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David Chai *Editor*

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to *Xuanxue* 玄學  
(Neo-Daoism)

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# Chapter 2

## *Xuanxue*'s Contributions to Chinese Philosophy



James D. Sellmann

### 1 Introduction

*Xuanxue* 玄學 prepared the way for later developments in Chinese philosophy, especially the blending and final amalgamation of Lao-Zhuang (i.e., Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 莊子) cosmological ideas and concepts into the later philosophical developments of the social, political and moral teachings of Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius), Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius), and their followers in Song dynasty (960–1279) *Lixue* 理學 (School of Patterned-Principles) or Neo-Confucianism. It drew from other Daoist sources and syncretized some alchemical and immortality practices with the Kong-Meng self-cultivation arts. In addition to these practical techniques, *Xuanxue* is noted for bringing the art of abstraction to new heights in the development of Chinese philosophy (Feng 1983: 42). *Xuanxue* especially paved the way for later Song dynasty *Lixue* philosophers to absorb Lao-Zhuang transformational vital-breath (*qi* 氣) cosmology into their systems of thought, coupled with the implicit cosmology from the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). *Xuanxue* philosophers opened a debate about the historical-dialectical relation between cherishing non-being (*wu* 無) and venerating being (*you* 有) that culminated in an historical synthesis of valuing “beyond non-being” (*wuwu* 無無). *Xuanxue*'s emphasis on non-being or beyond non-being, patterned-principles (*li* 理), original substance (*benti* 本體), and substance-functioning (*tiyong* 體用), established key concepts that reemerged in Chinese Buddhism and Song dynasty *Lixue* (Chan 1963: 318). The various philosophical masters of the Wei-Jin period continued the indigenous Chinese practice of synthesizing and unifying what are apparently diverse, or even divisive, teachings into coherent systems of thought while at the same time offering both abstract and

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practical teachings regarding “a more spiritual dimension” to navigate through the human condition (Kohn 2014: 4). *Xuanxue* unlike other Chinese philosophies took abstract inquiry into the fundamental questions of reality, ethics, epistemology, and logic to new heights. It also offers transformational practices to engage in, circumnavigate, or wander-freely (*you* 遊) around the natural-human realm. Generally Chinese philosophies are philosophical belief systems that offer pragmatic or practical *techné* for human flourishing, however such “flourishing” might be interpreted. *Xuanxue* continued and contributed to that practical approach to life and philosophy.

## 2 Setting the Stage for *Xuanxue*

During the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 CE), the economic and political structure changed with the institution of inherited government posts among the prominent families and the gentry class (*menfa shizu* 門閥士族), who were powerful political families that inherited and passed on government positions for generations. These economic and political changes created a new layer of social prestige with direct control of government offices. The prominent families with hereditary titles created a class divide even among the other gentry families who did not inherit political power, despite their wealth. Those with hereditary titles shared political power with the non-hereditary gentry by one of three methods. They provided a means for them to be appointed or selected for office. The successful sons of these less prestigious gentry families could be drafted (*zhengpi* 徵辟) for office or they could pass the civil service examination. The less prestigious families also intermarried with the families that held hereditary titles and gained power through their offspring. Usually the preferred method was to draft someone by making a special recommendation to the Emperor or high officials based on the recommended son’s moral fiber and standing in the community. The general idea was to select talented people, but often those selected or drafted had close family ties to the hereditary gentry, lacking real talent or morals. Because the drafting process was fraught with problems and corruption, a better method was needed. The person being drafted could not perform the duties of the office because the names or titles did not align with the realities of the job that needed to be accomplished or the draftee was incapable of doing the required work that the office demanded. During the Wei-Jin period (220–420 CE), warlords established and controlled their dynasties by working with the gentry and drafting gentry sons to operate their government agencies. Eventually as the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE) dynasties unified the empire, they turned more and more to appointment after examination to further dismantle the power held by the families with hereditary titles, and yet the gentry remained in power because it was primarily their sons who could sit for and pass the exams. During the Wei-Jin period, the *Xuanxue* philosophers came from these gentry families.

The Eastern Han also saw the breakdown of the Western Han’s moral norms and ethical code. The norms and code became ossified into dogmatic forms of the doctrine of names (*mingjiao* 名教) and the code of ritual-action (*lifa* 禮法) (Chan 2009:

317). The decline of morals challenged long held family values and basic humanity, leading to the breakdown of the family and even cannibalism. WANG Rong 王戎 (234–305 CE) classified people into one of three categories: sages, the gentry, and the common laborers (Feng 1983: 9). The gentry considered themselves to be the rightful inheritors of political and cultural power because they also considered themselves to be the top-notch, superior people by birth. In other words, “the gentry provided the class origin and social background for *Xuanxue*” (Feng 1983: 10).

### 3 Philosophical Predecessors to *Xuanxue*: Name and Reality and Evaluating Personnel

As mentioned above, one of the perplexing issues in the Eastern Han was how to correctly appoint and evaluate government personnel. WANG Fu 王符 (ca. 79–165 CE) considered that comprehensively verifying names and their realities was crucial to founding the Great Peace (*taiping* 太平). He said: “The title must match the position of authority; describing a specific reason (*li* 理) must relate to reality. If this is practiced, then there will not be mere symbolic positions in officialdom, and the wrong people will not be in office” (from the “*kaoji* 考績” chapter in the *Discourse on Recluses* 潛夫論; Feng 1983: 12). The proper fit between the actual state of affairs in the world, especially political offices, and the language used to describe them was a concern of many pre-Qin philosophers who discussed the attunement or rectification of names (*zhengming* 正名), the proper fit between penalty-punishment and name-title (*xingming* 刑名), form and name (*xingming* 形名), or name and reality (*mingshi* 名實). Although the concern about language and its proper fit and reference to reality was not new, nevertheless, the concern had lasting significance into the Wei-Jin period. The relationship between reality and how it is described strongly impacts the method of *Xuanxue*.

In the Wei dynasty, LIU Shao 劉劭 (ca. 170–240) and ZHONG Hui 鍾會 (225–264) offered their respective solutions to resolve the name and reality problem. Liu’s *Treaties on People* (*Renwuzhi* 人物志) classified people into three categories: the essential, the heroic, and those who simultaneously possessed both characteristics—the sage-ruler (Tang 2005: 4–5). He expands on these core traits by drawing from Yin-Yang 陰陽 and five agents (*wuxing* 五行) cosmological categories, denoting different personality types based on the different combinations of Yang-active and Yin-passive energy levels. He classified twelve personality types, ranging from pure moral-sentiment, to six types of people interested in managing government offices, to three types of intellectuals, debaters, and those who are heroic (Feng 1983: 19). A person with high quality essential characteristics could serve as prime minister; one with heroic traits could be a general. All of them have a deviant side to their personalities, opening the possibility for incompetence and corruption. The superior personality is the sage-ruler. The sage-ruler is the personality type that combines the essential and the heroic types being essential, intelligent or wise and

extraordinary, and heroic or very courageous. In this way LIU Shao attempted to align the names or position titles with the reality of people's personality types. *Xuanxue* philosophers discussed the characteristics and abilities of the sage in detail.

