yuankang* (元康 275-299), *Yongjia* (永嘉 307-312), and *Dong Jin* (東晉 317-420). *Zhengshi* thought is mainly built on the commentaries on the *Zhouyi* and the *Laozi*, whose representatives are He Yan (何晏 ca 190-249) and Wang Bi. *Yuankang* thought is influenced by the *Zhuangzi* and advocated by Ji Kang and Ruan Ji. *Yongjia* thought is also based on the commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, but is characterized by an attempt to reconcile Daoism with Confucianism. Its major figures are Xiang Xiu and Guo Xiang. In the last stage of the *Dong Jin* period, Buddhism thrived and largely influenced *xuanxue*. Tang’s view has been widely accepted. See Tang Yongtong, “Wei-Jin sixiang de fazhan” 魏晉思想的發展, in *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao*, 120.

<sup>284</sup> A series of political reforms was carried out in the *Zhengshi* era by the Wei minister Cao Shuang (曹爽 178-249). The enthusiastic proponents included He Yan, Xiahou Xuan (夏侯玄 209-254), and Deng Yang (鄧颺?-249). The reform centered on changing the system of official appointment and reducing the swollen administrative structure. In the spring of A.D. 249, Sima Yi (司馬懿 179-251), the political rival of Cao Shuang, staged a coup d’état that led to the death of Cao Shuang, He Yan, and other major participants. This signifies not only the end of the reform but also the end of the dominance of the Cao family. The Sima family took control and eventually

Guo Xiang also demonstrate their practical concern. Given this, it is reasonable to assume that when Wei-Jin philosophers turned to the Daoist classics, they were not for purely philosophical exploration. Deeply concerned with social instability, they believed that the Daoist texts convey the ancient wisdom that would enable them to solve present problems. Both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang clearly stated that there is something “fundamental” (*ben* 本) communicated in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*.

However, to appeal to the Daoist classics does not mean a complete break with Han Confucianism. In other words, Learning of the Profound should not be understood simply as a revival of Daoism, as the translation “Neo-Daoism” in some Western sources indicates. As shown in the previous chapters, the topics of Learning of the Profound are not confined to Daoism. They are broad including, for example, the social role of music, the relationship between Names and Actuality (*mingshi* 名實), and legal issues. Considering this, it may be misleading to construe Learning of the Profound as a Daoist movement.

Although I agree that Learning of the Profound “represents a broad philosophical front,”<sup>285</sup> I would consider it to represent an unparalleled development of the “Confucian” tradition that took shape in the Warring States period and developed in the Han dynasty. However, due to the social and political crisis towards the end of the Han dynasty, the tradition was called into sharp

---

established the Jin dynasty in A.D. 265. For detailed discussions of the Zhengshi reform, see Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學, 87-106; Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅, *Zhongguo wenhua de qingliu* 中國文化的清流, 54-77.

<sup>285</sup> Alan K.L. Chan, “Zhong Hui’s *Laozi* Commentary and the Debate on Capacity and Nature in Third-Century China,” 102.

question.<sup>286</sup> As we will see later, Wei-Jin philosophers also penetrated the serious problems of Han Confucianism. As heirs of the tradition, they utilized all the available resources to correct what they thought to be the corruption of the tradition and in so doing developed the tradition in a new way. Learning of the Profound represents an evident shift in the development of the tradition. It is distinct from Han Confucianism in both research interest and perspective of interpretation. This also shows that the tradition has a capacity for self-examination and self-adjustment.

In this chapter, I situate Wang Bi and Guo Xiang in this philosophical tradition, and examine what the two thinkers inherited from and the innovation they brought to this tradition. Especially of interest to me, it is not clear how Wang Bi and Guo Xiang were both influenced by and reacted against Han Confucianism, since Learning of the Profound is generally considered to be a direct response to the failure of Han Confucianism. Based on the analysis in the previous chapters, the first two parts of this chapter offer a comparison between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang. The third part formulates an account for their similarities and differences in understanding human nature, which I propose are both influenced by and arising from interrogating the Han Confucian tradition. Specifically, the Han nutrients that Wang Bi and Guo Xiang absorbed account for their similarity, while their efforts to surpass Han Confucianism resulted in their different views of human nature. Both views reflect an attempt to balance Confucian rites (*mingjiao* 名教), which had deteriorated into formalities and

---

<sup>286</sup> The most fierce criticism may come from Wang Chong, who investigated Han Confucianism, as both philosophical thought and social rites, in his skeptic composition *Lunheng* (論衡). He refuted a teleological understanding of Heaven, which was notably associated with Dong Zhongshu, and interpreted Heaven from a naturalistic or materialistic perspective. He also criticized the formalities and extravagance of Confucian mourning rites. For more details, see Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋; Alfred Forke, *Lun-hêng: Miscellaneous Essays of Wang Ch'ung* (New York, Paragon Book Galary, 1962).

means of attaining profit towards the end of Han, with the *Dao* as naturalness. They reinterpreted *mingjiao* by tracing it either to the objective principle of the *Dao*, or to the subjective mindset that is seen to be identical with the *Dao*.

#### **4.1. Similarities between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang**

The basic similarity between the two Wei-Jin philosophers arises from their effort to solve the problem of the origin of goodness and evil, to which Han Confucians, in their views, failed to produce a convincing explanation. The distinctive Han Confucian theory of human nature defines human nature in terms of *qi* endowment. However, as argued earlier, the problems concerning the theory are: (1) its argument is rather circular, in that *qi* is understood morally so that a person endowed with benevolent *qi* is good and one with deviant *qi* bad. And (2) evil has its origin in human nature, as human nature is a mixture of good and bad. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang refuted this view. They believed that human nature is simply natural good. Evil is not an innate flaw in human beings, but induced by external things, the Confucian rites in particular. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang shared this strong belief in the natural goodness of human nature, from which other similarities between them that will be discussed below stem.

##### **4.1.1. The relationship between nature and capacity and whether sagehood is achievable**

The relationship between nature and capacity attracted a great deal of philosophical attention in the Wei-Jin period. Zhong Hui collected and classified the various views of this topic into 4 kinds: nature is identical (*tong* 同) or coincides (*he* 合) with capacity; and nature is different (*yi* 異) or apart from (*li* 離) capacity. Although neither Wang Bi nor Guo Xiang addressed this topic directly,

their discussions of other relevant topics did imply their possible views of it. Both would hold that nature is identical or coincides with capacity.

In Wang Bi's interpretation, human nature consists of two parts, nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. Nature<sup>Dao</sup> is the share of the *Dao* in human beings, and it is the metaphysical reason for the existence of human beings. Since the *Dao* is an ontological reality devoid of any physical properties, it is simply unthinkable that nature<sup>Dao</sup> would be different from one person to another. It is nature<sup>qi</sup> that accounts for the differences among human beings in moral assets, physical features, and capacity. Or to be direct, one's nature<sup>qi</sup> determines one's capacity. Guo Xiang's view is more clear-cut. As shown in chapter 3, *qi* is the substance making human nature and life; capacity is one constituent of human nature.

Also, both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang agreed that capacity is unchangeable, a view that stems from the theory of *qi* endowment. This theory holds that one's *qi* endowment is pre-determined; so one's capacity as decided by it is unchangeable. Although the concept of *qi* is not prominently featured in Wang Bi and Guo Xiang's thought, it plays an important role in accounting for the differences of human beings. The sage is endowed with special refined *qi*, which distinguishes him from the common people. The sage's *qi* determines his extraordinary capacity, which Wang Bi termed as spirituality (*shenming* 神明). Spirituality refers to the sage's special capacity of comprehending the *Dao* and embodying Nonbeing. According to Guo Xiang, one can improve one's capacity in degree through practice, but cannot change one's capacity in kind. Each person has his/her limits, and this decides what he/she can and cannot do. Trying to do what one cannot do is transgressing one's limits. Only the sage is endowed with a

special capacity of being at one with the *Dao* and implementing the policy of non-action.

It is noteworthy that in both interpretations, the sage represents the highest level of human capacity. This is apparently different from the Confucian vision of sagehood, i.e., the sage is esteemed as the shining example of moral cultivation. Since this capacity is decided by a special *qi* endowment, which is unchangeable, the common people have no promise to become sages through effort.

#### 4.1.2. The relationship between nature and feeling

Regarding the relationship between nature and feeling, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang shared the view that nature guides feeling. Both Wang Bi's concept of nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> and Guo Xiang's concept of *xingfen* (the limits of nature 性分) set restriction on feeling.

For Wang Bi, the relationship between nature and feeling is that between nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> and nature<sup>*qi*</sup>, as feeling generates from the contact of nature<sup>*qi*</sup> with things. While nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is tranquil, nature<sup>*qi*</sup> moves incessantly and tends towards contact with things, which often results in excessive feelings, i.e., desires. That is why nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is necessary. As the differentiation of the *Dao* in human beings, nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is the principle guiding nature<sup>*qi*</sup>. Whether feeling is good or not depends on whether the response of nature<sup>*qi*</sup> to things is under the influence of nature<sup>*Dao*</sup>.

In Wang Bi's view, the sage does have the same feelings as ordinary people, but the former is not bound by things while the latter chase after things. The difference between the two may result again from *qi* endowment. *Qi* with which ordinary people are endowed may be thin and coarse, so it is prone to drifting with things; the sage is endowed with a special thick and refined *qi*, which shows a natural affinity to the *Dao*. The sage also has a high degree of



intelligence, which enables him to follow the *Dao* in his entire mode of being. This guarantees that the sage's nature<sup>qi</sup> is always close to his nature<sup>Dao</sup>, which means that his feeling is always proper.

Turning to Guo Xiang, one's *xingfen* (the limits of nature) decides whether one's feeling is proper or improper. One's natural feelings, for example, one's natural affection for one's parents, fall within the limits of one's nature. They are opposite to artificial feelings, which are informed by moral norms, *renyi* for example, and induced by the promise of rewards. The artificial feelings transgress one's limits and also name desires, which are the root cause for one's unhappiness. One's *xingfen* sets limits on one's feeling; one should express one's feeling within these limits.

To summarize the similarity between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang, on the relationship between nature and capacity, both thinkers thought that the two are identical or coincide with each other. One's *qi* endowment decides one's capacity. The sage is endowed with a special *qi* and he therefore has a special capacity. Since both one's *qi* endowment and capacity cannot change in kind, sagehood is unattainable through effort. As for the relationship between nature and feeling, both philosophers showed their trust in nature, in its natural goodness that should be distinguished from the moral vision of human nature in Confucianism. Although they acknowledged natural feelings, they were cautious with feeling. Since feeling is prone to drifting with things and degenerating into desire, it should be guided by nature.

#### **4.2. Differences between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang**

This part examines the differences between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang. I propose that Wang Bi understood nature<sup>Dao</sup> as principle and Guo Xiang as

substance. Consequently, Wang Bi's view focuses on the commonality of human beings while Guo Xiang's on the diversity of human beings. Both differences stem from a different understanding of the origin of nature. Wang Bi thought that human nature has its origin in the *Dao*, while Guo Xiang held that no metaphysical ontology engenders human beings and human nature forms of itself naturally.

