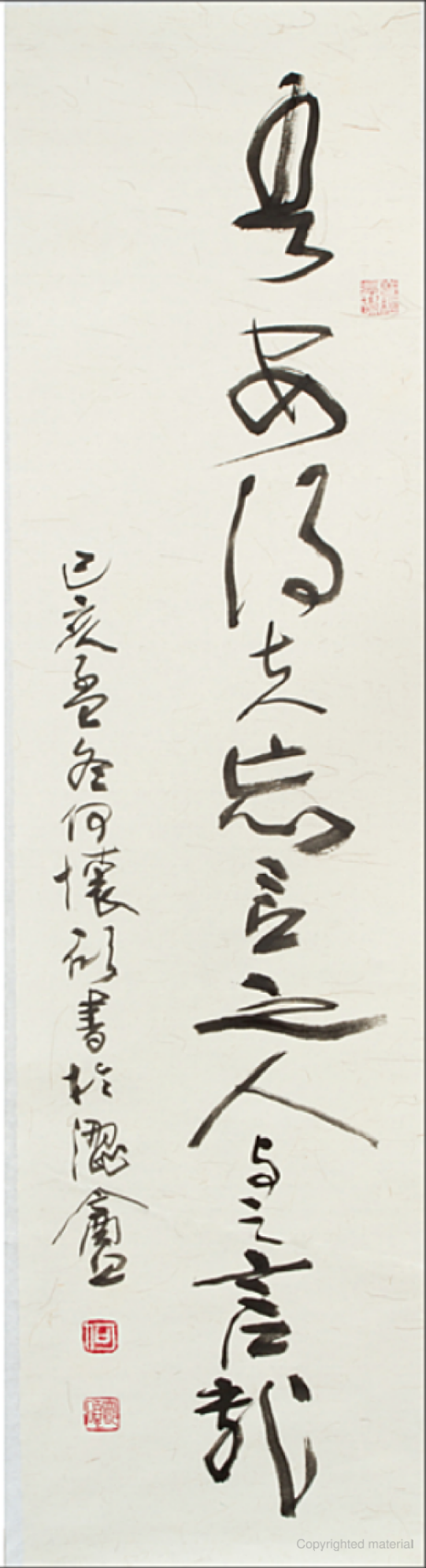
ZHUANGZI

A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted by Guo Xiang

Translated by

RICHARD JOHN LYNN



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吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉
"Where, oh, where can I find someone who will forget words so I may have a word with him?" (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 26)

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe many debts of gratitude to colleagues who helped this book come into existence. Work began more than two decades ago in 1998, immediately following my completion of *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the* Daode jing *of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, when the contract for this book, also with Columbia University Press, was signed. Progress since then was intermittent, with long periods of interruption due to other obligations, both professional and personal. First came the move from the University of Alberta to the University of Toronto in 1998, where from 1999 to 2005, I served as East Asian Studies Graduate Studies Coordinator and Professor of Chinese Thought and Literature. My retirement in June 2005 occasioned a move to Gabriola Island, British Columbia. During 2006–2007, I also served as Visiting Professor at the Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, in nearby Vancouver. During this time, earlier professorial visiting appointments were also held for shorter periods at the City University of Hong Kong and at Peking University (Beijing Daxue). Nevertheless, from the start, Jennifer Crewe, first as editor and later as the director of Columbia University Press, supported and encouraged the project through the years with more forbearance than I deserved. More recently, Christine Dunbar, its final editor, guided the project through to its end with a judicious hand and gracious advice. At various stages of completion, the manuscript was sent out to anonymous readers. I am grateful to their many expert and thoughtful suggestions.

My participation in two international conferences provided opportunities to interact with fellow scholars of the *Zhuangzi* and Wei-Jin *xuanxue* (arcane learning) thought, providing much new information and insight: International Conference on “Wang Bi and Guo Xiang: Commentaries and Philosophy Construction,” at the Chinese University of Hong Kong Research Centre for Chinese Philosophy and Culture (2005); and “Global Reception of the Classic

Zhuangzi: Han to Tang," at the Center for Chinese Studies, University of California at Berkeley (2019). At these and other occasions, conversations with friends and colleagues about the *Zhuangzi* and Guo Xiang contributed in countless ways, and I wish to thank in particular Zhang Longxi, Liu Xiaogan, Tim Barrett, Wang Baoxuan, Karl-Heinz Pohl, Brook Ziporyn, Michael Nylan, Esther Klein, Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Charles Muller, David Chai, Wendy Swartz, Robert Jackson, Martin Kern, David Knechtges, Qian Nanxiu, Victor Mair, Peipei Qiu, Peter Zhang, Stuart Sargent, Tom Tillemans, and Tobias Zürn.

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Finally, to my wife, Sonja Arntzen, I owe the most. Her patience and understanding, encouragement and unwavering support, constructive criticism, and heartfelt reassurance when the going got tough all mean more to me than I can ever express.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The arrangement and formatting of this translation follow my earlier translations of Wang Bi's commentaries to the *Zhouyi* and the *Laozi*: *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the* I Ching *as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the* Daode jing *of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). As such, this work forms another companion volume and completes my translation of all the *Sanxuan* (Three Arcane Classics), a term used both throughout the tradition and still common today, whose *locus classicus* is probably the *Yanshi jiaxun* (Family instructions for the Yan clan) of Yan Zhitui (531–591).[1] Several works were instrumental in the preparation of this translation: *Sōji* (*Zhuangzi*), by Akatsuka Kiyoshi (1913–1983); *Guo Xiang Zhuangzi zhu jiaoji* (Guo Xiang's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, with collation notes), by Wang Shumin (1914–2008); *Sōji no shisō to sono kaishaku: Kaku Shō Sei Gen'ei* (The thought of the *Zhuangzi* and its interpretation: Guo Xiang and Chen Xuanying), by Seki Masao; *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin xuanxue* (Guo Xiang and arcane learning in the Wei-Jin period), by Tang Yijie (1927–2014); and *Xuanxue tonglun* 玄學通論 (General survey of arcane learning), by Wang Baoxuan. Translated excerpts of Guo Xiang's commentary by Akatsuka and Seki often proved extremely helpful, the extensive commentary of Wang Shumin and his collation notes also greatly helped with interpreting the text of the *Zhuangzi*, and works by Tang Yijie and Wang Baoxuan have elucidated much concerning the basic assumptions, goals, rhetoric and modes of argument, and conclusions of *xuanxue* thinkers, thus providing meaningful parameters for Guo Xiang's own thought.

I have, of course, looked carefully at earlier translations of the *Zhuangzi*, particularly those by Burton Watson, *Chuang-tzu: The Complete Works*, and Victor Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*. It

seems to me that both versions are heavily indebted to the Japanese translations of Fukunaga Mitsuji (1918–2001), *Sōji* (*Zhuangzi*) (Watson), and Akatsuka (Mair). Since Fukunaga and Akatsuka largely follow the interpretive reading of the text by Lin Xiyi (ca. 1210–ca. 1273), *Zhuangzi Juanzhai kouyi jiaozhu* (Juanzhai's vernacular explications of the *Zhuangzi*), which is heavily influenced by neo-Confucian and Buddhist thought (especially Chan/Zen thought), their reading, as well as those by Watson and Mair, are radically different from that of Guo Xiang in many places, and thus equally different from my translation of the text, based as it is on Guo's commentary rather than on Lin Xiyi's. Nevertheless, referring to Watson's and Mair's versions greatly facilitated my treatment of many passages, especially those that tend more to narrative content than philosophical import.

As for the commentary itself, I am much indebted to Brook Ziporyn, who in his *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* uses a skillful inductive method based on a host of translated and interpreted passages to define both the general thrust of Guo's thought and the specific parameters of his modes of argument. Directed to such ends instead of focusing directly on the relationship between the commentary and the text of the *Zhuangzi*, Ziporyn's translations are inevitably often different from mine; but having got there first, his pioneering work has proved extremely helpful. I also must acknowledge my acquaintance with other prior translations of passages of Guo's commentary by Birthe Arendrup, Fung Yu-lan (Feng Youlan, 1895–1990), and Frederick W. Mote (in Hsiao Kung-ch'üan [Xiao Gongquan], *A History of Chinese Political Thought*). The translations of the *Zhuangzi* by James Legge and Herbert Giles also were occasionally consulted. Fung Yu-lan's *Chuang Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*, despite the promise of its title, proved disappointing: Only translations of the first seven "Inner" chapters of the text of the *Zhuangzi* are presented, and only those passages of Guo's commentary with which Fung agreed are included, and they are so abbreviated and paraphrased that their usefulness is rather limited.

I found the best modern annotated Chinese translation of the *Zhuangzi* to be *Zhuangzi* (1996), by Zhang Gengguang, and accordingly I often consulted it. However, the greatest assistance in translating Guo's commentary came from the subcommentary of Cheng Xuanying (ca. 600–ca. 660), contained in its entirety in *Zhuangzi jishi* (Collected explanations of Master Zhuang), compiled by Guo Qingfan (1844–1896), the base text for my translation of both the text of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary. Cheng's seventh-century prose expands on Guo's terse and too often opaque discourse of the late third–early fourth century, which is so ambiguous in places that its meaning is far from clear. In such cases, I

largely allowed Cheng to be my guide. My translation of institutional terms and official titles essentially follows Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, supplemented for the Wei-Jin era by reference to Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to a Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*, since the rendering of such terms in Loewe's work seem more accurate for the times in which Guo Xiang lived.

The translation technique here is the same as in *Classic of Changes* and *Laozi*: the text of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary are fully integrated, so the interpretation of the one is dependent on interpretation of the other. Adjusting what the text means in translation with the meaning of the commentary (and vice versa) demanded that I continuously had to ensure that the two complemented each other and were not at odds. Such a technique, of course, precludes independent presentation of either the *Zhuangzi* text or Guo's commentary; that is, translation of the commentary cannot simply be attached to some other translation of the *Zhuangzi* by Watson or Mair, for example—it just would not fit.

Guo's commentary is a long and difficult text. Even with all the exegetical help, from both traditional and modern scholarship, I am sure that errors in translation and interpretation have crept in despite my every effort—sometimes involving hours and even whole days of painful puzzling over single terms or phrases. Nevertheless, the many years of scholarly labor involved have afforded me far more joy than pain—it has been an incredibly enriching and fulfilling experience, for which I am most grateful.

Note

1. Yan Zhitui, *Yanshi jiaxun*, A: 35a: "The *Zhuang*, *Lao*, and *Zhouyi* are called as a group the *Sanxuan*."

INTRODUCTION

A "New" Translation

The word "new" here carries several meanings: (1) This translation of the *Zhuangzi*, "Sayings of Master Zhuang," is "new" in that it differs significantly from previous translations; (2) this difference is due to a "new" translation technique based on one particular traditional Chinese commentary, that of Guo Xiang (265–312). The reading of the *Zhuangzi* presented here is thus how Guo interpreted the text. To my knowledge, no previous translation of the *Zhuangzi*, into English or any other language, either in the modern East or West, has been based entirely on Guo's commentary. (3) The translation technique used here is also "new," in that the text of the *Zhuangzi* and its commentary are fully integrated; that is, the meaning of the one is determined by that of the other. Such a translation technique precludes independent presentation of either the *Zhuangzi* text or the commentary. Therefore, translation of the commentary cannot simply be attached to some other translation of the *Zhuangzi* (such as by Burton Watson or Victor Mair,[1] the two most popular English versions) because neither interprets its text consistently in terms of Guo's commentary, which makes many renditions of passages incompatible with it. Whereas some of Watson's and Mair's passages—mostly those involving straightforward narratives or parables—seem similar not only to each other but to those translated here, others with more philosophical content differ considerably because they are either based on different commentaries or are interpretations arrived at independently. Such independent interpretations are more apparent in A. C. Graham's translations of passages[2] and thus are usually quite different from Guo Xiang's readings presented here. (4) "New" does not necessarily mean "better" (that is, supposedly closer to the "original" meaning of the *Zhuangzi*). But what that original meaning might be has been a contentious

issue throughout the centuries up to now, complicated, of course, by what role Guo Xiang played in the recension of its text.

In light of Guo's editing of the much larger but long-lost fifty-two-chapter version of the *Zhuangzi* that apparently existed in his own time into his thirty-three-chapter version, we might ask, as does the prominent scholar of early Chinese thought and literature Professor Martin Kern, whether Guo's editing and reading of the text transform it from a late Warring States work from the third century bce into one shaped by the intellectual context of the Western Jin era of the early fourth century ce. And, if it does, does this mean that the text and its interpretation by Guo presented here remove the text that much farther from its original meaning?[3] Two opposing answers are possible: If one sides with hostile critics of Guo, both traditional and modern, who judge that he plagiarized the commentary from Xiang Xiu (ca. 223–ca. 275) and even twisted that into a new vehicle just to suit his own philosophy, then the *Zhuangzi* that I present has little in common with the original meaning. But if one believes that despite his radical editing and innovative commentary, Guo still preserved the drift of its basic integrity, then the text and commentary of this translation should embody both.

Although commentaries to the *Zhuangzi* appeared both before and after Guo Xiang, Guo's is the earliest to be preserved in its entirety. Moreover, his is almost entirely an interpretive commentary, with little concern about the identification of persons, places, and things. This deficiency was filled admirably by Cheng Xuanying (ca. 600–ca. 660), a scholarly Daoist priest from the early Tang dynasty, whose subcommentary I often quote in notes both for their factual information and for the light they cast on the more cryptic of Guo's interpretive passages. Cheng's prose consists of a far more standard vocabulary and syntax than does Guo's; thus, because it is easier to read, it often clarifies what is opaque in Guo's text.

Although Guo's commentary was never completely supplanted by later commentaries, its importance was considerably diminished by the *Zhuangzi Juanzhai kouyi* (Juanzhai's vernacular explications of the *Zhuangzi*) by Lin Xiyi (ca. 1210–ca. 1273), which incorporated Song-dynasty concepts and terminology from both Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, the dominant discourses of the time. Lin's reading of the *Zhuangzi* is very different from Guo's, and thus would result in an equally different translation.[4] Such differences are already reflected in the translations by Burton Watson and Victor Mair, whose works are significantly shaped by two Japanese translators and annotators of the *Zhuangzi*, Fukunaga Mitsuji (1918–2001)[5] for Watson and Akatsuka Kiyoshi (1913–1983) for Mair.[6] Both Fukunaga and Akatsuka were themselves greatly influenced by Lin's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, and their respective translations into Japanese generally follow

his readings closely. Since translations into modern Chinese also tend to follow Lin Xiyi's commentary, the modern reception of the *Zhuangzi* during the most recent two or three generations undoubtedly knows it more through Lin's reading than Guo's.

Nevertheless, Guo Xiang is immensely important in his own right, both for his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* and his contributions to the Chinese tradition of philosophy. The development of Chinese thought through the centuries was carried far more by commentaries to the foundational texts of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism than by stand-alone philosophical treatises. Guo's commentary surely must be counted among the most important in this regard, for it significantly advanced the tenets of arcane learning [*xuanxue*], the dominant discourse of the third to the sixth century CE, which not only linked essential features of Daoist metaphysics with Confucian morality and political philosophy to create a new worldview of its own, but also served as the basis for how concepts of Buddhism were received and developed in China. Later, such concepts and terminology made their way, either directly or via Buddhism, into the formulation of Neo-Confucianism during the Song era (the tenth to the thirteenth century). Therefore, ample reasons exist for focusing so much attention on Guo Xiang here.

After much consideration, I have settled on "arcane" to translate the *xuan* of *xuanxue*, which perhaps differs from the majority of current Western scholars of early medieval Chinese thought, who prefer "mystery" for *xuan* and "mystery learning" for *xuanxue*. *Xuan* has a wide range of meanings: "black," "dark," "dark color," "obscure," "hidden," "deep," "profound," "occult," "mysterious," "abstruse," "north/northerly," "deep understanding," "quiet/still," "marvelous," "sublime," "subtle," and "the color of the heavens and (figuratively) of Heaven." Moreover, the old term "Neo-Taoism"/"Neo-Daoism" for *xuanxue* is particularly misleading, since it suggests that *xuanxue* is primarily a renewal of the pre-Han thought of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* and fails to account for the amalgamation of that tradition of thought with many tenets of Confucianism. "Mystery," to my way of thinking, is also a misleading tag for *xuan* since, for students of comparative thought, it might well suggest aspects of the secret cults and mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world. "Arcane" seems more neutral in this respect, but this may be more based on personal preference than on firm heuristic principle. In any case, *xuan* translates as "arcane" throughout this introduction, the appendixes, and the translation of the texts of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary.

Adherents of the *xuanxue* tradition such as Guo Xiang are usually referred to in contemporary and later Chinese sources as belonging to the Daojia, a term that seems to have been invented by Sima Tan (ca. 165–110 BCE) as one of the

traditions of thought included in what he termed the "Essentials of the six *jia*" (*Liujia zhi yaozhi*), discussed in the *Shiji* (Records of the historian),[7] which was completed by his son, Sima Qian (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE), after his father's death. Kidder Smith translates Daojia as "men of Dao" in his analysis of Sima Tan's use of the term,[8] and Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan use the romanized term "Dao jia" throughout as they argue in their more recent and detailed analysis of the same material that *jia* in the *Shiji* refers to "the methods of individual persuaders, rather than established 'schools' or 'lineages.'[9] However, in one note, they do refer to Dao jia as "philosophical Taoism" in distinction to "religious Taoism."[10] Such a distinction has a long history and was first articulated in detail by Holmes Welch's *Taoism: Parting of the Way* (first published in 1957).[11] Nathan Siven revisited the issue in 1978 and did some much needed fine-tuning, but he still maintained the general distinction between *tao chia* [*Daojia*], the "Taoist school" (philosophical Daoism), and *tao chiao* [*Daojiao*], the "Taoist Sect" (religious Daoism). However, he also warned that the relationship between the two was often ambiguous, and much interaction occurred through the premodern era.[12]

In any event, I have found no evidence in the particular case of Guo Xiang that he was ever a "religious Daoist" involved in such activities as alchemy, hygiene, magic, religious ritual, or any quest for "transcendence" or "immortality" [*xian*], all of which are associated with religious Daoism. Therefore, since the terms "Daoism" and "Daoist" in the scholarly literature of recent years have largely been identified with religious Daoism, when the sources refer to Guo Xiang and other arcane learning [*xuanxue*] figures as "Daojia," or belonging to the "Daojia," to avoid confusion with religious Daoism, its adherents might best be translated as "Dao Scholastics" and their tradition of thought as "School of the Dao."

Sections of This Introduction

The sections of this introduction attempt to account for the sociopolitical context in which the basic assumptions and objectives of Guo's thought were founded, the conditions under which his commentary took shape, and his rise to political power and the effect it had on the commentary. All these topics are covered in "The Life and Times of Guo Xiang," "Guo Xiang's Commentary to the *Zhuangzi*," "Patronage of Sima Yue," and "Guo Xiang's Rise to Power." A major controversy that has lasted from Guo's own day until now concerns the authorship of the commentary. The following sections provide both an account of the controversy and an attempt to settle the debate: "Guo Xiang as Alleged Plagiarist, His Accusers," "Plagiarism Challenged: Doubtful Sources," "The Charge of Plagarization and Its Refutation,"

"The Modern Rehabilitation of Guo Xiang: Textual Comparisons," and "Comparison of Interpretive Content: Innovations in Guo's Commentary." Several sections then follow, which attempt to identify and explore the essential features of Guo's thought and to situate it both in the context of thinkers of his own time and to analyze it in terms of modern philosophical categories: "Created or Self-generated, Immanence or Transcendence, Immanent Transcendence," "The Universal and Particular Dao," "Transcendent Naturalism Versus Immanent Naturalism," "Pei Wei, Material Existence, and "Immanent Monism," "Immanent Transcendence in the Writings of Ruan Ji," "Xiang Xiu and Xi Kang on Perspicacity (Zhi)," "Immanent Transcendence and Guo Xiang's Immanent Monism," and, finally, "Xiang Xiu and Guo Xiang: Major Differences and Similarities." The next section, "Guo Xiang and the Zhuangzi," examines the relationship between the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary: Did Guo get its real meaning? Did he distort it completely? Or does the truth lie somewhere in between? Then, "Guo Xiang and Buddhism" describes Guo's general connections with Buddhism and directs the reader to detailed scholarship on the subject. The introduction closes with a section called "Master Zhuang and the Text Attributed to Him," which examines the history and recension of the text and provides a brief account of its essential features.

The Life and Times of Guo Xiang

Guo Xiang[13] (personal name Zixuan) was born between 262 and 269 and died in 311 or 312, with modern scholarship largely agreeing on 265–312 for his lifespan. As for his native place, whereas one source locates it in Yingchuan commandery (present-day central Henan)[14] and another in Henei, "Inside the Yellow River," commandery[15] (present-day northern Henan), most simply say that it was Henan. The connection with Yingchuan perhaps can be inferred from Guo's known close association with fellow arcane learning [*xuanxue*] master Yu Ai (262–311), who hailed from there. His family background, completely obscure, is never addressed in any sources, which suggests that no family members had ever been officials and Guo was originally without elite rank or title. However, his family, probably rural landlords or owners of some kind of commercial enterprise, must have had the resources to provide Guo with an elite education, resources that continued to support him through his maturity and allowed him for years to spurn offers of lower provincial and prefectural offices as he led a cultured and learned lifestyle at home.

