

The Corrected Interpretations of the Five Classics (Wujing zhengyi) and the Tang Legacy of Obscure Learning (Xuanxue)

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This paper analyzes some of the central arguments put forward by the *Corrected Interpretations of the Five Classics* (*Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義),¹ an underutilized source for the research of medieval Chinese intellectual history. Based upon the Classicist scholarship of the Six Dynasties period and building upon exegeses largely written in the Sui dynasty,²

¹ For the translation of “Corrected” rather than “Correct” meanings, see the preface to each volume of the series, wherein the “creation of a *zhengyi*” always involves the revision of a previous *yishu* 義疏 commentary. The phrase in question is invariably: “... 覆更詳審為之正義,” except in the *Maoshi zhengyi* preface, which reads, instead, “覆更詳正.” Here *zheng* 正 functions unambiguously as a verb. (All citations from the thirteen classics will refer to *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本十三經注疏附校勘記, originally edited by Ruan Yuan 阮元 [1764-1849] in 1816 [rpt. Taipei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1965]: see *Zhouyi zhushu* 周易注疏, “Zhouyi zhengyi xu,” 2b-3a; *Shangshu zhushu* 尚書注疏, “Shangshu zhengyi xu,” 4a-b; *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏, “Liji zhengyi xu,” 4a-b; *Zuozhuan zhushu* 左傳注疏, “Chunqiu zhengyi xu,” 4b-5a; and *Maoshi zhushu* 毛詩注疏, “Maoshi zhushu,” 3b.) Given that “*Zhengyi*” was apparently not the original title of the series (it was originally *Wujing yizhan* 五經義贊, further attesting to the series’ derivative character), but was subsequently imposed at Tang Taizong’s 唐太宗 (r. 626-649) command, the phrase may have had ambiguous connotations even when it was first used (see *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995], 198.5644). I will suggest in what follows, however, that the humbler claim to have “corrected” (some) previous errors is more in line with the intellectual positions of the series than would be a claim to have discerned the “Correct Meanings” of the Classics once and for all.

² Each of the series’ subcommentaries to the Five Classics was accomplished by editing a previous subcommentary. In the case of the *Zhouyi*, it is not clear whose subcommentary might have served as a base text. For the *Liji*, the editors followed Southern-dynasties scholar Huang Kan’s 皇侃 (488-545) *Liji yishu* 禮記義疏, and supplemented it with Northern-dynasties scholar Xiong Ansheng’s 熊安生 work of the same name. The other three subcommentaries are all based on *yishu* written by the Sui-dynasty scholars Liu Zhuo 劉焯 (544-608) and Liu Xuan 劉炫 (546?-613?). Although we cannot know how much the *Zhengyi*

this series of subcommentaries to the *Zhouyi* 周易, the *Maoshi* 毛詩, the *Shangshu* 尚書, the *Liji* 禮記, and the *Chunqiu* 春秋³ was formally commissioned by Tang Emperor Taizong in 638 and completed, after three rounds of revision by different committees, in 653.⁴ The series was at that point promulgated by the government and formally instituted as the official commentary on the Five Classics for use in the imperial academies and on the civil-service examination,⁵ a position it retained in the Five Dynasties and throughout most of the Song, until it was replaced by Neo-Confucian commentaries in the Yuan-dynasty examinations begun in 1315.⁶ Over the six centuries wherein it was officially backed by, published by, and used by the state, the commentaries contained in the *Wujing zhengyi* were probably among the most widely read of all Classicist works, and their centrality seems to have facilitated the lamentable loss of most other Classicist scholarship from the late Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang, making the series one of the few windows that

editors departed from these base texts, rhetorically they are quite critical of these scholars' works.

³) For a useful introduction to these Five Classics and the history of their exegesis, see Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001).

⁴) For an up-to-date summary of what is known about the compilation of the *Wujing zhengyi*, see Zhang Baosan 張寶三, *Wujing zhengyi yanjiu* 五經正義研究 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011), 17-27; 37, who lists references to the original research that informs our current understanding, largely from the late 1960s and 1970s. A more detailed account can be found in Noma Fumichika 野間文史, *Gokyō seigi no kenkyū: sono seiritsu to tenkai* 五經正義の研究：その成立と展開 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 1998), 7-38.

⁵) See *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 77.1405 and *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 4.71.

⁶) It is difficult to gauge precisely the influence of the *Zhengyi* series over this time period. When first promulgated, the subcommentary series was probably too large for most scholars to have had their own (handwritten) copies, and citations of the *Zhengyi* are relatively rare in surviving Tang materials until the turn of the ninth century, when they begin to appear fairly regularly in memorials written to the throne. After the series was first collated and printed by the Song Imperial Academy 國子監 from 988 to 995, it presumably would have been more accessible to examination candidates. From around 1068 to 1085, and then again from 1111 to 1126, the Song government patronized Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021-1086) commentaries over the *Wujing zhengyi*; the *Zhengyi* was used from the beginnings of the Song examinations until 1068, from 1086 to 1110, and then again throughout the Southern Song (although a number of other commentaries were also commonly studied throughout the latter period). See Thomas H.C. Lee, *Education in Traditional China: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 381-82. The series was displaced by Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200) commentaries on the *Four Books* 四書 on the Yuan examinations.

survive onto Classicist thought in the later medieval period.⁷ It is, therefore, well worth trying to understand the intellectual positions the series takes.

Modern scholarship has, however, devoted relatively little energy to piecing together the animating ideas of this series.⁸ Beyond its unwieldy size,⁹ several reasons can be adduced to account for this relative neglect,

⁷ It is possible to discern from the titles preserved in Tang and Song bibliographies that a considerable number of Classicist works were produced over the course of the Tang. But as David McMullen has written, “much evidence suggests that, from Gaozong’s reign on, Kong Yingda’s official sub-commentaries [that is, the *Wujing zhengyi*] and the primary commentaries that they endorsed enjoyed general acceptance in the scholarly world and in the school system. Not only did high authority commission no second sub-commentary series, but no complete work of Confucian canonical scholarship survives from the second half of the seventh century, and relatively few from the first decades of the eighth. At Dunhuang, fragments of the primary commentaries endorsed by Kong Yingda far outnumber those other commentaries, and fragments of Kong’s own sub-commentaries were preserved in some numbers there. The impression is therefore given that the series, following its promulgation in 653, effectively displaced existing works, while new, unofficial exegesis posed no threat to its pre-eminence. In view of the immense prestige of official service and of the examinations in the canons as a means of gaining official status, it is not surprising to see the officially approved commentaries and sub-commentaries prevail in this way.” See David McMullen, *State and Scholars in T’ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 83-84.