#### **4.2.1. Nature originating in the *Dao* vs. Nature devoid of any metaphysical reason**

Wang Bi and Guo Xiang held different views as to the generation of the cosmos. While the former formulated that Nonbeing engenders and sustains the myriad things, the latter refuted the existence of any absolute ontology and stressed that things simply come into being by themselves naturally.

This leads to the fundamental difference between the two thinkers in viewing human nature. Wang Bi traced the origin of human nature to the *Dao*. The share of the *Dao* forms what is "authentic" in human beings. Although human nature is materially made from *qi*, nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is the decisive part. It defines human beings in the same way that morality defines human beings in Confucianism.

As for Guo Xiang, when things come into being by themselves, their natures form concurrently. Human nature conceived in this way is devoid of any metaphysical reason. However, this does not mean that the *Dao* is neglected in Guo Xiang's thought. It remains crucial. But unlike Wang Bi, who upheld the *Dao* as principle, Guo Xiang construed the *Dao* as a kind of mindset, the key to living a happy life. I will return to this point later.

#### **4.2.2. Principle vs. Substance**

As pointed out in chapter 1, there is a contrast between the views of human nature in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. The former focuses on the metaphysical reason for human nature, while the latter offers a much more substantive account, referring human nature to a life of health and longevity. Now that Wang Bi and Guo Xiang are primarily commentators who largely confined themselves to the texts, it is not surprising that this contrast becomes sharper in their respective elaborations.

Wang Bi formulated an understanding of human nature as principle. The *Dao* is both formless and nameless; so it is hard to conceive of the *Dao* as anything concrete but an absolute principle. The *Dao* is a principle in that it engenders and sustains the cosmos. Consequently, nature<sup>*Dao*</sup>, the share of the *Dao* in human beings, should also be understood in a metaphysical way. The terms Wang Bi used to interpret human nature, for example, “authenticity,” “the One,” and “emptiness and stillness,” indicate the relation between the *Dao* and human nature. It is unthinkable that human nature would convey concrete references. As Wang Bi explicitly claimed, because nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is the principle and is still, it is able to regulate *qing*.

Wang Bi developed an interpreting methodology which aims to rediscover the fundamental meaning and principle (*yili* 義理) of the classics, as opposed to the Han exegesis that focuses on the sentences and words (*zhangju* 章句) of the classics. As Wang Bi was largely concerned with the metaphysical basis of human nature, it is hard to find any concrete references in his interpretation of human nature.<sup>287</sup> Consequently, although one gets to know that human nature has

---

<sup>287</sup> Whether Learning of the Profound is a pure metaphysical study or has practical concerns has been debated from the end of the Wei-Jin period onward. Many Chinese philosophers, Ge Hong, for example, held Learning of the Profound responsible for the division

its basis in the *Dao*, or it is the share of the *Dao* in human beings, one is left wondering what human nature is concretely, especially when the *Dao* is conceived as formless and nameless Nonbeing. This is further accentuated when one compares Wang Bi with Guo Xiang who referred human nature to substantive things.

Guo Xiang's explanations of human nature are quite substantive. *Qi* is the material from which human beings are made. Life, physical features, capacity and feeling are constituents of human nature. These are concrete, tangible things. Guo Xiang often combined the characters 性 (nature) and 命 (life) to indicate that

---

and disorder of China during and after the Wei-Jin period, for it only focused on the discussions of the *empty* issues and paid no attention to the practical issues. This position had not been questioned until the Qing dynasty. Qing scholars proposed that Learning of the Profound is practically oriented and its discussion includes many political, legal, ethical, and ritual topics.

Turning to Wang Bi, the question comes to be whether he is only interested in metaphysical explorations or has practical concerns too. Wagner and Lynn would go as far as to say that Wang Bi intended his commentary for the ruler, in order to effect political change. My proposal is that the philosophy of Wang Bi is practically or politically oriented; however, its methodology looks much more metaphysical. In his commentary on the *Laozi*, Wang Bi frequently mentioned "the ruler", "the management of the nation", and "the way of managing", etc. This might be one reason that Wagner and Lynn interpret Wang Bi as a prospective advisor of the ruler.

The historical context also indicates Wang Bi's political intention. Wang Bi lived in a period of division. The intellectuals of the period sought effective ways to restore the order of the *Dao*. He Yan, for example, was an eminent minister who made great achievements in both political and philosophical fields. Wang Bi often took part in the discussions organized by He Yan. The historical files show that the topics involve both philosophical and political issues. Wang Bi once requested an interview with the Wei General Cao Shuang, the de facto ruler of the Wei dynasty and a pure politician. Although what Wang Bi talked about during the interview is not recorded, it is reasonable to assume that he intended to contribute his solutions to the political problems facing the Wei dynasty.

However, in his commentary on the *Laozi*, Wang Bi saved most of his passages for the profound concept of the *Dao*, Nonbeing, and Being, which might give one an impression that Wang Bi was only concerned with metaphysical issues. However, it is also evident that Wang Bi highlighted the *Dao*, because it is the order underlying the universe. The only and most effective solution to the chaos is to return to the *Dao*. The intention of Wang Bi was evident. He hoped, through his interpretation, people, especially the ruler, would come to realize the absolutely significance the *Dao*, and follow the *Dao*. As a result, the world would restore order. So far as human nature is concerned, since it has its base in the *Dao*, it is originally perfect. Therefore, the ruler should not confuse and mislead the common people by norms. At this point, the policy of non-action prevails. The *Dao* is the most fundamental principle of the universe; comprehending it one is able to solve any problems and difficulties. This is Wang Bi's methodology of holding the One to manage the many (*zhiyi tongzhong* 執一統衆). By this methodology Wang Bi was able to commute freely between the *Dao* and the myriad things, between the metaphysical world and the physical (political) world.

nature is not an essence independent of the human body. Rather, nature can never be separated from physical life. Only through the physical existence of life can nature be realized.

Besides, one's figure, height, hair color, and other features all belong to the realm of nature. One's special capacity of doing something is also a part of one's nature. Whereas Wang Bi drew a line between nature and feeling and subordinated the latter to the former, Guo Xiang put nature and feeling on the same level. The two are inseparable in the same way as nature and life are. Feelings are expressions of the corporeal life and nature.

#### 4.2.3. Commonality vs. Diversity

A contrast between commonality and individuality, which is similar to that between commonality and diversity, has been mentioned in 3.3.1. What I have discussed about the former contrast is also applicable to the latter. The concepts of commonality and diversity are usually associated with Confucian and Daoist views of human nature respectively.<sup>288</sup> However, as pointed out in 3.3.1, this association is too general to reflect the complexity of Daoist thought in its long course of development.

The review of the ideas of human nature in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* in chapter 1 has revealed a contrast between commonality and diversity. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang made this contrast more evident through their respective interpretations of the two Daoist classics. Wang Bi traced all beings, despite their physical diversity, to one absolute principle.

---

<sup>288</sup> Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun (yuanxingpian)* 中國哲學原論（原性篇），2

Besides, the *Dao* has no physical features and cannot be measured by any normal standards, thus it is impossible that one receives more of the *Dao* or holds a larger share of the *Dao* than others. In this regard, human beings are again the same. To emphasize the commonality of human beings, Wang Bi employed the term “One” (*yi* 一), the opposite of many. Besides the meaning of being singular in number, the character 一 also means that various things have something in common or they are the same in one respect. To summarize, in view of nature<sup>*Dao*</sup>, people are the same; but with respect to nature<sup>*qi*</sup>, they are different. Given that nature<sup>*Dao*</sup> is the decisive part of human nature and determines the authenticity of human beings, people are alike in that their commonality is major while their difference is minor.<sup>289</sup>

Turning to Guo Xiang, he was fully concerned with the diversity of human nature. A brief summary of his thought of nature is, “each thing has its own nature; the nature of each thing has its own limits (*wugeyouxing* 物各有性, *xinggeyouji* 性各有極).” It is evident that human beings are different in life, physical features, capacity and the expressions of feelings. All these differences are self-so. In Wang Bi’s view, by nature one person is united with all others and human beings are united with all other creatures. However, according to Guo Xiang, nature is what differentiates one person or thing from another.

---

<sup>289</sup> Mencius is also concerned with the commonality of human beings. In my understanding, Wang Bi differs from Mencius in at least two respects. First, Wang Bi bases the commonality of human beings on the *Dao*, the metaphysical reason for human beings. In contrast, Mencius’ view is much more concrete. The similarity of human beings pertains to substantive things, for example, benevolent feelings, that the common people experience in everyday life. Mencius may further trace these experiences or phenomena to Heaven (*tian* 天) or the *Dao* of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道), the absolute moral principle penetrating the cosmos. But, evidently, his vision of the *Dao* is different from Wang Bi’s, which is devoid of any moral meanings. Second, for Mencius the moral nature is what separates human beings from animals and inanimate things. However, Wang Bi did not draw a sharp line between the two. Rather, it seems that nature unites human beings with all other creatures, for both groups have their natures based on the *Dao*. This agrees the observation that Daoism opposes the human-centered philosophies popular in history and today. This is an interesting question, but beyond the scope of this thesis.

While Wang Bi addressed the issue of nature in terms of its relation to the *Dao*, Guo Xiang addressed it in terms of its relation to life. Within expectation, if nature is interpreted as having its base in the *Dao*, it must be the common side of nature being highlighted. In contrast, since life consists of concrete contents and obviously diverges in physical appearance, nature, in Guo Xiang's interpretation, cannot but be diverse.

### **4.3. Inheritance from and Development to Han Confucianism**

I have shown the similarities and differences between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang in interpreting human nature. Now the question is how to understand these similarities and differences? I propose that the answer lies in the Han Confucian tradition that Wang Bi and Guo Xiang inherited and sought to change. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang were both influenced by and tried to go beyond Han Confucianism, from which the similarities and differences between them become understandable.

#### **4.3.1. Inheritance from Han Confucianism**

Learning of the Profound in the Wei-Jin period is said to be a denial of Han Confucianism and a revival of Daoism. However, as the examination of Wang Bi and Guo Xiang shows, the traces of Han Confucianism in both thinkers are evident. Clearly, although Wei-Jin intellectuals felt disappointed at Han Confucianism, they were not completely free of the influence of the latter.

Confucianism had formed an entrenched part of the tradition with the support of the Han court. Its influence did not end with the decline of the Han dynasty but pervaded the following dynasties. For example, the position of Confucius was hardly challenged during the Wei-Jin period. Of importance is that the Confucian classics remained required reading for the children of the noble clans in the Wei-Jin period. With this family education, quite a number of noble

descendants turned out to be renowned intellectuals well versed in both Daoist and Confucian texts. Considering this, it is understandable that Wang Bi and Guo Xiang were able to integrate Confucian ideas into their commentaries on the Daoist texts.

The similarities between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang suggest their inheritance from Han Confucianism. Of significance is the theory of *qi* endowment. The concept of *qi* is not the invention of Han Confucians, but Han Confucians developed a theory of *qi* endowment that accounts for the formation of human beings and all differences of human beings. It is with Han Confucianism that *qi* endowment came to be a very influential theory in the history of Chinese philosophy.