As someone who by birth seems to have lacked close elite connections, in an era dominated by great clans and the aristocracy, Guo's chances to achieve high

office were slim. However, two avenues did exist: (1) building a reputation as a learned and eloquent proponent of arcane learning [*xuanxue*], the dominant intellectual discourse of the day; and (2) being recruited to and rising within the staff of one of the Jin princes, either in the fief administration or in posts associated with the prince if he held positions in the central government. The former could attract a recommendation to office by a well-placed person, who in Guo's case was Wang Yan (256–311), then a doyen of arcane learning and a man who wielded enormous influence when it came to appraisal of personal character [*pinping*]. When Wang made Guo's acquaintance in the 290s, he was the defender-in-chief [*taiwei*], the highest military officer in the land, and personally well connected at court. The empress, Jia Nanfeng (257–300), who ruled between 291 and 300 in the name of her husband, the mentally defective Emperor Hui (Sima Zhong (259–307)), had had one of Wang's daughters married to Crown Prince Yu, Sima Yu (278–300), and another to her nephew, Jia Mi (d. 300). Wang's influence resulted in Guo receiving offers of several provincial and prefectural offices, which he refused because he was still biding his time. A few years later, with his reputation further enhanced, Guo found a patron in the prince of Donghai, Sima Yue (d. 311), who fostered his career from 302 on.

What little is known about Guo's early life indicates that he was extremely intelligent, devoted to foundational Daoist texts, and a keen scholar of arcane learning [*xuanxue*]:

> Xiang, whose personal name was Zixuan, was a native of Henan. From an early age he had a capacity for analytical thinking [*caili*], which he used to pursue the Dao. Devoted to learning, he assiduously applied himself to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. His contemporaries all regarded him as second only to Wang Bi.[16]

Since Wang Bi (226–249), along with He Yan (190–249), was one of the most significant figures in the earlier *xuanxue* tradition,[17] this was indeed high praise. Guo also became known as a voluble virtuoso of "pure discourse" [*qingyan*]. Both qualities came to the attention of Wang Yan:

> From an early age, Guo Xiang, personal name Zixuan, had a capacity for analytical thinking. Dedicated to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, he excelled at pure discourse. Defender-in-chief [*taiwei*] Wang often said of him, "When listening to Xiang talk, he seems like a great waterfall pouring out inexhaustibly." Although recruited for provincial and prefectural offices, he

would not serve but went on living a free life at home so he could enjoy writing and discussion.[18]

In connection with this passage, Yu Jiaxi (1884–1955) points out that the *Beitang shuchao* (Excerpts from books in the Northern Hall), compiled by Yu Shinan (558–638), cites a passage in the *Yulin* (Grove of anecdotes) of Pei Qi (second half of the fourth century):

> Grand Guardian Wang asked Sun Xinggong [Sun Chuo (310/314–371)], "What kind of a man is Guo Xiang?" Sun replied, "His use of words is refined and elegant, overflowing with energy, forming coherent discourse as fast as they are uttered, like a waterfall gushing water, they pour out inexhaustibly."[19]

This passage actually appears twice in the *Beitang shuchao*,[20] but it is either corrupt or a later invention, for the exchange between Wang Yan and Sun Chuo, who was born either about the year Wang died or two to four years later, could not have occurred. However, it is likely that a tradition of describing Guo's rhetorical power, in more or less the same words, existed at least until Sun Chuo's time, the generation following Guo's death.

In any case, Guo seems to have been well acquainted with Wang Yan. For example, probably in 297, he was invited to a large Wang family gathering:

> Three days after the marriage of Cavalier Attendant Pei [Pei Xia] to a daughter of defender-in-chief Wang, a grand party was held for his sons-in-law, to which eminent literati of the day and junior members of the Wang and Pei clans were also invited. Guo Zixuan, who attended, challenged Pei to a debate. Despite Zixuan's rich endowment of talent, during several exchanges at the start he was not quite at the top of his form, thus, although the propositions he set forth were extremely rich and pithy, Pei easily handled what he first proposed and argued with such subtlety that it made all those present sigh with pleasure.[21]

Guo's presence at such a gathering suggests that by the mid-290s, he enjoyed a considerable reputation among arcane learning circles. That he could challenge Pei Xia, a prominent expert of "pure discourse" or "pure conversation" [*qingtan*] and scion of the well-established Pei clan, which included masters in *qingtan* such as his father, Pei Chuo, and uncle, Pei Kai (237–291), indicate both daring and confidence. Guo had obviously climbed into their ranks:

> Kai's younger brother Chuo, personal name Jishu, was a man of great breadth of mind and expansive personality, whose highest offices were "attendant gentleman of the yellow gate" [*huangmen shilang*] and commandant [*xiaowei*] of troops in Changshui [southwest of Luoyang]. Zhuo's son Xia excelled at discussing arcane principles [*xuanli*], which he enunciated in a clear and fluent voice, sharp and cool as the notes of a balloon lute. When he once debated such things with Guo Xiang from Henan, the whole assembly present could only sigh in submission. Another time when seated as a guest of Pacifier of the East General Zhou Fu [d. 311] and playing *weiqi* [capture chess, Japanese *go*] with someone, Commander Fu toasted him to have a drink, but because he did not respond immediately, the commander, in a drunken rage, pulled him over so he fell down. However, Xia slowly got up, merely resumed his seat, not changing his expression, and continued playing just as before. His nature was as void and placid as that.[22]

The offers of provincial and prefectural posts that now came Guo's way were surely due to Wang Yan's influence. It is significant that Guo spurned them all. The cynic might conclude that he extended his period of self-cultivation not in the search for wisdom, but to further enhance his reputation and gain entry to the upper echelons of government. Such a view shapes the few surviving sources that address his life, particularly passages in Liu Yiqing (403–444), the nominal author of *Shishuo xinyu* (A new account of tales of the world), and Fang Xuanling (579–648), the principal editor of *Jinshu* (History of the Jin), a biography of Guo Xiang. Although both works accuse Guo of being "mean and insincere" [*xingbo*] and are often cited to prove that his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* is only a small part his and most of it actually the work of Xiang Xiu (ca. 223–ca. 275), enough evidence exists to refute both assertions. However, before exploring this issue, we should first consider his climb to high office.

It was not until 302, when Sima Yue became minister of works [*sikong*], that Guo began his official career; it is recorded in the *Wenshi zhuan* (Biographies of literary men), edited by Zhang Yin (late fourth century) and Zhang Zhi (act. ca. 401), that "Guo was then summoned to office as a section administrator in the ministry of works [*sikong yuan*]. . . ."[23] A section administrator [*yuan*] was at rank seven [*qipin*], already two ranks up from nine, the lowest rank. The years between 300 and 304 were a favorable time for someone from the fringes of privilege to enter officialdom, even at a rank usually reserved for young men from elite families, since (1) Chaotic internal war conditions due to the "Rebellions of the Eight Princes" [*bawang zhi luan*][24] resulted in a relaxation of conventions and rules governing recruitment to the bureaucracy. (2) Two men sympathetic to Guo then

held powerful positions in government. The wealthy aesthete, once a general and now minister of education [*situ*] Wang Rong (234–305), was an older, distant cousin of Wang Yan. The other, of course, was Guo's patron, Sima Yue. Wang Rong, remembered as one of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" and affiliated with *xuanxue* from his early years, was surely aware of Guo's own promotion of *xuanxue* and his commentary to the *Zhuangzi*. However, since Wang Rong is not known to have directly sponsored men such as Guo to office, it is more likely that it was Sima Yue, the sponsor of many such men, who first brought him into government. For the next eight years, Guo's fate is inextricably linked to Sima Yue's growing consolidation of power. The last decade of his life is so intertwined with that of Sima Yue that Guo's personal rise to power and the effect this had both on his *Zhuangzi* commentary and its subsequent reception cannot be fully appreciated unless we examine Sima Yue's own story.

Some two years later, in 304, we find Sima Yue, still minister of works in Luoyang, executing the orders of the regent and crown prince Sima Ying, prince of Chengdu, who at the time was leading military operations in the field from his headquarters in Yecheng (modern Handan, Hebei). It was then that Sima Yue had Guo promoted to "gentleman in attendance of the yellow gate" [*huangmen shilang*][25]—that is, supervising secretary of the chancellery, at rank five [*wupin*]. As one of several officials who handled memorials to the emperor, this placed him close to the pinnacle of power. In 306, when Sima Yue finally put an end to the rebellions of the eight princes and became senior tutor [*taifu*], he made Guo his recorder [*taifu bu*], which enhanced his position even further.

Guo Xiang's Commentary to the *Zhuangzi*

It was also about this time that Guo completed his commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, evidence for which appears in the account of Xiang Xiu's work on the *Zhuangzi* that was included in Xiang's biography in the *Jinshu*:

> Although readers throughout the ages applied themselves to the several tens of inner and outer chapters of Zhuang Zhou's work, no one ever succeeded in expounding its overall intent. But then Xiang Xiu explained its hidden aspects, which so clarified its profound meaning that it excited a vogue for arcane learning. Its readers had then acquired such an extraordinarily clear and heartfelt understanding of it that for a time no one thought it deficient in any respect. However, during the reign of Emperor Hui [r. 290–306], Guo Xiang went on to bring out such an expansion of Xiang's work that people henceforth

> scorned all footprints left behind by the Confucians and Mohists, and School of the Dao [*Daojia*] sayings flourished instead.[26]

It is actually possible to narrow down the time for the completion of the commentary to approximately 302–306. Although the reign of Emperor Hui began in 290, evidence from Guo's own writings suggests that his commentary could not have been completed during the early part of that reign: in his commentary to 33.23, the last passage in the *Zhuangzi*, Guo acknowledges:

> Earlier, when I had not yet myself examined the *Zhuangzi*, I occasionally heard people engaged in discussion and arguing about the meaning of such things as "a stick a foot long" and "linked rings," which they all said were from the *Zhuangzi*. I consequently thought that Master Zhuang belonged to the tradition of the rhetoricians. However, once I noted that the current chapter, which compares and critiques various philosophical masters, in this passage states that the way of the rhetoricians is so confused and contradictory that what they say misses the mark completely, I realized how possible it was that heeding such rumors harmed the truth.

Although Guo does not say when he began his study of the *Zhuangzi*, he likely was well into his exploration of philosophical thought before he had even begun to read the works of Master Zhuang. Note also that these remarks were composed only after he had first read much, if not all, of the text available to him. Assuming that Guo did not begin his commentary until he had read through the material at least once, work on the commentary itself, either concurrent with or subsequent to his massive editing of the *Zhuangzi* material, is unlikely to have been a project of his youth. By 290, Guo was twenty-five but still living at home and studying. By then, he had a reputation as a fast thinker and talker, but no evidence has come to light that he was also a fast writer. Whereas it is quite possible that he began the commentary by 290, it likely took at least a decade to complete, given the enormous task of editing the material from fifty-two chapters to thirty-three and composing a commentary that almost rivals the length of the *Zhuangzi* itself as he edited it.[27]

Other evidence also suggests that the commentary was a product of his later years, for running through the entire commentary is an undercurrent of statecraft pragmatism that was likely to have grown along with his involvement with the politics and military strife that marked the years 300 to 306. By the time he composed the commentary, he seemed to have moved away from disengaged philosophical speculation to embrace politics, eager to join in the search for

practical solutions. He thus not only found Master Zhuang wanting but also realized that he could remedy the work that Zhuang left by creating a commentary that converted its perceived impracticalities into a treatise of effective statecraft, for as Guo states in his preface to the *Zhuangzi*:

> We can say of Master Zhuang that he did indeed understand the underlying basis of things [*ben*]. As such, he never kept wild talk about it to himself. His words are those of one who responds to things in a unique way but fails to identify with them. Since he so responded but failed to identify with them, his words may be apt but have no practical use, and since what he says fails to address practical matters, though lofty it has no application. A gap certainly exists between one such as he who quietly refrains from action and one who does start to act but only because it is inevitable—for him it may be said his awareness is unselfconscious. When mind functions in terms of unselfconscious action, one responds as he is immediately affected, his response varying according to the moment involved. Such a one speaks only with utmost caution. As such, he forms one body with transformation and, flowing through a myriad ages, arcanely merges with things. How could such a one just playfully talk about otherworldly things only in terms of his own individual experience![28]

According to Guo, Master Zhuang is deficient in three respects: (1) Although he responds spontaneously and uniquely to things (without prejudice and free of influence), he fails "arcanely to merge" or "become one" with them. As such, his words never quite attain sagely wisdom, the articulation of which is the most practical advice possible. (2) Guo sees Master Zhuang as essentially disengaged from worldly affairs, one who "quietly refrains from action," whereas the truly enlightened sage does act, but only "because it is inevitable" or when "there is no alternative" [*budeyi*]. (3) Whereas Master Zhuang engages in "wild talk" couched in terms of his own personal experience, the truly enlightened sage, identifying perfectly with things in all space and time, "speaks only with the utmost caution."

Beginning in 306, Guo held high office, close to the center of power. By this time, he had likely concluded his work on the *Zhuangzi* and put it aside, finished or not. The state of the commentary itself supports this view, for the last of the three sections, the "Miscellaneous Chapters" [*zapian*], especially chapters 28–33, show markedly less attention than all the earlier parts of the work: only three passages in chapter 28, "Refusing Rulership" [*Rangwang*], receive comments, as do only another three in chapter 29, "Robber Zhi" [*Dao Zhi*]. Chapter 30, "Discourse on Swords" [*Shuojian*], lacks commentary entirely. Chapter 31, "The Old Fisherman"

[*Yufu*], has only a single comment attached to its last passage, which in a few brief sentences attempts to sum up the meaning of the entire chapter. For chapter 32, "Lie Yukou," most passages have comments, but compared with earlier chapters, they seem rather sketchy. Although most of the passages in chapter 33, "All Under Heaven" [*Tianxia*], receive comments, most of them tend to be brief, while the comment attached to 33.23, one of the longest in the entire commentary, does not address this, the last passage in the work, but instead provides Guo's opinion of Master Zhuang in general. Overall, the comments for chapters 28–33, compared to those for most earlier parts of the work, show signs of haste. Therefore, Guo's commentary received the last of his attention either just before or after he was appointed recorder for the senior tutor in 306. It was then that Guo tried to finish what he could of the commentary, which he then soon abandoned, for his attention was focused elsewhere and he was just too busy.

Patronage of Sima Yue

In 307, Emperor Hui was poisoned, likely on the orders of Sima Yue and possibly with the connivance of the crown prince, Sima Chi (284–313), who then became Emperor Huai.[29] Sima Yue, determined on acquiring power himself, immediately tried to dominate him, but the new emperor proved to be no pushover, for he enjoyed long and close connections with the Luoyang imperial guard and, as a son of the previous emperor, elicited strong support from many in the capital who championed succession legitimacy. He was also an experienced military leader and an energetic and engaging political figure, who enjoyed a considerable personal following, both before and after his ascension. Moreover, he gained followers from among opponents of the machinations to grasp power by the empress dowager, Yang Xianrong (d. 322), and her clique. Sima Yue was even found among these opponents of Yang, for it is thought that he considered the emperor easier to deal with than the empress dowager.[30]

While it may have been due to the emperor's strong support at the time that Sima Yue decided to leave Luoyang, shelving his plans to take immediate control, he had another more pressing concern. In March and April of 307, Wang Mi (d. 311) led a rebellion in Sima Yue's Donghai domain, which succeeded in taking Qingzhou and Xuzhou and killing their governors. Xuzhou, at the heart of the domain, was the primary source from which Sima Yue drew his standing army and on which he depended for political power. But when he asked permission to return to Donghai, the emperor, aware of its importance to him, refused. Sima Yue instead established his headquarters at Xuchang, about 100 miles southeast of

Luoyang, taking his princely court with him, including the office staff of the senior tutor [*taifu fu*], which now included Guo Xiang.[31] His choice of Xuchang seemed sound at the time, for it lay within striking distance of the rebellion to the east, and from Xuchang, he could oversee his troops deployed on all sides of Luoyang, which were commanded by his three younger brothers. These forces controlled all the approaches to Luoyang, including the most important, the one from the southeast, the only route by which the capital could then be supplied since all the western sources for supplying the capital were cut off by the Xiongnu, led by Liu Yao (d. 329), and all sources to the north were in the hands of the Jie people, led by Shi Le (274–333).

However, despite extensive military campaigning over the next two and a half years, much of it led in person by Sima Yue, all efforts proved futile, since he was gradually deprived of territory and driven westward toward Xuchang during 307–308 by the combined forces of Liu Yao and Shi Le, who now controlled most of the land north of the Yellow River. In the spring of 309, Sima Yue, still garrisoned in Xuchang, dispatched three thousand heavily armed soldiers into Luoyang, and at the court, had them kill most of the emperor's supporters. He then returned to Luoyang and made himself chancellor [*chengxiang*], assuming control of all civil and military affairs for the central government. Guo Xiang, now well established as one of Sima Yue's intimate advisors, returned with him to Luoyang, where his duties as recorder extended to the office of the chancellor. From then on, Sima Yue seems to have held two offices concurrently: he kept his position of grand tutor while assuming the new position of chancellor. He also apparently kept the staff of his office of grand tutor intact, now seconding its members to his new office, which resulted in Guo becoming recorder for the chancellor [*chengxiang zhubu*].[32]

Guo Xiang's Rise to Power

Guo Xiang's own rise to power is remarkable, for a recorder [*zhubu*] was subordinate to three higher positions in a princely court [*gongfu*]: chief clerk [*zhangshi*], major [*sima*], and palace guard administrator [*congshi zhonglang*]. Moreover, Guo was just one of five recorders who held that post during 306–310/311; the others were Pian Dun (d. 329), Liu Yan (dates unknown), Xun Kai (d. 324), and Pei Xia, the *xuanxue* rhetorician who had bested Guo at the wedding party of 297. Men who filled the senior positions then included Chancellor Pan Tao (d. 311), who had been on Sima Yue's princely staff since before 300; major and gentleman of the palace Liu Qia (dates unknown), Sima Yue's superintendent of

the capital [*zhongwei*]; and Major Yu Ai (262–311), Guo's friend and fellow *xuanxue* thinker.[33] Since these seven men were all scions of elite families and highly experienced senior military leaders or administrators, Guo was very much the odd man out. Nevertheless, Sima Yue, who spent most of the first decade of the fourth century out in the field, delegated most of the administration of his court and government during this time to Guo Xiang before, during, and after his usurpation of the complete power of the Jin state:

> When Prince Yue of Donghai appointed Guo recorder for the senior tutor [*taifu zhubu*], as his most trusted deputy, he began to wield such power that its touch smoked or singed [*xunzhuo*] those inside and outside the court. However, because general opinion later turned against him, he was removed from office.[34]

The metaphor "smoke and singe" indicates the effect of great power: like fire, it smokes those at a distance, "outside the court," and singes those nearby, "inside the court." This account in the *Jinshu* is corroborated by a fragment from another work of the same title, the *Jinshu* (History of the Jin) of Zang Rongxu (415–488): "When Guo Xiang, personal name Zixuan, was appointed recorder for the senior tutor [Sima Yue] he so enjoyed his confidence that he was able to use his office to control the military of the entire government [*zhuanling jun yifu*].[35] Wang Xiaoyi interprets in detail what *zhuanling jun yifu* means:

> During the Western Jin, the imperial palace guard consisted of the Left and Right Guards and the Resolute Cavalry of the Van, Rear, Left, and Right, seven garrisons in all, known as the "Seven Armies of the Imperial Guard."[36] The most important units in the entire imperial palace guard were the two Guards of the Left and Right, whose commanders-in-chief were the Left General and Right General of the Guards. The entire "Seven Armies of the Imperial Guard" were under the authority of a commander-in-chief, the Capital Commandant (also called "General of the Palace Guard" or "Watch Officer of the Northern Army"). According to the *Jin jiang xiang dachen biao* (Chronological table of Jin dynasty generals, ministers, and high officials) of Wan Sitong (1638–1702), while Sima Yue was dictator from the Guangxi era to the fourth year of the Yongjia era [306–310], the position of commander-in-chief of the imperial palace guard went unfilled, either as Capital Commandant, General of the Palace Guard, or Watch Officer of the Northern Army,[37] and one of the Senior tutor's [Sima Yue] individual assistants instead served as such an Imperial Palace Guard Supervisor. The trusted aid who then filled this crucial position was none another than Guo Xiang. . . . The expression *zhuanling jun*

yifu means that circumstances were such that no formally appointed senior official was in charge of the imperial palace guard, and Guo Xiang as Sima Yue's deputy had total authority over all military garrisons associated with it. The normal role of a recorder was management of the routine work of the department involved and supervision of its subordinate officials. However, during exceptional conditions stemming from the chaos of war, especially if the department head had also actually taken control of the imperial government, the role of such a subordinate official becomes rather flexible, and, as the department head's deputy, could become commander-in-chief of the army and even administer the puppet court. . . . Therefore, it is evident that it was entirely possible for Guo Xiang, holding the position of recorder for the senior tutor, to carry out the duties of "capital commandant" as his deputy. It was exactly because Guo Xiang had this extraordinary position that the "Guo Xiang biography" in the *Jinshu* states that "he began to wield such power that its touch smoked or singed those inside and outside the court." This happened while Guo Xiang was associated with Sima Yue's faction when it had reached its peak of political power, but, just as in the dramatic climax of a play, he was inextricably dragged along in its swift downfall that soon occurred afterwards.[38]