⁸ See Wang Zhen’s 王貞 closing summary in his introduction to the state of the field, “Kong Yingda yu *Wujing zhengyi yanjiu shulüe*” 孔穎達與《五經正義》研究述略, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu dongtai* 中國史研究動態 2012.1: 31-38, which concludes that “when it comes to the *Wujing zhengyi* as a whole, research has been relatively deficient; what work has been done to date has tended to emphasize the series’ composition, its editions, its editing, and its glossing of characters and phrases, but there has not been enough vigor in researching its thought” (p. 38). Wang’s survey, however, leaves out a number of Western works that have touched on the ideas of the *Zhengyi* series, such as Steven Van Zoeren’s treatment of the *Maoshi zhengyi* in *Poetry and Personality: Reading Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991): 116-150; Tze-Ki Hon’s discussion of the *Zhouyi zhengyi* in “Northern Song ‘Yijing’ Exegesis and the Formation of Neo-Confucianism” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1992), 46-65; Angela Zito’s use of the *Zhengyi* series as a background for discussing later developments in ritual understanding in *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997); and Andrew Seth Meyer’s more focused discussion of the series in “The Correct Meaning of the Five Classics and the Intellectual Foundations of the Tang” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard Univ., 1999). For a helpfully annotated (but now out of date) bibliography of scholarship on the *Wujing zhengyi*, see Noma Fumichika, *Gokyo seigi no kenkyū*, 39-86.

⁹ No doubt the relative lack of scholarship on the intellectual positions of the *Zhengyi* series is at least partly attributable to the fact the series comes in (when printed, as it is in all complete editions that survive today, alongside the Classics upon which it comments) at over 4,500,000 characters. This is the sort of subject that would surely benefit from the attentions of a scholar with expertise in digital methods of text analysis; unfortunately, I am not that scholar.

the most important among which are summarized succinctly by David McMullen's diagnosis that the series is "the result of the need to compromise and to honour political priorities," compiled by editors who "sometimes sacrificed intellectual consistency to their loyalty to their chosen authorities, and had a compendious approach to the controversies that marked the pre-Tang history of canonical scholarship."¹⁰ On account of its manifest heterogeneity,¹¹ scholars have tended to approach the *Wujing zhengyi* as a political performance, reconciling competing traditions of Classical exegesis in an orthodoxy that symbolically represented the Tang's consolidation of the long-fragmented empire.¹² As Andrew Meyer argues, in the most thoroughgoing treatment of the intellectual content of the series written to date, "for each classic, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) and his committee exposed tensions within the text and the history of its interpretation over time [and then] set out to demonstrate both how the interpretive conflicts of the Period of Division might be comprehended and how these conflicts might further be reconciled."¹³ The result is a series held together by a consistent political dance, more than by a coherent vision of what the Five Classics are, what they mean, and what they prescribe.

Such a vision of the series is difficult either to prove or disprove, given our fragmentary picture of the history of Classical exegesis before the *Wujing zhengyi*. As mentioned above, nearly all of the Han dynasty and medieval works on these same Classics that were not selected for inclusion in the *Zhengyi* series have been lost; equally disturbing, parts of the series are explicitly based upon subcommentaries (particularly by the

¹⁰ McMullen, *State and Scholars*, 74.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, 75; at least certain sections of the text clearly represent verbatim the subcommentaries that the *Zhengyi* edited, referring to the current dynasty, for example, as the "Great Sui" 大隋.

¹² This is probably the standard interpretation of the series' significance, repeated frequently in general studies of Tang history and Chinese intellectual history more generally. Beyond McMullen, see, for example, Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史, annot. by Zhou Yutong 周予同 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 193-219; Wang Shouan 王壽南, *Sui-Tang shi* 隋唐史 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1986), 724-25; Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhongguo sixiang shi* 中國思想史 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 460-61; and Mark Edward Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2009), 233-34 (Lewis, however, also articulates, in a very brief space, several of the points I will make in this paper). It is also a central exegetical framework for Van Zoeren (see especially 118-24) and Meyer.

¹³ Meyer, "Correct Meaning of the Five Classics," 282.

Sui-dynasty scholars Liu Zhuo 劉焯 and Liu Xuan 劉炫) that survive only within it, leaving us no way of telling what the (various groups of) editors of the final series might have added or subtracted from works that may have already had a synthetic tendency.¹⁴ In this context, reconstructions of the *Zhengyi*'s reconciliation of medieval debates are inevitably speculative; they are also somewhat willful, given the fact that the editors of the series left us with their own accounts of the relationship between their work and that of previous commentators. In their prefaces to each of the Five Classics, that is, the editors of the series give a brief explanation of the origin of the Classical text, the history of its transmission and commentary, and the reasons they have for choosing certain editions and commentaries over others. Nowhere do these prefaces suggest a political intention.¹⁵ Instead, the editors claim in each case to have followed the best commentary and edited the best subcommentary available to them, supplementing those authoritative readings with corrections from other editions only rarely, in instances where the primary subcommentary clearly diverges from the commentary or the original text. Rather than aiming for the "compendious approach" of a medieval *summa*, the *Zhengyi* editors emphasize that they have trimmed down their base subcommentaries in an effort to tame recent excesses and return to a conservative reading of the most authoritative texts available.¹⁶

Again, we know too little about the medieval intellectual landscape to judge how far the editors in fact followed the vision that they set out of themselves; but if they were making political compromises, we are unlikely ever to know for certain. We must acknowledge our ignorance here, without, however, giving up completely on the project of understanding at least the general intellectual categories through which the *Zhengyi* editors understood the precedent tradition. This project is especially important when their categories seem to conflict with those that modern scholars often bring to bear on medieval thought, such as

¹⁴ For Liu Zhuo and Liu Xuan, see *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 75.1718-20; see also Chen Jinmu 陳金木, *Liu Zhuo, Liu Xuan zhi jingxue* 劉焯、劉炫之經學 (Ph.D. diss., Zhengzhi daxue, 1988).

¹⁵ One possible exception to this rule, in the preface to the *Zhouyi zhengyi*, has been analyzed by Meyer, 57-62; Meyer's discussion does not, however, go on to consider the following passage, which would seem to contradict the point he wants to make.