After LIU Shao, the discussion turned to focus on talent and nature (*caixing* 才性). ZHONG Hui analyzed the four combinations of talent and nature in his work *Discourse on the Four Fundamentals* (*Siben lun* 四本論). First, talent and nature can be identical. Second, they can be different. Third, talent and nature can be united. Fourth, they can be separated. Nature refers to a person's virtuous character, while talent refers to one's capabilities. Zhong's work is lost, and so other sources are used to attempt to reconstruct his perspective on how to match the descriptive name or title and the realities of human personality types.

The works of Liu and Zhong are not philosophical, but they depict a shift from the Han dynasty focus on name and reality to the Wei-Jin focus on distinguishing names and analyzing patterned-principles (*mingli* 名理). What is important to note here is that the early Wei-Jin thinkers were breaking with Eastern Han practices, while forging a new path forward. As FENG Youlan notes, *Xuanxue* has roots in the opening chapter of the *Daodejing* 道德經 where four interrelated problematic issues are discussed, namely: (1) the gap between language and Dao 道; (2) the problem of describing particular things and the constant name (*changming* 常名); (3) being and non-being come from the same origin; and (4) they are named differently but have the same meaning (Feng 1983: 27). A new critical interpretation based on the texts by Laozi and Zhuangzi, as well as *Yijing* cosmology, focusing on how general names refer to specific instances begin the formation of *Xuanxue* philosophy.

During the Wei-Jin period, some scholars of integrity withdrew from court and turned their attention to an apophatic philosophy of non-being to further remove themselves from court intrigue, engaging in "pure conversation" (*qingtan* 清談). Rejecting the popular scholasticism of the day, they studied the Classics from a new and creative perspective incorporating Lao-Zhuang cosmology (Chan 1963: 314). The debate between the New Text school and the Old Text school that centered around whether or not Confucius was the throneless king who would save the world through his subtle teachings, inspired critical inquiry and creative, independent, philosophy (Chan 1963: 315). *Xuanxue*'s emphasis on non-being, patterned-principles, original substance, and substance-functioning, established modes of thought that reemerged in later Chinese Buddhism and Song dynasty *Lixue* (Chan 1963: 318). This is another way of describing *Xuanxue*'s break with Han scholarship, forging a new creative interpretation of the cultural teachings of human navigation through the reality of the natural and social worlds.

## 4 Confucius as a Deified Sage

Michael Puett (2017) contends that *Xuanxue* philosophers proposed a revised vision of the sage. Instead of focusing only on the sage Confucius as the creator of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), they focus on the sage

Confucius as the spontaneous teacher who effectively generates an atmosphere or mood for his disciples to emulate. To the extent that the *Zhuangzi*, especially based on a selective reading of the first two passages of chapter 4 (*renjianshi* 人間世) and other selective passages from the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters, set the stage for *Xuanxue*, we can see how the positive images of Confucius as sage in the *Zhuangzi* predisposed *Xuanxue* thinkers to this view of Confucius as a spontaneous sage-teacher.

The early developments of what would become Chinese imperial-court and popular-folk religions were taking root in the later part of the Zhou dynasty, especially the Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE), namely in the Spring and Autumn (722–481 BCE) and the Warring States (480–221 BCE) periods. Despite later attempts to delineate different ways of life or different religio-philosophies, the amalgamating, syncretic, comprehensive and cumulative character of what I am calling Chinese Imperial Religion and also Chinese Folk Religion both embraced ancestor veneration with apotheosis or the deification of great ancestors, such as Confucius, Laozi, the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝), the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母) and other figures. Both the Imperial and Folk Religions were mixed with nature veneration, dietary-health-hygiene-gymnastic-meditation practices, ritual, magic and other practices and beliefs. There is a “comprehensive harmony” (*he* 和), a unity of opposites and acceptance of a multiplicity of perspectives that is found throughout the history of Chinese philosophy, literature, cultural practices and beliefs. Kirill Thompson (1990), using the harmony of aesthetic order, comes to a similar conclusion that there is a unity of multiple ideas at play in the *Zhuangzi*. The *Zhuangzi* and its use of Confucius, especially where it depicts him in a positive manner, as a master of the proper way to live, accomplishes an important role in the deification of Confucius, and the amalgamating syncretic character of the later development of imperial and folk religion in China where Confucius is the sage of sages, the teacher of teachers, master of masters, the saint of saints, a Buddha or Bodhisattva. The *Zhuangzi's* use of Confucius influences the philosophers who present him as the highest sage, as one who even depicts and embodies the values of Laozi and Zhuangzi in a superior, more lived manner than they themselves were able to do. Despite the *Zhuangzi* passages and other sources that ridicule Confucius, his image as a deified sage-god was inspired by the positive images of him depicted in the *Zhuangzi* and other sources.

## 5 *Xuanxue* Philosophy

Despite the diversity of *Xuanxue* philosophers, they share a general love for pure conversation or debate about philosophical concepts and terminology. Most of them favor Laozi or Zhuangzi, and *Yijing* cosmology (Yu 2016; Tang 2005; Feng 1983). Many of them exhibit an antinomian spirit and a Zhuangzian love for humor that embraces a non-dual logic and outlook on life. They seek to syncretize the differences between Confucius' proactive self-cultivation of the moral virtues with the

effortless, and apparent purposeless, free-flowing “practices” or behavior patterns exhibited by certain characters in the *Zhuangzi*. It is often pointed out that the character *xuan* 玄 of *Xuanxue* is derived from the opening chapter of the *Daodejing*.

Let us briefly review that text and a passage from chapter 22 (*zhibeiyou* 知北遊) of the *Zhuangzi*, to elucidate the roots of the meaning of *Xuanxue*, and its approach to elucidating Dao. Rather than attempt to give a translation based on the original meaning of the text, let me try to read the ancient sources through the eyes of Wei-Jin philosophers because this is a matter of hermeneutic intertextuality (Swartz 2018: 20–40). Land and sea trade routes had long been transporting products and ideas from foreign lands such that the Chinese intellectuals understood that other cultures had terms for their respective concepts of ultimate reality or divine creator. *Xuanxue* philosophers knew that they too needed to define their ultimate reality or be outdone by the foreigners. They turned to the ancient concept of Dao as an indigenous root-concept for their ultimate reality. How to interpret this fundamental concept was the perennial question in China. The opening chapter of the *Daodejing* reads:

The Dao that is talked about is not the absolute Dao. The names that are named are not the absolute name. Non-being names the origin of sky and earth. Being names the mother of all things. Therefore, sometimes remove your passions to see the secret of life; sometimes embrace your passions to see the manifestations. These two (non-being or the passionless-secret, versus being or the passionate-manifestations) are (in their natures) the same; they are given different names when they become manifest. They may both be called the cosmic mystery (*xuan*); reaching from the mystery into the deeper mystery (*xuan*) is the gate to the secret of all life (Lin 2014: 2–4; translation modified).