It is evident that both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang were influenced by the theory of *qi* endowment. They followed their Han predecessors in maintaining that *qi* is the substance from which the human being is made. Another important idea they inherited is that *qi* endowment accounts for the differences of human beings. This idea directly explains their agreement that capacity is unchangeable. It was generally accepted in the Han dynasty that *qi* endowment decides the differences of human beings in moral cultivation, intelligence, health, and fate, etc. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang followed this view in indicating that *qi* endowment decides what capacity one has. As one's *qi* endowment is pre-determined, one can improve one's capacity through practice but cannot change it in kind. Due to his special endowment of *qi*, the sage has a special capacity, which indicates that sagehood cannot be attained through effort.

The Confucian vision of sagehood defined sagehood as a result of continued moral cultivation, so even a common person can become a sage through



learning and effort. This partly explains the emphasis that Han Confucians attached to education. But the question is that they attributed sagehood to the special endowment of *qi*. Here the contradictoriness is evident, as my examination of Wang Chong shows in chapter 1. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang criticized that Confucian education distorts the true nature of human beings. They interpreted sagehood in terms of *qi* endowment and capacity, both of which are natural and pre-determined. In so doing, they cut off the possibility of a common person becoming a sage.

Wang Bi and Guo Xiang's views of sagehood may also be influenced by the theory of the three grades of human beings (nature) predominant in the Han dynasty. The theory classifies human beings into three groups: the upper, the representative of which is the sage, the lower, for example, the wicked kings Jie and Zhou, and the middle or average, which consists of the common people. The upper is completely good and the lower, completely bad; they remain respectively good and bad permanently. The nature of the common people is changeable. Although a common person can become good through education, it is not clear whether this person can become as good as the sage. Wei-Jin thinkers borrowed the structure of the three grades from Han Confucianism, but reclassified human beings into the sage, the gentleman, and the common people in terms of capacity and feeling instead of morality. As both capacity and feeling are made from *qi*, the gaps between the sage, the gentlemen and the common people cannot be bridged.

The similarity between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang in understanding the relationship between nature and feeling also reflects their indebtedness to Han Confucians. As argued in chapter 1, the distinction between nature and feeling did

not become evident until the Han dynasty. Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang made clear distinctions between nature and feeling. Based on their contribution, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang were able to elaborate on the relationship between nature and feeling.

Wang Bi and Guo Xiang did not reject feeling as a whole. For them, some feelings are good and some should be suppressed. This is parallel to Liu Xiang's view that nature and feeling correspond to each other; since nature is a mixture of good and evil, feeling cannot be said to be completely bad. The question that Liu Xiang did not address is how to decide which feeling is good or bad. Wang Bi put forth the answer by his discussion of the relationship between nature<sup>Dao</sup> and nature<sup>qi</sup>. Guo Xiang's answer lies in the concept of *xingfen*. Only feelings informed by nature<sup>Dao</sup> or within the limits of nature are reasonable. Feelings resulting from insatiable demands for external things are deviant. Although Wang Bi and Guo Xiang did not disparage feeling as a whole, as Dong Zhushu did, they were cautious with it, for feeling is prone to drifting with things and becoming uncontrollable.

The relationship between nature and feeling involves a relationship between human nature and *renyi* (benevolence and righteousness). Wang Bi and Guo Xiang produced similar explanations on this issue. When *renyi* refers to natural feelings, for example, one's natural affection for others, it is a part of human nature. But when *renyi* refers to artificial expressions induced by Confucian rites, it is alien to human nature. Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's clarifications of *renyi* indicate the enduring influence of the Confucian view of human nature. It also reflects their attempt to surpass the dichotomy between Confucianism and Daoism by reconciling the two.

### 4.3.2. Development to Han Confucianism

Although Wei-Jin thinkers absorbed nutrients from Han Confucianism, they also realized the serious problems of the latter, i.e., its failure to restore order in society. They tried to surpass Han Confucianism by exploring more effective ways of reestablishing social peace, which results in their respective contribution to the tradition.

In this part I examine the innovations that Wang Bi and Guo Xiang brought to the tradition, Han Confucianism in particular. I propose that the differences between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang in understanding human nature arise from their interrogation of Han Confucianism. To be specific, both Wang Bi's and Guo Xiang's views of human nature reflect an attempt to balance *mingjiao* (Confucian rites 名教) with the *Dao* as naturalness. To save *mingjiao* from deteriorating into formalities and being abused for selfish interest, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang reinterpreted *mingjiao* by tracing it either to the objective principle of the *Dao*, or the subjective mindset of being at one with the *Dao*.

#### (1) A clarification of *mingjiao* (名教)

*Mingjiao* (名教) literally translates as “Teaching of Names” and is generally used in the Wei-Jin period to characterize the Confucian rites.<sup>290</sup> The term *ming* 名 conveys meanings similar to that of “Rectifying Names (*zhengming* 正名)” in the *Analects* and in the *Xunzi*, which is to make distinctions among various Names, to make clear the respective requirements of various Names, and to check whether a person under a certain Name meets its requirement. Generally

---

<sup>290</sup> *Mingjiao* (名教) has various English translations. For example, Richard B. Mather translates it as “conformity”; Brook Ziporyn as “the teaching of names.” See Richard B. Mather, “The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties,” 160; Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*, 23.

speaking, *mingjiao* is a comprehensive concept, referring to the institutionalized Confucian doctrines.

The relationship between *mingjiao* and *ziran* attracted a great deal of philosophical attention in the Wei-Jin period. Many prominent philosophers of the period produced arguments on this topic. However, because of the comprehensiveness of *mingjiao*, it is necessary to clarify how many constituents or aspects *mingjiao* encompasses. This clarification is helpful to give a clear sense of the problems of *mingjiao* and the solutions that Wei-Jin philosophers proposed.

*Mingjiao* consists of three aspects: (1) moral cultivation, which highlights the development of virtues derived from moral feeling or moral consciousness; (2) social and moral norms as to what each individual should do in accordance with his or her position; (3) social institutions, for example, the hierarchical structure of government and the system of appointing officials.

Ideally, aspect (1) is the basis of aspects (2) and (3). As Mencius suggested, to be virtuous is a human being's self-requirement, because he or she already has a kind of intrinsic moral seeds. Thus, one's behavior of *renyi* (benevolence and righteousness) is a natural flow of one's nature of *renyi*. Then, moral norms are established as an external reflection of moral cultivation. I admit that moral norms are not entirely based on moral cultivation. In some cases they are compulsory impositions on people. But in the sense that moral norms need each individual's moral cultivation to be buttressed, they have their basis in the latter. Then social institutions are developed to reward the good and punish the bad. It was common practice in the Han dynasty that a virtuous person had the chance to work in government and to be promoted to higher positions.

However, *mingjiao* became artificial and false towards the end of Han. The aspect (1) of moral cultivation of *mingjiao* was neglected, whereas the normative and institutional aspects (2) and (3) were immensely emphasized. A man would waste no time on moral cultivation. He simply conducted himself intentionally to show his accordance with moral conventions. This would win him good reputation faster than moral cultivation. He devoted his time and effort to making friends with famous characterologists, which proved to be an effective way to expand one's reputation and bring one profit. It was common at the end of Han that a person's name or reputation (*ming* 名) did not match his actuality (*shi* 實) at all. A famous filial son was found to live separately from his father; an official said to be of complete integrity was in fact corrupt.<sup>291</sup> Without moral cultivation, *mingjiao* deteriorated into formalities and a means of obtaining reputation and profit. Realizing the seriousness of the problem, Wei-Jin thinkers began to explore their respective solutions.

**(2) Two understandings of *ziran* (naturalness 自然): objective principle vs. subjective mindset<sup>292</sup>**

Both Wang Bi and Guo Xiang realized that the overwhelming emphasis on *mingjiao* resulted in the collapse of the Han court. When its regulative and institutional aspects overshadowed moral cultivation, *mingjiao* would distort the true nature of human beings and corrupt social relations. To quote Wang Bi,

The virtues of simplicity and sincerity are not admired, but the exquisiteness of reputation and conducts are appreciated. People

---

<sup>291</sup> Ge Hong 葛洪, *Baopuzi* 抱樸子, 3:509.

<sup>292</sup> I thank Professor Alan Chan and my classmates on this issue. The discussions in his lecture on Wei-Jin philosophy inspired the present section.

make effort to do what is commonly desirable and look forward to reputations; they cultivate themselves according to what is publicly praised and look forward to profit. Looking forward to reputation and profit, they do things more sedulously. The more splendid their reputations are, the further they are from sincerity. The more profit they achieve, the more competitive they become. The father and the son, the elder brother and the younger brother, each harbors selfish intention and thus loses frankness. Filial piety does not come out of sincerity; kindness does not come out of cordiality. All these result from upholding reputation and (artificial) moral conduct. Worrying that customs have become corrupt and (the desire for) reputation soared, a ruler esteems benevolence and righteousness. Even though he is intelligent and skillful, he causes artificiality. Needless to say, those inferior to him will cause more falseness. Therefore, to repudiate benevolence and to discard righteousness, one can rediscover filial piety and kindness. But this has not been widely recognized.

夫敦樸之德不著，而名行之美尙顯，而修其所尙而望其譽，修其所道而冀其利。望譽冀利以勤其行，名彌美而誠愈外，利愈重而心愈競。父子兄弟，懷情失直。孝不任誠，慈不任實，蓋顯名行之所招也。患俗薄而名行興，崇仁義，愈致斯僞，況術之賤此者乎？故絕仁棄義，以復孝慈，未渠弘也。<sup>293</sup>

---

<sup>293</sup> *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, p. 199; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 39-40.

As clearly expressed in the above passage, when inner self-cultivation was neglected, *mingjiao* became baseless and its collapse was within expectation. Penetrating this serious problem, Wang Bi and Guo Xiang tried to relay a solid foundation for *mingjiao*. Of course they did not re-base *mingjiao* on moral cultivation but on the *Dao*, i.e., *ziran* (naturalness).

Wang Bi and Guo Xiang put forth two different understandings of the *Dao*, from which all their differences in understanding human nature stem. Wang Bi interpreted the *Dao* as an objective principle, while Guo Xiang conceived of it as a subjective mindset.

Before exploring Wang Bi's understanding of the *Dao*, I need to briefly address the idea of the *Dao* in the *Laozi*. It remains controversial whether the *Dao* in the *Laozi* is an existing thing or existence itself. Although far more passages in the *Laozi* are devoted to the transcendence of the *Dao*, some passages indicate that the *Dao* is a thing. Of them chapter 21 is most frequently cited:

As a thing the *Dao* is so dim and faint. Being dim and faint, there is some image within. Being faint and dim, there is some thing within.

道之爲物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象。恍兮惚兮，其中有物。

A reader may conclude from this passage that the *Dao* indeed exists as a *thing*, though this thing is too dim to be felt through the sense organs and too profound to be comprehended through human knowledge.