¹⁶ See particularly *Shangshu zhushu*, "Shangshu zhengyi xu," 4a.

that of *xuanxue* 玄學, a term that meant something rather different in the seventh century than it has come to mean in modern scholarship. Now generally used as the name of a Wei- and Jin-dynasty philosophical movement centered around the exegesis of such “Daoist” works as the *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子—and thus often mistranslated as “Neo-Daoism”—this term has presented a minor stumbling block to scholarship on the *Zhengyi*, which has sometimes seen the school’s influence on the series as evidence of its problematic heterogeneity. Medieval sources, however, make it clear that the term *xuanxue* was not used to designate a coherent philosophical system or school at the time the *Zhengyi* was written, much less one that was tainted by “Daoism” or otherwise incompatible with the study of the Classics. Instead, *xuanxue* simply meant “study of the obscure.”¹⁷ Certain thinkers (and certain governments) had more interest in speculating about the obscure, and in texts that did so, than others did; indeed, the value of “studying the obscure” seems to have sometimes been a point of debate in the medieval period.¹⁸ This debate, I will suggest here, is one into which the *Zhengyi* series can be seen as intervening, and in a largely coherent way.

Put briefly, the argument of this paper is that the *Wujing zhengyi* shows consistent signs, across all the subcommentaries of the series, of an editorial attempt to articulate a coherent vision of the cosmos, of the role of the sages, and of the culture they create. This vision involves a generally coherent stance toward “the obscure”: namely, that it is of fundamental importance both to the way that the world works and to the origins of the Classical tradition, but that we, nonetheless, should not study it. The Classics are valuable because they provide exoteric models that largely obviate investigation into the obscure, allowing those of us who are incapable of succeeding in such study (nearly everyone) to benefit from the sages’ authoritative mediation of mysteries we cannot

¹⁷ Uses of the phrase *xuanxue* are rare in medieval texts beyond the institutional context I will discuss below; where it does appear, it is generally unambiguous that it does not refer to a school or movement, but rather to a general field of learning. See, for example, *Weishu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 84.1864; *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 53.1486 and 96.2516; *Bei Qishu* 北齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 43.575; and Sima Zhen 司馬貞, “*Xiaojing Laozi zhu Yi zhuan yi*” 孝經老子注易傳議, in Dong Gao 董誥 et al., ed., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 402.4107a.

¹⁸ See, for example, Yan Zhitui’s 顏之推 (531-591) polemic against the study of the obscure in *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 3.177-78.

understand. Because we have these models, and the (limited) insight into the motions of the universe that they encode, we do not need to apprehend the obscure directly to adequately follow its directions or harmonize with its movements.

As I hope will become apparent below, this argument is orthogonal to questions about the influence, sometimes profound, that particular *xuanxue* thinkers had upon the *Zhengyi*:¹⁹ whatever concepts the editors borrowed from those thinkers, they put to ends that are fundamentally at odds with what I take to be the unifying orientations of what we now recognize as the *xuanxue* “movement” of earlier dynasties. In fact, I would suggest that the *Zhengyi*’s claims about the ultimate importance and proximate inaccessibility of the obscure were part of a broader early-Tang attempt to preserve space for the more-this-worldly, less-speculative teachings of the Classics within an intellectual landscape in which *xuanxue*, Buddhism, and Daoism—all of which crucially involved “the obscure”—had become central features. Reading the *Zhengyi* series in this way offers, in turn, a new spin on some of the arguments of Peter Bol’s account of Zhenguan-era court scholarship in his seminal work, *This Culture of Ours*.²⁰ Bol observes that early-Tang court scholars upheld a “general distinction between traditions that stemmed from the Former Kings of Chinese antiquity and those they classed as ‘outside the square’ or ‘beyond the bounds’ (*fangwai* 方外),” seeing “the ‘language of mystery’ (*xuanyan* 玄言) of the Jin period [as marking] a ... stage of decline..., for [the sages] ‘certainly never addressed the patterns of what is outside the square.’”²⁰ The quotes here derive from the “Bibliographical Treatise” 經籍志 of the *Suishu*, but in a later section of the same text, which Bol does not cite, we read that

The *dao* is the mystery of the myriad things, and the ultimate depth of the sages.... The common people depend upon the *dao* on a daily basis, but do not know its function in their lives. The sages embodied the *dao* as their nature, preserving themselves void and pure, accomplishing and not being arrogant about it, growing things and not dominating them. Therefore, they did not need to tax their eyes and ears, yet their people transformed of their own accord; and they did not make use

¹⁹ On this latter topic, the best study I have found is Pan Zhongwei 潘忠偉, “Cong *Zhouyi zhengyi* kan guiwu, chongyou, duhua sanshuo zhi ronghe” 從《周易正義》看貴無、崇有、獨化三說之融合, *Zhongguo zhexue* 中國哲學 3 (2007): 28-35.

²⁰ Peter Kees Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), 81-82.

of laborious methods of rule, and yet their achievements were completed of their own accord. The obscure (*xuan*) power [of the *dao* and the sages] is deep and distant, and cannot be fathomed with words or images. The Former Kings were thus afraid that people would be confused, and so placed it 'beyond the bounds' (*fang-wai*). The Six Classics therefore rarely discuss it.

道者，蓋為萬物之奧，聖人之至蹟也。... 百姓資道而日用，而不知其用也。聖人體道成性，清虛自守，為而不恃，長而不宰，故能不勞聰明而人自化，不假修營而功自成。其玄德深遠，言象不測。先王懼人之惑，置于方外，六經之義，是所罕言。²¹

According to the editors of the *Suishu* here, what made the sages sages, and what allowed them to create normative culture in the first place, is itself constitutively obscure, and thus “beyond the bounds” in apparently the same way that the speculations of *xuanxue*, Buddhism, and Daoism are.²² Where Bol suggests that “the characteristic assumption of this medieval aristocratic worldview was to think of values as cultural forms,”²³ then, it is probably better to see this idea as an argument rather than an assumption. The editors of this text are arguing, that is, in favor of a deep epistemological pessimism, which would encourage us to approach the obscure *not* through speculation, but rather only through the mediation of the representational and cultural forms (*wen* 文) left for us by the Former Kings. And given that the editorial board of the *Suishu* had significant overlaps with that of the *Wujing zhengyi* we should not be surprised to find a similar argument developed in the latter work.²⁴

Xuanxue and the *Zhengyi* Series

As Wang Baoxuan 王葆琰 has pointed out, the name *xuanxue* is inherently problematic. No thinker during the movement's supposed height, the Wei-Jin period, ever uses the term to describe what they are doing;

²¹ *Suishu*, 34.1003.

²² This quote comes from the *Suishu*'s summary of the *Dao* section in its bibliography, wherein are listed some of the sacred texts of the Daoist tradition (primarily commentaries on the Daoist “Masters texts” 子書).

²³ Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 76.