Guo Xiang as Alleged Plagiarist and His Accusers

The *Jinshu* biography then goes on to close its account of Guo's life and shifts the focus to his *Zhuangzi* commentary:

Toward the end of the Yongjia era [307–313] Guo fell ill and died, leaving a work, *Beilun* (Tombstone Discourses) in twelve chapters.[39] Up to then, dozens had written commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*, but all had failed to master its overall intent. But Xiang Xiu [ca. 221–ca. 300], taking an approach different from these old commentaries, explained its meaning in a marvellously new and wonderfully engaging way, which resulted in a great development of arcane learning. When Xiang Xiu died, only the two chapters "Autumn Floods" and "Perfect Joy" remained undone. Since his sons were then too young to do anything about it, his interpretation remained incomplete and piecemeal. However, quite a few copies of this separate version of Xiu's work began to circulate. Guo Xiang was a man whose conduct was reprehensible, so when he saw that Xiang Xiu's interpretation had not achieved proper circulation, he plagiarized the commentary and passed it off as his own work. He composed his own commentary to only two chapters, "Autumn Floods" and "Perfect Joy," and modified just one chapter, "Horses' Hooves." For all other chapters, he probably just edited the wording. Later on, Xiang Xiu's own interpretation also

> appeared as a separate work, so two versions of the *Zhuangzi* now exist, Xiang's and Guo's, but interpretation of it is one and the same.[40]

This passage is copied almost verbatim from an account in the *Shishuo xinyu*, differing only in one sentence: "As for Guo Xiang, he was a man whose conduct was contemptible, though he possessed great talent, so when he saw that Xiang Xiu's interpretation had not achieved proper circulation . . ."[41] However, that people thought Guo's conduct contemptible was not just because of this supposed act of plagiarism; the act itself was considered characteristic of a far greater fault. Such a negative view of Guo seems to have derived from both his perceived desertion of the lofty principles of Lao-Zhuang philosophy by striving for high office and, even more serious, the way that he acted once he held a position of power. Such was the view, for example, of his erstwhile friend, Yu Ai:

> Then, joining the office of senior tutor for military affairs [*taifu junshi*] of Prince Yue of Donghai [Sima Yue], Yu was transferred to the post of military consultant libationer [*junzi jijiu*]. At that time, the court of Prince Yue was filled with many men of exceptional talent. Although Yu Ai was one of them, he always kept his hands inside his sleeves [observed but took no active part]. Guo Xiang from Henan, then an aide [*zhangshi*] to the regional governor of Yuzhou [a province comprising Henan and northern Hubei], was considered by his contemporaries a second Wang Bi [226–249]. Ai, who knew him well, often said, "Why should Guo Zixuan be thought a lesser man than I, Yu Zisong!" But later, when Guo had become recorder for the senior tutor and used his official appointment to usurp autocratic power, it prompted Ai to say to him, "Henceforth you may be a man of great ability for our present age, but the high opinion I formerly had of you now is all gone!"[42]

At the end of the *Jinshu*, fascicle 50, which contain the biographies of Yu Ai, Guo Xiang, Yu Chun (Yu Ai's uncle), and the upright official Qin Xiu (later third to the early fourth century), the chief editor, Fang Xuanying (578–648), as court historian [shichen] proclaimed:

> For centuries, Master Yu [Ai] has carried a reputation for pure virtue and been praised by the whole world. The area between the Ru and the Ying rivers [Henan] produced many men of extraordinary ability, so how could such a man have been found elsewhere? Mofu [Yu Chun, the uncle of Yu Ai] had always detested the obsequious and wicked, but he only divulged this when he had indulged in food and drink. Therefore, as when shooting at rats one fears to break vessels, how can we make rash accusations? But just as someone who

> steals another's property is justly called a thief, Zixuan [Guo Xiang] borrowed another's reputation and claimed credit due to him, so why should we not take him for a thief!

In the "Appraisal" [*zan*] of these figures, which immediately follows, Fang delivers the final blow: "Whereas [Guo] Xiang claimed credit due to another, Qin Xiu was a man who hated wickedness."[43] Guo's biography is sandwiched between those of Yu Ai and Yu Chun, a high official (governor of Henan) whose reputation for lofty integrity also stands in great contrast to the one that Fang thrust upon Guo, which was designed to denigrate him as much as possible. Never questioned, the *Shishuo xinyu* passage and Guo's *Jinshu* biography were often repeated in sources for the rest of the tradition and into modern times, albeit at times reworded slightly differently or abbreviated.[44]

The view that Guo had usurped and abused his authority tarnished his reputation for centuries; for example, Yan Zhitui (531–591), staunch Confucian that he was, included Guo in a general diatribe against figures prominent in *xuanxue* thought, which Yan considered inimical to good government and society:

> The writings of Masters Lao and Zhuang teach perfection of authenticity, nourishment of original nature, and aversion to entanglement by things. As such, the one hid from fame as a court archivist and finally went off to tread desert sands, while the other concealed himself as clerk of the lacquer garden and in the end rejected the prime ministership of Chu. This is exactly how the truly unfettered should behave.
>
> However, the likes of He Yan (190–249) and Wang Bi [226–249] transmitted what they taught as "arcane tradition" [*xuanzong*], which, among themselves, they flaunted and promoted, sticking together like shadows of one another or so much grass bending to the wind. Believing that the transformative power of the Divine Farmer [Shennong] and the Yellow Thearch inhered in them all, they discarded the tradition of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius as unworthy of attention. Nevertheless, Pingshu [He Yan] was executed because he was associated with Cao Shuang [d. 249] and, when he got caught in the net of the law, died for the sake of power. Fusi [Wang Bi] provoked resentment because he too often ridiculed others, and the trap he fell into was his excessive desire to win. Shan Juyuan [Shan Tao (205–283)] incurred ridicule for amassing wealth, for he had violated the maxim, "much hoarding is sure to result in heavy loss."[45] Xiahou Xuan (209–254) was killed because of his talent and popularity, which means he did not follow the examples of Zhili [Shu] and "the unspoiled simple" and "useless wood" [*yongzhong*].[46] When the wife of Xun Fengqian [Xun Can (ca. 209–ca. 237)] passed away, he was so wounded in spirit that he himself died, which is not at all the character of one who drums on an earthenware vessel![47] When Wang Yifu [Wang Yan (256–311)] mourned his son, he

was so grief-stricken that he could not bear it, which was completely unlike Dongmen [Wu] with his consummate insight.[48] When Xi Shuye [Xi Kang] disdained conventional behavior, how was he the kind of person who "merges with the brilliant and becomes one with the very dust"![49] When Guo Zixuan went after autocratic power that made people alarmingly upset, how was that the way to "place himself in the rear" and "put aside his person"![50] Ruan Sizong [Ruan Ji (210–263)] immersed himself in wine and lived a disordered life, which was contrary to the advice: when the road is feared, people should take warning.[51] Xie Youyu [Xie Kun (282–324)] was cashiered from office because he took bribes, which ran counter to what was meant when he [Master Zhuang] threw back his extra fish.[52]

These men were all leading figures to whom adherents of arcane doctrine gravitated. As for other such lesser figures, who, shackled by the dust and filth of the world and thoroughly confounded by fame and profit, how can I possibly address all of them! Such people do nothing but take up pure conversation [*qingtan*] and elegant views [*yalun*] to analyze the utmost subtleties of arcane doctrine. Host and guest may go back and forth with all this, but it only delights the mind and pleases the ear and has nothing to do with the essentials for saving the world and establishing good moral habits.[53]

Yan Zhitui seems to have been so determined to denigrate *xuanxue* that he refused to entertain the possibility that it might contribute to effective statecraft and a good society, which, after all, was the apparent intent of Guo's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*.

Other detractors embellished the plagiarism accusation with unsubstantiated elaborations of their own. For example, Chen Jiru (1558–1639), the prominent painter, calligrapher, essayist, and arbiter of taste and culture, not only condemned Guo for stealing the commentary from Xiang Xiu, but also denounced the very idea that commentaries helped one to understand the *Zhuangzi*:

Forty-nine different commentaries to *Zhuangzi* exist in a total of five hundred sixteen fascicles. Although the "wings" to *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* as a pair have received much praise recently,[54] my friend Zou Mengyang [1575–1643] told me that all such commentaries should be discarded, except for the one by Guo Zixuan, for it alone is all we need. Yu Shanfu [Yu Ai (262–311), who was fond of reading the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, said, "This is exactly the way I think!" And Xi Shuye [Xi Kang[55] (223–262)] asked "Why must this book [*Zhuangzi*] have any commentary added to it?" This means that only if one tries to understand it without such explanation will an intrinsically marvelous understanding of it emerge, for just as a good military strategy teacher might get half his troops killed, so a commentary on a work might lose half its substance. It was the way that Guo blatantly took it on himself to violate its actual gist that allowed him his supposedly marvelous explication of the *Zhuangzi*. As for the study of Master Zhuang, later generations condemned Guo for gross error,

judging him as bad as the wife of Xu Zao, who when she wrote to her younger sister, said that she regarded them [the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*] as just so much trivial nonsense.[56] Nevertheless, Dao scholastics [Daojia] went on promoting Guo by attaching his commentary to the work of that supremely perfected one—how ridiculous! . . .

It is to be regretted that *Zhuangzi* commentators were not only the likes of Guo Zixuan! When he was made recorder to the senior tutor by the Prince of Donghai [Sima] Yue, [Guo] Zixuan usurped such power that it smoked and singed. After popular general opinion turned against him, he was removed from office. How could anyone such as [Guo] Zixuan ever have composed an explication of the *Zhuangzi*! He just stole the commentary from Xiang Ziqi [Xiang Xiu]. Since Guo was incapable of conveying the meaning of the *Zhuangzi*, was Xiang equally incapable as well? Earlier commentators of the *Zhuangzi* rarely plumbed its overall meaning, but Ziqi's explication of its hidden meaning went so far beyond these older commentaries that it stirred up extraordinary interest. When Xiang died, only the two chapters "Autumn Floods" and "Perfect Joy" remained undone. Although Zixuan composed his own commentaries to these two chapters, for all the rest he merely edited the wording. Even though Guo could not long conceal the lie that it all was his own work, why was the commentary never attributed to Xiang? As Guo Xiang stole it from Xiang Xiu, Xiang Xiu stole it from Master Zhuang. As Master Zhuang stole it from Old Longears [Master Lao], Old Longears stole it from the *Changes*. And the *Changes* stole it from Heaven and Earth. As the *Yinfu jing* (Scripture of the Hidden Accordance) has it, Heaven and Earth steal from man,[57] so why go on to blame [Guo] Zixuan? This is why today it is still called the "Guo commentary."[58]

Another late Ming scholar, the Confucian moral philosopher Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645), after repeating the damning remarks, goes on to characterize Guo as beset first by arrogance and then by shame:

> He [Guo] plagiarized it as his own commentary and bragged about it to all the world. Then, Xiu's disciples, who managed to obtain drafts of his work, placed it in circulation so people could examine and compare the two, and, since the part that Guo had done consisted only of the "Autumn Floods" and "Perfect Joy" chapters, he was so shamed that he wished to die.[59]

Reading through these passages, the rationale underlying such denigration unfolds: Guo could not have composed most of the commentary to the *Zhuangzi* because he was such a devious, mean, and worldly ambitious man that he must have plagiarized it. Not only did he become a high official, he also usurped autocratic power, in great contrast to Xiang, who, although he accepted office, did so only out of fear for his own safety, and, once in office, took no part in its affairs:

> Once Xi Kang [223–262] had been executed, Xiang Xiu, responding to a recommendation for office from the local commandery accounts clerk, went to Luoyang, where [posthumously entitled] Emperor Wen [Sima Zhao (211–265)] said to him, "I have heard that your will was fixed on Jishan [present-day Zhili], so what are you doing here?" Xiang Xu replied, "It is my opinion that Father Chao and Xu You may have been stubbornly upright but never quite understood what Yao had in mind, so why should they be greatly admired!"[60] At that, the emperor was most pleased, and from then on Xiu served as an official. . . . Later, although he was appointed a gentleman cavalier attendant and senior recorder [*sanji shilang*], transferred to the post of gentleman attendant at the palace gate [*huangmen shilang*], and then to cavalier attendant-in-ordinary and senior recorder [*sanji changshi*], at court he had no official duties and did nothing more than just take his place there.[61]

Plagiarism Challenged: Doubtful Sources

However, the accusation that Guo plagiarized Xiang's earlier work appears only in the *Shishuo xinyu*, and, since it obviously copies its account from that work, the *Jinshu* version does not provide independent corroboration. In fact, no such evidence exists for the claim in any other source. Of all the official dynastic histories, the compilation of the *Jinshu* (648) is furthest chronologically from the time it addresses, 229 years (the Jin ended in 420), and more than three centuries from Guo's own time during the Western Jin (265–316). Moreover, it has often been criticized for its failure to corroborate evidence, stick to verifiable facts, and maintain standards of the historiographical tradition. As early as the generation following its completion, the historiographer Liu Zhiji (661–721) criticized it roundly:

> When the *History of the Jin* [*Jinshu*] was edited during our great Tang dynasty, those who drafted it were all literary men who ignored the *Records of the Historian* [*Shiji*, by Sima Qian] and the work of the Ban family in the distant past[62] and instead made the Xu and Yu families in recent times their patriarchs.[63] As such, embellishing what they did with frivolous and flimsy diction, their rendering of the text is no different from applying makeup to a fit man in his prime or clothing a person of lofty integrity in fine silks.[64]
>
> . . . . .
>
> As for the recently appeared history of the Jin produced under imperial auspices, its sources consist mostly of shorter, undemanding and easy to read minor works such as the *Yulin* [Grove of anecdotes by Pei Qi (2nd half 4th cent.)], *Shishuo* [*xinyu*], *Soushen ji* [Record of searching the spirit realm, by Gan Bao (d. 336)], and *Youming lu* [Accounts of the hidden and visible worlds, by Liu Yiqing]. But from

> works such as the [*Jin*] *ji* (*Annals of the Jin*) by the two masters, Cao [Jia (fl. 250–296)] and Gan [Bao (d. 336)] and the two [*Jin*] *yangqiu* (*Annals of the Jin*) by Sun [Sheng (302–373)] and Tan [Daoluan (5th cent.)], it took nothing.[65] As a result, a great many fine things that it should have been included were left out.[66]

This negative view of the *Jinshu* persisted, for example, in the *Jiu Tangshu* (Old history of the Tang), completed in 945, where Fang Xuanling (579–648), editor-in-chief of the *Jinshu*, and his subordinates were again attacked:

> Historians involved [in the *Jinshu*] were mostly literary men who liked to include unusual, even bizarre, anecdotal odds and ends in order to broaden the appeal of the narrative. Moreover, while they vied to make their discussions and judgements ever more elaborate and dazzling, they failed to seek solid fact. For all these reasons this work has been criticized harshly.[67]

While reiterating much of what Liu Zhiji said centuries before, the editor-in-chief Ji Yun (1724–1805) of the *Qinding siku quanshu zongmu* (Comprehensive catalog of the complete four treasures library, authorized by His Majesty), judged the *Jinshu* even more harshly:

> As for the sources it [the *Jinshu*] chose to use, it disregarded authentic records and instead cited minor anecdotal works. . . . In general, what it chose to include strongly promoted the romantic and unconventional, which it used to liven up the narrative. Passages taken from the *Shishuo xinyu* by Liu Yiqing and the commentary of Liu Xiaobiao [462–521], which one after the other reinforce one another, are included almost entirely without change. Such manner of composition is nothing but the style of commonplace storytellers, so how can anyone look at it and call it a real history! . . . It is simply because the works of the eighteen historians [who compiled histories of the Jin] had all been lost that anyone wishing to investigate the history of the Jin had no other way to get at it than with this, is the only reason it has been preserved down through the ages and not dispatched to oblivion.[68]

Although fragments of some of these eighteen lost Jin histories do exist, only one brief passage from the *Jinshu* of Zang Rongxu (415–488) survives, the one cited here.[69]

It should be noted that a key historiographical concern of the compilers and writers of the *Jinshu* was to explain the downfall of the Western Jin regime. Timothy M. Davis has succinctly summarized how this concern shaped the content and thrust of its biographies:

> The medieval historians [Fang Xuanling et al.] who sought to explain the instability of the Western Jin regime faced a number of challenges. Most pressing was the need to supply reasons for the imperial administration's inability to preserve territorial sovereignty. It was assumed that the psychologically stunning loss of the traditional Chinese heartland to non-Chinese peoples could only have been brought about by the immoral and seditious behavior of key individuals holding positions of authority and influence. Readers of the *Jin shu* should bear this in mind when evaluating the accuracy of the many dramatic accounts of wrongdoing contained therein. The biographical section of the *Jin shu* was one venue for fleshing out (in selective detail) the actions, words, and motives of a whole cast of personalities who were perceived as contributing to the dynasty's demise. Faced with such moral obligations, the medieval historiographer often subordinated "historical truth" to "ethical truth" when handling the more unsavory details of an individual's life.[70]

Since Guo Xiang was a major player in the political and military life of the Western Jin regime during the decade leading up to its demise, he was inevitably targeted as a villain. Not only was he perceived as a usurper of power, he did so as deputy of the greatest usurper of all, Sima Yue, whose intrigues, murders, and subordination of Emperor Huai, as well as his failure to repel foreign threat in the field, all led to the Jin's loss of north China. Guo himself is said to have died of natural causes about 312, the year that Luoyang was attacked and occupied by the Xiongnu. Five years later, the final collapse of the Western Jin occurred with the fall of Chang'an in 316.

Other Works by Guo Xiang

Besides his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, Guo is known to have composed the following works: *Laozi zhu* (Commentary to the *Laozi* [Sayings of Master Lao]), *Zhuangzi yin* (Pronunciation [of names and terms] in the *Zhuangzi*), *Lunyu tilue* (Essentials of the Lunyu [Analects]), Lunyu yin (What is hidden in the *Lunyu* [Analects]), *Guo Xiang ji* (Collected works of Guo Xiang), which probably contained the following three titles: *Zhiming youji lun* (Resultant fate depends on the individual self, a discourse), *Beilun* (Tombstone discourses), and *Lun Xi Shao* (A discussion of Xi Shao [253–304]). For details, see appendix B.

The Charge of Plagiarism and Its Refutation

Here again is the exact charge:

> When Xiang Xiu died, only the two chapters “Autumn Floods” and “Perfect Joy” remained undone. Since his sons were then too young to do anything about it, his interpretation remained incomplete and piecemeal. However, quite a few copies of this separate version of Xiu’s work began to circulate. Guo Xiang was a man whose conduct was reprehensible, so when he saw that Xiang Xiu’s interpretation had not achieved proper circulation, he plagiarized the commentary and passed it off as his own work. He composed his own commentary to only two chapters, “Autumn Floods” and “Perfect Joy,” and modified just one chapter, “Horses’ Hooves.” For all other chapters, he probably just edited the wording.[71]

As we have seen, many throughout the ages accepted the truth of the accusation, but some did not. For example, the bibliophile and great book collector Qian Zeng (1629–1701),[72] in his *Dushu minqiu ji* (Record of my earnest search through reading books) quotes the previous passage and then observes:

> When I look into Master Lu’s [Lu Deming (556–627)] *Jingdian* [*shiwen*][*Textual explications for*] *classics and scriptures*, I see that the Xiu commentary that it cites is not the least like Guo’s, so I suspect that Xiang’s existed as a different version then still in circulation. Since it was such a long time ago and so subject to discrepancies of rumor and hearsay, I fear that what the *Jinshu* has to say need not be trusted.[73]

However, the editors of the *Qinding siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* (completed 1781–1783) rejected Qian Zeng’s judgment and declared that the *Jinshu* accusation against Guo Xiang was reliable, despite the strong doubt they cast on the general reliability of the *Jinshu* elsewhere. After repeating the accusation in Guo’s *Jinshu* biography and noting that it is almost identical to what the *Shishuo xinyu* has to say, the *Qinding siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* continues:

> Qian Zeng in his *Dushu minqiu ji* takes exception and says that “since it was such a long time ago and so subject to discrepancies of rumor and hearsay that what the *Jinshu* has to say need not be trusted.” [*Siku* editor’s note:] According to Chen Zhensun [ca. 1183–1262], Xiang Xiu’s commentary was already lost by the Song dynasty, “though it is seen sporadically in Master Lu’s *Textual explications* [for classics and scriptures].[74] [Here follows more than a dozen comparisons of identical or almost identical excerpts from the two commentaries.]. . . . Therefore they [the two commentaries] are both virtually

> the same and differ only in small ways. The assertion that Guo plagiarized what Xiang had written and merely edited the wording is thus certainly not unfounded." . . . So how could Qian Zeng have made such a doubtful judgement of it?[75]

The compilers of the *Qinding siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* thus reinforced the centuries-long bias against Guo Xiang as author of the commentary, but if they had considered other early passages in other works that address Guo and his commentary, they might have been more inclined to agree with Chen Zeng. Such reconsideration should actually begin with the *Jinshu* biography of Xiang Xiu, for in it Guo's commentary, clearly identified as his, is given high praise:

> Although throughout ages there had been readers among the learned and talented intelligentsia of the inner and outer several tens of chapters of the work that Zhuang Zhou had composed, no one had ever succeeded in expounding its overall intent. However, Xiang Xiu then composed an "Explanation of its hidden meaning" [*Yinjie*] for it,[76] which cast such light on its profound meaning that it stirred up a vogue for arcane learning. Although readers then got such a extraordinarily clear and heart-felt understanding of it that for a time none thought it deficient in any way, during the reign of Emperor Hui [r. 290–307], once Guo Xiang again transmitted it in an expanded version, this brought scorn on all footprints that Confucians and Mohists left behind and instead made School of the Dao [Daojia] teachings flourish.[77]

These two contradictory claims, either that Guo plagiarized Xiang's commentary and merely edited the wording or he enlarged and developed it to the extent that his new version greatly enhanced School of Dao teachings, formed the basis of a controversy that lasted throughout the rest of the traditional era and endures to this day. Such modern and contemporary Chinese scholars fall into three groups: (1) those who ignore all evidence to the contrary and simply claim that Guo plagiarized Xiang's commentary—these include Qian Mu (1895–1990) and Hou Wailu (1903–1987); (2) those who take into account a wider range of evidence and conclude that the commentary should be ascribed jointly to Xiang and Guo—these include Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan, (1895–1990), Feng Qi (1915–1995), Ren Jiyu (1916–2009), and Tang Yongtong (1893–1964); and (3) those who conclude that because Xiang's commentary was lost before the Tang but Guo's survived fully into the Song and the age of print, the two must have been very different overall, and Guo's was surely superior, the commentary should be ascribed to Guo alone—these include Tang Yijie (1927–2014), Xiao Jiefu (1924–

2008), Pang Pu (1928–2015), and Wei Zhengtong (1927–2018).[78] However, to fully understand the issues involved and the conclusions drawn, the controversy should be traced to earlier times.