道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。無名天地之始；有名萬物之母。故常無欲，以觀其妙；常有欲，以觀其徼。此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，衆妙之門。

The *Daodejing* is intriguing in that its poetic style is vague, profound, and opens the imagination to various readings. In the opening poem the ultimate reality is named Dao, and yet its name and all names are readily identified as being inadequate in a dynamic living world of flux and transformations. Names cannot keep up with the rapid changes, transformations, the identity of the various particulars among myriad things shifts, and the whole of nature as the sky and earth is in flux. In Laozi’s correlative thinking, or non-dual logic, being and non-being are locked in a dialectic relationship, and so the human perspective or cognition is also locked into the constant flux between eliminating the passions and embracing them, of having and not having, seeing and not seeing, understanding and not understanding. This worldview is a type of naive realism based on processional transformations filtered through correlative non-dual logic in the form of Yin-Yang classification categories. The correlations align non-being with the passionless secret and being aligns with the passions and manifestations or the objects that become manifest to our consciousness once we begin to have desires. The correlative, interlocking opposites (being and non-being, having passions and being passionless, being manifest and not being manifest, the ultimate secret and the obvious) are one and the same all-embracing ultimate reality, but they are merely given different, inadequate names. If people can grasp the non-dual logic, or experience the passionless, empty, state of awareness, then the mystery of mysteries opens the gate to the secret of all life. To



do this, people have to enter an apophatic meditative state of inner peace and emptiness, or they can penetrate the experience of abstract, correlative, non-dual logic. Religio-philosophically speaking, they venerate non-being as the ultimate, all-encompassing reality.

Another way to think about this is that, at first glance, from the perspective of categories, there are things and all things fall into the larger category of myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物). The myriad things are contained within the category of “sky and earth” (*tiandi* 天地)—the physical, material reality. “Being” is a synonym, or another general, all-encompassing category, that incorporates all things. Is there another larger-scale, abstract, universal category that can include or encompass being? Many mainstream philosophies argue that only Being or God, that is God-as-Being, can be Real. The ancient Greek Atomists, Christian *via negativa* advocates like Nicolas of Cusa, the early Upanishad-Hindus, the Buddhists, and the Daoists argue that non-being, variously conceived as the Void, non-substantial (absolute) God, Ultimate Reality without any characteristics, Emptiness, and *wu* 無, is the higher abstract category that encompasses being and the sensible, material world. That is to say, non-being is the Really Real Reality. This higher abstract non-being is not the mere absence of a thing or the absence of all things; it is conceived as a non-dual logical attempt to find the highest, universal, abstraction that the human mind can conceive to name as a placeholder or null-set for the Ultimate Reality or godhead. This is variously conceived as hitting the limits of language and thought, the ineffable, the inconceivable, the most abstract source of sources, the godhead beyond god itself, the abstract reality beyond physical-reality. It cannot be perceived by the sense-organs, but it can be experienced in dreamless sleep and altered states of consciousness such as apophatic meditation. The abstract concept of non-being is discoverable, experienceable in a sense, in human consciousness by meditation, dreamless sleep and higher order abstraction; people can gain a quickly fading glimpse of “It.” In this sense, these philosophers are proposing that non-being is a more encompassing category than being itself. This is another way to attempt to grasp the meaning of Laozi’s and early *Xuanxue*’s focus on non-being.

Whether they focus on being or non-being, early *Xuanxue* thinkers argue there is a higher, abstract reality that is beyond and, in some sense, generates and controls the lower categories and things of the natural world. However, later thinkers, such as GUO Xiang, counter this kind of externalist, transcendental view, and deploy an immanentist, internalist view that grounds reality in the particulars of this world.

The correlative non-dual thinking about the Ultimate Reality that underlies Laozi’s poetic philosophy is also found in the *Zhuangzi*. In chapter 22 (*zhibeiyou* 知北遊), there is an insightful dialogue between four fictitious characters named Ether, Infinite, No-action, and No-beginning about how (not) to talk about Dao. The passage reads:

So, Ether asked Infinite, “Do you know Dao?” “I do not know it,” replied Infinite. Ether asked No-action the same question and he replied, “I know Dao” ... “I know that Dao can be high, or low, can be congealed, or dispersed. These are some of the specifications that I know.” Ether told No-beginning what No-action had said, and asked, “So, Infinite says he does not know, and No-action says he knows. Who is right?” “The one who thinks he does

not know is profound. The one who thinks he knows is shallow. The former deals with the inner reality, the latter with appearance.” Ether sighed while raising his head, “Then the one who (thinks he) does not know really knows, and the one who (thinks he) knows really does not know. Who knows this knowledge without knowing (or who [thinks he] knows this knowledge without [thinking he is] knowing it)?”

No-beginning replied, “Dao is not heard, what is heard is not Dao. Dao is not seen, what is seen is not Dao. Dao cannot be told; what is told is not Dao. Do you realize that which is invisible in all the visible things? Dao should not be named. If someone answers in reply to a question about Dao, he does not know Dao. Even the one who asks about Dao has not heard Dao. Dao cannot be asked about, and for the question (about it) there is no answer. To ask questions which cannot be answered is to fail to recognize the inner reality. If then those who do not recognize the inner reality try to answer questioners who land in extremities, such people have neither observed the workings of the sky and earth, nor do they realize the Ultimate Source. Therefore, they cannot surmount Kunlun Mountain or travel in the realm of the Great Void (Lin 2014: 3–4; translation modified).

於是泰清問乎無窮曰：子知道乎？無窮曰：吾不知。又問乎無為。無為曰：吾知道……無為曰：吾知道之可以貴，可以賤，可以約，可以散。此吾所以知道之數也。泰清以之言也問乎無始，曰：若是，則無窮之弗知，與無為之知，孰是而孰非乎？無始曰：不知深矣，知之淺矣；弗知內矣，知之外矣。於是泰清中而歎曰：弗知乃知乎！知乃不知乎！孰知不知之知？無始曰：道不可聞，聞而非也；道不可見，見而非也；道不可言，言而非也。知形形之不形乎？道不當名。無始曰：有問道而應之者，不知道也。雖問道者，亦未聞道。道無問，問無應。無問問之，是問窮也；無應應之，是無內也。以無內待問窮，若是者，外不觀乎宇宙，內不知乎太初，是以不過乎崑崙，不遊乎太虛。

It is this kind of thinking by the followers of Zhuangzi that set the *Xuanxue* thinkers on their path of trying not to talk about the ultimate reality, Dao, or when they did talk about it, to do so in such a manner so as not to appear totally ignorant because they had attempted to talk about it! Their approach is first and foremost a rational method of linguistic and literary analysis of “differentiating names and analyzing patterned-principles” (*bianming xili* 辯名析理) (Feng 1983: 33). The exception to this generalization is the non-rational direct experience approach found in the poets and LIU Ling’s “arriving at comprehension” discussed below.

## 6 The Philosophers’ Contributions

With the above brief exposure to the background that influenced Wei-Jin period thinkers, let us turn to the specific contributions offered by the leading proponents of *Xuanxue*.