²⁴ Kong Yingda had served on the original compilation of the *Suishu*, as did Yan Shigu, whose potential contribution to the *Zhengyi* series is not known; it is not clear whether Kong might have contributed to the compilation of the monograph section. Even if he did not, other scholars such as Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 and Yu Zhining 于志寧 participated in the compilation of both the *Suishu* monographs and the *Zhengyi* series.

instead, it appears first in sources from the Southern Dynasties, as the name of one of the “Four Institutes of Learning” (*Si xue* 四學) established by Emperor Wen of the Liu-Song 宋文帝 in 439.²⁵ The curriculum of this institute—which would subsequently become one of four courses at the National Academy (*Guozi xue* 國子學) in 442 and then incorporated into the curricula of the Institute of Clarity in Sight and Hearing (*Congming guan* 聰明觀) from 470 to 484—is not known in detail. It would, however, have centrally involved study of the “Three Obscure Texts” (*san xuan* 三玄): the *Zhouyi* 周易, *Daodejing* 道德經, and *Zhuangzi* 莊子, interpreted through the lens of some of their medieval commentaries.²⁶

Thus defined, however, *xuanxue* represents neither a “school,” nor an exclusive corpus of texts, nor a coherent philosophical account of the

²⁵ See Wang Baoxuan, *Xuanxue tonglun* 玄學通論 (Taipei: Wunan tushu, 1987), 1-2 and 11-15. Scholarship on *xuanxue* is increasingly vast. For seminal studies, see Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001); Wang Yao 王瑤, “Xuanxue yu qingtán” 玄學與清談, in his *Zhongguo wenxue sixiang* 中古文學思想 (Hong Kong: Zhongliu chubanshe, 1973), 44-79; Wang Baoxuan, *Zhengshi xuanxue* 正始玄學 (Jinan: Qi-Lu shushe, 1987); Xu Bin 徐斌, *Wei-Jin xuanxue xin lun* 魏晉玄學新論 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000); Tang Yijie 湯一介, *Guo Xiangyu Wei-Jin xuanxue* 郭象與魏晉玄學 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000); and Zhou Daxing 周大興, *Ziran, mingjiao, yinguo: Dong Jin xuanxue lunji* 自然、名教、因果：東晉玄學論集, *Zhongguo wenzhe zhuan* no. 31 (Nangang: Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo, 2004), among others. In English, see Richard B. Mather, “The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness During the Six Dynasties” in *History of Religions* 9 (1969): 199-214; Alan K.L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1991); Rudolf Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2000); idem, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi’s Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003); Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, Translations from the Ancient Classics (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994); idem, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999); John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2003); Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003); Robert Ashmore, “Word and Gesture: On Xuan-school Hermeneutics of the Analects,” *Philosophy East and West* 54 (2004): 458-88; idem, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010); Alan K.L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo, eds. *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2010); and Michael Puett, “Sages, Gods, and History: Commentarial Strategies in Chinese Late Antiquity,” *Antiquorum Philosophia* 3 (2009): 71-88.

²⁶ See Wang Baoxuan, *Xuanxue tonglun*, 15.

world. To the first point, Southern-Dynasties *xuanxue* was not established in opposition to other basic orientations or teachings: the other institutes and curricula were not opposed doctrines like “Confucianism” and “Buddhism,” for example, but rather Ru-learning 儒學, history 史學, and the arts 文學. *Xuanxue*, that is, was not understood as opposed to Ru-learning, but rather thought to stand in at least a potentially complementary relationship to it, roughly equivalent to that Ru-learning stood to history.²⁷ *Xuanxue* and Ru-learning, moreover, shared at least one common text: the *Zhouyi*. (They may in fact have shared several, given the number of *xuanxue* commentaries that were written on texts like the *Analects* [*Lunyu* 論語].)²⁸ According to a letter from Lu Cheng 陸澄 (425-494) to Wang Jian 王儉 (452-489), the *Zhouyi* was represented in both the *Xuan* and the Ru curricula, albeit with different commentaries, Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249?) representing the *xuan* approach to the text, and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) representing the Ru. Lu Cheng, for his part, was of the opinion that both approaches should be preserved: “The *xuan* cannot be discarded, and the Ru cannot be lacking. Thus, I say that it is fitting that both be preserved [in the official curricula]. This is the way that we can match with the meaning of what is without a fixed form (*wuti zhi yi* 無體之義)” —that is, with the *dao*, understood according to a fundamentally *xuan*-leaning paradigm.²⁹

As modern scholarship has long recognized, furthermore, the most important medieval commentaries on the “Three Obscure Texts” are not in agreement with one another on many of the central questions of *xuanxue* discourse. Since the pioneering work of Tang Yongtong 湯用彤,

²⁷ The relationship between *xuanxue* and Ru-learning was never unambiguous; for some *xuanxue* thinkers, the two were compatible, while for others (such as Xi Kang 嵇康 [223-262] and Guo Xiang 郭象 [d. 312]), interest in the *xuan* entailed a critical attitude toward study of the Classics. Clearly the incorporation of both Ru and *xuan* into the Southern Dynasties’ curricula was intended to suggest compatibility, a view that seems to have been common in the south in the fifth and sixth centuries more generally. See, for example, *Weishu* 魏書, 84.1863, wherein a southern scholar asks a northerner: “I have heard you are excellent at [understanding, or perhaps annotating] the meaning of the Classics. Among Ru and *xuan*, what have you mastered?” See also *Nanshi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 48.1188.

²⁸ Many *xuan*-inflected *Lunyu* commentaries were written but subsequently lost; fragments of several survive in Huang Kan 黃侃, ed. and annot., *Lunyu jijie yishu* 論語集解義疏 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1936). For an important study of this text, see Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators*, 77-168.

²⁹ This text, and Wang Jian’s reply, are preserved in *Nan Qishu* 南齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 39.681-85.

for example, Wang Bi's commentaries on the *Laozi* and *Zhouyi* have consistently been placed into a different evolutionary stage and a different "faction" (*paibie* 派別) of the *xuanxue* movement from, say, Guo Xiang's 郭象 (d. 312) commentary on the *Zhuangzi*.³⁰ Guo, in fact, seems intent on overturning the most fundamental of Wang's claims. Where Wang had argued that "actuality" (*you* 有) derives from and is dependent upon "negativity" (*wu* 無),³¹ Guo protests that "negativity cannot give rise to actuality,"³² and that everything instead "transforms in isolation" (*duhua* 獨化), being "so-of-itself" (*ziran* 自然) without being directed by a unified controlling reality.³³ Although thinkers like Han Bo 韓伯 (*zi* Kangbo 康伯, fl. fourth c.) had sought to reconcile these two influential positions,³⁴ it is highly unlikely teachers and students in the Southern-Dynasties *xuanxue* curriculum would have mistaken the of-

³⁰ See Tang Yongtong, *Wei-Jin xuanxue lungao*, 45 and 51.