If it remains controversial whether the *Dao* is an existing thing or existence itself in the *Laozi*, it is certainly a purely metaphysical existence in Wang Bi's interpretation. Nonbeing is the key concept that Wang Bi employed to interpret the *Dao*. He stressed that Nonbeing is formless and nameless. Being formless the

*Dao* cannot be felt by the sense organs; being nameless the *Dao* is beyond the scope of human language and knowledge. As Wang Bi was largely concerned with the transcendence of the *Dao* and its power, his hermeneutic strategy was to make lengthy comments on the textual passages concerning the metaphysical side of the *Dao*. As for passages that may suggest a more this-worldly understanding of the *Dao*, he either left them uncommented or interpreted them in such a way that they all turned out to be backed by the metaphysical *Dao*. With this strategy, Wang Bi would not bother to clarify whether the *Dao* is a thing or not. He left the textual words *daoziweiwu* 道之爲物 uncommented, and focused instead on the characters *huang* (dim 恍) and *hu* (faint 惚). According to him, the two characters are used to describe the profound process of creation. Because the *Dao* is formless and nameless, the myriad things are unclear (*huang* 恍, *hu* 惚) how they come into being (萬物以始以成，而不知其所以然).<sup>294</sup> In other words, their memory of birth is very dim and faint (*huang* 恍, *hu* 惚), which in turn testifies to the miraculous yet modest *Dao*.

The *Dao* is not a physical thing, but a principle of *ziran* (naturalness 自然) engendering and sustaining the cosmos. To live a proper life, each thing needs to accord with this principle. As each thing has the share of the *Dao* in its nature, what it needs to do is to follow (*yin* 因), to abide by (*ren* 任), or to yield to (*shun* 順) its Daoist nature. Since each thing can live a proper life without external aid, the principle of the *Dao* also translates as the principle of non-action. The socio-political application of non-action, i.e., a pragmatic administrative policy, is highlighted in Wang Bi's commentary. It stresses that a ruler is obliged to

---

<sup>294</sup> Wang Bi *jijiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, 52; cf. Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, 86.



establish circumstances favorable for the natural flow of people's nature rather than govern them with artificial statecraft, for example, to inculcate into them the moral doctrine of benevolence and righteousness. When the principle of *ziran* prevails, order in human society and the cosmos will be restored.

This principle is objective for two reasons. First, it is independent of human beings. The principle of the *Dao* exists before human beings and will last forever. It is not dependent on human beings, but human beings rely entirely on it to live a proper life. Second, it is a universal principle applicable to both human beings and other animate creatures and inanimate objects.

While Wang Bi was largely faithful to the *Laozi* text in his interpretation of the *Dao*, Guo Xiang went far beyond the *Zhuangzi* text. As pointed out in chapter 1, the *Dao* in the *Zhuangzi* refers to a universal principle of transformation. Once people comprehend and follow this principle, they are able to live a life free of anxiety and bitterness. Guo Xiang was also concerned with the question of how people can live a happy life. For him, the key is to attain the mindset of the *Dao* as a result of fully utilizing one's nature.

Utilizing one's nature involves developing a mode of self-knowledge, i.e., a consciousness of one's *xingfen*. Having a clear knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses, one devotes oneself to do what one is good at and does not admire or envy others. As such, one is free from the disturbance of desire, which is the root cause of one's unhappiness.

The Daoist mindset is not only a positive affirmation of who one is and the limits of one's nature, but also a way of viewing the differences between oneself and others. Evidently, people are different in many aspects. The key is how to view these differences; people also vary in this respect. In the absence of a Daoist

mindset, one may be disturbed so much by the differences between oneself and others that one makes every effort to eliminate them. However, a person, who has attained the Daoist mindset, is able to penetrate these surface differences and realize that all human beings are actually equal with each other. Each person has his or her limits; if he or she fully utilizes his or her nature, he or she obtains a sense of self-sufficiency similar to all others. Consequently, one is free from the disturbance of comparing oneself with others.

The Daoist mindset also involves a deep understanding of the principle of self-transformation. As the cosmos is in constant change and each thing is transient, one need not concern oneself too much with external situation. One accepts whatever happens to one's life, good or bad, as simply natural, and tries to comprehend the *Dao* through whatever one experiences. To take the example of the farmer again, once he attains the Daoist mindset, he will not insist on becoming a minister. He feels comfortable with the farming life that he happens to lead and concentrates on comprehending the *Dao* through his current work. He remains a farmer; nothing changes in his life substantively. But his mindset changes; previously he was a miserable farmer who always complained bitterly about his misfortune, now he is a happy farmer enjoying his life.

The sage is someone who has attained the Daoist mindset. With it, the sage did not make any calculation and discrimination and simply did everything spontaneously and properly. It is a mindset of spontaneity and freedom, an ideal that looks similar to what Confucius achieved in his seventies when he was able to follow what his heart desired without transgressing the limits.<sup>295</sup> This mindset is independent of any external circumstances. Guo Xiang made a well-known

---

<sup>295</sup> The *Analects* 2:4; *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 22.

elaboration of this point, as shown in chapter 3 (p.183). With the mindset of the *Dao* the sage is able to meet, effortlessly, whatever the contexts require. The environment can never affect him. If the sage happens to be a ruler, he devotes himself to what a ruler should do. Because he fulfills the obligations of a ruler out of spontaneity, he always feels as free as wandering randomly in the mountains and forests. In contrast, if a man thinks that in order to achieve the *Dao*, he needs to retreat from the secular world and shuts himself in a cave in the mountains, he already runs counter to the spirit of the *Dao*, for he is doing things deliberately and purposively. Consequently, even if he lives in the wilderness, he is less free than the sage who is fully occupied with state affairs. The man has become a prisoner of his own unnatural mind. So it does not matter where a person is or what kind of life he is living. It is his mindset that counts. A person who comprehends the *Dao* will find his current life completely different from his previous life, though there is no substantive change on the surface.

Since the *Dao* refers to a state of mind completely independent of any external things, one need not retreat from society to pursue the *Dao*. In arguing this, Guo Xiang competently proved that the sage, who was usually laughed at by Daoists for his worldly engagement, had achieved the *Dao* and was in the same superior sphere with those exemplary Daoists described variously as the authentic person, the ultimate person and the spiritual person. This shows again Guo Xiang's attempt to reconcile Confucianism with Daoism.

A few words need to be said about the subjectivity of the mindset of the *Dao*. Firstly, the *Dao* conceived in this way refers to the human mind. It is independent of the objective conditions of human beings, for example, occupation, position, and family background. Secondly, the achievement of the mindset of the

*Dao* differs from one person to another. That is, although both a farmer and a minister are enlightened by the *Dao*, the external reflections of their inner mindsets are substantively different from each other.

### (3) Reinterpretations of *mingjiao* in terms of *ziran*

The overwhelming emphasis of the normative and institutional aspects of *mingjiao* turns *mingjiao* baseless. Wang Bi and Guo Xiang tried to re-base *mingjiao* on the *Dao*, either as an objective principle or a subjective mindset.

In Wang Bi's view, *mingjiao* comes from *ziran*. Since the *Dao* is the principle creating and sustaining the myriad things, *mingjiao* has its origin in the *Dao*. The relationship between the *Dao* and *mingjiao* is metaphorized as that between the roots and the branches, or that between the mother and the children. Wang Bi stressed that the theme of the *Laozi* is to esteem the roots and rest the branches (崇本息末), to preserve the mother and maintain the children (守母存子). If the roots and the mother are carefully attended to, they will be strong enough to support the branches and the children. It is devastating that emphasis is attached only to the branches and the children. They may die young for lacking continuous support. *Mingjiao* is the product of the *Dao*, thus its existence should be acknowledged. However, *mingjiao* is the branches dependent on the root *Dao*; so it should not be upheld apart from the *Dao*. Otherwise, it would degenerate into formalities and statecraft. In contrast, with the significance of the *Dao* being highlighted, *mingjiao* could be used properly as an effective method of restoring social order.

According to Guo Xiang, *mingjiao* are "traces" (*ji* 迹), while *ziran* (naturalness), which refers to the mindset of the sage, is what leaves those traces (*suoyiji* 所以迹). In this regard, as in Wang Bi's case, people should not fasten to

*mingjiao*, for it is subject to change. They should penetrate the phenomenon of *mingjiao* and try to catch the wisdom of the *Dao*, which is embodied by the sage. On the other hand, however, once a person attains a deep comprehension of Daoist wisdom, the conventional distinction between *mingjiao* and *ziran*, i.e., that between Confucian behaviors and Daoist behaviors will not hold true any longer. The person feels comfortable with whatever he meets with, i.e., he accepts whatever allotted to him happily and concentrates on comprehending the *Dao* through whatever he experiences. If he happens to be a minister, he simply engages busily in dealing with state affairs; if he happens to be a farmer, he goes out to farm at sunrise and comes back to rest at sunset happily.

It does not matter whether he is a minister or a farmer, whether he is living a Confucian or a Daoist life, or how others may view him; the key is that he has attained the mindset of the *Dao*. This mindset allows him to conduct himself properly in each specific context. Insofar as the Confucian engagement with secular affairs is a natural flow of one's mindset of *ziran*, *mingjiao* can be said to be *ziran*. Also, given that the distinction between *mingjiao* and *ziran* does not hold true for a person who attains the mindset of the *Dao*, *mingjiao* can be said to be identical with *ziran*. Guo Xiang urged people to develop a mindset of the *Dao* and in so doing he was able to base *mingjiao* on a deep comprehension of the *Dao*. Without understanding the *Dao*, both the Confucian and Daoist way of life, as they are distinguished normally, are simply artificial. Worse, an overemphasis on external behavior misleads people to focus on conducting themselves intentionally, as Wang Bi also maintains, and consequently they may neglect to pursue an inner understanding of the *Dao*.

To summarize, the most fundamental difference between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang lies in that the former understood the *Dao* as an objective principle and the latter as a subjective mindset, from which all their differences on human nature stem. This difference arises from their interrogation of Han Confucianism and their attempt to balance *mingjiao* with the *Dao*. In so doing, while they inherited certain basic ideas from tradition, they also contributed to its renewal.

## Selected Bibliography

### Classical Chinese Sources

- Ban Gu 班固. *Houhanshu* 後漢書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1962.
- Chen Bojun 陳伯君. *Ruan Ji ji jiaozhu* 阮籍集校注. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1987.
- Chen Shou 陳壽. *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, 5 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1973.
- Dai Mingyang 戴明揚. *Ji Kang ji jiaoshi* 嵇康集校注. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 北京: 人民文學出版社, 1962.
- Fan Ye 範曄. *Houhanshu* 後漢書. Beijing: zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1965.
- Fang Xuanling 房玄齡. *Jinshu* 晉書. Beijing: zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 10 vols. 1962, 1974.
- Ge Hong 葛洪. *Baopuzi* 抱樸子. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1993.
- Guo Xiang 郭象. *Guo Xiang Zhuangzi zhu* 郭象<莊子>注. In *Sibubeiyao* 四部備要. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju 上海: 中華書局, 1935,
- . *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注. In *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 edited by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1961.
- He Yan 何晏. *Lunyu jijie* 論語集解 edited by Liu Baonan 劉寶楠. In *Zhuzi jichang* 諸子集成, vol.1. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1954.
- Huang Hui 黃暉. *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋. Taipei shangwu yinshuguan 臺北: 商務印書館, 1964.
- Huang Kan 皇侃. *Lunyu jijie yishu* 論語集解義疏. In *Shisanjing zhushu buzheng* 十三經註疏補證 edited by Yang Jialuo 楊家駱. Taipei: shijie shuju 臺北: 世界書局, 1990.
- Liu Shao 劉邵. *Renwuzhi* 人物志 edited by Liu Bing 劉昉. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan 臺北: 藝文印書館, 1966.
- Lou Yulie 樓宇烈. *WangBi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1980.