WANG Bi 王弼 (226–249 CE) and HE Yan 何晏 (d. 249 CE) lived at the beginning of the Wei dynasty during the Zhengshi 正始 reign period, marking an initial stage in the development of *Xuanxue* philosophy, sometimes referred to as Zhengshi *Xuanxue*. They began a new approach to studying the Classics, breaking away from Han scholasticism, by creating fresh interpretations of the *Analecets* (*Lunyu* 論語), *Yijing*, and the *Daodejing*. The Tang court made HE Yan’s commentary on the *Analecets*, and WANG Bi’s commentary on the *Yijing*, the official standard

commentaries to be studied for the civil service exams, and their study of the *Daodejing* and the Tang Emperor's belief that he descended from Laozi's Li-family-lineage led to the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* being included on the examination system's list of required readings.

Wang and He both studied the *Daodejing*, and both cherished (*gui* 貴) non-being. Because there is a religious viewpoint underlying their philosophical perspectives, I prefer to use terms like “cherish or venerate” (terms close to “worship”) rather than “value or esteem.” Note that the expression “cherish non-being” (*guiwu* 貴無) is used to describe Wang's and He's outlook in the “Biography of WANG Yan 王衍” in the *History of the Jin* 晉書 (Feng 1983: 48). In a sense they are presenting Dao as non-being, to be the ultimate reality or impersonal godhead. This marks the initial assertion, the thesis if you will, in the historical dialectic development of non-being, followed by PEI Wei's 裴頠 (267–300 CE) veneration of being (*chongyou* 崇有) as the anti-thesis, and finally GUO Xiang's 郭象 (ca. 252–312 CE) synthesis by “moving beyond non-being” via a double negation (i.e., *wuwu* 無無) in the development of *Xuanxue* philosophy. First a look at HE Yan's position.

It reads in HE Yan's *Discourse on Dao* (*Dao lun* 道論):

Being qua being is engendered by relying on non-being. An affair qua that very affair is completed (by originating) from non-being. If something is beyond speech while it is being spoken of it, beyond description while being described, beyond form while being observed, or beyond sound while being listened to, then Dao is complete in it. Hence vital-breath (*qi* 氣) and things are manifest after being able to make the sound and the echo obvious; light and shadow are clear while color and form are made spiritual. [As a consequence,] the darkness (*xuan* 玄) becomes black by it; the pure silk becomes white by it; the T-square-ruler scrutinizes the square by it; the compass scrutinizes the circle by it. Both the circle and the square obtain their forms, but they are derived from the formless; both black and white obtain their descriptions (names, *ming* 名) but they are beyond description.

有之為有，恃無以生；事而為事，由無以成。夫道之而無語，名之而無名，視之而無形，聽之而無聲，則道之全焉。故能昭音向而出氣物，包形神而章光影；玄以之黑，素以之白，矩以之方，規以之員。員方得形而此無形，白黑得名而此無名也 (Feng 1983: 48).

WANG Bi explained it more clearly in the following:

As for the cause by which a thing is produced and merit is accomplished, they must be engendered by what is beyond form and from what is beyond description. What is beyond form and what is beyond description are the ancestor of the myriad things. Neither warm nor cold, neither a high *gong* tone nor a low *shang* tone, it cannot be heard while listening to it; it cannot be seen while looking at it; it cannot be felt while touching it; and it cannot be sensed while tasting it ... Hence covering and penetrating heaven and earth; nothing is not a master; it is able to become the ancestor of the things in categories. If something is warm, then it cannot be [simultaneously] cold; if a sound is a high *gong* tone, then it cannot be [simultaneously] a low *shang* tone. Any form certainly has that which gives it its identity (*fen* 分, allotment); there must be that to which sounds belong to (that is, the scale of tones). Hence the form of any particular phenomenon (*xiang* 象) will not be the greatest phenomenon; any sound in a particular tone will not be the greatest tone. However, if the four phenomena (*sixiang* 四象) do not take shape, then the greatest phenomenon will not be easily accessible. If the five tones are not sounded, then the greatest tone will not be obtained. If things do not have a master (that is, are not in a category of Yin or Yang) while the four

phenomena are in form, then the greatest phenomena will be easily accessible. If one's heart-mind has no specific place to go while the five tones are being played, then the greatest tone will be attained.

夫物之所以生，功之所以成，必生乎無形，由乎無名。無形無名者，萬物之宗也。不濫不涼，不宮不商。聽之不可得而聞，視之不可得而彰，體之不可得而知，味之不可得而嘗……故能為品物之宗主，苞通天地，彌使不經也。若濫也則不能涼矣，宮也則不能商矣。形必有所分，聲必有所屬。故象而形者，非大象也；音而聲者，非大音也。然則，四形不象，則大象無以暢；五音不聲，則大音無已至。四象形而物無所主焉，則大象暢矣；五音聲而心無所適焉，則大音至矣 (Feng 1983: 49; Yu 2016: 133–134).

From these two passages we can see how He and Wang attempted to explicate the higher abstraction of non-being as a kind of plenum-void, an esoteric way of talking about the ultimate reality or ultimate source for the material world by approaching what is beyond sensation and beyond the ordinary usage of terms. The description of that which exists beyond sensation reminds us of chapter 14 of the *Daodejing*. The above passage fits with Laozi's claim that "the myriad things of the world are generated from being and being is generated from non-being" (chapter 40). This interpretation of non-being opens a spiritual dimension for self-cultivation. When the heart-mind (*xin* 心) is empty, Dao dwells within, the practitioner directly experiences the ultimate reality, having a panenhenic—all in one, one in all—experience. In this way "non-being" is used to name the unnamable to discuss what cannot be directly discussed as both cosmological and self-cultivation concepts.

HE Yan and WANG Bi had to discuss the role of the indescribable (*wuming* 無名) and the relationship between the abstract generalization and the concrete particular. Above I translated the third line of the opening chapter of the *Daodejing* as "non-being names the origin ..."; the expression *wuming* can and has been read as "nameless is the origin" or "there is no name for the origin," and it is also read as "non-being names," or "non-being is the name." Wang and He were likely to have read this line in both ways as the nameless and the name called "non-being," or "the nameless non-being." This creates a paradox in that calling it "nameless" is to give it a name. In his essay, entitled *Discourse on Beyond Naming (Wuming lun 無名論)*, HE Yan argued that, "if we say that being beyond a name (*wuming*) is Dao, and that being beyond reputation is the greatest reputation, then *wuming* can be said to be an a-describable-name, and being beyond having a reputation can be said to have a reputation. However, will this not function the same as having a reputation and having an a-describable-name?" (Feng 1983: 51; Yu 2016: 86). This is not a mere semantic word game. It is an attempt to make an abstract difference between a specific example and a more encompassing generalization. This level of being-beyond-name and being-beyond-reputation functions differently than being nameless or reputationless. As HE Yan explained, "this is comparable to there is nothing, then there is everything. Among 'there is everything,' it should entail 'there is nothing,' and this is different from (the common expression) 'there is everything'" (Fang 1981: 52; Yu 2016: 86). Being beyond description is a type of description. Dao is beyond description hence Dao can be described by any particular-thing. A particular example is used to designate the general category, yet those specific descriptions or

names will not describe all of it. This is best explained by appealing to correlative thinking just as Yin and Yang are mutually intertwined and codependent such that one of them cannot exist without the other. So too are the namable and the unnamable, the general and the specific, being and non-being, and vice versa. Thus, the unnamable stands in for a name, the specific stands in for the general, non-being represents being, and vice versa.