³¹ See Wang Bi's "Laozi zhilüe" 老子指略 in *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋, ed. and annot. by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 195-210, also preserved as "Laojun zhigui lüeli" 老君指歸略例 in the eleventh-century *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 1.2-7. On this text, see Rudolf Wagner, "Wang Bi: 'The Structure of the Laozi's Pointers' (*Laozi weizhi lilüe*)—A Philological Study and Translation" in *T'oung Pao* 72 (1986): 92-129. For a translation of the text that makes the point at hand, see idem, *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2003), 83-86.

³² See, for example, Guo's comments at *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu* 南華真經注疏, with annotations by Guo Xiang 郭象 and Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 26 and 242-43. For an introduction to Guo's thought in English, see Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*.

³³ There is, I think, no perfectly satisfactory translation for the terms *wu* and *you*, which take on a wide range of meanings in *xuanxue*, in Six-Dynasties and Tang Daoism, and in *xuanxue*-influenced Buddhist discourse in the same period. The terms are themselves paradigmatically *xuan*, and thus open themselves to a number of mutually exclusive interpretations—the disagreement between Wang Bi and Guo Xiang cited here being merely one such example, insofar as Guo's argument is predicated on interpreting Wang's *wu* (which means something like "lacking determinate characteristics") as simple nothingness. Various translations of the binary have been proposed, such as Makeham's "having" and "not-having"; Ziporyn's "being" and "non-being"; Ashmore's "extant" and "non-extant"; and Puett's "something" and "nothingness." My translation of "actuality" and "negativity" borrows its terms from Mather ("actuality" and "non-actuality") and Wagner ("entities" and "negativity"), respectively. Though this hybrid translation loses the clear binary polarity that is present in the Chinese, it does, I think, allow for most of the large range of uses that were made of these terms in the medieval period (including, notably, both verbal and adjectival forms that are difficult under alternate renderings).

³⁴ Han Bo has received very little scholarly attention; for articles I have found useful, see Xu Jianliang 許建良, "Han Kangbo Zhouyi jieshi de daode sixiang" 韓康伯《周易》解釋中的道德思想, *Zhouyi yanjiu* 周易研究 2003.4: 60-68 and Li Yancang 李延倉, "Zhuang Yi

ten acrimonious polemics that made up Six-Dynasties debate about “the obscure” for a unanimous philosophical program.

Since *xuanxue* thus represented neither a historical school, nor an exclusive textual corpus, nor a coherent philosophy in the latter half of the medieval period, what held it together as a state-sponsored curriculum seems to have been its focus on issues that, as Paul W. Kroll has put it, we can only understand “*per speculum in aenigmate*.”³⁵ Consider, for example, a revealing remark that Li Yexing 李業興 of the Northern Wei is supposed to have made in a debate with Emperor Wu of Liang (Xiao Yan 蕭衍 [464-549, r. 502-549]) recorded in the *Weishu* 魏書.³⁶ Xiao Yan asks Li, “Is the great ultimate (*taiji* 太極) of the *Yijing* actuality or negativity?” Li responds: “What has been passed down is that the great ultimate is actuality, but I generally do not study the obscure (*su bu xuanxue* 素不玄學), so I do not dare answer directly.” Note that Li does not dismiss the fundamentally *xuan* category of “negativity”; nor is he claiming not to have studied the *Yijing*. He is instead claiming not to study particular questions relating to the *Yi*, questions that were the characteristic domain of *xuanxue*. And about these questions, there was often no consensus. Han Bo, for example, took the *taiji* to be synonymous with negativity; the *Zhengyi* series, by contrast, although it takes the *Zhouyi* commentaries by the *xuanxue* thinkers Wang Bi and Han Bo as the basis of its own subcommentary, agrees instead with Li Yexing.³⁷

This observation raises the question of the *Zhengyi*'s relationship to *xuanxue*. Although it is well known that the *Zhengyi* bases its approach to the *Zhouyi* on *xuanxue* commentaries, it is not generally considered a part of the *xuanxue* tradition—indeed, nothing from the Sui or Tang is discussed under this heading, the “school” or “movement” generally being delimited in contemporary scholarship to the Six-Dynasties period, and often merely to the Wei and Jin. Yet this is where the term *xuanxue* becomes a stumbling block to understanding the central arguments of the *Zhengyi*, whose editors would instead have seen their contempo-

guangxi qianlun—jian lun daoja Yi” 《庄》、《易》關係淺論—兼論道家易, *Zhouyi yanjiu* 2004.3: 62-66.

³⁵ Kroll, “Between Something and Nothing (Presidential Address),” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127 (2007): 409.

³⁶ For this anecdote, see *Weishu*, 84.1864.

³⁷ For both Han Bo's equation of negativity and the *taiji* and the *Zhengyi*'s correction of his misapprehension, see *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.156b-57a.

aries as continuing to “study the obscure,” often—as in the case of the seventh-century Daoist thinkers associated with what is now called “*chongxuanxue*” 重玄學—writing subcommentaries to “classical” *xuanxue* works or simply employing *xuanxue*’s central concepts intermixed with ideas drawn from Buddhism, which itself represented an important contemporary tradition of “studying the obscure.”³⁸ The word “*xuanxue*” continued, moreover, to be used throughout the Tang not to denote a particular school of Wei-Jin-era thinkers, but rather as a general term for studying the *xuan*: we find it used in this sense as late as the tenth-century *Jiu Tangshu*, where we read (for example) that the high official Chen Xilie 陳希烈 (d. 758) was “proficient in *xuanxue*, and there was no book he had not read.”³⁹ From the perspective of their contemporary context, then, the *Zhouyi zhengyi* is unmistakably a work of “learning about the obscure,” if one, as I will suggest, that turns against the central faith of the Southern-Dynasties *xuanxue* curriculum: that it was important for elite members of society to study closely and to think over what previous thinkers had said about the obscure.

The *Zhouyi zhengyi* is, moreover, far from the only subcommentary in the series to employ the concepts and consider the questions of Six-Dynasties *xuanxue*, though this point has been little recognized to date. Another reason that the series has not been treated as belonging to the *xuanxue* tradition lies in an oft-repeated characterization of its supposed fidelity to the heterogeneous commentaries the editors chose as the basis of their work: that is, that their “subcommentaries do not break with their chosen commentaries” (*shu bu po zhu* 疏不破注). As I have already suggested by observing that the *Zhengyi* contradicts Han Bo on the question of the *taiji*’s “actuality” or “negativity,” however, this cliché is simply false; Jiang Longxiang 姜龍翔 has collected numerous other instances of mostly subtle contradictions between the series’ commentaries and its subcommentaries, noting that none of the series’ editors

³⁸ For *chongxuanxue*, and an appropriate caution as to the coherence of this “school,” see Robert H. Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 53–75; see also Friederike Assandri, *Beyond the Daode jing: Twofold Mystery in Tang Daoism* (Magdalena, N.M.: Three Pines Press, 2009). For the most important Tang-dynasty continuation of a work of “classical” *xuanxue*, see Cheng Xuanying’s subcommentary to Guo Xiang’s *Zhuangzi*.