- Wang Liqi 王利器. *Yangshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1980.
- Yan Kejun 嚴可均. *Quanshanggu sandai qinhan sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦汗三國六朝文, Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan 北京: 商務印書館, 1999.
- Yan Zhitui 顏之推. *Yan shi jiashu* 顏氏家書. Taipei: Zhonghua shuju 臺北: 中華書局, 1974.
- Yang Yong 楊勇. *Shishuoxinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋. Hong Kong: Dazhong shuju 香港: 大眾書局, 1969.
- Yu Jiayi 餘嘉錫. *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 edited by Zhou zumo 周祖謨 and Yu Shuyi 餘淑宜. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 1993.
- Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣. *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋. Peking University Press 北京大學出版社, 1997.

### English Translations of Chinese Classics

- Bodde Derk, trans. *A History of Chinese Philosophy* by Fung Yu-lan. 2 vols. Princeton University Press, 1952-1953.
- Ch'en Ch'i-yün. *Hsun Yueh and The Mind of Late Han China: a translation of the Shen-chien with introduction and annotations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Lau, D.C. *Mencius*. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1984.
- Erkes, Eduard, trans. *Ho-shang-kung's Commentary on the Lao-tse*. Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1950.
- Fang, Achilles, trans. *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (220-265): Chapters 69-78 from the Tzu Chih T'ung Chien of Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-1086)*, 2. Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies 6. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Feifel, Eugene, trans. "Pao-p'u tzu nei-p'ien." *Monumenta Serica* 6.1-2(1941): 112-211; 9(1944):1-33; 11(1946): 1-32.
- Forke, Alfred, trans. *Lun-hêng*. New York, Paragon Book Galary, 1962.
- Henricks, Robert. G, trans. *Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China: The Essays of Hsi K' ang*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1983.



- Knechtges, David R, trans. *Wen Xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature* edited by Xiao Tong (501-531). 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982-87.
- Lin, Paul J. *A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary.*" Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, no.30. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1977.
- Lynn, Richard J. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue---A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- . *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Mather, Richard B, trans. *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World, by Liu I-ch'ing.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976. Second edition. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002.
- Rickett, W. Allyn. *Guanzi: political, economic, and philosophical essays from early China: a study and translation.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Rump, Ariane, and Wing-tsit Chan, trans. *Commentary on the Lao Tzu by Wang Pi.* Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, no.6. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979.
- Shih, Vincent Y.C., trans. *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons by Liu Hsieh: A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature.* Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies, no.58. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.
- Shryock, J.K., trans. *The Study of Human Abilities: The Jen Wu Chih of Liu Shao.* American Oriental Series, vol. 11. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1937; reprint, New York, 1966.
- Teng, Ssu-yü, trans. *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan: Yen-Shih Chia-Hsün.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968.
- Torchinoy, E.A., trans. *Ge Hong, Baopuzi neipian.* St. Petersburg: Center for Oriental Studies, 1999.

Wagner, Rudolf G. *The Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's commentary on the Laozi with critical text and translation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

Ware, James R., trans. and ed. *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966; reprint, New York: Dover, 1981.

### Secondary Sources in English

Ames, Roger T. "Is Political Taoism Anarchism?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 10.1 (1983): 27-47.

Arendrup, Brithe. "The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuang Zi: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis." *Acta Orientalia* 36 (1975): 311-415.

Bloom, Irene. "Human nature and biological nature in Mencius." *Philosophy East and West* 47: 1(January 1997): 21-32.

Boltz, William G. "Review of *A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary* by Paul J. Lin." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100, 1(1980): 84-86.

———. "The Laozi Text that Wang Bi and He-shang Kung Never saw." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, 5(1985): 493-501.

Ch'en Ch'i-yün. "A Confucian Magnate's Idea of Political Violence: Hsün Shuang's (128-190A.D.) Interpretation of the Book of Changes." *T'oung Pao* 54 (1968): 73-115.

———. *Hsün Yüeh (A.D.148-209): The Life and Reflections of an Early Medieval Confucian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Chan, Alan K. L. "What are the Four Roots of Capacity and Nature?" in *Wisdom in China and the West* edited by Vincent Shen and Willard Oxtoby. Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, forthcoming 2005.

———. "Zhong Hui' Laozi Commentary and the Debate on Capacity and Nature in Third-Century China." *Early China*, 28-29 (2003-2004): 101-160.

———. "Wang Bi and the Laozi: A Review Article." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31 (2003): 127-149.

- . *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-Shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Chan, Tim Wai-Keung. “Ruan Ji’s and Xi Kang’s Visits to the Two ‘Immortals.’” *Monumenta Serica* 44 (1996): 141-165.
- Chan, Wing-tsit. “Review of *A Translation of Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi’s Commentary* by Paul J. Lin.” *Philosophy East and West* 29, 3 (1979):357-60.
- . *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Chang, Chung-yue. “The Metaphysics of Wang Bi (226-249).” Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979.
- . “Wang Bi on the Mind.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 9(1982):77-105.
- Chappell, David W., ed. *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*. Buddhist and Taoist Studies, 2. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987.
- Chen, Ning. “The Ideological Background of the Mencian Discussion of Human Nature: A Reexamination.” In *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations* edited by Alan K.L. Chan. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000.
- Creel, H.G. “The Eclectics of Han Thought.” In *The Making of China: Main Themes in Premodern Chinese History* edited by Chun-shu Chang. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Cua, A. S. “Morality and human nature.” *Philosophy East and West* 31: 2 (1981).
- Cutter, Robert Joe. “The Incident at the Gate: Cao Zhi, the Succession, and Literary Fame.” *T’oung Pao* 71.4-5 (1985).
- De Crespigny, Rafe. “The Recruitment System of the Imperial Bureaucracy of the Late Han.” *The Chung Chi Journal* 6.1(1966):67-78.
- Dien, Albert E., ed. *State and Society in Early Medieval China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- . “Yen Chih-t’ui (531-591): A Buddho-Confucian.” In *Confucian Personalities* edited by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962.

- Ebrey, Patricia B. "Towards a Better Understanding of the Late Han Upper Class." In *State and Society in Early Medieval China* edited by Albert E. Dien. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Edwards E.D. "'Principles of Whistling'—*Hsiao chih*—Anonymous." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20(1957).
- Frankel, Hans H. "The K'ung Family of Shan-yin." *Ch'ing-hua hsüeh-pao*, new series 2.2 (1961).
- Feng Youlan. *Chuang Tzu: a new selected translation with an exposition of the philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933.
- Frodsham, J.D. "Hsieh Ling-yün's Contribution to Medieval Chinese Buddhism." In International Association of Historians of Asia, *Proceedings of the Second Biennial Conference*. Taipei, 1962.
- . *The Murmuring Stream: the Life and Works of the Chinese Nature Poet Hsieh Ling-yün (385-433), Duke of K'ang-lo*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967.
- Goodman, Howard L. *Exegetes and Exegeses of the Book of Changes in the Third Century A.D.: Historical and Scholastic Contexts for Wang Pi*. Ph.D. Dissertation in East Asian Studies: Princeton University, 1985.
- Grafflin, Dennis. "The Great Family in Medieval South China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41.1(1981).
- Graham, A.C. "How Much of Chuang tzu Did Chuang Tzu Write?" *Studies in Classical Chinese Thought* edited by Henry Rosemont, Jr. and Benjamin I. Schwartz. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Issue* (1979). Chico: American Academy of Religion, 1980, 459-501.
- . "The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature." *Studies in Chinese Philosophy & Philosophical Literature*. The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, Singapore, 1986.
- Hansen, Chad. "*Qing* (Emotions) 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought." In *Emotions in Asian thought* edited by Joel Marks & Roger T. Ames. State University of New York Press, 1995, 181-211.
- Henricks, Robert, G. "Examining the Ma-wang-tui Silk Texts of the Lao-tzu: with Special Note of Their Differences from the Wang Pi Text." *T'oung Pao* LXV: 4-5 (1979): 166-98.

- . “Hsi K’ang and Argumentation in the Wei.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 8(1981):169-223.
- Henry, Eric. “Chu-ko Liang in the Eyes of His Contemporaries.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.2 (1992).
- Ho Ping-yü, and Joseph Needham. “Elixir Poisoning in Medieval China.” *Janus* 48 (1959).
- Holcombe, Charles. *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasty*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.
- . “The Bonds of Empire: Liberty in Early Medieval China.” *The Historian* 54.4 (1992).
- . “The Exemplar State: Ideology, Self-Cultivation, and Power in Fourth-Century China.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.1(1989).
- Holzman, Donald. *Poetry and Politics: the Life and Works of Juan Chi, A.D.210-263*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- . “Ts’ao Chih and the Immortals.” *Asia Major*, third series 1.1 (1988).
- Hsiao, Kung-chuan. *A History of Chinese Political Thought*. Vol.1, *From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.* translated by Frederik W. Mote. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Hsü Cho-yün. “The Roles of the Literati and of Regionalism in the Fall of the Han Dynasty.” In *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations* edited by Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988.
- Hughes, E.R. *The Art of Letters: Lu Chi’s ‘Wen Fu,’ A.D. 302*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1951.
- Hu Shi. “The Concept of Immortality in Chinese Thought.” *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* 43, 3 (March 1946):23-42.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. “The concept of *de* (virtue) in the *Laozi*.” In *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* edited by Mark Csikzentmihalyi and Philip J. Ivanhoe. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999.
- Knaul, Livia. “Kuo Hsiang and the Chuang Tzu.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 12.4 (December 1985):429-447.
- Kohn, Livia. *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.

- . *Taoist Mystical Philosophy: The Scripture of Western Ascension*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- , ed. *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1989.
- Le Blanc, Charles. *Huai Nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1985.
- Levy, Howard S. “Yellow Turban Religion and Rebellion at the End of Han.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76.4 (1956): 214-27.
- Liebenthal, Walter, trans. “Wang Bi’s New Interpretation of the I Ching and Lun-yu” (王弼之周易論語新義 by Tang Yongtong 湯用彤). *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 124-61.
- . “The Immortality of the Soul in Chinese Thought.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 11.1 (1952).
- Lin Tien-wai. “Some Thoughts on the Development of the Chuang-yuan System in the Medieval China.” *Chinese Culture* 18.1(1977).
- Link, Arthur E. “The Biography of Tao-an.” *T’oung Pao* 46 (1958): 1-48.
- Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢. *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* translated by William E Savage (from *Zhuangzi zhexue jiqi yanbian* 莊子哲學及其演變. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 北京: 中國社會科學出版社, 1988). Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1994.
- Lo, Chin-t’ang. “Popular Stories of the Wei and Chin Periods.” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 17.1-2 (1979).
- Loewe, Michael. *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 B.C. to A.D. 9*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974.
- . *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth, and Reason in the Han Period (202 B.C.-220 A.D.)*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982.
- . *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979.
- Lynn, Richard John. “Wang Bi and Liu Xie’s *Wenxin diaolong*: Terms and Concepts, Influence and Affiliations. In *A Chinese literary mind: culture, creativity and rhetoric in Wenxin Diaolong* edited by Zong-qi Cai. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, 83-100.