WANG Bi was the first philosopher to introduce the substance-functioning (*tiyong* 體用) concept. *Tiyong* was appealed to often in later Chinese Buddhist and Neo-Confucian texts. The concept had been taken to refer to two different aspects of an object, until Charles Muller's analysis, which puts them together in a non-dual frame, as one complex structural-functioning operation (Muller 2016: 119–120). Scholars who advocate the binary view note that WANG Bi did not write consistently about this concept. If we follow the view that the essential substance is different from the operational functioning, then a charitable reading would propose that the non-being-Dao is the original substance (*benti* 本體) and the myriad things are its functioning. To put it another way, non-being is the substance and being is the functioning (Feng 1983: 55). But this old interpretation is based on a misunderstanding of the correlative, non-dual, structural-functioning complex of each entity or concept. It is clear that Wang and others wanted to maintain a non-dual complex structural-functioning process because in his commentary on *Daodejing* chapter 11, Wang claims that “non-being is the function” and that “when one speaks of non-being, one still admits that something in being is the means to gain benefit, but all of this constitutes functioning by relying on non-being” (Feng 1983: 55). Wang makes a similar claim that non-being is functioning in his commentary on chapter 38 (see below). If we appeal to correlative non-dual thinking, the apparent problem dissolves itself; just as non-being and being implicate each other and are synonymous, so too are substance/structure and function/functioning implicating and interpenetrating each other. The unification of the structural-functional complex still fits well with Muller's proposal that *tiyong* “is a distinctive Sinitic archetypical concept” used in Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism with ancient roots in the non-dual logic of pre-Qin philosophy and Han Yin-Yang thinking (Muller 2016: 114). *Tiyong* applies to complex operational-entities of reality and cognition.

WANG Bi contributed to social and moral aspects of human life and society in terms of the general and the particular (Wagner 2003: 121 and 153ff). Wang saw the individual as a member of the human species, that is, a person is a member of the category of the myriad things within the category of sky and earth. Dao is the ancestor of sky, earth and the myriad things; *de* 德 (instantiated power) is the ancestor of particular creatures through which they embody Dao. WANG Bi's commentary on chapter 38 shows how humans are to live in harmony by accepting their specific place in the larger scheme of Dao. He says:

The term “instantiated power” means “to attain.” Constantly obtaining without any loss is beneficial without any harm. Hence it takes the term “instantiated power” as its name. How to obtain instantiated power? It comes from Dao. How to completely fulfill instantiated power? People should take non-being as their function. If people can take non-being as their function, then no one will not be supported. Hence toward things if people treat them by

depending on non-being, then nothing will not be managed. If people treat them by depending on being, then it is not sufficient to avoid their problems of life. Therefore, no matter how vast sky and earth are, they take non-being as their heart-mind; no matter how great the sage kings are, they take being-vacuous as their major principle ... Hence if people can eliminate their selfish-biases and ignore their lives, then none within the four seas won't look up to them, and none among the distant or near will not come to them. If they make themselves special and possess selfish-biased heart-minds, then they cannot even preserve their own bodies; their muscles and bones cannot tolerate each other. This is why people of superior instantiated power know that Dao is what they should use. They never consider their instantiated power to be their power. They never hold fast and never use deliberate application. Hence they can be of instantiated power and nothing is not done by them. They will obtain without seeking, and they will accomplish without acting. Hence although they have instantiated power, nevertheless, they do not have the name of power.

德者，得也。常得而無喪，利而無害，故以德為名焉。何以得德？由乎道也。何以盡德？以無為用，以無為用則莫不載也。故物無焉則無物不經，有為則不足以免其生。是以天地雖廣，以無為心；聖王雖大，以虛為主……故滅其私而無其身，則四海莫不瞻，遠近莫不至；殊其己而有其心，則一體不能自全，肌骨不能相容。是以上德之人，唯道是用，不德其德，無執無用，故能有德而無不為。不求而得，不為而成，故雖有德而無德名也 (Feng 1983: 67).

For Wang the problems of human social life are rooted in people's selfishness by extracting themselves from the comprehensive energy flow of Dao and *de*. If they merge with the energy flow and act according to the natural process of life by assimilating with the general processes that their particular person is part-and-parcel of, they would live in perfect harmony and everything would go "their way," that is, things would unfold the way they are supposed to unfold according to Dao, not according to people's artificial selfish-desires.

Wang and He debated whether the sages have affections. This topic was and still is hotly debated. During the Wei-Jin period many intellectuals held the view that the sages, being unique and vacuous, were beyond or without the experience of basic human emotions or affections, that is, the sages do not experience pleasure, anger, sorrow or joy. He Yan held this view that the sages did not have the basic human affections, that the worthy officials experienced pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy in a controlled manner, while the commoners who are motivated by selfish desires could not control their inappropriate experience and expression of their affections. His view was fairly common among the intellectuals of the day. In his youth WANG Bi also held this view, but later he changed his mind. Wang came to recognize that because the sages are human beings, they must also share natural-innate human characteristics (*ziran zhi xing* 自然之性) such as these basic human affections. For Wang's later thinking, it is because the sages are wise and on a higher level of spiritual attainment, that is they are enlightened, that the sage's expression and experience of the affections are different from those of common people. The sage remains calm when encountering worldly phenomena because they are able to "penetrate into non-being by embodying vacuity and harmony" (Feng 1983: 73). Sages can properly attune their affections according to patterned-principles. As living humans, they respond to worldly phenomenon without being emotionally affected by them. For example, life and death are natural phenomenon and sages accept them for what they are, hence they do not rejoice in life or mourn death. They flow with the

patterned-principles and remain calm. Song-Ming scholars also debated whether sages experience the affections.

Ji (or Xi) Kang 嵇康 (223–262 CE) and RUAN Ji 阮籍 (210–263 CE) continue the first stage of Zhengshi *Xuanxue*, concentrating more on the social, moral, spiritual aspects of self-cultivation than cosmology, and bring the *Zhuangzi* into the field of study. They were good friends and poets (Owen and Swartz 2017: 13). RUAN Ji allegedly died of grief when he learned that Ji Kang had been executed. They solidify the image of the *Xuanxue* philosophers engaging in pure conversation in the Bamboo Grove (*zhulin* 竹林). Importantly they help transform the Han emphasis on Huang-Lao Daoism to *Xuanxue's* focus on Lao-Zhuang Daoism, reshaping Daoist thought from a Han political focus to a cosmological and self-cultivation emphasis.