It should first be noted that the *Wenshi zhuan* (Biographies of literary men) of Zhang Yin (from the late fourth century) pays tribute to Guo's commentary entirely, without mention of Xiang Xiu: "The commentary composed by Guo Xiang to the *Zhuangzi* consists of the most sublime meaning expressed in the clearest diction [*qingci qiuzhi*]."[79] Therefore, even at this early date, the charge that Guo simply incorporated Xiang's earlier commentary into his own with little or no change seems utterly unfounded. However, it was also argued that the preference for Guo's commentary may have also been because Guo's edition of the *Zhuangzi*, to which it is attached, was considered the better version. As Lu Deming, in his preface to the *Jingdian shiwen* (Textual explications for classics and scriptures) (ca. 583), states:

> The *Zhuangzi* in fifty-two chapters listed in the dynastic bibliography in the *History of the Former Han* [206 BCE–24 CE], the *Hanshu yiwen zhi*,[80] is the work to which Sima Biao [240–306] and Mengshi [Master Meng, name and dates unknown] later wrote commentaries. It contains much strange and incredible material, sometimes resembling the *Shanhai jing* [Classic of Mountains and Waters (compiled probably in the third century BCE) and sometimes works concerned with dream divination. As such, these commentators selected and rejected parts based on their opinion of them. Although the inner chapters are the same for all versions, as for the rest of the work, some have the outer chapters but lack the miscellaneous chapters, so it is only Zixuan's [Guo Xiang's] commentary edition that entirely captures Master Zhuang's real meaning, which is why it is universally admired. When Xu Xianmin [Xu Mian (344–397)] and Li Hongfan [Li Gui (early fourth century)] prepared their pronunciation editions, they both used Guo Xiang's version, and I too now use it as the base text here.[81]

Lu Deming then goes on to compare editions of the *Zhuangzi* that were known to him and notes that Xiang Xiu's commentary version consists of twenty fascicles and twenty-six chapters, adding his own comment that a variant version also exists in twenty-seven fascicles and twenty-eight chapters and they both lack the miscellaneous chapters. Therefore, Guo's edition, with thirty-three fascicles and thirty-three chapters, is at least five chapters longer than either of the known Xiang versions, and Guo's division of his into seven "Inner Chapters," fifteen "Outer Chapters," and eleven "Miscellaneous Chapters" likely resulted in a book that was

better organized, easier to use, and more appealing. Lu Deming began a trend that soon made Guo's edition the definitive version of the *Zhuangzi* for all time, a trend much enhanced when Cheng Xuanying (ca. 600–ca. 660) added his generally admired subcommentary to Guo's during the Tang dynasty.

Once determined as the definitive version of the *Zhuangzi*, Guo's attached commentary acquired an authority of its own that dominated the interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* for much of the later tradition.[82] For example, in his preface to Gui Youguang's (1507–1571) *Nanhua zhenjing pingzhu* (Commentary to the true classic of Nanhua), Feng Mengzhen (1546–1605), the prominent scholar and noted diarist, whose highest office was chancellor of the National University in Nanjing, unequivocally places Guo's commentary at the center of *Zhuangzi* exegesis, leaving in abeyance the question of how much of it was Guo's and how much Xiang's. Note that Feng also moves the commentary at the end of his essay away from a statecraft focus to one of his own personal cultivation and self-fulfillment:

> None of the dozens of *Zhuangzi* commentators since Guo Zixuan have matched his subtlety and profundity, which at their best he used to explain the meaning of the *Zhuangzi* in ways others failed to reach. Now then, if the text of the *Zhuangzi* is the sun, then Zixuan's commentary is the moon, and all other commentators are just stars in the sky, which at most are but lit torches or glowing fireflies. As long as Zixuan's commentary was there before them, they did not let their own lights go out, for, just like ladies other than the beauties Mao Qiang and Xi Shi at court, their faces whitened and brows darkened, who time and again never gave up competing against them for imperial favor.
>
> In recent times Jiao Ruohou [Jiao Hong (1540–1620)] brought out a joint edition entitled *Lao Zhuang yi* (Wings to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*), which though it contains the entire Guo commentary, includes comments by others only as marginalia. These others, like the Woman Zhao and Doll of Wu,[83] are assigned to low rank. As for the rest, he did away with them all and made Master Guo his sole patriarch. All it took was one look back to him, and in all the Nine Palaces [bedchambers of the emperor's nine wives and concubines], no beauty existed for him.
>
> Now here the main text is set out first with Guo's commentary copied one character space beneath it. Both texts are printed in large characters exactly the same size in order to promote it [Guo's commentary]. Someone long ago once said, "It is not that Guo Xiang comments on Master Zhuang, but that Master Zhuang comments on Guo Xiang." What a perceptive thing to say! This is why we should promote the commentary, and promote it as equal to the *Zhuangzi* itself.
>
> Some say that his commentary came from Xiang Xiu and that Master Guo stole it, merely adding his own commentary to two chapters, "Autumn Floods" and "Perfect

Joy," and then called it all his own work. However, although one might never quite know whether or not this is true, people now only know the commentary as Guo Xiang's and not as Xiang Xiu's—good fortune for the one and misfortune for the other.

About the time I was capped [twenty *sui*, nineteen years], the time was so troubled that I stayed behind our shut gate and read the *Zhuangzi* with Guo's commentary.[84] I so immersed myself in it for almost two months that I neglected all social intercourse. After that, though I must have seemed foolish and wild, I was no longer contrary with family members or even with the world at large. No matter what happened, I became entirely compliant, and I have been at peace right up to now. Although it was later when I was reading Buddhist scriptures that all doubts and misgivings melted away, might it not have been the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary that served as vanguards for the Buddha's teachings?[85]

The Modern Rehabilitation of Guo Xiang: Textual Comparisons

Suspicion that Guo was being treated unfairly and that the commentary should principally be attributed to him began to emerge more frequently during the late Qing and early Republic eras. For example, when the eminent scholar Wang Xianqian (1842–1918),[86] published his *Zhuangzi jijie* (Master Zhuang, collected explications) in 1909, he compared similar comments by Guo and Xiang to a particular passage, to which he himself added the note, "Although people in the past say that Guo plagiarized Xiang's commentary, this is probably wrong."[87]

Qian Zeng's defense of Guo Xiang and its rejection by the editors of *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* attracted the attention of Takeuchi Yoshio (1866–1966), a scholar of Chinese philosophy who in work published in 1926 examines evidence for both the charge and the exoneration in considerable detail. Concentrating on passages quoted in Zhang Zhan's (fl. 350–400) commentary to *Liezi* and Lu Deming's *Jingdian shiwen*, he concludes that whereas Guo borrowed much from Xiang Xiu, he also added much of his own work to it.[88] Takeuchi's findings a few years later in 1933 prompted Wu Chengshi (1885–1939), in his *Jingdian shiwen xulu shuzheng* (Prefatory treatise to textual explications for classics and scriptures, critical annotations), to undertake his own survey of the evidence, from which he came to much the same conclusion. He added that although Guo certainly borrowed from Xiang, both commentaries were shaped by general trends in contemporary thought, and since such borrowing was then pervasively practiced, the accusation of "plagiarism" was inappropriate:

Note: In the *Shishuo* [*xinyu*] where Chancellor Wang maintains that "music has nothing to do with either joy or sorrow," [Liu Jun, better known as Liu Xiaobao (462–521)] notes that just as this concept began with Xi Kang, "nurturing life" [*yangsheng*] began with Ruan Ji and "words fully express idea" [*yan jin yi*] began with Ouyang Jianshi [268–300].[89] Thus it turns out that when a distinctive new idea occurred but words for it were still lacking, those involved relied for its articulation on something already written. This was how the arcane learning movement grew ever stronger. As for the Guo-Xiang case, it was entirely fitting that the one resembled the other, and such a one should not be accused of plagiarism. A further note: When people long ago elucidated classic works, besides explicit explanations, they composed pronunciation guides to works [*yinshu*]. Therefore, when the [*zongmu*] *tiyao* ([*Comprehensive*] *critical catalogue* [*of the complete four treasures library*]) uses as evidence the fact that the [*Jingdian*] *shiwen* (*Textual explications* [for classics and scriptures of Lu Deming]) cited Xiang's *Pronunciation* [of names and terms in the *Zhuangzi*][90] to prove that Xiang had also composed a commentary to the "Autumn Floods" chapter is in error as well.[91] The *Shishuo* also states, "The *Xiaoyao* (Spontaneous Freedom) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* has in the past always been so troublesome that, though various eminent worthies intensively scrutinized and appreciated it, none could extract anyway to understand it other than the way Guo and Xiang did. However Zhi Daolin [Zhidun (314–366)] proposed a superb new way to understand it beyond these two masters and established a new interpretation that went farther than all other famous worthies, a way of approaching it that despite all their ponderings they failed to reach."[92] Therefore, that the Liu [Jun] commentary here cites Guo's and Xiang's explanation of *Xiaoyao* (Spontaneous Freedom) without distinguishing between them can serve as evidence that it was Xiang who first postulated meaning and then Guo who followed up on it. It is generally certain that since in substance their respective writings were not entirely the same, the way they were worded, of course, must have been rather different too. This was the usual way such things were done, so one should not find it particularly surprising.[93]

Although Wu intended to absolve Guo from the charge of plagiarism, he failed to make specific comparisons between Guo's and Xiang's commentaries, so his conclusions seem weak. However, several years earlier, in 1927, the classical scholar and bibliophile Liu Pansui (1896–1966) wrote *Shen Guo pian* (On exonerating Guo),[94] which, after quoting the *Shishuo xinyu*, accuses its author, Prince Kang of Linchuan (Liu Yiqing), of egregiously fabricating a trumped-up charge. Liu then declares that both the conception and plan of the commentary

were purely Guo's own, and he achieved its final form independently. Wu proposed that this terrible injustice can be put right by looking at three pieces of evidence:

1. The versions of the *Zhuangzi* that Guo and Xiang used were very different. According to the *Suishu jingji zh*i (History of the Sui, "Treatise on classics and scriptures," completed 641–656), Xiang's version comprised twenty fascicles and was already lost by then. Guo's version comprised thirty fascicles and a table of contents in one fascicle. Lu Deming's *Jingdian shiwen shuzheng* (Prefatory treatise to textual explications for classics and scriptures) has it that whereas Xiang's commentary comprises twenty-six fascicles in twenty-six chapters, Guo's version comprises thirty-three fascicles in thirty-three chapters. Moreover, whereas Xiang's version of a *Zhuangzi yin* (Pronunciation guide to Zhuangzi) consisted of one fascicle, Guo's version consisted of three fascicles. All three titles thus indicated very different texts. Since the size of the works differed, their contents must have differed accordingly. Lu Deming also stated that whereas Xiang's version lacked all the miscellaneous chapters [*zapian*], Guo's included eleven chapters, leaving twenty-two chapters for the rest, the inner [*neipian*] and outer chapters [*waipian*]. The Xiang version thus contained four chapters of text not included in Guo's, and the additional eleven chapters in Guo's had attached to them much commentary material that were not present in Xiang's.[95] Such discrepancies clearly indicate that much of the commentary attributed to Guo could not have been written by Xiang Xiu, and the accusation that Guo "composed his own commentary to only two chapters. . . . and modified just one chapter. . . . for all other chapters, he probably just edited the wording" is manifestly groundless.
2. The content of the phrase and passage interpretive comments [*zhangju shiyi*] that comprise the two commentaries mostly differ. Liu Pansui presents comparisons of a dozen or so selected passages from both and concludes that overall, only one to two out of ten seem closely similar or identical. He then notes that excerpts of Guo's and Xiang's commentaries quoted in Zhang Zhan's (fl. 350–400) commentary to the *Liezi* (Master Lie), though often different, are occasionally similar or even identical, but then he goes on to suggest that this is because they both belong to the same Wei-Jin mainstream of thought, not because Guo plagiarized Xiang. One scholar borrowing from another was commonly done in the early tradition of letters, and others did it both more closely and more extensively than Guo. For example, Fu Qian borrowed much of his commentary to the *Zuozhuan* from Zheng Xuan (127–200), and Yan Zhou [Yan Shigu (581–645)] based his commentary on the *Hanshu* (History of the Former Han) on his uncle Yan Youqin's *Hanshu jueyi*

(Resolving doubtful passages in *History of the Former Han*). Liu concludes: "If such matches were their doing, even though they did it by the handfuls, what harm did it do? And how much the less should Zixuan be blamed, for whatever he gleaned from Ziqi was never as great as that which Fu and Yan got that way. So why should such evidence be used to bring a case against Zixuan that he connived to plagiarize!"

3. No one before Liu Yiqing had ever accused Guo of plagiarism. Liu quotes the positive appraisal of Guo by Zhang Yin (late fourth cent) in the *Wenshi zhuan* (Traditions of literary men),[96] and then cites Lu Deming, who explained that his reason for using Guo's version of the *Zhuangzi* in his *Jingdian shiwen* was that Xu Mian (344–397) and Li Gui (early fourth century)] had both prepared their own pronunciation editions based on it:

> Zhang Yin, Xu Mian, and Li Gui, who lived at the beginning of the Eastern Jin [(317–420), were all eminent learned Confucians earlier than Liu Yiqing [403–444] and all had exactly the same good opinion of Guo. When Master Lu compiled his textual explications for *Zhuangzi with Guo's commentary*, although he cited Master Xiang's works on pronunciation and commentary, he never mentioned anything about Guo Xiang's having plagiarized them. That being so, we can know that Guo's commentary was the unique product of his genius and that the Prince Kang's [Liu Yiqing's] accusation was utterly unfounded. Investigating the many such mistakes that occur in the *Shishuo*, Liu Xiaobiao in his commentary sifted out quite a few such errors for censure. However, he did not include this passage about Guo, and that must be acknowledged here. Nevertheless, taking these three points into consideration, it is still perfectly obvious that Guo Xiang did not plagiarize Xiang's interpretation—obvious as if posted at the city gate tower. However, in preparing the *Jinshu* biography of Guo during the Tang, the slander against him in the *Shishuo* was included in its entirety, with no attention as to whether it was true or not. As such, Zixuan was condemned to suffer this injustice, denied vindication for the next thousand years![97]

As zealous as Liu Pansui was in Guo's defense, his brief comparison of passages was still too brief to exonerate Guo completely. However, a much larger investigation was published a few years later in 1940 by the eminent philologist Yang Mingzhao (1909–2003). Yang first notes that among all the fragments of Xiang's commentary, thirty-seven have no counterpart in Guo's, so these play no part in the study. Yang then goes on to list forty-seven passages that are almost exactly the same, only differing slightly in the wording: "In some cases explanatory comments [*jiegu*] match, while in others arguments [*chilun*] are similar. Of similar

mind they seem to reason in the same way."[98] Next comes a list of fifteen passages that seem only somewhat similar: "Although explanations differ in these, they seem to follow almost the same gist, as if they were archers shooting at the same target who hit it not far apart."[99] His third comparison lists twenty-seven passages that differ completely. Liu concludes:

> Of these eighty-nine passages, forty-seven are similar in both commentaries, fifteen are close, and twenty-seven are completely different. Overall, more than half are the same or similar. Although this still fails to explore all aspects of comparison and settle things once and for all, it does give a partial view of it that allows summing up: As sure as a river divides off one hill from another or when spring turns seared stubble green, suspicion cast on Zixuan [Guo Xiang] led to a false accusation against which he never had redress.[100]

However, Yang then reiterates Liu Pansui's observation that Liu Xiaobao, despite his many corrections to the *Shishuo xinyu*, failed to address the passage that accuses Guo of plagiarism. That, coupled with how Guo and Xiang get lumped together, where Zhidun's exegesis is judged better than "theirs,"[101] and how eight out of ten comparable passages in Guo's commentary and those of Xiang quoted in Zhang Zhan's (fl. 350–400) commentary to the *Liezi* are virtually the same, lead him to conclude that later scholars should not be blamed for judging the two commentaries more similar than different, or even finding the compilers of the *Jinshu* at fault for following the *Shishuo xinyu* without correction or dissent. Moreover, it seems that Liu Xiaobao, who lived so close in time to Guo, had nothing to go by to determine whether the accusation was true—implying that this might be why he said nothing about it. Yang's final words suggest that Guo probably took over Xiang's commentary and expanded on it, adding new elements of his own, but even this, he says, is not entirely certain.[102]

The next major contribution, and the most important for comparison of the two commentary texts, was published in 1947 by Wang Shumin (1914–2008) in his "*Zhuangzi* Xiang Guo yitong kao" (Investigation of differences and similarities in Xiang's and Guo's commentaries on *Zhuangzi*).[103] Wang not only includes more fragments of Xiang's commentary in his survey, thus providing a larger range of comparative material, but he also provides more detailed comparative analysis. I have prepared a slightly edited and condensed version of Wang's study as appendix C of this book.

Wang's investigation consists of four sections: I. included in Xiang's commentary but not in Guo's (forty-eight places); II. Xiang's and Guo's comments differ completely (thirty places); III. similar comments by Xiang and Guo (thirty-two

places); and IV. comments by Xiang and Guo with almost identical wording (twenty-eight places). The original Chinese texts involved by Guo and Xiang are all provided, translated into English, and, where possible, keyed to the numbering system for the translated passages of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary.

Wang Shumin determines that not one of the forty-eight fragments of Xiang's commentary listed in section I appears anywhere in Guo's commentary, and this, coupled with the thirty places listed in section II where the two commentaries differ completely, amply refute the accusation that Guo plagiarized Xiang's commentary out of whole cloth: that Guo composed his own commentary to only two chapters, "Autumn Floods" and "Perfect Joy," and modified just one chapter, "Horses' Hooves," is manifestly false. As for similar and almost identical places listed in sections III and IV, whereas Guo's comments do seem based on Xiang's, Guo often altered Xiang's exact words to formulate something of his own and did not, as the *Shishuo* and *Jinshu* assert, merely edit the wording and do nothing more. It is also likely that Guo's borrowed material was not always directly from Xiang's commentary, whatever the wording, but rather was assimilated from the general discourse of contemporary *xuanxue* thought, which they both contributed to and drew upon.

Although we can never know all the written sources from which Guo and Xiang might have borrowed, such evidence still exists in a few cases. For example, eight citations to Xiang's commentary in the *Jingdian shiwen* are also attributed to Cui Zhuan (late third–early fourth centuries), whose own twenty-seven-fascicle version of the *Zhuangzi* with his commentary has long been lost.[104] It is also recorded by Liu Xiaobao (462–521) that Xiang largely based his commentary on Cui's: "Although Xiu wandered among numerous worthies seeking support, throughout life he found them all drab and dreary, only loved the *Zhuangzi*, and, largely in accord with what Cui Zhuan had done, composed a commentary to it to guard against forgetting what it meant."[105] We also know that Guo borrowed from Sima Biao's (240–306) fifty-two-chapter *Zhuangzi* commentary. Although this work has long been lost, many fragments of the commentary survive in other works. One such fragment is particularly telling:

> (Guo, 4.0) It is impossible for one who associates with others to live apart from men. However, vicissitudes that beset the human world are such that different measures are appropriate in each and every age. It is only if one remains unselfconscious and so holds not to his own purposes and opinions who can follow wherever vicissitudes lead and yet not be burdened with their entanglements.
>
> (Sima Biao) This addresses the appropriate way to live in the human world. It is a principle for life during an age of chaos that anyone associating with others will find it

> impossible to live apart from men. However, the vicissitudes that beset mankind are such that appropriate measures of what to do differ from age to age. It is only if one remains unselfconscious and so holds not to his own purposes and opinions who can change in ways that are exactly right. What may entangle such a one then![106]

Whereas adherents of the plagiarism theory view this instance of Guo's borrowing from Sima Biao as just that much more evidence that he must be guilty,[107] this seems too simplistic. My view is that he synthesized what was available and pertinent from all such sources to enhance his own personal readings of the *Zhuangzi*, and this was how his commentary was composed.