- Machle, Edward J. "The mind and the 'shen-ming' in *Xunzi*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 19 (1992): 361-386.
- Makeham, John. *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Mather, Richard B. "Chinese Letters and Scholarship in the Third and Fourth Centuries: The Wen-hsüeh P'ien of the *SSHY*." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 84.4 (1964): 348-91.
- . "Some Examples of 'Pure Conversation' in the *SSHY*." In *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan* 9 (1964): 58-70.
- . "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties." *History of Religions* 9, 2-3 (1969-1970):160-80.
- . "The Fine Art of Conversation: The Yen-yü P'ien of the *SSHY*." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91.2 (1971): 222-75.
- Miao, Ronald C. *Early Medieval Chinese Poetry, the Life and Verse of Wang Ts'an (A.D.177-217)*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982.
- Munro, Donald J. *The Concept of Man in Early China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969.
- Na, Tsung Shun. "A Historical Study of Juan Chi." *Chinese Culture* 22.1(1981).
- Needham, Joseph. *Science and Civilization in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956.
- Nylan, Michael, and Nathan Sivin. "The First Neo-Confucianism: An Introduction to Yang Hsiung's 'Canon of Supreme Mystery' (T'ai hsuan ching, c. 4 B.C.)." In *Chinese Ideas about Nature and Society: Studies in Honour of Derk Bodde* edited by Charles Le Blanc and Susan Blader. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1987.
- Nuyen, A. T. "Naming the Unnamable: the Being of the Dao." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 22 (1995): 487-497.
- Petrov, A.A. *Wang Pi: His Place in the History of Chinese Philosophy* (in Russian). Monograph 12, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow Academy of Science, 1936. English review and summary by Arthur Wright in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 75-80.

- Robinet, Isabelle. "Review of *Commentary on the Lao Tzu by Wang Pi* by Ariane Rump and Wing-tsit Chan." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102-3 (1982):573.
- Roth, Harold D. *The Textual History of the Huai-nan-tzu*. Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies Monograph 46, 1992.
- . "An Outline of the Concept of Innate Nature in Early Daoism." In *Contacts between Cultures* edited by Bernard Hung-Kay Luk. Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992.
- Sailey, Jay. *The Master Who Embraces Simplicity: A Study of the Philosopher Ko-Hung, A.D. 283-343*. San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978.
- Savage, William E., trans. *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters (Zhuangzi zhexue jiqi yanbian 莊子哲學及其演變)* by Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢. Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1994.
- Schipper, Kristofer. "The Taoist Body." *History of Religion* 17:3-4 (1978):355-86.
- Seidel, Anna K. "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung." *History of Religions* 9:2-3 (1969-1970): 216-47.
- Shin Un-chol. "Plagiarism and Originality in Kuo Hsiang's Commentary on the Chuang-tzu." *Asian Thought and Society* 8.22-23 (1983).
- Shun, Kwong-loi. *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Solomon, Bernard S. "'One is No Number' in China and the West." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17(1954): 253-60.
- Stein, Rolf A. "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries." In *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Tang Yongtong. "Wang Pi's New Interpretation of the *I Ching* and the *Lun-yu*" translated by Walter Liebenthal. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10.2 (1949):124-61.
- Wagner, Rudolf G. "Bei yiwang de weizhi——Wang Bi de *Laozi jieshixue*" 被遺忘的微指——王弼的老子解釋學. *Xueren 學人* 10 (1996):313-44.
- . "Interlocking Parallel Style: Laozi and Wang Bi." *Asiatische Studien* 34.1(1980): 18-58.



- . “The Impact of Conceptions of Rhetoric and Style upon the Formation of Early *Laozi* Editions: Evidence from Guodian, Mawangdui, and the Wang Bi *Laozi*.” In *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies* 44 (1999):32-56.
- . “The Wang Bi Recension of the *Laozi*.” *Early China* 14(1989): 27-54.
- . “Wang Bi: ‘The Structure of the *Laozi*’s Pointers’ (*Laozi weizhi lilue*).” *T’oung Pao* 72 (1986): 92-129.
- . *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi’s Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- . Review of Alan K.L.Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-tzu*. *T’oung Pao* 79(1993):179-82.
- . *The Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi’s commentary on the Laozi with critical text and translation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
- . *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Wallacker, Benjamin E. “Han Confucianism and Confucius in Han.” In *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization* edited by D. Roy and Tsuen-hsuei Tsien. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978, 215-28.
- Wright, Arthur F. “Review of A.A.Petrov, Wang Pi: His Place in the history of Chinese Philosophy.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 101 (1947):75-80.
- Yang V.T. “About Shih-shuo hsin-yü.” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 2.2 (1955).
- Yang, Lien-sheng. “Great Families of Eastern Han.” In *the Making of China: Main Themes in Premodern Chinese History* edited by Chun-shu Chang. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Princeton-Hall, 1975.
- Yates, Robin. *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huanglao and Yinyang in Han China*. New York: Ballantine, 1997.
- Yu Yingshi, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin Chin.” In *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* edited by Donald J. Munro. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985, 121-55.

- . “‘O Soul, Come Back!’ A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47(1987): 363-95.
- . “Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 25(1964-65): 80-122.
- . “New Evidence on the Early Chinese Conception of After-life.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 41.1 (November 1981): 81-85.
- Zhang, Ellen Y. “Life and death: the Dionysian spirit of Juan Chi and Neo-Taoists.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 26:3 (September 1999): 295-321.
- Ziporyn, Brook. “The Self-so and Its Traces in the Thought of Guo Xiang.” *Philosophy East and West* 43.3 (July 1993): 511-539.
- . *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang*. State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Zücher, Erik. “Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence.” *T'oung Pao* 66.1-3(1980): 84-147.
- . *The Buddhist Conquest of China: the Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*. 2 vols. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959.

### Secondary Sources in Chinese

- Cai Zhenfeng 蔡振豐. *Weijin mingshi yu xuanxue qingtán* 魏晉名士與玄學清談. Taipei: Liming wenhua 臺北:黎明文化, 1997.
- Ch'en Ch'i-yün. “Wei Jin Nanbeichao shiqi zhongguo zhishifenzi de tese” 魏晉南北朝時期中國知識份子的特色. In *Guojin hanxue huiyi lunwenji: lishi kaogu zu* 國際漢學會議論文集:歷史考古組 (1981.10). Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan 臺北:中央研究院, 1981.
- Chen Lai 陳來. “WeiJin zhexue de ‘you’ ‘wu’ fanchou” 魏晉哲學的“有”“無”範疇. *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 9(1986): 51-57.
- . “Guo Xiang zhexue shuping” 郭象哲學述評. *Zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學 11 (1984).
- Chen Linguo 陳琳國. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao zhengzhi zhidu yanjiu* 魏晉南北朝政治制度研究. Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 臺北:文津出版社, 1994.
- Chen Xuguo 陳戍國. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao lizhi yanjiu* 魏晉南北朝禮制研究. Changsha:Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe 長沙:湖南教育出版社, 1995.

- Chen Yinque 陳寅恪, “Shishuoxinyu wenxuelei Zhong Hui zhuan Sibenlun shibi tiaohou” 世說新語文學類鍾會撰四本論始畢條後. In *Chen Yinque xiansheng lunwen ji* 陳寅恪先生論文集. Taibei: Sanrenxing chubanshe 臺北: 三人行出版社, 1974, 601-7.
- . “Tao Yuanming zhi sixiang yu qingtian zhi guanxi” 陶淵明之思想與清談之關係. In *Chen Yinque xiansheng lunwen ji* 陳寅恪先生論文集, 309-33.
- . “Xiaoyaoyou Xiang Guo yi ji Zhidun yi tanyuan” 逍遙遊向郭義及支遁義探源. In *Chen Yinque xiansheng lunwen ji* 陳寅恪先生論文集, 651-656.
- . *Sui Tang zhidu yuanyuan luelungao* 隋唐制度淵源略論稿. In *Chen Yinque xiansheng lunwen ji* 陳寅恪先生論文集, 1-150
- Ding Guanzhi 丁冠之. “Lun Ji Kang de zhexuesixiang” 論嵇康的哲學思想. *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 4: (1980): 63-68.
- . “Ruan Ji” 阮籍. In *Zhongguo gudai zhuming zhexuejia pingzhuan* 中國古代著名哲學家評傳 edited by Fang Litian 方立天 and Yu Shoukui 於首奎. Jinan: qilu shushe 濟南:齊魯書社, 1982, 91-132.
- Fan Shoukang 范壽康. *Wei Jin zhi qingtian* 魏晉之清談. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 上海:商務印書館, 1936.
- Fang Litian 方立天. “Handai jingxue yu WeiJin xuanxue——lun woguo qianqi fengjian shehuizhong guanfang zhexue de yanbian” 漢代經學與魏晉玄學——論我國前期封建社會中官方哲學的演變. *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 3(1980): 48-59.
- Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo zhexueshi xinbian* 中國哲學史新編, vol.4. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 北京:人民出版社, 1986—1988.
- . “WeiJin xuanxue guiwulun guanyu youwu de lilun” 魏晉玄學貴無論關於有無的理論. *Beijing daxue xuebao* (Zhexue shehuikexue ban) 北京大學學報(哲學社會科學版)1(1986):11-18.
- . “Wei Jin zhiji guanyu mingshi caixing de bianlun” 魏晉之際關於名實、才性的辯論. *Zhongguo zhexueshi yanjiu* 中國哲學史研究 4(1983):3-12.

- Fu Qinjia 傅勤家. *Zhongguo daojiao shi* 中國道教史. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 上海:商務印書館, 1937; reprint, Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 臺北:商務印書館, 1980.
- Fu Sinian 傅斯年. *Xingming guxun bianzheng* 性命古訓辯證. In *Fu Sinian quanji* 傅斯年全集. Taipei: lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 臺北:聯經出版事業公司, 1980.
- Fu Yunlong 傅雲龍. “Lun Wei Jin zhiji de ‘caixing zhibian’” 論魏晉之際的“才性之辯”. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3(1993): 64-73.
- Gao Chen yang 高晨陽. *Ruan Ji pingzhuan* 阮籍評傳. Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe 南京:南京大學出版社, 1994.
- . *Ru dao huitong yu zhengshi xuanxue* 儒道會通與正始玄學. Jinan: Qilu shushe 濟南:齊魯書社, 2000.
- Gao Lingfen 高齡芬. *Wang Bi laoxue zhi yanjiu* 王弼老學之研究. Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 臺北:文津出版社, 1992.
- Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛. *Handai xueshu shilue* 漢代學術史略. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian 上海:上海書店, 1990.
- . “Liuchao menfa” 六朝門閥. *Guoli Wuhan daxue wenzhe jikan* 國立武漢大學文哲季刊 5.4 (1936): 829-76.
- Guo Lihua 郭梨華. *Wang Bi zhi ziran yu mingjiao* 王弼之自然與名教. Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 臺北:文津出版社, 1995.
- Han Chuanda 韓傳達. *Ruan Ji pingzhuan* 阮籍評傳. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京:北京大學出版社, 1997.
- Han Guopan 韓國磐. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shigang* 魏晉南北朝史綱. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 北京:人民出版社, 1983.
- He Changqun 賀昌群. *Wei Jin qingtang sixiang chulun* 魏晉清談思想初論. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 上海:商務印書館, 1947.
- He Qimin 何啓民. *Wei Jin sixiang yu tanfeng* 魏晉思想與談風. Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 臺北:商務印書館, 1967; reprint. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 臺北:學生書局, 1978.