Ji Kang argued against the old doctrines of the School of Names, while advocating for a return to self-so spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) as an initial stage of entering a spiritual form of self-cultivation. He is known for views on nourishing life (*yangsheng* 養生) drawing from the *Zhuangzi*, and the Daoist practices of his time (Henricks 1983: 10). Ji Kang develops another form of *Xuanxue*: spirituality of “the heart-mind not violating Dao.” In his essay entitled the *Discourse on Dispelling Self-interests* (*Shisi lun* 釋私論), he reframes the ideal of the Confucian gentleman or exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) into a sublimely-transforming person (*zhenren* 真人) by proposing that these consummate people can remove themselves from the artificial restrictions of the school of names and ritual action. Ji Kang seems to be echoing a passage from chapter 6 (*dazongshi* 大宗師) of the *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn 2009: 47). He says:

When perseverance and preferences are not preserved in their heart-minds, hence they can surpass the doctrine of names and entrust their self-so [spontaneous nature]. When their affections are not tied to their desires, hence they can cautiously examine veneration and baseness and penetrate the affections of others. Because the affections of others are compliant and penetrating, hence the great Dao will not be violated. Because they surpass names and entrust their [spontaneous] heart-mind, hence right and wrong have no place [in their heart-mind] (Henricks 1983: 21–30).

矜尚不存乎心，故能越名教而任自然；情不繫於所欲，故能審貴賤而通物情。物情順通，故大道無違；越名任心，故是非無措也 (Feng 1983: 77–78).

For Ji Kang, dispelling self-interest is a matter of people's internal motivation. If they put on a public face and comply with social expectations to merely comply, then they are selfish and not public-spirited. If they have the correct frame of mind of detachment that complies with Dao, then they are actually free of self-interest and the most public-spirited. Hence he himself was noted for not complying with social expectations, behaving in a free and spontaneous manner.

RUAN Ji's philosophy is primarily contained in two essays: *Account of the Great Man* (*Daren Xiansheng zhuan* 大人先生傳) depicts the lifestyle of the sublimely-transforming person, and *Discourse on Comprehending the Zhuangzi* (*Da Zhuang lun* 達莊論). In *Account of the Great Man*, RUAN Ji sets up a parody of three successive conversations that depict his position. The great man uses the label of the self-realizing or utmost person (*zhiren* 至人) from the *Zhuangzi*. The utmost person dwells between the sky and earth without attachment to a specific location. In

merging with nature, he is not bound by social conventions and so is beyond passing judgment about right and wrong, or good and bad. He has no preferences, living a free and detached life. Yet the great man is not a hermit; he engages the social-political life from a different perspective. The utmost person even goes beyond the contingencies of the natural world, even life and death, entering a spiritual realm, returning to the primordial Dao beyond change and time. He did not discuss non-being however; he wrote about what is beyond the external (*wuwai* 無外), beyond the cosmos.

In *Discourse on Comprehending the Zhuangzi*, RUAN Ji presents a cosmogony in which *ziran* generates the sky and earth, which in turn generate and contain the myriad things. The myriad things are in a sense contained within the sky and the earth. So, in a similar sense of this spatial metaphor, *ziran* is beyond or outside of them. This clarifies what it means to be “beyond the external.” Dao as *ziran* is a higher realm beyond the sky and the earth. The myriad things are contained within them and taken as a complete whole form “one substance” (*yiti* 一體), that is, a basic essential unity. The composite nature or essential unity of the myriad things is the dominate theme of *Comprehending the Zhuangzi* (Feng 1983: 104). Human beings are generated along with the myriad things and they too are part-and-parcel of the essential unity. The human spirit (*shen* 神) becomes the governing factor of the cosmos (Feng 1983: 105).

When it comes to PEI Wei 裴頠 (267–300 CE), we can say he had extensive knowledge of medicine, and his father was an early geographer and cartographer, which gave him a proto-scientific background and outlook. Being politically engaged and not withdrawing from office like the sages of the Bamboo Grove, he was eventually killed by the king of Zhao, SIMA Lun 司馬倫. PEI Wei wrote an essay entitled *Discourse on Venerating Being* (*Chongyou lun* 崇有論), which forms the anti-thesis phase in *Xuanxue*’s historical development. He vehemently opposed the popular trend of the day established by WANG Bi and HE Yan concerning the cherishing of emptiness and non-being. Although he opposed the idea of non-being as the highest category, nevertheless, he still appealed to the basic method of *Xuanxue*, namely, distinguishing names and analyzing patterned-principles, and his view still advocates an all-encompassing, external cause for things. His *Discourse* opens with an analysis of various terms that are paraphrased in the following:

The integrated and chaotic root of the multitude of existence is the ancestral and utmost Dao. Things are differentiated according to various categories. The essential nature of life is derived from the phenomenon of their physical form. Patterned-principles originate from the mix of complex transformations. Things inherit specific characteristics based on their categorical group. Things must depend on external factors because their specific character cannot be self-sufficient. The things that are exploited to sustain life are referred to as patterned-principles. The essential-substance of patterned-principles is referred to as being. The necessities of being are called resources. Resources possess a complex unity referred to as meaningful-appropriateness (*yi* 宜). The efficacy of meaningful-appropriateness is called reality (*qing* 情). Once conscious intelligence arises, despite their differentiation, the means by which they treasure life and preserve meaningful-appropriateness are one and the same reality. The various patterned-principles exist simultaneously without conflict such that what is respected and what is base are differentiated. Profit and loss arise by contact



with them and the auspicious and inauspicious become manifested. Therefore, the worthy ones (*xianren* 賢人) and the gentlemen cannot be cut off from their conscious-awareness and desires in their social interactions with others, and by observing the cyclic cycle they find equilibrium and decide on their course of action. By using heaven's Dao and sharing in earth's benefits, after they work hard, they enjoy life. By practicing human-kindness (*ren* 仁) and obedience, reverence and frugality, loyalty and honesty, being respectful and humble, their intention is never excessive or demanding, being moderate and balanced, will they not be successful? So, the great establishes the extreme, sets the patterned-principles for all living creatures, instructs others and displays the model, thereby they exist. These are the means by which the sage-king administers government.

夫總混群本，宗極之道也。方以族異，庶類之品也。形象著分，有生之體也。化感錯綜，理跡之原也。夫品而為族，則所稟者偏，偏無自足，故憑乎外資。是以生而可尋，所謂理也。理之所體，所謂有也。有之所須，所謂資也。資有攸合，所謂宜也。擇乎厥宜，所謂情也。識智既授，雖出處異業，默語殊塗，所以寶生存宜，其情一也。眾理並而無害，故貴賤形焉。失得由乎所接，故吉凶兆焉。是以賢人君子，知欲不可絕，而交物有會。觀乎往復，稽中定務。惟夫用天之道，分地之利，躬其力任，勞而後饗。居以仁順，守以恭儉，率以忠信，行以敬讓，志無盈求，事無過用，乃可濟乎！故大建厥極，綏理群生，訓物垂範，於是乎在，斯則聖人為政之由也 (Feng 1983: 112).