³⁹ See *Jiu Tangshu*, 97.3059.

or contemporaries ever articulated such a principle for their work.⁴⁰ And even if it is true that the *Zhengyi* does follow the interpretations of its chosen commentators most of the time, the editors nonetheless frequently attempt to synthesize apparently incompatible statements articulated across the Five Classics and their commentaries, thus providing themselves ample space to articulate ideas drawn from one commentary within the subcommentary on another volume. Although neither the pseudo-Kong Anguo 孔安國 commentary on the *Shangshu*, nor the Zheng Xuan commentaries on the *Liji* or *Maoshi* are works of the *xuanxue* “school,” for example, the *Zhengyi* subcommentaries to these works take up *xuanxue* issues in explicitly *xuanxue* terms like “negativity,” “so-of-itself,” and “lone-transformation.” And in so doing, these subcommentaries articulate the basic framework within which the *Zhengyi*’s vision of the Classics is best understood.

Obscurity and the Cosmos

Some of the clearest examples of the *Zhengyi* series’ tendency to offer synthesizing visions—visions, often, that import *xuanxue* ideas into its subcommentaries on texts and commentaries that do not obviously seem to call for them—can be found in its discussions of cosmology. It is far from surprising, of course, that the treatment of this topic in the *Zhouyi zhengyi* should be underwritten by concepts drawn from Wang Bi’s and Han Bo’s *xuanxue* commentaries to the *Yijing*, in particular the concepts of “negativity” (*wu*) and “actuality” (*you*).⁴¹ This fact many scholars have recognized and discussed at length;⁴² less commonly con-

⁴⁰ See Jiang Longxiang 姜龍翔, “Wujing zhengyi ‘shu bu po zhu’ zhi wenti zaitan” 《五經正義》「疏不破注」之問題再探, *Chengda Zhongwen xuebao* 成大中文學報 46 (2014): 137-84. Jiang is not the first to make this argument, but he makes it quite definitively; see his first footnote for earlier articulations of the same point.

⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that Wang Bi’s commentary to the *Zhouyi* in fact makes less use of the concept of “negativity” than we might expect. See Howard Lazar Goodman, “Exegetes and Exegeses of the *Book of Changes* in the Third Century AD: Historical and Scholastic Contexts for Wang Pi” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Univ., 1985), which argues that the avoidance of *wu* may mark a significant philosophical break with Wang’s earlier *Daodejing* commentary. The *Zhengyi*’s heavy reliance on the concept thus derives largely from Han Bo’s commentary.

⁴² See, for instance, Meyer, “The Correct Meaning” and Zhao Rongbo 趙榮波, “*Zhouyi zhengyi* de yuzhou guan” 《周易正義》的宇宙觀, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 307 (2008): 56-63;

sidered, however, is the appearance of these same concepts in the *Liji zhengyi* as well, in a passage that seeks to reconcile the variegated cosmological and ontological terminology of the Classics, their chosen commentaries, and at least one of the texts that Wei-Jin *xuanxue* characteristically took as authoritative.

The “Monthly Ordinances” [chapter of the *Liji*] comprehends the affairs of heaven and earth and *yin* and *yang*. Yet heaven and earth have the form of above and below, *yin* and *yang* have a pattern in their creating and nurturing, the sun and moon have a measure to their rotations, and the stars have constancy in their stations and astral mansions. Since we will be explaining the text, it is necessary to briefly discuss their situation. Now, Laozi says: “The *dao* gives rise to the one, the one gives rise to the two, the two give rise to the three, and the three give rise to the myriad things.” The *Yijing* says: “The *Yi* has the Great Ultimate, and this gives rise to the Two Norms.” The “*Li yun*” chapter [of the *Liji*] says: “Ritual must be based on the Great Oneness, which splits to become heaven and earth.” The *Yijing* [weft text] *Qian zao du*⁴³ says: “The Great *Yi*⁴⁴ is when *qi* has not yet appeared; the Great Beginning is the origin of *qi*; the Great Origin is the origin of form; the Great Plainness is the origin of substance.” These four all discuss what is before heaven and earth and the beginning of heaven and earth. When Laozi says that “The *dao* gives rise to the one,” his *dao*, along with the Great *Yi*, void and negative *qi* that is so-of-itself, is without images, incapable of being sought through form or grasped through analogy—when we force a name on it, we call it *dao*; when we force a kenning on it, we call it Great *Yi*.⁴⁵ The “one” in “the *dao* gives rise to the one,” then, refers to chaotic primal *qi*, which is the same as the Great Beginning, the Great Origin, and the Great Plainness—this is also the same as what is referred to as the Great Ultimate (*taiji*) in the *Yijing* and what the “*Li yun*” chapter calls the Great Oneness. The meanings of these terms are not different: they all refer to the begin-

these are the two best accounts of the *Zhengyi* cosmology I have found. Other important studies of the *Zhouyi zhengyi* include Gong Pengcheng 龔鵬程, *Kong Yingda Zhouyi zhengyi yanjiu* 孔穎達《周易正義》研究 (Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2008) and Qiao Dongyi 喬東義, “Kong Yingda de *Yi xiang guan yu shenmei yixiang de jiangou*” 孔穎達的易象觀與審美意象的建構, *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 2011.4: 50-57.

⁴³ As a “weft text” of the *Yijing*, the *Qian zao du* 乾鑿度 is likely to be a Han-dynasty composition. The editors of the *Zhengyi*, however, believed that it was written by Confucius (see *Zhouyi zhushu*, 1.7a).

⁴⁴ There is a miscopied character here in the current text of the *Liji zhushu*; 大極 here should be 太易. The *Zhouyi zhengyi* citation of the same passage (see *Zhouyi zhushu*, 1.4a) reads correctly, and the logic of this passage clearly requires 太易. For the text of the *Qian zao du*, see Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, eds., *Chōshū Isho shūsei* 重修緯書集成 (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1971-92), vol. 1, 17-68.