Concerning textual discrepancies that indicate Guo's and Xiang's commentaries must have been significantly different, Tang Yijie (1927–2014) has the last word:

> If the two commentaries were really so similar that Guo Xiang merely "edited the wording," their two editions of the *Zhuangzi* could not possibly have both survived for the more than 300 years from the Jin to the Tang [when Xiang's was lost]. Only if the two commentaries were significantly different could they both have survived separately for so long—only that makes sense.[108]

Such synthetization and adaptation are, of course, not unique to Guo Xiang and Xiang Xiu, for the era in which they lived, or for the Chinese tradition as a whole. Such habits can also be found in the West, as practiced, for example, by one of its most eminent essayists, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592):

> I leaf through books, I do not study them. What I retain of them is something I no longer recognize as anyone else's. It is only the material from which my judgment has profited, and the thoughts and ideas with which it has become imbued; the author, the place, the words, and other circumstances, I immediately forget.[109]

Created or Self-Generated, Immanence or Transcendence, Immanent Transcendence

Fukunaga Mitsuji seems to have been the first to draw attention to the identification and analysis of the fundamental philosophical propositions, the basic assumptions and presuppositions, that underpin Guo's interpretive comments and how they differ from Xiang's. Fukunaga's reasons for exonerating Guo from the accusation of plagiarism, succinctly set out in a 1964 article, develop an argument

that he introduced in a study published in 1954, in which he cites Guo's postscript [*houyu*] to the handwritten text of the *Zhuangzi* preserved in the Kōzanji Temple (Kyoto) (see appendix A.3). The postscript contains a detailed description of how Guo edited the text, which indicates both his vision of the text and his plan for the commentary's overall design, and, because the terminology and reasoning in interpretive passages throughout the commentary is consistent with that vision and design, Fukunaga concludes that Guo should be credited with its overall authorship, regardless of how much he may have borrowed from Xiang.[110] Fukunaga then points out that the commentary also became a vehicle for Guo's own philosophical views:

> Moreover, his *Zhuangzi* commentary is not simply an annotation of the *Zhuangzi*, for he also uses it as a medium through which he conveys his own speculative thought. As such, his *Zhuangzi* commentary becomes an important source by which we may explore the way he thought. Therefore, along with its being a commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, thanks to its systematic treatment and unified interpretation, it also became a work that expressed his own ideas.[111]

In his 1964 study, Fukunaga quotes a passage in Zhang Zhan's (fl. 350–400) commentary to the *Liezi* that, while praising Guo, also suggests that a major difference exists between his and Xiang's interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*:

> Where a form exists a shadow inevitably appears, and where a sound happens an echo inevitably occurs. These both come into existence spontaneously, and both appear and disappear together. How could they possibly exist separately or sequentially depend on each other? And how detailed and comprehensive is Guo Xiang's analysis of this issue in his *Zhuangzi* commentary! Nevertheless, the conventional view is that when a form moves, a shadow follows, and when a sound is made, an echo consequently responds. But here the sage finds a model, since, as an analogy, he understands it to mean that when one is agitated, he loses his foundation, but, if tranquil, he reverts to his roots. So never again misinterpret what shadow and echo actually mean![112]

While specifically referencing both the famous conversation between Shadow and Penumbra (2.33–2.34.4) and the relationship between the mind of the sage and his teachings (11.32.1), the passage also alludes to Guo's basic insistence on the spontaneous self-generation [*zisheng*] of all things (e.g., 2.4.1, 2.5, 2.8.9, and 2.8.21) and his exclusion of deliberate action (along with causal effects) from the rule of the enlightened sovereign (e.g., 1.13.3, 7.13.1–7.13.5, 12.1.3–12.2.1,

13.3.8). That Zhang Zhan cites Guo's commentary but not Xiang's implies that Zhang ascribed such views exclusively to Guo.

However, compare another passage from Xiang's commentary that Zhang quotes (see appendix C, "Texts not included in the Guo Xiang 33 chapter edition," first entry) with Guo's commentary to 2.5–2.6. Although Guo obviously borrowed Xiang's words almost verbatim, a subtle but significant difference emerges: Xiang has it that the generator of things [*shengwuzhe*], the source or initiator of material existence, exists, but is itself "without material substance" [*wuwu*]. That is, *shengwuzhe* designates an ultimate and all-pervasive principle that is both transcendent to and also immanent in the physical world. Using modern terminology, Xiang may be said to have adopted an "immanent transcendence" position. Instead, Guo insists that no external generator exists because for him, no existence is possible apart from material reality; as such, designations such as Heaven [*Tian*], Dao, Creator [*zaowuzhe*], or Great Ultimate [*taiji*] refer not to any universal principle transcendent to physical reality but to one immanent in everything. Guo's position is thus one of "immanent monism" [neizai yiyuanlun].[113] It follows that since the Dao is inherent in all things, it is identical with both their self-generation [*zisheng*] and self-transformation [*zihua*].

The discrepancy between Guo's strict immanence and Xiang's immanent transcendence can be discussed in several ways. Let us first situate it in the modern debate in both China and the West over the roles of transcendence, immanence, and immanent transcendence in the Chinese tradition.[114] "Immanent transcendence" translates as "*neizai chaoyue*," a term that emerged from the New Confucianism [*xinruxue*] movement during the 1950s in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the West. The movement was led by the philosophers and historians of Chinese thought Tang Junyi (1909–1978),[115] Mou Zongsan (1909–1995),[116] Xu Fuguan (1904–1982), and Carsun Chang (Zhang Junmai) (1886–1969), and later was popularized further by the eminent scholar of Chinese intellectual history Yu Yingshi (b. 1930)[117] and the historian and philosopher Tu Wei-ming (Du Weiming), a close student of Mou Zongsan.[118] Dissatisfied with the rigid dichotomy between transcendence and immanence, characteristic of Western philosophy and religion, which they considered inappropriate for the Chinese tradition, such scholars instead proposed "immanent transcendence" as an alternative to concepts of strict or absolute "external transcendence" [*waizai chaoyue*]—that is, a universal principle or being, "God," or absolute "other" that governs the phenomenal universe and exists strictly apart from it. Although "immanent transcendence" [*neizai chaowu*] is a modern term, its advocates in both China and the West regard

it as a concept that can be traced through the tradition to the earliest stages of Chinese philosophical and religious thought.[119]

The Universal and Particular Dao

A different, though still sympathetic, view of transcendence in early Chinese thought, particularly in Huang-Lao metaphysics and its concept of the natural order of the Dao, appeared in several scholarly articles during the 1980s written by Randall Peerenboom, whose research culminated in 1993 in a major monograph, *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao*. Huang-Lao thought was a syncretic school that arose during the Han dynasty, which drew on the philosophy of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* and combined with it legends and sayings associated with Huangdi (the Yellow Thearch), together with views of legalist thinkers. Peerenboom claims that the Dao in Huang-Lao thought is "descriptively immanent" and "prescriptively transcendent":

> Normatively, the natural order is transcendent in two senses. First, it is transcendent in that it is privileged as the fundamental realm of value. That is, the natural realm is transcendent in its normative priority. Its value is independent of human value judgments. Humans do not determine the value of the natural order. Rather, it is simply taken to be good, indeed, to be the good. It is the right Way.[120]

Peerenboom also claims that the natural order is also "transcendent" in either a "correspondence" or an "interpretive" sense:

> Both correspondence and interpretive naturalism are naturalisms in that they conceive of humans as part of the natural order, privilege the natural order and insist that the human order be compatible with the natural order. . . . the former conceives of the natural order as predetermined whereas the latter does not. . . . correspondence naturalists contend that there is a single, preconfigured, normatively correct Way, dao, cosmic natural order. Just as nature is rule governed, . . so is human society governed, structured by constant, impersonal laws. . . . interpretive naturalisms reject that there is a single correct order . . . [but instead] contend that that there are, at least in theory, many possible natural orders.[121]

Peerenboom next defines Huang-Lao naturalism as a "correspondence naturalism," in which "there is a correct Way (*zheng dao*)." I can easily agree with

this, but then he goes on to claim that "this differentiates the dao of Huang-Lao from the multiple daos of Zhuang Zi [*Zhuangzi*]," maintaining that in the *Zhuangzi*, each person has his own way, his own dao, and that there are as many rights and wrongs as there are daos—whereas in Huang-Lao thought, "there is just one."[122] This seems to misconstrue the role of immanence as it appears in the text of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary, for both demonstrate the complete fallacy and futility of trying to formulate "right" and "wrong," condemned as conscious and artificial constructs inimical to the true, correct, and uniquely single Dao, and one single natural order, the Dao itself, is always "right" or "suitable," but that "suitability," inconceivable and inexpressible, is attained only through unself-conscious thought and in spontaneous action—the only ways that humans have full access to and can perfectly correspond with the immanent presence of the Dao in them.[123] What happens is not that each person has a different dao particular to him, but that once natural endowment is received from the Dao, the Dao as a process delineates what is "suitable" for each. Such a natural "right" has nothing to do with the supposed "right" artificially formulated by the Confucians and Mohists (see 2.9.10, 2.9.11, 2.10.3, 11.7.3, 11.7.4, 11.8.1, 14.39.9, 14.39.10, 24.43.7, 29.31), who, like Huang-Lao thinkers, claimed their notions of "right" enjoyed the authority of Heaven [*tian*]. What is "right" or "wrong" for each individual is thus not determined by standards external to him, but rather by manifestation of the Dao immanent in one's natural endowment.

Herein lies a paradox: *xuanxue* theory, whether associated with the immanent transcendence of Wang Bi and He Yan or the immanent monism of Pei Wei and Guo Xiang, conceives of the Dao as both overarching and universal on the one hand, and as particularly manifest in each individual thing through its natural endowment on the other. In each person, it thus delineates original generation and subsequent transformation of all physical and nonphysical traits, all of which are realized spontaneously/naturally [*ziran*]. In other words, there is one single natural order that, in its individual manifestations, differentiates one particular individual from another. Moreover, this universal-particular paradox carries over to the issue of values—that is, what is "good" for both individual and society. Again, we must be careful not to confuse external, artificial standards of "good" with the inherent and natural "good" that exists for each individual thanks to his particular natural endowment. Brook Ziporyn rightly draws attention to the difference:

> While the *Daodejing* seems to take for granted the universal validity of the standard values of the culture—life, longevity, social harmony—while offering contrarian and counterintuitive strategies for attaining them, the *Zhuangzi* for the first time raises questions about these values themselves, focusing on their dependence on

> particular points of view, and affirming the value-to-themselves of all possible value perspectives. Zhuangzi's idea that a thing's value derives not from its accordance with a single pre-existing universal norm of what is desirable, but rather from its inalienable relation to the standard of rightness implicit in the being of its own quiddity, would become the central pillar of all Guo Xiang's thinking.[124]

However, Ziporyn fails to take into account the paradoxical universal *and* particular nature of the *xuanxue* Dao, in which the universal norms of an overarching Dao are reconciled with the particular corresponding rightness inherent in the individual. Guo Xiang reconciles the two by first rejecting the artificial norms of society and then extolling the innate tendency in individual personal nature to the good:

> "Government" means establishing invariable rules, which are used to rectify the common folk, and "punishment" means promoting criminal law, which is used to determine innocence and guilt. When rules are invariable, people can feign compliance, and when criminal law is promoted, people can evade it. But being able to evade it, they violate innate character in order to avoid trouble. Capable of pretense, one casts off one's original nature in order to comply with the rules. One's outer self may be rectified by complying with the rules, but no submission occurs in the innermost heart. If one harbors the intention to avoid trouble, he will have no sense of shame when it comes to others. As far as moral transformation is concerned, is this not a flimsy way to go about it! Therefore, the text [*Analects* (*Lunyu*) "Conduct Government" part 2 ("*Weizheng dier*")] says, "the common folk will evade both without shame." "Virtue" allows them to embody their original natures, and "propriety" allows them to realize the potential of their innate characters. Innate character has its own sense of shame, and original nature has its own source of being. When one fulfills his original nature, its source provides perfection, and when one embodies his innate character, he has a sense of shame. With this sense of shame, one regulates himself without threat of punishment, and with one's source providing perfection, one rectifies himself without need for rules. This is how "one leads them with virtue and regulates them with propriety, and they have a sense of shame and become rectified."[125]

That is, if each person is allowed to fulfill his innate nature, endowed to him by the Dao, as each individual "rightness" is achieved and maintained, the rightness of the whole society inevitably takes place. And when the whole of society is "right," the entire world, both nature and human, conforms in perfect unity with the universal norms of the Dao.

Transcendent Naturalism Versus Immanent Naturalism

Peerenboom's contrasting definitions for "correspondence naturalism" or "Huang-Lao naturalism" and "interpretive naturalism" given in the following pages seem overly complex, opaque in places, and rather extraneous to understanding transcendence and immanence in the thought of Guo Xiang. Essential differences come to light more when he compares his basis of distinction with that proposed by David Hall and Roger Aimes:

> As a rule of thumb, what I would call a *foundational*, *correspondence theory*, Hall and Aimes would call a *logical order*; what I would call a *pragmatic*, *interpretive* or *coherence theory*, Hall and Aimes would call an *aesthetic order*.[126]

Whereas a full account of what Hall and Aimes mean by "logical" and "aesthetic" theories is beyond the scope of this introduction, the essential difference between them is succinctly summarized by Carine Defoort:

> The "logical" order could be characterized as appealing to "transcendent" essences or principles—Platonic Forms, the Unmoved Mover, atoms in classical materialism, the modern rational or volitional ego, human nature, and so forth—for analyzing or explaining something, while the "aesthetic" order is radically immanent in the sense that it completely lacks recourse to such "transcendence."[127]

As such, this brings us back to our principal concern here: issues of transcendence and immanence, immanent transcendence, and immanent monism.

At first, the term and concept of "immanent transcendence" was either ignored or rejected in the West, where, for example, David L. Hall, Roger T. Aimes, and François Jullien, like Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and Maximilian Karl Emil Weber (1864–1920) before them, continued to insist that the concept of a universal principle that exists apart from yet universally governs material existence was entirely absent from the Chinese philosophical tradition. In their influential *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), Hall and Aimes specifically argue against the immanent transcendence of Mou Zongsan and Tu Wei-ming:

> There is considerable confusion among commentators concerning the applicability of "transcendence" to the classical Chinese tradition. For example, although the unity of *t'ien* [*tian*] and man is a central feature of Tu Wei-ming's interpretation of early Confucianism, he insists on numerous occasions that *t'ien* has a transcendent dimension. Mou Tsung-san [Mou Zongsan], using Kant to illuminate the distinctive characteristics of Chinese philosophy, observes: "The way of *t'ien* as . . . high above denotes transcendence. When the way of *t'ien* is invested in the human person and resides internally in him as human nature, it is then immanent. On this basis, we can use an expression that Kant liked to use, and say that in one sense the way of *t'ien* is transcendent, and in another it is immanent (immanent and transcendent are opposites)."[128]

Moreover, Hall and Aimes define "transcendence" strictly in terms distinguishing it from the "radical immanence" that they claim characterizes the Chinese philosophical tradition as a whole :

> Perhaps the most far-reaching of the uncommon assumptions underlying a coherent explication of the thinking of Confucius is that which precludes the existence of any transcendent being or principle. This is the presumption of radical immanence . . . Strict transcendence may be understood as follows: a principle, A, is transcendent with respect to that, B, which it serves as principle if the meaning or import of B cannot be fully analyzed and explained without recourse to A, but the reverse is not true. . . . as we discuss Confucius' thinking in subsequent chapters that attempts to articulate his doctrines by recourse to transcendent beings or principles have caused significant interpretive distortions. Employing the contrast between "transcendent" and "immanent" modes of thought will assist us materially in demonstrating the inappropriateness of these sorts of transcendent interpretations.[129]

Hall and Aimes also insist on maintaining a clear distinction between philosophical and religious thought: whereas they acknowledge the role of a transcendent creative and nourishing source in Chinese religious traditions, they claim that whenever such transcendence appears in philosophical texts, it is but a transitory aberration. Using the *Huainanzi* (Master of Huainan) as an example, they claim that this recourse to transcendence here is characteristic of a shift from what they call an "aesthetic" to a "rational" or "logical" sense of order that occurred due to the influence of Han-state Confucianism, which tended to formulate its tenets in terms of dualistic distinctions, such as two-world cosmogony (other world–this world), yin-yang dualism, Heaven-earth or Heaven-human reciprocity,

all of which are rational/logical (and thus literal) constructs. “Aesthetic,” on the other hand, supposedly characterizes mainstream Chinese philosophical thought in general, in which terms such as “creator” [*zaowuzhe*] are not used literally but figuratively and should be understood as such:

> On the Taoist side, we can witness a similar shift if we track the movement from the immanental cosmos of the *Lao Tzu* [*Laozi*] and *Chuang Tzu* [*Zhuangzi*] “Inner Chapters” in the direction of the two-world orientation of religious Taoism. An interesting illustration of this shifting orientation can be found in the *Huai Nan Tzu’s* reiteration and reinterpretation of the *Chuang Tzu*. While the intention of the *Chuang Tzu* passage is to challenge the principle of an absolute beginning, the *Huai Nan Tzu*, Ch. 2,[130] assumes precisely the opposite position and uses it to describe a series of increasingly abstruse stages in a cosmogonic evolution of existence. Significantly, it was during this late Ch’in [Qin] and early Han period that various cosmogonic theories appear and are developed in the early Chinese corpus, for cosmogonic theories are primary signals of the conception of logical order.[131]

Moreover, Hall and Aimes assert not only that since such a creative transcendent principle is entirely absent from Chinese philosophical thought, whether Daoist or Confucian, its essential character as a whole can only be characterized as immanently monistic:

> *T’ien* [Tian] is not a preexisting creative principle which gives birth to and nurtures a world independent of itself. *T’ien* is rather a general designation for the phenomenal world as it emerges of its own accord. *T’ien* is wholly immanent, having no existence independent of the calculus of phenomena that constitute it. There is as much validity in asserting that phenomena “create” *t’ien* as in saying that *t’ien* creates phenomena; the relationship between *t’ien* and phenomena, therefore, is one of interdependence. The meaning and value of *t’ien* is a function of the meaning and value of its many phenomena, and the order of *t’ien* is expressed in the harmony that obtains among its correlative parts.[132]

Five years later, Jullien, apparently influenced by Hall and Aimes, delineated the role of Heaven [*tian*] in much the same way—as a presence entirely immanent in things and transcendent only in a figurative sense:[133]

> Il n’“agit” pas, ne fait rien de lui-même (à partir de lui-même), et son efficacité est à la mesure de cette non-ingérence: car, de sa corrélation avec le réel

> embrassé dans sa totalité résulte un pouvoir d'influence qui peut être à la fois invisible, infini et parfaitement spontané. Par rapport à l'action ou à la causalité, qui sont transitives, il n'y a d'efficacité qu'intransitive, et le "Ciel"—qui s'érige en Transcendance par rapport à l'horizon humain—n'est lui-même que la totalisation—ou l'absolutisation—d'une telle immanence.[134]
>
> It [*tian*, Heaven] does not "act," does nothing on its own (separate from itself), and its effectiveness is commensurate with this noninterference: because, from its correlation with the reality that it embraces in its totality a power of influence results, which can at the same time be invisible, infinite, and perfectly spontaneous. In contrast to action or causation, which are transitive, it only possesses an intransitive efficiency, and the "Heaven"—which rises up in Transcendence in relation to the human horizon—is itself only the totalization—or absolutization—of such immanence.