In this way PEI Wei links his understanding of cosmology, human life, and good government. The method is clearly that of distinguishing terms and analyzing patterned-principles in the spirit of *Xuanxue* philosophy. Instead of describing Dao as non-being, Pei defines it as the integrated and chaotic root of the multitude of existence. Pei is arguing for a concrete form of existence that is not an abstraction. For him, Dao is not an abstract category of non-being like WANG Bi's. The primordial Dao as an integrated and chaotic root is a collective noun for all of existence. This collective noun is like what RUAN Ji called "beyond the external" (*wuwai* 無外), what XIANG Xiu 向秀 (ca. 227–277) and GUO Xiang 郭象 (ca. 252–312 CE) meant by "heaven and earth is the collective name of the myriad things" or what we would refer to as the "cosmos" (Feng 1983: 112–113). PEI Wei wants to ground his idea of existence in the particular manifested phenomena of material forms rather than an abstract non-being. He goes on to criticize Laozi's claim that "being is generated from non-being" as incorrect and groundless (Feng 1983: 115). Pei argues that the focus on non-being should only be used to support material existence, and he felt that it was misleading in that it would cause people to focus on nothingness, not promoting the values and virtues required to manage a civil society and government.

PEI Wei argues that his cosmology of venerating being has direct social implications. He proposed that the focus on vacuity and non-being led people to act inappropriately, to ignore basic human relationships, civic duties, moral values and virtues, and causes the demise of good government. In a sense he links non-being to moral nihilism and extreme pessimism. There are stories in *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo Xinyu* 世說新語) that appear to acknowledge this kind of breakdown where government officials have no interest in serving the public good and prefer to drink alcohol all day, and where people behave in a Zhuangzian anti-nomian manner, violating social norms (Mather 1976). So, Pei advocated the veneration of being to strengthen people's resolve to be engaged in social-moral activities to properly complement the true nature of reality. He wants to link the

positive affirmation of being to the moral affirmation of human social relationships and virtuous behavior (Feng 1983: 114–115). In the end he died for his cause in the ancient spirit of Confucius' teachings that praise martyrs who will not compromise their virtue to save their own lives.

PEI Wei would have agreed with the old saying “nothing comes from nothing.” There is a cryptic and problematic passage in the *Discourse on Venerating Being* that sums up his thinking. It reads: “[Concrete] being does not come into existence/being from non-being, nor does non-being come from non-being, nor does non-being come from being that is not [concrete] being 夫有非有，於無非無；於無非無，於有非有” (Feng 1983: 117). Feng argues that there are two problems with this passage. First, he contends that the passage has been taken out of context and should appear at the end of the *Discourse* as its summary, which sounds reasonable. Second, he proposes that the copier made mistakes, and he rewrites the passage to fit his own materialist-dialectical interpretation that being is the antithesis of non-being and vice versa. I believe that my translation conveys PEI Wei's idea that concrete being cannot arise from an abstract non-being, non-being cannot create itself nor arise from being itself. PEI Wei appeals to a few specific examples to drive home his point that only being truly exists, namely that things can only exist based on other existing things. For example, an existing draftsman must make a tool; tools do not come from non-existing draftsmen. We cannot catch fish by sitting quietly on the bank doing nothing, nor can we shoot a bird without taking aim with a bow and arrow. Likewise, a minister cannot govern the masses by effortless, non-action. For PEI Wei, people must know how to use real existing things to accomplish actual results. Abstract speculative philosophy will not yield the kind of physical outcomes he is seeking. PEI Wei's philosophy is a type of pragmatic, concrete realism. In this sense, his thinking advanced *Xuanxue* historically to move beyond the lofty abstractions of his predecessors.

After Ji Kang and RUAN Ji began discussing the *Zhuangzi*, other prominent scholars carried on the practice. Being obscure, the *Zhuangzi* needed commentarial insights for interpretation. Philosophers not only elucidated the texts they commented on, but also used those texts to expound their own philosophies. Thus, XIANG Xiu and GUO Xiang wrote their respective commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*. Ji Kang and XIANG Xiu were friends and they discussed the *Zhuangzi* (Feng 1983: 128). Xiang's commentary and many other works of the Wei-Jin period were lost during or shortly after that period of political disorder. Previously some scholars considered GUO Xiang's commentary to be a copy of XIANG Xiu's. This is not the case. In the commentarial practices, scholars typically incorporated the commentaries of other intellectuals, as a type of argument by authority, to help develop their interpretation of a text, and to further create their own philosophy. GUO Xiang's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* is no exception to this practice. He incorporated some of XIANG Xiu's commentary and the commentaries of others to develop his own philosophical perspective and commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. To consider his commentary to be a mere plagiarism of XIANG Xiu's work is an oversimplification.

In what sense does the philosophy of GUO Xiang promote an historical synthesis that incorporates and goes beyond the debate and controversy of cherishing

non-being and venerating being? GUO Xiang's synthesis of what is "beyond non-being" (*wuwu* 無無), marks the third phase of the historical-dialectical development of *Xuanxue*. GUO Xiang goes beyond both views that either being or non-being serve as the ultimate reality that creates or generates the myriad things by proposing that the material forms of existence are "created" or generated in-and-by themselves, naturally, spontaneously, self-so-ingly (*ziran* 自然). Guo's philosophy offers a criticism of the popular and the philosophical beliefs that there must be an ultimate reality that creates and rules over the world and human life by arguing that things exist independently (*du* 獨), naturally, and are self-generated (*zisheng* 自生). As we saw above, although they use different names or designations for ultimate reality, nevertheless, both WANG Bi and PEI Wei seem to agree that there is an ultimate reality that stands outside of the material forms of existence, that generates or creates them, and in this sense also governs or controls them. At least for PEI Wei, things are generated by other existing things; they are not spontaneously self-generated. That is, they both accept an external cause or external determinant for the world's existence. Guo argues against these views.

GUO Xiang was influenced by a passage from chapter 2 (*qiwlun* 齊物論) of the *Zhuangzi*. In the opening section of this chapter, Ziqi comes out of an apophatic meditation of panenhenic unity, while being questioned by Yancheng Ziyou about his experience of having lost his "me-identity." To explain his panenhenic experience of unity, Ziqi draws an extended metaphor-analogy with the various vibrations or piping-sounds of humans, earth, and Nature. Humans make music on bamboo pitch-pipes, while the earth's wind resonates through the indentations and hollows of things. As for the energy-vibrations of Nature, "they resonate through all the ten thousand differences, allowing each to go their own way. But because each one selects out its own, what identity can there be for their rouser?" (Ziporyn 2009: 9–10; translation modified). Readers and interpreters who are inclined to believe in an external cause or creator interpret this passage as a reference to a creator god who must be the cause or rouser that does the sounding; for them, that rouser-cause is an omnipresent, all-encompassing god or ultimate reality, making creatures and things exist. That view was certainly not Zhuangzi's intention, and GUO Xiang correctly captures the meaning of the passage in his commentary and expands upon it in his philosophy of "independent transformation" (*duhua* 獨化). Guo's note on the above passage says:

This is the piping-sound (energy-vibration) of Nature. As for the piping-sounds of nature, how could there be anything else besides them? They are exactly the sounds of the various cavities (earthly vibrations) and the multiple bamboo-pipes (human music), connecting living creatures and taken together they become one natural (i.e., heavenly) sound.