⁴⁵ The idea of “forcing” a name upon a reality beyond names derives from the *Laozi* 25; see Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 63.

nings of *qi* and form. “The one gives rise to the two” refers to chaotic primal *qi* splitting into two, the two being heaven and earth. This is the same as the *Yijing*’s Two Norms, and the same as the “Li yun” chapter’s “the Great Oneness splits to become heaven and earth.” “The two give rise to the three” means that humans make a third to form the Three Powers. “The three give rise to the myriad things” means that once heaven, earth, and mankind are established, the myriad things all arise in their midst.

月令者，包天地陰陽之事。然天地有上下之形，陰陽有生成之理，日月有運行之度，星辰有次舍之常。今既贊釋其文，不得不略言其趣。按老子云：道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。易云：易有大極，是生兩儀。禮運云：禮必本於大一，分而為天地。易乾鑿度云：大極者未見其氣，大初者氣之始，大始者形之始，大素者質之始。此四者，同論天地之前，及天地之始。老子云道生一，道與大易自然虛無之氣無象，不可以形求，不可以類取，強名曰道，強謂之大易也。道生一者，一則混元之氣，與大初大始大素同，又與易之大極，禮之大一，其義不殊，皆為氣形之始也。一生二者，謂混元之氣分為二，二則天地也，與易之兩儀，又與禮之大一分而為天地同也。二生三者，謂參之以人，為三才也。三生萬物者，謂天地人既定，萬物備生其間。⁴⁶

This vision, by which the *dao* precedes and gives rise to the unified *qi* of chaos, is nowhere articulated in Zheng Xuan’s commentary to the *Liji*;⁴⁷ instead, it derives from the *Zhengyi*’s attempt to reconcile the language of the *Liji* with three other texts: the *Qian zao du*, the Wang-Han commentary on the *Zhouyi*, and, most importantly, Laozi’s *Daodejing*—a markedly non-Ru text that is frequently cited as an authority throughout the *Zhengyi* series, alongside other *xuanxue* favorites like the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*. Compare now this *Liji zhengyi* passage with the most detailed cosmology of the *Zhouyi zhengyi*, which takes this same logic of emanation and more explicitly labels the *dao*—here described as “void and negative *qi*” 虛無之氣—as negativity, in opposition to all actuality.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Liji zhushu* 14.278a.

⁴⁷ In fact, Zheng Xuan’s commentary on the *Qian zao du* explicitly denies that the Great Yi gives rise to the Great Beginning; here is another instance of the *Zhengyi*’s willingness to contradict the commentators it considers authoritative. See Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi, *Chōshū Isho shūsei*, vol. 1, 24.

⁴⁸ Note that this understanding of the *dao* as negativity seems to have been common to early-Tang Classicism in general. See, for example, Lu Deming 陸德明, *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 1.74 and Jia Gongyan 賈公彥, annot., *Yili zhushu* 儀禮註疏, 1.2a.

The *Yi* has three meanings, and all are within actuality. But since actuality emerges from negativity, the logic [of the *Yi*] comprehends negativity as well. Therefore, the *Qian zao du* says: “All that has form arises from what has no form. So where do Qian and Kun [heaven and earth] come from? Thus, there are the Great *Yi*, the Great Beginning, the Great Origin, and the Great Plainness. The Great *Yi* is when *qi* has not yet appeared; the Great Beginning is the origin of *qi*; the Great Origin is the origin of form; the Great Plainness is the origin of substance. When *qi*, form, and substance are all there but have not separated, this is called chaos. Chaos means that all things are mixed together chaotically and have not yet separated. If you look at it, you will not see; listen and you will not hear; seek it and you will not grasp it. Therefore, it is called *Yi*.” From this, we know that the structure of the *Yi* comprehends both actuality and negativity, but the images of the *Yi* are only within actuality.

蓋易之三義，唯在於有。然有從无出，理則包无。故乾鑿度云：夫有形者生於无形，則乾坤安從而生？故有太易，有太初，有太始，有太素。太易者未見氣也，太初者氣之始也，太始者形之始也，太素者質之始也。氣形質具而未相離，謂之渾沌。渾沌者，言萬物相渾沌而未相離也。視之不見，聽之不聞，循之不得，故曰易也。是知易理備包有无，而易象唯在於有者。⁴⁹

As I hope is obvious, the cosmologies of both this text from the *Zhouyi zhengyi* and the preceding text from the *Liji zhengyi* are structurally the same, providing at least an initial indication that the series is not the heterogeneous hodgepodge it is often thought to be. In both cases, the *dao* is negativity, which (we see repeatedly in the *Zhouyi zhengyi*) “gives rise to” 生⁵⁰ and “controls” 制⁵¹ all actuality. In this respect, the cosmology of the *Zhengyi* series represents a faithful recounting, in its broadest outlines at least, of the cosmologies articulated by the *xuanxue* thinkers Wang Bi and Han Bo.

As Andrew Meyer points out, however, this cosmology of negativity and actuality offers little in the way of clear knowledge about how the universe works, especially in comparison with the more elaborate Handynasty cosmologies against which it was originally articulated—this, indeed, is what makes it *xuan*.⁵² And this obscurity is a feature the *Zhengyi* itself seeks to emphasize, making it clear that its deployment of the term “negativity” is itself designed precisely to deny language’s ability to accurately describe the universe’s functioning. *Wu* does not name

⁴⁹ *Zhouyi zhushu*, “*Zhouyi zhengyi xu*,” 4a.

⁵⁰ See, among many other instances, *ibid.*, 7.156b-57a.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, 7.155a.

⁵² Meyer, “The Correct Meaning,” 89.

a particular, well-demarcated reality, that is, but rather gestures toward what we cannot fully denote or comprehend. As the *Zhouyi zhengyi* explains,

[Because it contains no *yin* and no *yang*], in terms of number we call it “unity” [i.e., it contains no distinctions]; in terms of form we call it “*wu*” [i.e., it has none]; in terms of the fact that it allows for the communication of all things we call it “*dao*” [“path”]; in terms of its being subtle and unfathomable we call it “spirit”; and in terms of its according with the time and transforming we call it “*yi*” [“change”]. In sum, all of these are ways of talking about what is vacant and negative. The sages gave it names according to human affairs, following its inherent structure to establish these kennings.