Aimes continued to assert a similar view in the years since these remarks were made. These he eventually refined and expanded in *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (2011), where he began using the term "strict transcendence" to qualify why "transcendence," in the Western conventional sense, has no place in Chinese philosophical thought. Coupled with "strict transcendence," Aimes would also banish "strict dualism" from Chinese philosophical thought:

> Such an exclusive mind/body and theory/praxis dualism has never been a distraction in a Chinese correlative yinyang cosmology in which mind/body (*shenxin*) and theory/praxis (*zhixing*) have been taken to be collaborative, coterminous, and mutually entailing aspects of experience. Indeed, the continuity and wholeness of experience is defined in terms of "forming and functioning" (*tiyong*), and "flux and persistence" (*biantong*)—cosmological assumptions that preclude any strictly dualistic categories.[135]
>
> . . . as we have explained the asymmetry in strict transcendence between God and world, God has a free hand in determining and sustaining the world while conversely the world does not have any effect on the perfection that is God. Hence God and world stand in a dualistic relationship. God stands independent of the world, and negates it in the sense that the world has no independent existence outside of God's perfection. An alternative to such strict transcendence is the correlative relationship between *tian* and the human experience captured in the familiar expression used to characterize classical Chinese cosmology, *tianren heyi*, "the continuity between the natural and cultural context and the human experience."[136]

However, implicit in these remarks is the recognition that some kinds of "nonstrict transcendence" and "nonstrict dualism" exist in Chinese philosophical thought: The transcendent both exists apart from and is immanent in the material cosmos—as two distinguishable counterparts that interact in interdependent relationship. Such "nonstrict" concepts of transcendence and dualism can also define the key elements of "immanent transcendence," where the interaction between the transcendent *Tian* or Dao with the material extant is conceived in much the same way. However, like Jullien, Aimes never swerves from treating Chinese philosophical thought as the dichotomous opposite of that of the West; thus, a few years later, he again insisted on characterizing Western philosophical thought exclusively in terms of a "strict transcendence" supposedly not found in the Chinese tradition:

> Strict philosophical or theological transcendence is to assert that an independent and superordinate principle A originates, determines, and sustains B, where the reverse is not the case. Such transcendence renders B absolutely dependent upon A, and thus, nothing in itself. The formalist notion of eidos that is foundational in Plato as antecedent "ideals" that together constitute the single Good or the notion of an independent, absolute, eternal, self-sufficient, and hence unchanging creator God that emerges in mainstream Christian theology would be two philosophical and theological examples of such strict transcendence.[137]

Evidence is presented next that such "strict transcendence" does occur in the Chinese philosophical tradition, albeit only in a limited sense, but first we should consider a related issue that is germane to understanding the course of Wei-Jin *xuanxue* thought, to which Aimes shifts his attention—to the relationship between *you* (being, phenomenal existence) and *wu* (non/not being, nothingness):

> Because the determinate and indeterminate—*youwu*—are always mutually entailing *yinyang* correlative categories required to describe the unfolding process of experience, there is no such thing as "being" as something that is independently permanent and unchanging and no such thing as "not being" as a gaping void or an absolute nothingness. *You* describes a persistent yet always changing determinate pattern or rhythm within the flux and flow of experience.[138]

Whereas such a claim accurately describes imminent monism in Chinese thought, with which Guo Xiang and Pei Wei were affiliated, it fails to account for the

presence of immanent transcendence found throughout the tradition from the early Confucian and Daoist classics to the Neo-Confucians of the Song to Qing eras. It also fails to explain why such an "immanental cosmos," which is supposedly the fundamental characteristic of Chinese philosophical thought, necessarily precludes transcendence entirely. For example, Hall, Aimes, and Jullien ignore evidence in both the *Laozi* and its early commentary tradition that the Dao, as the prime mover, is thought to have existed *prior* to Heaven, Earth, and all things—the "immanental cosmos" of which they speak. In such texts, the Dao, declared to have existed prior to things, is ipso facto "strictly transcendent"—at least chronologically. Consider the following from the *Laozi* and the commentary of Wang Bi:

> Nameless, it [the Dao] is the Origin of the myriad things; named, it is the mother of the myriad things. [Wang Bi:] Anything that exists originates in nothingness [wu], thus, before it has forms and still nameless, it serves as the origin of the myriad things, and, once it has forms and is named, it grows them, rears them, ensures them their proper shapes, and matures them as their mother. In other words, the Dao, by being itself formless and nameless, originates and brings the myriad things to completion.[139]

He Yan, Wang Bi's contemporary, similarly equated nothingness with the Dao and asserted that it was the creative principle or force responsible for the origin of everything:

> In his *Daolun* (On the Dao), He Yan states: "For the extant to exist, its generation depends on nothingness [*wu*]. When something happens, its realization is contingent on nothingness. Say what it is, but there are no words for it. Name it, but there are no names for it. Look for it, but it has no form. Listen for it, but it makes no sound. Nevertheless, since the Dao is present in everything, it thus can manifest sounds and echoes, produce the [twenty-four] seasonal pneuma and all things [*qiwu*], encompass their physical forms and animating spirits [*xingshen*], and display their images and shadows. As black results from its black profundity [*xuan*], so does white results from its white simplicity [*su*];[140] as square results from its squaring, so does round result from its rounding. Although the round and the square thus get their forms, it has no form itself; although the white and the black thus get their names, it has no name itself."[141]

However, whether or not such a transcendent Dao is immanent in things, the very idea of a Dao that exists apart from the material cosmos offends some modern students of the Daoist tradition. For example, the practicing Daoist priest and

eminent scholar Kristofer Schipper has declared that Wang Bi was not a Daoist at all, but actually a Confucian whose commentary to the *Laozi* should be condemned for "rationalizing explanations" that "completely miss the point," as well as for conceiving of the Dao as "a kind of god."[142] Schipper is in good company, for back in the Wei-Jin era, Pei Wei and Guo Xiang likewise denied the existence of Wang Bi's "strict" transcendent Dao.

Pei Wei, Material Existence, and Immanent Monism

The trend to conceive of the Dao as transcendent persisted well into the time of Guo Xiang and two significant contemporaries, Wang Yan, a strong proponent of a nonmaterial Dao equated with nothingness, and the immanent monist Pei Wei (267–300), who utterly rejected transcendence in any form and would banish all notions of "nothingness" from the well-managed state, all of which he sets out in an essay largely compatible with the gist of Guo's commentary, his "*Chongyou lun*" (On venerating material existence). An account in the *Jinshu* (History of the Jin) succinctly sums up the situation:

> During the Zhengshi [240–249] era of the Wei, people such as He Yan and Wang Bi followed the teachings of Masters Lao and Zhuang and honored them as patriarchs. They founded a doctrine that taught that "Heaven, earth, and the myriad things all have their roots in nothingness. As for this nothingness, from the start of things to the completion of affairs, no undertaking takes place in which it is not integrally present. The yin and yang rely on it to create things; the myriad things rely on it to attain mature physical existence; worthies rely on it to complete their virtue; and the antisocial rely on it to avoid harm. Therefore, it is because nothingness functions in this way that, though invaluable, it is never honored." Wang Yan thought very highly of this teaching, but Pei Wei thought it all wrong and even wrote a treatise ridiculing it, but Wang Yan, unruffled, persisted in upholding it.[143]

Pei Wei's immanent monism is so similar to Guo Xiang's that it is likely that the one influenced the other—though it is unclear who was first to oppose the earlier immanent transcendent thought represented by Wang Bi and He Yan.

Although few of Pei Wei's writings survive, "On venerating materiality" was fortunately copied into his *Jinshu* biography. Because the arguments Pei uses to castigate "nothingness" illustrate what was politically and socially at stake during these the last years of the Western Jin state, why this philosophical standoff between adherents and opponents of "nothingness" [*wu*] actually occurred, and

what the terms and concepts involved actually meant, thereby casting much light on Guo's own use of them, it is here translated and analyzed in its entirety, including the *Jinshu* introduction:[144]

> [Pei] Wei found current trends to dissipation and licentiousness profoundly disastrous. Whereas people no longer respected Confucian learning, He Yan and Ruan Ji continued to enjoy the highest of reputations during that age, though what they had to say was just showy, devoid of substance and failed to follow the rules of propriety. They held sinecures and enjoyed imperial favor, but while in office failed to attend to duties. As for men such as Wang Yan, the more their reputations swelled, the higher their positions, and the greater their power, the less they allowed themselves to be constrained by government duties. As such, mimicking one another, moral standards kept on deteriorating. Thereupon Pei Wei composed this "On venerating materiality" to free people from such foolish falsehood.
>
> The tap root of everything in all its diversity is the prime ultimate Dao. It is the way by which things are differentiated into different categories, within which are different levels of rank. Forms of physical existence clearly differ one from another, for this is the way physical bodies exist. Although the way things change and interact is intricate and complex, these are imprinted by principles inherent in their root origin. Since things in their categories exist at different ranks, natural endowment is proportioned accordingly. If endowment leaves something inadequate, it thus must rely on external resources. As such, once alive, things may be investigated through what we know as "principles" [*li*]. The embodiment of principles is identified by the term "material existence" [*you*]. What "material existence" provides may be identified by the term "resources" [*zi*]. When "resources" and "material existence" match, this is identified by the term "suitability" [*yi*]. When one chooses what is suitable for himself, this is identified by the term "natural inclination" [*qing*]. Once one is bestowed with intelligence, going out or staying still may be different ways of life, and remaining silent or speaking out may mean different paths,[145] but the natural inclination to maintain oneself in what is innately suitable, thereby treasuring life, is one and the same.

Here, Confucian social and political hierarchy is justified in School of Dao [Daojia] terms: the ideal society results by everyone filling the position in life that suits his natural endowment or allotted capacity. Moreover, sagehood is achieved because of natural endowment, not because of effort or learning. However, if people try to exceed the limits of natural endowment or allotted capacity, individual life is ruined and social and political chaos ensues. Guo Xiang agrees; see, for example, 1.0–1.7.1, 2.8.15, 3.1.1–3.1.2, 3.8, 4.24.2, 4.45.5, 5.8.3–5.8.5, 5.2.8.8, 5.28.8, 10.5.12–10.5.13, 11.3.1–11.3.3.

> Because principles governing everything act concurrently and do so without damage or obstruction, physical existence, whether noble or base, takes its shape from them. Because success or failure are determined by the particular physical existence one receives, good fortune and bad may be predicted accordingly. Therefore, the worthy or noble man, realizing that desire cannot entirely be eliminated, at times forms friendships with others, and, observing what happens in such interactions, carefully consider what they should do. Acting in accord with the Dao of Heaven and sharing in the goods of earth, they bend themselves to duty with all their strength, and only turn to the joys of pleasure after labors are done. They perform official duties in compliance with benevolence, live simple lives with courtesy, obey with loyalty and sincerity, and act with reverence and deference. Their goal is not to acquire everything they desire and work not to have more than they need. As such, this is how they alleviate the troubles of the world. Therefore, to establish widely the highest standard of moral virtue, to pacify and govern the myriad folk, and to display a model to teach the people, all this is found here—it is the way the sage conducts government.

Although these observations of Pei Wei are echoed in Guo's commentary (e.g., at 11.7.7 and 13.6), Guo also emphasizes that the ideal fit of a person to his position in life depends on his spontaneous recognition of and adherence to individual natural allotment or capacity, a practice that once prevailed in sagely antiquity and now must be recovered in the present. Pei Wei addresses such concerns in the next section of his essay:

> But when it comes to malicious confrontation and arrogant, willful behavior, these are the sprouts of dangerous harm. As such, the more they spread, the quicker disaster arrives; the more people are inclined to dissipation, the more resentment and complain grow. The more people do as they please without constraint, the more prone they are to attack one another. The more advantage is monopolized, the more thievery spreads. One may say that by so trying to enhance life, life is actually lost. The common run of people, shocked at these bloody quarrels, seek reasons why such hard strife occurs. They examine how excessive emphasis on material existence is harmful and thus see the good in simplification and reduction, but they then fall in with expositions of theories that revere nothingness, whose aim is to denigrate material existence. Once they denigrate material existence, they are sure to distance themselves from how they appear to others; once they distance themselves from how they appear to others, they are sure to discard the rule of law; once they discard the rule of law, they are sure to disregard precautions; once they disregard precautions, they are sure to forget all about propriety. Once people no longer maintain propriety and the rule of law, no way remains to conduct government. The masses follow the example of superiors just as water fills the shape of a vessel. Therefore, since it is the nature of the mass of common folk to

> trust what they are accustomed to, being so accustomed, they are reconciled to their occupations, and, reconciled to their occupations, they say this is the right and natural thing to do. Therefore, the ruler must take care with their moral guidance. He tends to all duties, such as promulgating government decrees and dealing with the penal code, sees that the common folk are separated into households and that each fill one of the four vocations [scholar, farmer, artisan, merchant]. He should ensure that those who receive his orders need not act with undue severity, and he should leave them so secure in their posts that, utterly unmindful that one is different from another, no one wishes to transfer. How much the more true this is for those who fill the exalted positions of the three dukes, for, thanks to the venerable inclinations they harbor at heart, they too should serve as moral guides. Since these are the steps to either benighted or enlightened rule,[146] one cannot fail to treat them with the utmost caution.

Pei Wei would have the ideal ruler rely more on established and conventional rules and regulations, with far less stress on spontaneity and natural inclination, than does Guo Xiang, who insists throughout the commentary on the role of unself-conscious rule for the true sovereign: he should rule by not ruling, and thus shape his people by exemplifying such unself-consciousness.

> Although desire for repletion can be reduced, merely having something should not be rejected entirely; although excessive consumption can be decreased, this should not mean that to have nothing at all need be venerated. For the most part, those who have a talent for disputation, on the one hand, go to extreme lengths to expose abuses inherent in advocating material existence and, on the other, can only praise how admirable the notion of absolute nothingness [*kongwu*] is. But whereas material things have verifiable characteristics, absolute nothingness is impossible to examine. Since disputatiously clever discourse may delight, and words that seem true may lead one astray, everyone may become so bedazzled by them that they get thoroughly taken in by the conventional arguments involved. Even though someone might think differently, such dissent will be to no avail. Held in thrall to what they are accustomed, they say that the theory of pure nothingness [*xuwu*] cannot really be eclipsed. Whenever someone chants it, others chime in, so many set off in that direction never to turn from it. Consequently, they neglect to heed worldly duties, denigrate the need to achieve anything, esteem aimless behavior that drifts this way and that, and disparage pragmatic men of worth. What people will risk their lives for is fame and fortune, which is why writers exaggerate the truth in what they say, but the inarticulate so admire their opinions that everyone in general is infected by them. This is how they establish their arguments, based on pure nothingness, which they say deals with “arcane marvels” [*xuanmiao*]. In office, they pay no heed to responsibilities, which they say is to keep “elegant distance.” They maintain themselves in such a way that they lose all sense of honesty and honor, which they

> say is to be “broad minded.” Therefore, such abrasive practices wear away ever harder. As for the unrestrained who follow this trend, some act contrary to the rules of propriety and ceremony governing auspicious and inauspicious events, disregard how their looks and demeanor appear, irreverently ignore the proper order of the old and young, and utterly confuse the social status of the noble and lowly. The worst of them go around naked, talking and laughing heedless of what is appropriate. Thinking that unscrupulous behavior is something grand, the conduct of the intelligentsia keeps on degenerating.

To frame his arguments, Pei Wei manipulates the range of meanings for *you*, which include “actuality,” “being,” “existent,” “material/physical existence,” “possess,” “possession(s),” “something,” and “somethingness,” and *wu*, which include “be/do without,” “emptiness,” “empty,” “free from,” “lose,” “nonexistent,” “nonexistence,” “nothing,” “nothingness,” and “without.” Although these ranges of meaning for *you* and *wu* also appear in Guo’s writings, he never uses them in such a rhetorical strategy. By “manipulate,” I mean that Pei has one meaning slide into another so that one set of associations merges with another. However, such pseudologic may have been the order of the day, for Pei may have employed it in this particular essay to parody those he rails against, who move from the denigration of excessive *possessions* to extoling *none at all*, from *nothing at all* to an appeal to an ontological pure or absolute *nothingness*, which they then use to justify *freedom from* conventions in order to pursue an indulgent lifestyle *empty* of all moral and ethical concerns. Nevertheless, Pei’s assertions still have affinities with Guo’s thought, for the self-conscious self-indulgence, which Pei condemned, was also anathema to Guo Xiang, whose commentary is replete with injunctions to follow unself-conscious spontaneity in all things while never violating one’s natural limits:

> The text that Master Lao composed in five thousand characters explicitly exposes all foul and confusing harmful practices, while expounding what tranquillity in singular totality means and how it relieves perplexity, allows for self-equanimity and for accord with the essential directives of *Sun* [Diminution, Hexagram 41], *Qian* [Modesty, Hexagram 15], *Gen* [Restraint, Hexagram 52], and *Jie* [Control, Hexagram 60], of the *Changes*. Moreover, this maintenance of original nature [*shouben*] through tranquillity of singular totality has nothing to do with any “pure nothingness.” What such hexagrams as *Sun* and *Gen* actually indicate is one particular Dao for the sovereign; it is not that they serve as a medium for some original nothingness inherent in the *Changes*. When we examine Master Lao’s book, although it is profoundly knowledgeable from start to finish, it nevertheless asserts that “existence arises from nothingness,”[147] which puts vacuity [*xu*] in charge of things, and, with bias, sets up a proposition favored by one particular school of thought. How could

anything be possibly right about that! Once one comes to life, its full span is achieved by safeguarding it. To take steps to achieve its full span, one should make compliant response to things his chief concern. But if one's taste for the fondly familiar causes neglect of duties, overwhelming disaster will arise. If by paying such heed to details one becomes unmindful of fundamentals, the truth of natural principles will vanish. Depending on how one's actions engage others, results may lead either to survival or to destruction. . . . [148] This is why Master Lao exposed the snares of decadence and unrestraint and composed a text that venerated nothingness, whose aims were to end the utter mistake of living to excess, which he so condemned, to encourage perfect equanimity, which he considered the greatest good, to restrain indulgence in pleasure from going too far, and to re-establish purity and rectitude in one's heart and mind. Although it suited him to employ "nothingness" [*wu*] as a term here, his aims remained entirely with material existence [*you*], which is why, he said, "they [such terms] serve as mere decoration."[149] As such, what is recorded is but discourse with a particular biased perspective.

Extant fragments of Guo's *Laozi zhu* (Commentary to the *Laozi*) are presented, translated, and analyzed in appendix C.1. For similar comments concerning the nonexistence of the Dao as creator or generator, see C.1. *Laozi* 4; for praise of frugality and modesty, see C.1, *Laozi* 10 and 24:

If it were declared that the ultimate principle of things really depended on nothingness as its progenitor, such biased perspective would harm the truth. The worthy of former times had such thoroughgoing understanding that, no way confined, they profoundly discussed everything. However, only Ban Gu wrote to refute this assertion, but he failed to analyse what it really meant. Although Sun Qing [Xun Kuang (ca. 314–217 BCE), Xunzi] and Yang Xiong [53 BCE–18 CE)] basically denigrated it, they still approved of some aspects. However, use of the term "pure nothingness" spread day by day, and this so stimulated interest among many thinkers that they all set forth theories about it, which, from explaining creative transformative power above covered the myriad things below. Not a one failed to venerate nothingness, with every view of it exactly the same. By nature inflexible, many proclaimed that every advocacy of the principles of material existence as debased in meaning and thus merely superficial and crude. As a consequence, those learned in the Confucian classics, whose avocation had been the debate over human relations, shifted their affiliation to them. This so struck me with fear that I had to express my heartfelt thoughts, which while many gathered to attack, some dismissed them as just some personal grumblings of no lasting significance. Someone good enough to visit me was so upset by what he saw happening that he asked me to compose an essay that enumerated how all evidence proved that "pure nothingness" was untenable, because as long as all aspects of it were not analytically corrected, what partisans of "nothingness" meant by it would be impossible to refute. I then withdrew to think it over: Although the noble man should

> heed his true inclinations, he should not seek prominence, so when he states his opinions, he should do no more than communicate what he means. However, we are now so distant from the time of sagely wisdom that one's differences from and similarities to it are inescapably mixed together. Nevertheless, even something somewhat compatible should serve to venerate and supplement those canonical works of ancient times, support the clarity of their great enterprise, and be of benefit to the present. As such, though my only worry is that my words will fail, how can I remain silent! Though I fail to lift even one corner of the problem, let me at least briefly express my views on it!

Pei Wei seems much more in the Confucian camp than Guo Xiang, and far more concerned with the formulated wisdom of that tradition, which Guo denigrates as mere "footprints" that only serve to mislead and confuse. For example, see 1.13.7, 6.48, 7.2.1, 8.4.2–8.4.4, 8.6.2:

> As for absolute nothingness, since it cannot possibly generate anything, the start of generation must come from the self-generation of things themselves. Once self-generated things surely embody material existence, but if no material existence is there, no source of generation is there either. Since the individual capacity produced by generation consists of material existence, "pure nothingness" just means the "absence" of material existence, as mentioned above. As for "material existence," if "material existence" were not opposed to "nothingness," it would not be "material existence." And as for "nothingness," if "nothingness were not opposed to "material existence," it would not be "nothingness."[150] Therefore, the material extant, which develops when it is nourished, cannot be kept intact by that which has no means to do so. The masses, which exist as long as order is maintained, cannot be kept in compliance by something that has no means to act. The mind is not phenomenal matter yet managing matters must proceed from the mind. However, although managing matters is done by something other than the phenomenal, one cannot say that the mind consists of "nothingness." An artisan is not an implement, yet the making of a tool surely must be done by the artisan. However, though the making of an implement is done by something other than an implement, one cannot say that the artisan does not exist. In like manner, one might wish to catch a deep-water fish, but it cannot be caught by an indolent person, or to shoot down a bird atop a high wall cannot be done by someone who keeps his hands clasped quietly together. Carefully examine how one must apply himself to the operation of bow and bait: these cannot be mastered by "not knowing." Looking at it from this perspective, everything that sustains the material existent must materially exists itself—so how could "pure nothingness" be of any benefit to all the living things that already exist!