此天籟也。夫天籟者，豈復別有一物哉？即眾竅比竹之屬，接乎有生之類，會而共成一天耳 (Feng 1983: 138).

In the context of Lao-Zhuang thought, *Xuanxue*, and especially here in GUO Xiang's philosophy, *tian* is an abbreviation of *tiandi* 天地 the natural environment, sky and earth, or nature, not a transcendent, other-worldly heaven. In a sense, Guo anticipates the interdependency of the part and the whole that Huayan Buddhism

advocates in which the whole is not greater than the sum of its parts but is part-and-parcel or none other than all of the parts taken together; change a part and the whole changes. For Guo, nature (*tian*) is a collective noun for the various concrete particulars, and these particulars are self-created. As his commentary continues:

Hence nature is the collective noun for the myriad things. Nothing is more appropriate than nature. Then who is the lord who enslaves the myriad things? (Because there isn't one,) hence each of the myriad things is self-engendering, and nothing exceeds it—This is the natural way.

故天者，萬物之總名也，莫適為天，誰主役物乎？故物各自生而無所出焉，此天道也 (Feng 1983: 138).

In this way, Guo expands on Zhuangzi's thinking, creating his own philosophy of an imminent reality of concrete-particulars. He does not appeal to an abstract generalization or a higher transcendent reality. Guo's philosophy is grounded in the unique, sui generis character of each and every particular thing.

Guo Xiang wrote on many topics that were popular in *Xuanxue* philosophy such as inner-nature (*xing* 性) and destiny (*ming* 命), life and death, taking action and being tranquil, being antithetical (*youdui* 有對) and beyond being antithetical (*wudui* 無對), speaking (*youyan* 有言) and being beyond speaking (*wuyan* 無言), no mind (*wuxin* 無心), non-action (*wuwei* 無為) and non-dependency (*wudai* 無待), the sage (*shengren* 聖人), the doctrine of names (*mingjiao* 名教), and complying with self-so-ness (*ziran* 自然). Guo's philosophy is comprehensive, far reaching, broad and profound. It is the culmination of the development of *Xuanxue*.

LIU Ling 劉伶 (d. 265 CE) and ZHANG Zhan's 張湛 (fl. 4th C. CE) commentary on the *Liezi* 列子 offer an expedient, direct experience and non-rational technique that counters the mainstream rational method of *Xuanxue* to use "distinguishing names and analyzing patterned-principles." Some intellectuals sought a more direct approach referred to as "arriving at comprehension." With this direct approach they could enter a profound spiritual experience of manifesting self-so-spontaneity in a natural manner and bypass the method of "distinguishing names and analyzing patterned-principles." One way to achieve this direct experience of arriving at comprehension was the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol. LIU Ling was one of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" (*Zhulin Qixian* 竹林七賢) who was most famous for his daily drunkenness. He composed the "Song to the Power of Wine" (*Jiu de Song* 酒德頌) in which he extols the virtue of wine as an expedient means "to comprehend by direct experience chaos" (*da hundun* 達混沌). Liu describes a "great man" who is at home in the vast universe, taking the sky as his tent and the earth as his floor mat, he wanders freely without a care. His only endeavor is to drink wine all day. Liu's "great man" is like RUAN Ji's in that both have entered a spiritual realm of living the natural, free and easy, self-so spontaneous life.

In the "Song to the Power of Wine," Liu describes how, being in an inebriated state, he goes beyond thinking, beyond normal considerations, to enter a happiness of wanton joyfulness. When drunk he is immovable but when he awakens, he is in a daze. He is beyond physical and emotional concerns. This is the spiritual experience

of the direct comprehension of chaos. But it cannot be merely experienced or obtained by just getting drunk. People try to imitate the practice by merely drinking a lot; this is called “contrived arriving at comprehending” (*zuo da* 作達). The wanton, carefree, antinomian behavior of the seven worthies of the Bamboo Grove set up a pretense for posers, fakes, or charlatans, who could easily exhibit similar external behaviors without the philosophical understanding that must accompany authentic directly experiencing comprehension by merely pretending or contriving such alleged comprehension by simply getting drunk and being irresponsible.

This kind of irresponsible, adolescent behavior may be a background reason that simulated the alleged hedonism proposed in the “*Yang Zhu* 楊朱” chapter of the *Liezi*. YANG Zhu (ca. 4th C. BCE) provides the strongest advocacy for hedonism in classical Chinese literature. When he advocates total sensory and bodily pleasure, he clearly falls short of the spiritual dimension of ancient “Daoism” of the Lao-Zhuang teachings, and the spiritual aspirations of *Xuanxue* (Feng 1983: 200). Those passages can be read as metaphors given for their “shock affect,” to point the reader toward liberation (Henricks 1983: 6). When the “*Yang Zhu*” chapter proposes that there can be a natural, spontaneous expression to freely say and do what one naturally does, then it returns to the self-cultivation and self-transformation intent and purpose of *Xuanxue* promoting a natural, self-so-spontaneous spiritual liberation. There is a way to read and interpret the “*Yang Zhu*” chapter in a Daoist frame without advocating blind hedonism (Sellmann 1995: 78–79). LIU Ling’s exploits provide a kind of capstone experience for the Wei dynasty *Xuanxue*, just as ZHANG Zhan’s commentary concludes the Jin dynasty *Xuanxue* with a similar appeal to return to *ziran*.

## 7 Conclusion

I have only been able to introduce a few of the contributions that *Xuanxue* has to offer the growth and historical development of Chinese Philosophy. *Xuanxue* provides a bridge from the initial ancient pre-Qin flourishing of philosophy that sets a foundation for the later Song-Ming revival of Chinese philosophy after the Tang dynasty interest in Buddhism. In this sense, Wei-Jin *Xuanxue* provides the second period of profound philosophical developments in the history of Chinese philosophy. Because the *Xuanxue* philosophers focused on integrating Daoist ideas into Confucianism, it should be considered the first wave of neo-Confucianism, setting the stage for Song dynasty *Lixue*. Through the *Zhuangzi*’s use of Confucius’ voice, *Xuanxue* philosophers were better able to integrate Lao-Zhuang cosmology and self-transformation teachings with Confucian-Mencian self-cultivation and moral teachings, creating a renewed and more comprehensive theoretical understanding and practical application of both traditions. Through their eclectic, amalgamated approach to philosophy that blended Lao-Zhuang and Confucian-Mencian teachings, they ushered in new concepts. By both using the method of “distinguishing names and analyzing patterned-principles” while also seeking other direct

experiential methods, *Xuanxue* integrated Lao-Zhuang transformational vital-breath cosmology into Confucian-Mencian philosophy, while developing higher abstractions and promoting nothingness in various forms such as cherishing non-being, venerating being, culminating in an historical synthesis of valuing what is beyond non-being, analyzing and expanding the understanding of patterned-principles, original substance, and substance-functioning that impacted later philosophical developments in the ongoing understanding and development of Chinese philosophy. *Xuanxue* made lasting contributions to Chinese philosophy.

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