- . *Zhulin qixian yanjiu* 竹林七賢研究. Taipei: Zhongguo xueshu zhuzuo jiangzhu weiyuanhui 臺北：中國學術著作獎助委員會, 1966.
- He Ziquan 何茲全. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shilue* 魏晉南北朝史略. Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1958.
- Hou Waihu 侯外廬, Zhao Jibin 趙紀彬, Du Guoxiang 杜國庠, and Qiu Hansheng 邱漢生. *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史, vol.3. *Wei Jin sixiang shi* 魏晉南北朝思想. 1957. Reprint. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 北京:人民出版社, 1992.
- Hu Fuchen 胡孚琛. *Wei Jin shenxian daoja: Baopuzi neipian yanjiu* 魏晉神仙道家: 抱樸子內篇研究. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 1989.
- Jiang Hainu 蔣海怒. “Cong lixuan zhibian kan Wei Jin mingshi de lunli kunjing” 從禮玄之辨看魏晉名士的倫理困境. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3(2004): 72-82.
- Kong Fan 孔繁. “Cong shishuo xinyu kan qingtang” 從〈世說新語〉看清談. *Wenshizhe* 文史哲 1981.6.
- . *Weijin xuanxue* 魏晉玄學. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 北京：中國社會科學出版社，1987.
- Kuang Shiyuan 鄺士元. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao yanjiu lunji* 魏晉南北朝研究論集. Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe 臺北：文史哲出版社, 1984.
- Lai Yanyuan 賴炎元. *Chunqiu fanlu jinzhū jinyi* 春秋繁露今注今譯. Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1984.
- Lao Siguang 勞思光. *Xinbian zhongguo zhhexueshi* 新編中國哲學史, vol.2. Taipei: Sanmin shuju 臺北: 三民書局，1995.
- Li Lanfen 李蘭芬. “Xuanyuan zhimu de piaoluo——Wang Bi Lunyu shiyi de mingyun” 玄遠之幕的飄落——王弼《論語釋疑》的命運. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3(2004):60-71.
- Li Zhonghua 李仲華, Chen Zhanguo 陳戰國, and Na Wei 那薇. *Wei Jin xuanxue shi* 魏晉玄學史. Xi'an: Shanxi shifan daxue chubanshe 西安: 陝西師範大學出版社, 1989.
- Lin Congshun 林聰舜. *Xiang Guo zhuangxue zhi yanjiu* 向郭莊學之研究. Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe 臺北: 文史哲出版社 1981.

- Lin Dengshun 林登順. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao ruxue liubian zhi xingcha* 魏晉南北朝儒學流變之省察. Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 臺北：文津出版社, 1996.
- Lin Lizhen 林麗真. “Wang Bi ‘xing qi xing’ shuo xilun” 王弼‘性其情’說析論, in *Wang Shumin xiansheng bashi shouqing lunwenji* 王叔岷先生八十壽慶論文集. Taipei: Daan chubanshe 臺北：大安出版社, 1993, 599-609.
- . “Oumei ‘Wei Jin zhexue’ yanjiu gaikuang ji zhuyao xueshu lunzhu pingjie” 歐美「魏晉玄學」研究概況暨主要學術論著評介. *Zhexue yu wenhua* 哲學與文化 347 (April 2003): 3-15.
- . “Wang Bi Lunyu shiyi zhongde Laozi yi” 王弼「論語釋疑」中的老子義. *Shumu jikan* 書目季刊 22. 3(1988): 34-61.
- . *Wang Bi Lao Yi Lunyu sanzhu fenxi* 王弼《老》《易》《論語》三注分析. Dongda tushu gongsi 東大圖書公司, 1988.
- Liu Dajie 劉大傑. *Wei Jin sixiang lun* 魏晉思想論. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju 上海：中華書局, 1939; reprint. Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1998.
- Liu Kangde 劉康得. “Wei Jin mingjiao yu ziran lunjian” 魏晉名教與自然論箋. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 2(1994): 63-69.
- Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢. “Naturalness (*ziran*) and Non-action (*wuwei*): Their Ancient Meaning and Significance Today” 老子之自然與無為——古典意含與現代意義. *Zhongguo wenzheyanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 10 (March 1997).
- . *Zhuangzi zhexue jiqi yanbian* 莊子哲學及其演變. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 北京：中國社會科學出版社, 1988; the first three chapters of this book is translated into English *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* by William E Savage. Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1994.
- Liu Zehua 劉澤華. “Wang Bi mingjiao chu ziran de zhengzhi zhexue he wenhede junzhu zhuanzhi sixiang” 王弼名教出自然的政治哲學和溫和的君主專制思想. *Nankai xuebao* 南開學報 4(1993): 22-31.
- Lu Guolong 盧國龍. *Guo Xiang pingzhuan : lixing de qiangwei* 郭象評傳：理性的薔薇. Nanning: Guanxi jiaoyu chubanshe 南寧：廣西教育出版社, 1996.

- Lü Simian 呂思勉. *Liang Jin Nanbeichao shi* 兩晉南北朝史. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 1983.
- Lu Xu 魯迅. “Wei Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi” 魏晉風度及文章與藥及酒之關係. In *eryi ji* 而已集, vol.3 of Collected Works, Beijing, 1961, 379-95.
- Luo Zongqiang 羅宗強. *Xuanxue yu Weijin shiren xintai* 玄學與魏晉士人心態. Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe 杭州: 浙江人民出版社, 1991.
- Ma Lianghuai 馬良懷. *Bengkui yu chongjian zhong de kunhuo : WeiJin fengdu yanjiu* 崩潰與重建中的困惑: 魏晉風度研究. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 北京: 中國社會科學出版社, 1993.
- Mao Hanguang 毛漢光. *Liang Jin Nanbeichao shizu zhengzhi zhi yanjiu* 兩晉南北朝士族政治之研究. Taibei xueshu zhuzuo jiangzhuhui 臺北學術著作獎助會, 1966.
- Meng Penyuán 蒙培元. *Zhongguo xinxing lun* 中國心性論. Taibei: xuesheng shuju 臺北: 學生書局, 1990.
- Mou Ruisun 牟潤孫. *Lun Wei Jin yilai zhi chongshang tanbian jiqi yingxiang* 論魏晉以來之崇尚談辯及其影響. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1966.
- Mou Zongsan 牟宗三. *Caixing yu xuanli* 才性與玄理. Taibei: Xuesheng shuju 臺北: 學生書局, 1978.
- . *Wei Jin xuanxue* 魏晉玄學. Taizhong: Sili donghai daxue 台中: 私立東海大學, 1962.
- Qian Mu 錢穆. “Luelun Wei Jin Nanbeichao xueshu wenhua yu dangshi mendi zhi guanxi” 略論魏晉南北朝學術文化與當時門第之關係. *Xinya xuebao* 新亞學報 5.2(1963).
- . “Wang Bi Guo Xiang zhu yilaozhuang yonglizitaiolu” 王弼郭象注易老莊用理字條錄. *Xinya xuebao* 新亞學報 1.1 (1955):135-156.
- . “Ji weijin xuanxue sanzong” 記魏晉玄學三宗.” In *Zhuanglao tongbian* 莊老通辨. Taibei: Sanmin shuju 臺北: 三民書局, 1973. Reprint. Taibei: Dongda tushu gongsi 臺北: 東大圖書公司, 1991, 345-365.

- Qing Xitai 卿希泰. *Zhongguo daojiao sixiang shigang* 中國道教思想史綱. Vol.1, *Han Wei Nanbeichao shiqi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝時期. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe 成都:四川人民出版社, 1980.
- Ren Jiyu 任繼愈. “Wei Jin qingtang de shizhi he yingxiang” 魏晉清談的實質和影響. *Lishi jiaoxue* 歷史教學 (Oct. 1956): 9-11.
- . *Zhongguo zhexue fazhan shi (Wei Jin Nanbeichao)* 中國哲學發展史 (魏晉南北朝). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 北京:人民出版社, 1988.
- Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖. *Wei Jin de ziran zhuyi* 魏晉的自然主義. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 上海:商務印書館, 1935.
- Su Shaoxing 蘇紹興. *LiangJin Nanchao de shizu* 兩晉南朝的士族. Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 臺北聯經出版事業公司, 1988.
- Su Xinwo 蘇新鋈. *Guo Xiang zhuangxue pingyi* 郭象莊學平議. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 臺北:學生書局, 1980.
- Tang Changru 唐長孺. *WeiJin NanBeiChao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢. Beijing: Sanlian shudian 北京:三聯書店, 1955, 1978.
- . “Dong-Han moqi de daxing mingshi” 東漢末期的大姓名士. In *Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao shi lun shiyi* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺, 25-52.
- . “Jiupin zhongzheng zhidu shishi” 九品中正制度試釋. In *Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢, 85 - 126.
- . “Wei Jin caixing lun de zhengzhi yiyi” 魏晉才性論的政治意義. In *Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢, 298 - 310.
- . “Wei Jin xuanxue zhi xingcheng jiqi fazhan” 魏晉玄學之興成及其發展. In *Wei Jin Nan-Bei chao shi luncong* 魏晉南北朝史論叢, 311-50.
- . *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi luncong xubian* 魏晉南北朝史論叢續編. Beijing: Sanlian shudian 北京:三聯書店, 1959.
- . *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shilun shiyi* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京:中華書局, 1983.
- Tang Junyi 唐君毅. “Lun zhongguo zhexue sixiangzhong li zhi liu yi” 論中國哲學思想中理之六義. *Xinya xuebao* 新亞學報 1, 1(1955):45-98.



- . *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun—yuan dao pian* 中國哲學原論——原道篇, vol. 2. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 臺北：學生書局，1990.
- . *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun yuanxing pian* 中國哲學原論（原性篇）. Xinyashuyuan yanjiusuo 新亞書院研究所，1968.
- Tang Yijie 湯一介. *Guo Xiang yu Wei Jin xuanxue* 郭象與魏晉玄學. Press of Peking University 北京大學出版社，2000.
- . and Hu Zhongping 胡仲平. “Xifang xueshu Beijingxia de Wei Jin xuanxue yanjiu” 西方學術背景下的魏晉玄學研究. *Zhongguo zhexueshi* 中國哲學史 1(2004):5-15.
- . “Bianming xili—Guo Xiang zhu Zhuangzi de fangfa” 辯名析理——郭象注<莊子>的方法. *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學 1(1998): 46-52.
- . “Wei Jin xuanxue he wenxue lilun” 魏晉玄學和文學理論. *Zhongguo zhexueshi yanjiu* 中國哲學史研究 1(1980):37-45.
- . *Wei Jin Nanbei chao shiqi de daojiao* 魏晉南北朝時期的道教. Xi'an: Shanxi shifan daxue chubanshe 西安：陝西師範大學出版社，1988.
- Tang Yiming 唐翼明. *Wei Jin qingtang* 魏晉清談. Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi 臺北：東大圖書公司，1992.
- Tang Yongtong 湯用彤. *Tang Yongtong xueshu lunwenji* 湯用彤學術論文集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京：中華書局，1983.
- . and Ren Jiyu 任繼愈. *Wei Jin xuanxue zhongde shehui zhengzhi sixiang luelun* 魏晉玄學中的社會政治思想略論. Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社，1956.
- . “Wang Bi zhi Zhouyi Lunyu xinyi,” 王弼之周易論語新義. In *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 76-93. W. Liebenthal, trans. “Wang Bi’s New Interpretation of the I Ching and Lun-yu.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10 (1947): 124-61.
- . “Xiang Guo yi zhi Zhuangzhou yu Kongzi” 向郭義之莊周與孔子. In *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 94-102.