Pei's view that "nothingness" cannot be the source of materiality and that things exist only because they self-generate is similarly found in Guo's commentary,

where it is most forcefully asserted at 2.5: “Nothingness is just that—nothing—so it cannot generate phenomenal reality [the extant or “somethingness”]. Before anything phenomenally extant is generated, it cannot generate anything else.” See also 2.34.4, 11.12.2, 12.18.2–12.18.3, 22.34.3–22.34.4, 23.30.9–23.30.12, 23.38.6.

Immanent Transcendence in the Writings of Ruan Ji

This last section of Pei’s essay and comparable passages from Guo’s *Zhuangzi* commentary illustrate how both differ from the earlier tradition of *xuanxue* thought, represented first by Wang Bi and He Yan, and later by Xiang Xiu and his contemporaries such as Ruan Ji and Xi Kang. Turning first to Ruan Ji, we find that for him, things do not generate themselves; rather, they are subject to external generation, as this passage from his “Da Zhuang lun” (On understanding Master Zhuang) clearly states:

> As Heaven and Earth are generated by the Natural [*ziran*], so the myriad things are generated by Heaven and Earth. As for the Natural, since nothing exists outside it, “Heaven and Earth” is the name for it. As for Heaven and Earth, since everything extant [*you*] exists within them, the myriad things are generated by them. If the former is deemed to be that outside which nothing exists, who may take issue with that? If the latter is deemed to be that inside which everything exists, who may say otherwise?[151]

However, Donald Holzman interpreted Ruan’s position entirely differently—as allied with the immanent monism of Guo Xiang. In doing so, he translated *ziran* as “spontaneity” and asserted that the text should mean “Heaven and Earth are born of themselves.’ ”[152] Although such a reading of the text is possible, other passages in Ruan’s writings unambiguously place him in the immanent transcendence camp. Moreover, since the term *zisheng* (“self-generation” or “self-generate”) never appears in Ruan’s works, it is more likely that *ziran* as it appears in the previous passage is not equivalent to *zisheng*, and thus is not a process but rather indicates an entity, the prime mover that generates all things. Ruan seems here to have had in mind a section in the *Laozi* that refers to the “Natural” in the same way:

> Man takes his models from Earth; Earth takes its models from Heaven; Heaven takes its models from the Dao; and the Dao takes its models from the Natural [*ziran*].

Ruan seems also to have been influenced by Wang Bi, whose commentary further clarifies that *ziran* is the prime entity upon which all else sequentially depends:

> "The Natural" is a term for that for which no equivalents exist, and expression for that which has infinite reach and scope . . . The Dao complies with the Natural, which results in Heaven having something to rely on [the Dao]; Heaven takes its models from the Dao, which results in Earth having something to emulate [Heaven], which results in Man finding images there [on Earth].[153]

Similarly, Ruan combines references to the *Laozi*, sections 25 and 37, near the beginning of his "Tong Lao lun" (On understanding Master Lao):

> "The Dao takes its models from the Natural" as it effects transformation. If any prince or lord could hold on to it, the myriad folk would undergo moral transformation spontaneously."[154] The *Changes* calls this the "Great Ultimate" [*taiji*];[155] the *Spring and Autumn Annals* calls it the "Origin" [*yuan*];[156] and the *Laozi* calls it the "Dao."[157]

For Ruan, "the Natural," "the Great Ultimate," "the Origin," and "Dao" are all provisional names for the prime entity, the name for one of which, "Origin," he expands to "Amorphous Origin" [*hunyuan*] in the fortieth of his "Poems Singing My Feelings" [*Yonghuai shi*]: "Amorphous Origin generated the Two Exemplars (Heaven and Earth)."[158] Also apparent is his writings is Ruan's belief in a causal sequence: the Natural causes the generation of Heaven and Earth, which in turn causes the generation of the myriad things. As for the Dao, its place in Ruan's system is ambiguous: it is either a term interchangeable with the Natural as the prime entity or the name for its immanent process.

Xiang Xiu and Xi Kang on Perspicacity (*Zhi*)

Besides the remnants of Xiang's *Zhuangzi zhu* (Commentary to the *Zhuangzi*) various other writings reveal important aspects of his thought. Among the existing fragments of his *Zhouyi Xiangshi yi* (Master Xiang's explications of the *Changes of the Zhou*), only one passage seems philosophically significant—a comment addressed to Hexagram 42 *Yi* (Increase), *Commentary on the Judgements*, "*Yi* [Increase] is such that it means diminution for those above and Increase for those below, so the delight of the common folk is without bounds." Xiang comments: "According to the Dao of the enlightened sovereign, he should aspire to treat those

below with kindness. Therefore, his catering to the interests of those below means his diminution, and his giving to those below means their increase."[159] "Should aspire to" [*zhi zai*], also may be translated "should be determined to," "should intend to," "should set his will on," all of which involve conscious intentionality and thus inimical to Guo's basic tenet that the enlightened sovereign or sage ruler should be free of conscious mind and never act with deliberate intent.[160] It is impossible to know if this fragment, utterly devoid of *xuanxue* thought and entirely Confucian in direction, is representative of Xiang's overall approach in his *Changes* commentary, but his view of enlightened rulership here seems typical of an earlier stage of statecraft thinking that harks to the original Confucian classics and their Han dynasty exegetes, and also probably reflects an early stage in Xiang's own thought.

Xiang also addresses the role of perspicacity in his "Nan Yangsheng lun" (Refutation of "On nurturing life"), by Xi Kang:

> A man receives his form from the Former-and-Transformer [*zaohua*] and thus exists among the myriad things. However, he differs from plants and trees, for plants and trees can neither avoid wind or rain nor avoid hatchet or axe, and also differs from birds and beasts, which can neither elude traps or nets nor escape from cold or heat. He possesses both mobility to interact with things and the perspicacity to shift himself elsewhere. As such, he has both the advantage of mind and the faculty of perspicacity. But if one shuts these down and silences them, he would be the same as things that lack all perspicacity. So what can be more valuable than perspicacity![161]

Although nothing is said here about unself-conscious mind, which is so important to Guo Xiang, both in his *Zhuangzi* commentary[162] and his *Lunyu tilue* (Essentials of the Lunyu [Analects]),[163] Xiang does say much the same thing in his own *Zhuangzi* commentary,[164] which we know was completed before 262, the year of Xi Kang's death, and that Xi had commented specifically on it:

> At first, when Xiang Xiu wanted to do his commentary, Xi Kang said, "Why must this book have a commentary added to it? That would do nothing but hinder others from using it to play their own music." But once Xiang had finished, he showed it to Xi, saying, "As an exception, this might even be up to it, might it not?" He then went on to discuss "Nurturing Life" with Xi in words that confounded both questions and answers, for he wanted Xi to give it his most lofty consideration. When Xi Kang tended his forge, Xiang Xiu assisted

him, and they interacted so cheerfully it was as if no one else was there with them.[165]

Xiang's refutation of Xi's "On nurturing life" was thus written later than his *Zhuangzi* commentary. Although Xiang's commentary to the *Changes*, in which he clearly commends conscious thought and purposeful initiative, might represent an earlier stage in Xiang's thought, much the same view is promoted here. However, this seems at odds with his *Zhuangzi* commentary, where instead he exalts unself-conscious action and freedom from conscious mind. Xiang Xiu and Xi Kang were close friends, so I suspect that their exchange of essays, including also Xi's "*Da nan yangsheng lun*" (Rejoinder to the refutation of "On nurturing life"),[166] constitutes a debate between polemicists who were more interested in "pure conversation" [*qingtan*] competition than in stating opinions of conviction. They also often seem to be talking past one another in order to score points instead of answering or refuting specifics made by the other.

Xi actually says little concerning mind and perspicacity in his two essays, but what he does say seems largely compatible with Xiang's pronouncements in his *Zhuangzi* commentary. Xi first criticizes the common man who

> lets delight and anger violate his correct pneuma [*zhengqi*], lets selfconscious ratiocination [*silü*] ruin his essential spirit, and lets grief and happiness upset his stable essence [*pingcui*]. Now, although his is just a tiny body, its attackers do not take a single path to assault it, so his easily exhausted person has to suffer enemies both inside and out.[167]

One who excels at nurturing life, by contrast, has the mind of a sage:

> Because external things entangle the mind, they do not exist for him. Instead, because divine pneuma [*shenqi*] in its purity lodges there, it alone leaves impressions. Unconcerned, it is free from suffering and misery; utterly still, it is free from selfconscious ratiocination [*silü*]. Moreover, he guards it with unity and nurtures it with harmony. Harmony with principle thus daily accrues, which is the same as Vast Compliance.[168]

Moreover, Xi does not denigrate all perspicacity, but only self-conscious, deliberate ratiocination, referred to in his "Rejoinder" as "foresight" [*qianshi*]:

> The reason why we value perspicacity and esteem action is because they can enhance life and improve one's person. However, as soon as desire acts,

> regret and remorse arise. As perspicacity functions, foresight develops, and once foresight develops, intention begins, which allows external things entrance. When regret and remorse arise, worries mount and one's person is placed in jeopardy. As for the two [perspicacity and action], if one fails to store them within but allows them to engage without, all they will manage to do is visit disaster on one's person while doing nothing to improve life.[169]

"Foresight" involves deliberation, planning, judgment, weighing options, and other kinds of ratiocination—all of which are anathema to spontaneous and unself-conscious thought and action, which both Xiang Xiu and Guo Xiang championed in their *Zhuangzi* commentaries.

Immanent Transcendence and Guo Xiang's Immanent Monism

Whereas Xi Kang never uses the term "self-generate" [*zisheng*], his occasional references to generation suggest instead that it is subject to dependency. For example, in his "Sheng wu aile lun" (On neither grief nor joy exists in music), he states: "It is on the merger of virtues by Heaven and Earth that the myriad things rely for generation."[170] He also refers to dependence in "*Ming dan lun*" (On Elucidating Courage): "It is the molding and smelting of the primordial undifferentiated pneuma [*yuanqi*] on which all living things depend for their endowments."[171] We saw previously that the same kind of causal sequence appears in Ruan Ji's writings. Xi's "*Taishi jian*" (Admonitions of the Grand Tutor) also contains a passage that alludes to immanent transcendence: "From the vast and majestic grand basis [*taisu*], came luminosity of yang and coalescence of yin, which the Two Exemplars [Heaven and Earth] molded and transformed to give humankind its start."[172]

The sequence of such causality and dependence leads back, either implicitly or explicitly, to a prime creative entity that is both temporarily and ontologically transcendent to phenomenal reality. However, such transcendence for Ruan Ji, Xi Xang, and Xiang Xiu seems equally immanent in things, and so their position seems entirely compatible with the "transcendent immanence" view of modern and contemporary scholars of Chinese thought. By contrast, every time Guo Xiang refers to a supposed creator/transformer, whether it is "Dao," "Heaven," "Nothing(ness)," "Creator," "Nature," or "Former-and-Transformer," he either refutes its independent existence[173] or interprets or uses the term figuratively, as a metaphor for innate spontaneity.[174] Such contrast is particularly apparent in Xiang Xiu's and Guo Xiang's use of the term "Former-and-Transformer" [*zaohua*]. With

Xiang, it is both an entity and a process, apparently synonymous with “Creator” or “Dao,” and thus transcendent as well as immanent, but with Guo, it is exclusively a process, equivalent to “spontaneity” [*ziran*],[175] and thus solely immanent in material existence.

Xiang Xiu and Guo Xiang: Major Differences and Similarities

While it is undeniable that Guo incorporated parts of Xiang’s commentary, how much Guo may have borrowed is unknown because most of Xiang’s commentary is lost. Comparison of extant Xiang passages corresponding to Guo’s (see appendix C) discloses much similarity, but also reveals many differences, both obvious and subtle:

1. It is likely that Guo at times altered the text of the *Zhuangzi* as he edited it so that it better supported his own interpretations. One telling example is 2.33, which begins the famous conversation between Shadow and Penumbra. Xiang’s comments that survive are found in C.I.2.33, 27.14.1, and C.II.2.33. In the first two, Xiang’s comments, less precise than Guo’s, add nothing to philosophical interpretation, but in the latter, Xiang indicates that his text of the *Zhuangzi* has Penumbra exclaim, “How you [Shadow] lack control [*wuchi*]!” Guo’s edited text instead reads, “How you lack independent control [*wu techi*]!” Unfortunately, nothing else remains of Xiang’s commentary here, so we do not know if he shared Guo’s extreme view that all things were absolutely free of dependency, like Shadow, and thus not only self-generate, but also self-transform throughout their existence.
2. However, shortly later at 2.5–2.6, another opportunity for such comparison occurs since a fragment of Xiang’s commentary to the same passage survives:

> My generation is not caused by me; such generation just generates itself. As for that which generates generation, how can it be a thing! Therefore, it is not material. My transformation is not caused by me. Such transformation just transforms itself. As for that which transforms transformation, how can it be a thing! Therefore, it has no materiality [wuwu]. If that which generates things were also subject to generation and that which transforms things were also subject to transformation, how could it differ from material things? It is thus clear that only something subject to neither generation nor transformation may serve as the root source of generation and transformation.[176]

Although both Xiang and Guo similarly assert that generation and transformation are immanent in things, Guo also insists that neither external agency nor dependency is involved. I suspect that his lengthy comment here was to refute Xiang's assertion that a "root cause of generation and transformation" did exist, which though immaterial itself was still immanent in things, a position that is anathema to Guo. Xiang instead accepts that such a role commonly exists, such as in C.I.2.7.12. Moreover, even when a comment is attributed to both, it does not necessarily mean the same thing, such as at 6.18.1 (see note 61 and C.IV.6.18.1), where both Xiang and Guo say, "Arcane Obscurity [the Dao] is a name for that which is nothingness [*wu*] and yet not nothingness." I interpret this to mean that whereas Xiang viewed the Dao as a nonmaterial entity, "nothingness," and thus "immanently transcendent," Guo believed that the Dao had no existence apart from its immanent presence in things; as such, as "nothing," it confirms Guo's immanent monism.

3. A major similarity is Xiang's and Guo's promotion of spontaneous, unself-conscious thought and action. Many examples are found in both commentaries; see C.I.19.5.2, C.II.3.4.5, C.II.6.5.3, C.III.3.1.4, C.III.3.4.5, C.III.4.17.1, C.III.4.24.4, C.III.7.15.2, C.III.7.24.2, C.III.7.24.4, C.IV.3.4.4, among many others.
4. Fundamental in Guo's commentary is his concept of "footprints" [*ji*]—that is, the recollections in legends and accounts of sagely thought, action, behavior, and pronouncement that, since these always fall short of the realities involved, falsely establish standards for people to follow, which then corrupt natural inclinations to the good and damage original personal nature. Reference to such "footprints" occurs 11 times in the text of the *Zhuangzi* itself, and 151 times in Guo's commentary. Although the *Zhuangzi* itself provided a precedent for Guo to follow (see especially 14.42.1), Xiang Xiu also used "footprints" in the same sense as did Guo, though only one such instance is found among the fragments of Xiang's commentary (see C.III.7.21.1), so perhaps the difference here is essentially one of degree and not in kind.
5. The "transcendent immanence" (Xiang) versus "immanent monism" (Guo) divide covered in point 2 extends to their different uses of epithets for the Dao: whereas Xiang tends to regard the Dao, whatever it is called, literally as the ultimate generator and transformer, Guo instead always uses such epithets figuratively, so "Creator" [*zaowuzhe*], "Former-and-Transformer" [*zaohua*], "Great Ultimate" [*taiji*], "Heaven" [*tian*], or "Nature" [*ziran*] alike signify the Dao directly as the immanent process of generation and transformation.

6. Appendix C.II lists thirty known instances where the same passage in the *Zhuangzi* is addressed completely differently in Guo's and Xiang's commentaries. Overall, Xiang seems more interested in the semantics of words and expressions; Guo seems more interested in larger philosophical issues of meaning.

Guo Xiang and the *Zhuangzi*

The relationship between the text of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary has been the focus of controversy throughout the centuries, with some praising the commentary for its accurate interpretation, as did Lu Deming when he wrote that Guo's commentary "entirely captures Master Zhuang's real meaning, which is why it is universally admired." Others took the opposite view—namely, that Guo, in promoting his own ideas, completely distorted the original meaning of the *Zhuangzi*. For example, the prominent literatus and Neo-Confucian philosopher Yao Nai (1731–1815) reckoned that Guo, in trying to elucidate the *Zhuangzi*, "got four parts of ten wrong."[177] And the erudite scholar and exegete Fang Qian (1805–1868) thought that Guo got it completely wrong:

> The world praises Guo Xiang for his fine understanding of the *Zhuangzi*, but what did Guo Xiang ever know about the *Zhuangzi*! . . . What did Guo Xiang ever know about what Master Zhuang meant as the essence of things!. . . . Were not people like Guo Xiang criminals in their treatment of Master Zhuang! . . . As for Guo Xiang's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, it is not worth discussing.[178]

The most radical of Guo's critics hold that, like all commentaries, his text distorts the meaning of the *Zhuangzi*, and they insist that the text must be experienced exclusively on its own. A particularly telling example of this view appears in a witty exchange between two Chan masters during the Southern Song dynasty:

> Wuzhuo said, "I once took a look at Guo Xiang's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, about which erudites say should actually be Master Zhuang's commentary to Guo Xiang." Although this old monk found what she said quite strange, I did not ask about it but instead cited the story of Yantou and the old woman. Wuzhuo then composed this *gāthā*:
>
> Let your boat drift alone, leaflike

on the vast and vague,
For to ply oars and make them dance
creates a different music of its own,
And once cloudy peaks and water moon's reflection
are all cast aside,
Win a long time for yourself in Zhuang Zhou's
butterfly dream![179]

Wuzhuo ("Free of Attachments") is the nun and Chan Master Wuzhuo Miaozong (1095–1170), and Yantou is the Chan Master Yantou Quanhuo (828–887). The text is from the "recorded conversations" [*yulu*] of Wuzhuo's teacher, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), who refers to himself here as "this old monk." The story of Yantou and the old woman is an obvious parable:

> When Yantou took up duties at Shatai he served as ferryman at the side of Lake Ezhu, where on both sides of the lake a wooden board was hung so that when people wanted to cross the lake they struck the board. The Master would then ask, "Who is it?" And the reply was "I want to go to that side." The Master then made oars dance and went to meet them. One day, holding a child in her arms, an old woman arrived and said, "To ply oars and make them dance, I don't care about that. Just tell me where I got this child that I hold in my arms." But the Master immediately started to row anyway. The old woman then said, "I gave birth to seven children. With the first six I never encountered one who understood my music [*zhiyin*]. Just this last one does, but now I find I can do without it." She immediately threw it into the water.[180]

That the text of the *Zhuangzi* can serve as a practical guide to interpreting Guo's commentary is actually quite perceptive—I have certainly found it so (more about this in the "Translator's Note," earlier in this book). Dahui did not ask Wuzhuo what she meant; rather, he cited the parable, which in this context implies the question: Like the old woman who tried various ways to enlightenment and finally found the right one, which once found became superfluous, did you, Wuzhuo, try various commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*, and when you finally found the right (or at least the best) one (namely, Guo Xiang's), did you realize that you no longer needed it? Wuzhuo's response in her *gāthā* suggests something quite different: "Your boat" means "your reading of the *Zhuangzi*," which should be unself-conscious and directionless; one should just wander aimlessly about in it. To "ply oars and make them dance," since it "makes a music of its own," differs

from the “music” of the *Zhuangzi* itself, and thus is useless as a way to understand it.

An erudite herself, Wuzhuo surely knew Xi Kang’s initial reaction to Xiang Xiu’s announcement that he intended to compose a commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, which Xi cast in terms of music: “Why must this book have a commentary added to it? That would do nothing but hinder others from using it to play their own music.”[181] Rowing is not drifting but self-conscious and directed momentum, equivalent metaphorically to directed reading and manipulated understanding. The third and fourth lines suggest that if one is not distracted by the attractive tropes, parables, and imagery—all the beauty that permeates the text of the *Zhuangzi*—a truly realized, even “enlightened,” experience of interacting with the *Zhuangzi* will occur, one that goes on to enhance all of life itself.[182] However, since a translator must make conscious choices and direct his version in certain directions, he cannot drift aimlessly but must pick up oars and row in one direction instead of another. The oars that I choose to use for this work are borrowed principally from Guo Xiang, who unquestionably shaped an understanding of the text that differs both from that of other commentaries, before and after him, and surely to some extent also from the so-called original meaning of the *Zhuangzi* itself—whatever that might have been.

Guo Xiang and Buddhism

Guo’s impact on the introduction and early development of Buddhism in China was complex and profound, the principal conduit of which were Eastern Jin scholarly monks, who, though influenced by the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *xuanxue*, in general drew especially on the *Zhuangzi* and Guo’s commentary for terms and concepts, resulting in a significant convergence of *xuanxue* and Buddhist thought during this, the first great era of translation of Buddhist literature from Sanskrit and Prakrit.[183] Such eminent monks included Zu Daoqian (286–374), Zhu Fayi (307–380), Dao’an (312–385), Zhidun (Zhi Daolin) (314–366), who also composed a commentary to the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Xiaoyao you* (Spontaneous Free Play),[184] Huiyuan (334–416), Huiyan (363–443), and Sengzhao (384–414).

Since enough material is involved here to fill another book, and thus far beyond the scope of this introduction, the reader is directed to the following relevant sources. For a general comparison of Guo’s thought and Buddhism, see Erik Zücher, “Buddhism at Jiankang and in the South-East”[185]; for a discussion of “nothingness” [*wu*] in Guo Xiang and Buddhism, Guo and Zhidun, Guo and Mādhyamika Buddhism, and Guo and other Eastern Jin monks, see Isabelle

Robinet, “Kouo Siang ou le monde comme absolu (Guo Xiang or the world as absolute)”; for comparisons of Guo’s thought and Huayan, Tiantai, and Chan Buddhism, see Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* and “Guo Xiang: The Self-So and “The Repudiation-cum-Reaffirmation of Deliberate Action and Knowledge”;[186] for a detailed discussion of the influence of Guo’s terminology on Chinese Buddhist thought and translation, see Hans-Rudolf Kantor, “The Daoist-Buddhist Discourse(s) on Things, Names, and Knowing in China’s Wei Jin Period”;[187] for Guo and monks of the Eastern Jin, concepts, terms, and translation, see Livia Kohn, “The Buddhist Connection,” chapter 13 in *Zhuangzi: Text and Context*; and for a detailed discussion of Guo Xiang and Zhidun, see Ellen Y. Zhang, “Zhi Dun on Freedom: Synthesizing Daoism and Buddhism.”[188]

Although modern Chinese studies of Guo’s relation to Buddhism are legion, only two of the most significant are listed here. Although highly speculative, Wang Xiaoyi has devoted a large part of *Guo Xiang pingzhuan fu Xiang Xiu pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Guo Xiang with critical biography of Xiang Xiu appended) to the possibility of Buddhist influence on Guo Xiang (pp. 175–199). On the other hand, Guo’s influence on Buddhism via Eastern Jin monks is treated in detail in Tang Yijie, *Guo Xiang yu Wei-Jin xuanxue* (Guo Xiang and arcane learning in the Wei-Jin Period) (pp. 81–97).

Master Zhuang and the Text Attributed to Him

Although the *Zhuangzi* has been popularly regarded in both traditional and modern times as the work of a single author, Master Zhuang, Zhuang Zhou (fourth century BCE), the overwhelming modern scholarly consensus is that it was compiled probably over at least two centuries. However, concerning the text, which (except for fragments) exists only in the thirty-three-chapter recension of Guo Xiang that is divided into three sections, *Neipian* (Inner Chapters), *Waipian* (Outer Chapters), and *Zapian* (Miscellaneous Chapters), agreement has never been reached either on how its chronological layers should be stratified or who contributed to its compilation, either individually or as members of schools of thought. Different ways of approaching the text, based on textual analysis, have been proposed, resulting in the reassignment of some passages in the Inner Chapters to the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, the movement of passages in them to the Inner Chapters, and the classification of all chapters in terms of both chronological layers and “school of thought” affiliations. Earlier modern scholars tended to accept that the Inner Chapters were largely authored by Master Zhuang in the

fourth century BCE, and the other two sections were product by later "schools" of Master Zhuang's followers; but eventually, more sophisticated approaches appeared that resulted in more detailed conclusions, first significantly by Guan Feng (1919–2005) in 1961.[189] Guan's work was developed further by A. C. Graham in "How Much of Chuang Tzu Did Chuang Tzu Write?" (1980) and *The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang Tzu* (1981). Working independently of Graham, Liu Xiaogan covered similar ground but came to somewhat different conclusions in his Peking University doctoral dissertation (1985), directed by Professor Zhang Dainian (1909–2004), published *as Zhuangzi zhexue ji qi yanbian* (Philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* and its evolution). The first three chapters of Liu's work were translated as *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters with an Afterword* (1994), in which Liu contrasts his dating and classification scheme with Graham's.

Graham proposes seven strata and kinds of authorship in the Zhuangzi as follows:

(1) The Inner Chapters (1–7) represent the actual writings of Master Zhuang, including some passages in the Miscellaneous Chapters in Guo Xiang's recension that rightly belong in the Inner Chapters.
(2) Chapters 8–10 and the first part of 11 are authored by an individual "Primitivist" influenced by the *Laozi*.
(3) Parts of chapter 11, chapters 12–16, and chapter 33 are composed by an early Han school of eclectic Daoists or"Syncretists" (early third century BCE).
(4) Chapters 17–22 expound on and further develop material in the Inner Chapters, and as such, are from the later "School of Master Zhuang" (third to second century BCE, perhaps into the early Han period).
(5) Chapters 23–27 and 32 consist of heterogeneous fragments, including some early material that rightfully belong to the Inner Chapters (fourth-second centuries BCE).
(6) Graham attributes chapters 28–31 to the "Yangists," narratives that are supportive of Yang Zhu's (370–319 BCE) ethical egoism and can be dated to the same time as the "Primitivists" (205 BCE).
(7) The Syncretists" is a collection of passages, probably all from the early Han period, that synthesize Confucian, Legalist, and Daoist thought found in chapters 12, 13, and 14.

Liu proposes four divisions for the Zhuangzi:

(1) Inner Chapters (1–7) (mid–Warring States period, fourth century BCE), records of Master Zhuang's own teachings;

(2) Group I Outer Chapters (17–22), Miscellaneous Chapters (23–27 and 32), are composed and compiled by "Transmitters and Expositors of Master Zhuang"(late Warring States period before 235 BCE), who explained and developed thought from the Inner Chapters, as well as initiating thoughts of their own that are different from that of the Inner Chapters, and essentially tried to transcend the conflicts between Confucians and Mohists;

(3) Group II Outer Chapters (11B, 12–16, and 33) (late Warring States period before 235 BCE) represent the "Huang-Lao School" and assimilate and accommodate several Confucian and Legalist points of view, emphasizing the arts of the ruler and expounding the principle that he should be inactive while his ministers are active;

(4) Group III Outer Chapters (8–11A), Miscellaneous Chapters (28–31) (late Warring States period before 235 BCE) represent "The Anarchists," who reject "reality" as illusory, seek the freedom of human nature, and promote the idea that in a society of highest virtue, neither distinction of ruler and subjects nor class consciousness exists.

Liu also insists that all of the *Zhuangzi* was completed by 241 BCE, and none of it dates from as late as the early Han.

In the meantime, Harold Roth in "Who Compiled the *Chuang Tzu*?" (1991) largely follows Graham's scheme, but he also argues, agreeing with Guan Feng, that the compilation of the *Zhuangzi*, which contains material composed and transmitted for about two centuries (fourth to second century BCE) should be attributed to Liu An (179–122 BCE), the king of Huainan, and the Huainan scholars, and the actual date of compilation can be narrowed down to about 130 BCE

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to analyze and evaluate the methodologies used and the conclusions arrived at by these scholars. However, for a comprehensive critique of Graham's, Liu's, and Roth's work, among others, as well as new perspectives and conclusions, the reader is directed to Brian H. Hoffert, "Chuang Tzu: The Evolution of a Taoist Classic" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2001). After sifting through all the evidence and arguments presented, Hoffert concludes that the fifty-two-chapter *Zhuangzi* listed in the *Hanshu* (History of the Former Han) *Yiwen zhi* (Treatise on Arts and Letters) was indeed likely compiled by "Syncretists" at the court of the prince of Huainan.[190] However, despite all this effort, much of the evidence remains ambiguous as to which parts were originally composed when, and by whom. Fortunately for the purposes of this study and translation, Guo Xiang, like so many before and after

him, regarded Master Zhuang as the single author of the work that bears his name.

The most significant early attribution of such a body of writings to Master Zhuang appears in the biography prepared for him in the *Shiji* (*Records of the Historian*) completed in 104 BCE by Sima Qian.[191] Although the fifty-two-chapter version of the text apparently did not yet exist in Sima's own day, it did come down to the time of Guo Xiang, who, when he revised and edited everything down to thirty-three chapters, also attributed it all to "Master Zhuang."[192] Let us now consider what Sima Qian made of it.

Sima Qian referred to only four sections or chapter titles: *Yufu*, "The Old Fisherman" (Guo's chapter 31), *Dao Zhi*, "Robber Zhi" (chapter 29), *Quque*, "Ransack Chests" (chapter 10), and *Weilei xu Kangsang zi*, "Master Kangsang of Weilei Mountain" (apparently similar to "Gengsang Chu," chapter 23),[193] all of which belong to Guo's edited *Waipian*, "Outer Chapters" and *Zapian*, "Miscellaneous Chapters." None of these four belong to the first set of layers, considered the most representative of the core ideas of the *Zhuangzi* in the *Neipian* "Inner Chapters." Although surprising, this strongly suggests that the "Inner Chapters" compiled by Guo Xiang did not yet exist in a coherent form during Sima Qian's lifetime.

However, it is also obvious that Sima Qian was very familiar with a body of writings associated with Master Zhuang, for not only does his "Biography of Master Zhuang" consist of much detailed factual information, but elsewhere, in other parts of the *Records of the Historian*, he quotes or paraphrases passages that appear later in the Guo Xiang version of the *Zhuangzi*.[194]

Sima Qian recognized that Master Zhuang "excelled at style and diction" and at "clarifying the principles underlying things through analogy," and, although "his words unrestrained flowed as a great ocean just to please himself" and "such writings as 'Master Kangsang of Weilei Mountain' were all fictional fabrications," he effectively used his skills to "excoriate the Confucians and Mohists," while "clarifying the teachings of Master Lao." Sima goes on to say that although Master Zhuang's scope of interest was vast, his teachings ultimately had their origin in the naturalistic thought of Master Lao, and so he contributed nothing fundamentally new. Moreover, Sima thought that Master Zhuang's thought was narrower than that of Master Lao and it lacked practical applications. Such a view had an enormous influence on the later tradition, including Guo Xiang, whose commentary on the *Zhuangzi* is significantly shaped to supplement and correct what he, like Sima Qian, regarded as Master Zhuang's shortcomings.

Key to understanding this last point is the correct reading of Sima Qian's judgment of Master Zhuang that appears at the end of the "Grouped biographies of Master Lao and Han Fei":

> Master Lao emphasized the absolute emptiness of the Dao and that it is by resonating with the Natural in non-purposeful action that one keeps in step with all possible change and transformation. Thus the work he wrote is judged so marvelously subtle that it is hard to understand. Although Master Zhuang separated Dao from Virtue [*san daode*], and freely indulged in high-flown talk, he still fixed his essential thought on the Natural.

"*San daode*" is a troublesome phrase. Although in one modern Chinese translation of the *Shiji*, Xu Jialu and his associates glossed it as "Master Zhuang wandered far off from the Dao-and-Virtue" (i.e., digressed drastically from such a focus),[195] most recent Chinese scholarship on this passage tends to gloss it in various other ways. A few examples follow:

> Master Lao concentrated on the basic meaning of the Dao and Virtue, but as for Master Zhuang, he destroyed the concept of Dao and Virtue that had been handed down [from Master Lao] [or, "fragmented the unified concept of Dao-and-Virtue handed down from Master Lao"].[196]

Although *san* as *pohuai* (meaning "break apart/destroy the unity of") differs from my reading, it similarly criticizes Master Zhuang for harming the tradition of thought associated with Master Lao.

Another reading tries to temper the negative connotations of *san* and *fang* and turn them into positive features of discourse:

> To address how Master Zhuang theorized about things as opposed to how Master Lao did, we should say he went on to develop Master Lao's thought more fully. . . . It was with "recklessness" and "lack of restraint" that Zhuang Zhou derived his thought from Master Lao and expanded on it. In terms of the form his discourse took, adopting an expressive literary style, he used a great many images of natural creatures, all brimming over with life and energy, to expound his Daoist philosophical thought.[197]

Liu Kunsheng reads *san daode* and *fanglun* as parallel verb-object phrases, splitting the verbal compound *sanfang* into "reckless and unrestrained," and

apparently reading this term as it appears in Ge Hong's (283–343) *Baopu zi* (The Master who embraces simplicity):

> A gentleman might show abundant respect in his outer appearance, expression reverent and his words circumspect, yet the way he thinks is negligent and careless, his inner self reckless and unrestrained [*zhonghuai sanfang*]; as such, if he were appointed to office he would not manage it properly. . . . [198]

As such, this reading seems to imply that Sima Qian thought that Master Zhuang's work, although rightly inspiring for the free-thinking individual in his personal life, was utterly at odds with standards of thought and behavior for the responsible serving official—and thus, by extension, for the good society as a whole.

However, in another modern annotated Chinese translation of the *Shiji* prepared by Yang Yanqi, the expression *san daode* is glossed differently yet again: *san* as both *kuosan*, "diffuse, promulgate," and *tuiyan*, "derive," "evolve," and "develop." Yang settles on *tuiyan* in his modern Chinese translation of the passage, the pertinent part of which may be translated as "Master Zhuang derived the theory of Dao and Virtue [from Master Lao] and developed it further."[199]

Glosses such as "develop," "expand on," and "extend" tend to be favored by modern commentators, a trend that is reflected in Western scholarship, such as that of Esther Klein, who renders the passage as "Zhuangzi extended and developed *dao* and *de*, and discussed them at length; essentially [his thought] also goes back to *ziran* (the self-so/natural)."[200] It is likely that this general modern tendency to read *san* as *tuiyan* can be traced back to the *Shiji zhu buzheng* (Supplements and corrections to annotations of the *Records of the Historian*) of Fang Bao (1668–1749), where Fang uses the *tuiyan*^{2} cognate of *tuiyan*^{1}, to gloss *san*: "*San* means *tuiyan*. [Master Zhuang] derived the concept of Dao and Virtue from Master Lao and developed it further, about which he discoursed in a grand and free manner."[201]

Nevertheless, I still prefer to understand *san daode* as "separated Dao from Virtue," and I suggest that the key to understanding the sentence "*Zhuangzi san daode fanglun yao yi gui ziran*" is the function word *yi*, which here seems to indicate an adverse relationship between the two clauses, "but still" or "nevertheless" (i.e., "although/despite A, B happens/is so"). Thus, the first clause ascribes negative qualities to Master Zhuang, but nevertheless, the second clause concludes on a positive note: "Although Master Zhuang separated Dao from Virtue

[*san daode*], and freely indulged in high-flown talk, in essentials he still kept returning to the Natural."

Sima Qian, as is well known, largely identified with the Huang-Lao tradition of thought, which emphasized, among other things, the unity of the inner man (cultivation of sagehood) and external action (nonpurposeful action, *wuwei*) resulting in harmonious and perfect government, in other words, the *neisheng waiwang* "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" ideal. This tradition, of course, has its origin in the *Laozi* (Sayings of Master Lao), with regard to which Sima seems to have understood *dao* and *de* as complementary, two sides of the same coin, a fusion of inner and outer, essence [*ben*], and its practical ramifications [*mo*]. Therefore, as Sima Qian found that Master Zhuang failed to maintain the unity of Dao and Virtue, so did Guo Xiang later, as he states in his preface to his edition of the *Zhuangzi*:

> We can say of Master Zhuang that he did indeed understand the underlying basis of things [ben]. As such, he never kept wild talk about it to himself. His words are those of one who responds to things in a unique way but fails to identify with them. Since he so responded but failed to identify with them, his words may be apt but have no practical use, and since what he says fails to address practical matters, though lofty it has no application.[202]

Tang Yijie has insightfully commented on this passage:

> According to Guo Xiang, although Zhuang Zhou understood the essence of things [*genben*], he still tried to recognize such essence in terms of independent concrete entities [*shiti*], and in so doing he split essence and ramification into two. This was why Zhuang Zhou's view of things "may be apt [*dang*] but has no practical use [*yong*] and "though lofty it has no application [*xing*].[203]

Thus, Sima Qian, Guo Xiang, and now the modern historian and critic of Chinese philosophy Tang Yijie all come to the same conclusion: although the *Zhuangzi* contains much wisdom for the cultivation of the enlightened individual self, it still fails to serve as a means to create the ideal society through sagely rulership (i.e., it may lead to sageliness but not kingliness). Therefore, Guo Xiang composed his commentary as a corrective and supplement to the *Zhuangzi*—he did not merely explain what he thought Master Zhuang is supposed to have "said." Guo rendered for the *Zhuangzi* what Wang Bi provided for the *Daode jing*: he composed a commentary that turned the *Zhuangzi* into a treatise on statecraft, to

serve as “advice for the prince.” However, such an interpretation does not preclude the reader from delving into it for wisdom to enhance personal thought and behavior, for it was commonplace throughout the ages to read Confucian and Daoist works of philosophy, including the *Zhuangzi*, on more than one level. As the traditional Chinese view had it that the state was the family writ large, so the sage ruler of “all under Heaven” was regarded as a model for the aspiring individual sage in his private life. The *Zhuangzi* thus can be read this way, just like many other early texts.

Notes

1. Burton Watson, trans., *Chuang-tzu: The Complete Works* (1968); Victor Mair, trans., *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (1998).
2. A. C. Graham, trans., Chuang-tzu: *The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book* Chuang-tzu (1981).
3. Remarks following the presentation of “Whose *Zhuangzi*? Master Zhuang’s, Guo Xiang’s, or Cheng Xuanying’s? Who Says What in the Commentary Tradition,” by Richard John Lynn at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, May 27, 2019.
4. Such a translation is currently in progress by Peipei Qiu, Louise Boyd Dale and Alfred Lichtenstein Chair Professor of Chinese and Japanese, Vassar College.
5. Fukunaga Mitsuji, trans., *Sōji* (*Zhuangzi*) (1966–1967); Watson, *Chuang-tzu*, 26.
6. Akatsuka Kiyoshi, trans., *Sōji* (*Zhuangzi*) (1974); Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, liii–liv.
7. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 130: 3288.
8. Kidder Smith, “Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, ‘Legalism,’ et cetera,” 129–156.
9. Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions Through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” 67.
10. Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions,” 60, note 3.
11. See especially Holmes Welch, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, 89–105.
12. Nathan Siven, “On the Word ‘Taoist’ as a Source of Perplexity. With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China,” 303–30. It is interesting to note that recent scholars of religious Daoism tend to blur this distinction, while those of philosophical Daoism tend to insist on strictly maintaining it.
13. The following biographical material is largely based on Wang Xiaoyi, *Guo Xiang pingzhuan fu Xiang Xiu pingzhuan* (Critical biography of Guo Xiang with critical biography of Xiang Xiu appended), especially 372–397.
14. Huang Kan (488–545), *Lunyu jijie yishu* (Collected explications and expository commentaries to the *Analects*), *Preface*, 5b.

15. Lu Deming (556–627), *Jingdian shiwen* (Textual explications for classics and scriptures), 1: 40a.
16. Zhang Yin (late fourth century) supplemented by Zhang Zhi (act. ca. 479–502), *Wenshi zhuan* (Biographies of literati), quoted in Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* (A new account of tales of the world); see *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* (A new account of tales of the world, collation and commentary), original commentary by Liu Jun (462–521), collation and new commentary by Yu Jiaxi (1884–1955), ed. Zhou Zumo, Yu Shuyi, Zhou Shiqi, et al., part 4: *Wenxue* (Letters and learning), no. 17, 206; cf. Richard B. Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World, by Liu I-ch'ing*, 105–106.
17. See Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the* I Ching *as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, 10–15, and *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the* Tao-te ching *of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, 5–20.
18. Fang Xuanling et al., ed., *Jinshu* (History of the Jin), 50: 1396–397.
19. *Shishuo xinyu*, part 8: *Shangyu* (Appreciation and praise), 32, B: 438; cf. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, 219.
20. Yu Shinan, *Beitang shuchao* (Excerpts from books in the Northern Hall), 98: 3a and 100: 5b.
21. Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu*, part 4: *Wenxue* (Letters and learning), no. 19, 209; cf. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, 107.
22. Xuanling et al., *Jinshu*, 35: 1052.
23. Quoted in *Shishuo xinyu*; see Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, part 4, 206.
24. Albert E. Dien and Keith Nathaniel Knapp, ed., *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 2: The Six Dynasties*, *220–589*, 93: "The Disturbances of the Eight Princes resumed later at a higher level of intensity; from 301 to 307 there was a cascade of assassinations, power grabs, and counterattacks. The scenario was always the same: as soon as one prince succeeded in taking power, the others formed a coalition against him and did all they could to bring him down. As soon as that goal was attained, the coalition broke apart."
25. Xuanling et al., *Jinshu*, 50: 1397.
26. Xuanling et al., *Jinshu*, 49: 1374.
27. See appendix A.3 of this book.
28. See appendix A.2.
29. Both of these assertions are based on contemporary hearsay; see Xuanling et al., *Jinshu*, 4: 108 and 59: 1623.
30. Chen Suzhen, "*Sima Yue yu Yongjia zhi luan* (Sima Yue and the turmoil of the Yongjia era [307–313])," 119; Zhao Yixin, "*Jin Huaidi, Sima Yue yu Xi Jin zhongshu zhengquan de bengkui*" (Jin emperor Huai, Sima Yue, and the collapse of Western Jin central state power), 75–76.
31. Xuanling et al., *Jinshu*, 5: 116, 59: 1623–1624.

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