- . “Du renwuzhi” 讀《人物志》. In *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 3-22.
- . “Wang Bi shengren youqing lun” 王弼聖人有情義釋. In *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 66-75.
- . “Yanyi zhibian” 言意之辨. In *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿, 23-42.
- . *Han Wei liangJin Nanbeichao fojiaoshi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju 上海: 中華書局, 1955.
- . *Lixue foxue xuanxue* 理學佛學玄學. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京: 北京大學出版社, 1991.
- . *Wei Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿. Forword by Tang Yijie 湯一介. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 2001.
- . *Xuanxue wenhua fojiao* 玄學文化 佛教. Taipei: Yumin chubanshe 臺北: 育民出版社, 1980.
- Tian Wentang 田文棠. *Ruan Ji pingzhuan: kangkai renqi de yisheng* 阮籍評傳: 慷慨任氣的一生. Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe 南寧: 廣西教育出版社, 1994.
- Tu Weiming 杜維明. “Cong yi dao yan” 從意到言. In *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 (Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1981), 255-61.
- . “Wei Jin xuanxuezhong de tiyan sixiang: shilun Wang Bi shengren tiwu yi guannian de zhexue yiyi” 魏晉玄學中的體驗思想: 試論王弼聖人體無一觀念的哲學意義. *Mingbao xuekan* 明報學刊 18, 9 (1983): 21-26.
- Wan Shengnan 萬繩楠. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lungao* 魏晉南北朝史論稿. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe 合肥: 安徽教育出版社, 1983.
- . *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenhua shi* 魏晉南北朝文化史. Hefei: Huangshan shushe 合肥: 黃山書社, 1989.
- Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟. “Wang Bi Yi Lao xuezhong yuzhoulun he bentilun de jiehe” 王弼易老學中宇宙論和本體論的結合. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 2(1987): 70-77.

- . “Zenyang renshi Wang Bi de bentilun” 怎樣認識王弼的本體論. *Wenshizhe* 文史哲 3(1985): 17-19. Reprint. *Zhongguo zhhexueshi* 中國哲學史 6(1985):57-59.
- . *Wang Bi pingzhuang: xuanxue zhizu songxue zhizong* 王弼評傳: 玄學之祖宋學之宗. 南寧: 廣西教育出版社, 1997.
- . *Xuanxue tonglun* 玄學通論. Taibei: Wunan tushu 臺北: 五南圖書, 1996.
- . *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學. Jinan: Qilu shushe 濟南: 齊魯書社, 1987.
- Wang Deyou 王德有. *Tanyou lunwu: Weijin xuanxue* 談有論無: 魏晉玄學. Taibei: wanjuanlou tushu youxian gongsi 臺北: 萬卷樓圖書有限公司, 2000.
- Wang Liqi 王利器. “Zhuangzi Guo Ziang xu de zhenwei wenti.” 莊子郭象序的真偽問題. In *Xiaozhuan shuzhai wenshi lunji* 曉傳書齋文史論集. Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1989, 199-207.
- . *Ge Hong lun* 葛洪論. Taibei: Wunan tushu chuban gongsi 臺北: 五南圖書出版公司, 1997.
- Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅. *Zhongguo wenhuade qingliu* 中國文化的清流. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學院出版社, 1991.
- . “Wang Bi guli xintan” 王弼故里新探. *Kongmeng xuebao* 孔孟學報 75(1998):169-85.
- . “Guo Xiang ‘xing’ bentilun chutan 郭象 “性” 本體論初探. *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 9(2001): 32-38.
- . *Biography of Wang Bi* 王弼評傳. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press 南京大學出版社, 1996.
- . “Guo Xiang shengren lun yu xinxing zhexue” 郭象聖人論與心性哲學. *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 2(2003): 46-51.
- . “Jingzhou guanxue yu sanguo sixiang wenhua” 荊州官學與三國思想文化. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 1(1994): 44-49.

- . *Ji kang pin zhuan : hanwei fenggu jin zh lin yihe chang* 稽康評傳：漢魏風骨盡竹林遺恨長. Nanning: Guanxi jiaoyu chubanshe 南寧：廣西教育出版社, 1994.
- . *Rushidao yu WeiJin xuanxue xingcheng* 儒釋道與魏晉玄學形成. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京：中華書局, 2003.
- Wang Zhongluo 王仲榮. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 魏晉南北朝史. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe 上海：人民出版社, 1979; reprint 1981.
- Xu Bin 徐斌. *WeiJin xuanxue xinlun* 魏晉玄學新論. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海：上海古籍出版社, 2000.
- Xu Guorong 徐國榮. “Mingshi jingshen yu Han Wei zhiji Menzi diwei zhi chenfu” 名士精神與漢魏之際孟子地位之沈浮. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 5(2002): 67-76.
- Xu Fuguan 徐復觀. *Liang Han sixiangshi* 兩漢思想史. Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe 華東師範大學出版社, 2001.
- . *History of the Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature: the Pre-Qin Period* 中國人性論史(先秦篇). Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1969, 1990.
- Xu Jianliang 許建良. *WeiJin xuanxue lunli sixiang yanjiu* 魏晉玄學倫理思想研究. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 北京：人民出版社, 2003.
- Xu Kangsheng 許抗生. “Lun weijin shiqi de zhuzibaijiaxue” 論魏晉時期的諸子百家學. *Zhongguo zhhexueshi yanjiu* 中國哲學史研究 3(1982):31-42.
- . “He Wang xuanxue guanjian” 何王玄學管見. *Wenshizhe* 文史哲 3 (1985): 31-32. Reprint in 中國哲學史 *Zhongguo zhhexueshi* 6(1985): 56-57.
- . “Lun Wei Jin daojiao yu xuanxue de guanxi” 論魏晉道教與玄學的關係. *Zhongguo zhhexueshi yanjiu* 中國哲學史研究 3(1986): 26-31.
- Yan Buke 閻步克. “Wei Jin Nanbeichao shidai de zhiwenlun” 魏晉南北朝時代的質文論. *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1999.3.
- Yu Dunkang 余敦康. “Guo Xiang de shidai yu xuanxue de zhuti” 郭象的時代與玄學的主題. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3(1988): 23-33.

- . “Lun Wang Bide moulue sixiang yu guiwulun xuanxue de guanxi” 論王弼的謀略思想與貴無論玄學的關係. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 3 (1986): 78-85.
- . “Lun zhongguo siwei fazhan shishang de yici dabiange——xuanxue sichao zenyang daitile jingxue sichao” 論中國思維發展史上的一次大變革——玄學思潮怎樣代替了經學思潮. *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 1(1986):53-66.
- . *He Yan Wang Bi xuanxue xintan* 何晏王弼玄學新探. Jinan: Qilu shushe 濟南:齊魯書社, 1991.
- Yu Jiayi 餘嘉錫. *Hanshi san kao* 寒石散考. In *Yu Jiayi lunxue zazhu* 餘嘉錫論學雜著. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京:中華書局, 1963, vol.1, 181-226.
- Yu Yingshi 余英時. “Wang Sengqian ‘Jiezi shu’ yu naochao qingtang kaobian” 王僧虔<誠子書>與南朝清談考辨. *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊, 3 (1993):173-196.
- . “Mingjiao weiji yu Wei Jin shifeng de zhuanbian” 名教危機與魏晉士風的轉變. In *Zhongguo zhishi jieceng shi lun* 中國知識階層史論. Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe 臺北:聯經出版事業公司, 1980.
- Zeng Chunhai 曾春海. *Zhulin xianxue de dianfan——Xi Kang* 竹林玄學的典範——嵇康. Taipei: Wanjuanlou tushu gongsi 臺北:萬卷樓圖書公司, 2000.
- Zhang Beibei 張蓓蓓. *WeiJin xueshu renwu xinyan* 魏晉學術人物新研. Taipei: Da'an chubanshe 臺北: 大安出版社, 2001.
- Zhang Dainian 張岱年. “Wei Jin xuanxue de pingjia wenti” 魏晉玄學的評價問題. *Wenshizhe* 文史哲, 1985.3.
- . *Zhongguo gudianzhixue gainianfanchou yaolun* 中國古典哲學概念範疇要論. Beijing: zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe 北京: 中國社會科學出版社, 1989. English version *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy* is translated and edited by Edmund Ryden. New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2002.
- Zheng Qinren 鄭欽仁. “Jiupin guanren fa——Liu Shao de xuanju zhidu” 九品官人法——六朝的選舉制度. In *Zhongguo wenhua xinlun (zhidu pian)* 中國文

- 化新論(制度篇), Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 臺北: 聯經出版事業公司, 1982, 213-256.
- Zhou Daxing, 周大興. "Wang Bi 'xingqiqing' de renxing yuanjin lun" 王弼 '性其情' 的人性遠近論. *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 16 (March 2000).
- Zhou Guangzhuang 周光莊. "Wang Bi de Laozi jieshi fangfa lun" 王弼的《老子》解釋方法論. *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學 3(1998): 75-87.
- Zhou Shaoxian 周紹賢. *Daojia yu shenxian* 道家與神仙. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Taipei: Zhonghua shuju 臺北: 中華書局, 1974.
- . *Wei Jin qingtán shulun* 魏晉清談述論. Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 臺北: 商務印書館, 1966.
- Zhou Yiliang 周一良. *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lunji* 魏晉南北朝史論集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 北京: 中華書局, 1963.
- . *Wei Jin Nanbeichao zhaji* 魏晉南北朝史劄記. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1985.
- . "Liang Jin Nanchao de qingyi" 兩晉南朝的清議. In *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lunji* 魏晉南北朝史論集. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京: 北京大學出版社, 1997, 436-445.
- Zhu Dawei 朱大渭. *Liuchao shilun* 六朝史論. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1998.
- Zhu Xiaohai 朱曉海. "Caixing sibenlun ceyi" 才性四本論測義. *Journal of Oriental Studies* (Hong Kong) 18(1980): 207-24.
- Zhuang Wanshou 莊萬壽. *Ji Kang yanjiu ji nianpu* 嵇康研究及年譜. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju 臺北: 學生書局, 1990
- Zhuang Yaolang 莊耀郎. *Guo Xiang xuanxue* 郭象玄學. Taipei: liren shuju 臺北: 裏仁書局, 1998.
- Zou Benshun 鄒本順. "Wei Jin de caixing zhibian" 魏晉的才性之辨. *Renwen zazhi* 人文雜誌 4(1982): 28-31.