以數言之謂之一，以體言之謂之無，以物得開通謂之道，以微妙不測謂之神，以應機變化謂之易。總而言之，皆虛無之謂也。聖人以人事名之，隨其義理立其稱號。⁵³

The language of “kennings” here (and in the *Liji* quote above) derives from Wang Bi’s commentary on the *Laozi*, where such heuristic designations are described as useful but limited tools for gesturing at realities that cannot be defined by a name.⁵⁴ The multiplicity of these kennings are, for Wang Bi, explicitly meant to warn us against reifying what we do not understand, an attitude that the editors of the *Zhengyi* echo in a passage we shall consider in a moment, wherein all language and all images are said to remain within the realm of *you*, and thus inevitably to betray

⁵³ *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.148a. For the sake of convenience, all quotations from the *Zhengyi* will be drawn from Ruan Yuan’s *Chongkan Songben Shisanjing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* editions (the particular editions I cite here are available for free at the *Scripta Sinica* database 漢籍電子文獻, hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw). It should be noted, however, that this edition is far from unproblematic when it comes to reconstructing the original form of the *Zhengyi* subcommentaries. For an introduction to the textual history of the series, and to what survives, see Zhang Baosan, *Wujing zhengyi yanjiu*, 28–46. The *Zhengyi* originally circulated in *danshu ben* 單疏本 that did not contain the text of the Classics themselves; for research into the fragmentary manuscripts of such editions that survive, see (among others) Jian Boxian 簡博賢, *Jin cun Tangdai jingxue yiji kao* 今存唐代經學遺籍考 (M.A. thesis, Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue, 1970), 20–82; Chen Tiefan 陳鐵凡, “Dunhuang ben Yi Shu Shi kaolie” 敦煌本易書詩考略, *Kong-Meng xuebao* 17 (1969): 149–81; Noma Fumichika, *Gokyō seigi no kenkyū: sono seiritsu to tenkai*, 211–386; and idem., *Jūsangyō chūso no kenkyū: sono gohō to denshō no katachi* 十三經注疏の研究：その語法と傳承の形 (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 2005), 287–393. Philological research has revealed significant levels of variation between early texts and Ruan Yuan’s edition, but nothing systematic enough to affect the conclusions of this paper.

⁵⁴ I take the idea of “gestural language” from Ashmore, “Word and Gesture.”

that which is not “actuality.”⁵⁵ A text like the *Zhouyi* can thus describe fairly well how the manifest aspects of the universe in fact work,⁵⁶ and how we should respond to their functioning, but no text can explain why they work that way.⁵⁷

The result of this skepticism of language’s purchase on ultimate reality is that the Classics themselves become problematic as texts. In using the language and the graphs that make up the *Zhouyi*, for example, the *Zhengyi* editors stress that the sages had to depart from negativity—which is their basic nature as sages—and temporarily participate in actuality.⁵⁸ Here we begin to see something of the *Zhengyi*’s characteristic inversion of previous *xuanxue* arguments. For Wang Bi and Han Bo, words may be imprecise, but they can be useful in directing us to what is beyond them; through words, we can learn what the *dao* is not, and also how to approach it.⁵⁹ The *Zhengyi*, however, tends to discourage its readers from trying to make such an approach upon the obscure, stressing that claims that the *dao* can be fathomed refer to the sages alone. Consider the differences, for example, between Han Bo’s explication of the following *Zhouyi* passage and that of the *Zhengyi* subcommentary:

⁵⁵ *Zhouyi zhushu*, 1.4a.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, 7.154a.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, 1.15a and 7.152b-53a.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 7.149a: “In their transformation of things, the sages cannot make their substance completely *wu*, because they have the worries of planning and organizing; the *dao* makes its function by being void and empty, having no affairs and nothing it does (*wuwei*). It does not have the same function as the sage, and thus does not have the worries of planning and organizing... The *dao* has no mind and no traces; sages have no minds but have traces. Thus sages can have a substance that is close to the *dao*, but their traces function within the realm of actuality” 聖人化物，不能全無以為體，猶有經營之憂。道則虛無為用，無事無為，不與聖人同用，有經營之憂也 ... 道則無心無跡，聖人則亦無心有跡。聖人能體附於道，其跡以有為用云。The concept of “traces” derives from Guo Xiang’s commentary on the *Zhuangzi*; see, for instance, *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, 5.304-5.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Rudolf Wagner’s summation of Wang Bi’s achievement, by which Wang Bi’s “main discovery was the intrinsic ‘darkness’ of the ‘that by which,’ *suoyi* 所以, the ten thousand kinds of entities are, and [his] main contribution was to discover this darkness not as a sad limitation of the human mind and of human language in their capacity to conceptualize something excessively complex but as a constituent feature of the That-by-which itself” (*Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China*, 1). Wang Bi’s “*Zhouyi lüeli*” 周易略例 is even more optimistic about our capacity to learn to appreciate the obscure structure of the cosmos. For this text—which the *Zhengyi* editors left out, perhaps pointedly, of their subcommentary to Wang’s *Zhouyi* commentary—see Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 591-620; for a translation, see Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 25-46.

Zhouyi: What *yin* and *yang* do not fathom is called “spirit” [per the above, another word for *dao*, *wu*].

Zhengyi, on the Classic: The myriad things under heaven are all created and completed by *yin* and *yang*. What is meant by “spirit” is that at base, the principles through which all this comes about cannot be fathomed.

Han Bo, on the Classic: Spirit is the ultimate of transformation; it is a word for that which is miraculous in the myriad things, that which cannot be sought through form—therefore the Classic says that it is what *yin* and *yang* do not fathom.⁶⁰ Once I tried to explain this in the following way: The revolution of the Two Norms and the movement of the Myriad Things—how could there be anything that makes them behave this way? None do not transform in isolation (*duhua*) within the great vacuity, suddenly creating themselves.⁶¹ There is no self that creates them, but according to their own logic they respond mysteriously of themselves; transformation has no master, but the numbers simply revolve darkly of themselves. Therefore, since we do not know why things are this way, we figuratively designate this with the word “spirit.” Therefore, the Two Norms begin from the Great Ultimate, which means that all change in the cosmos finds its ultimate source in the “spiritual.” Only those who “know what Heaven does”⁶² can exhaust the logic of things and embody transformation, sitting and forgetting, abandoning brightness. By being completely vacant and responding excellently, they can be called *dao*; by not thinking but mysteriously observing, they can be named “spiritual.” They rely upon the *dao* and become the same as the *dao*; they make use of the spiritual and thus blend darkly with the spiritual.

Zhouyi: 陰陽不測之謂神。

Zhengyi: 天下萬物皆由陰陽，或生或成。本其所由之理不可測量之謂神也。

Han Bo: 神也者，變化之極，妙萬物而為言，不可以形詰者也，故曰陰陽不測。嘗試論之曰：原夫兩儀之運，萬物之動，豈有使之然哉？莫不獨化於大虛，故兩而自造矣。造之非我，理自玄應；化之无主，數自冥運。故不知所以然，而況之神。是以明兩儀以太極為始，言變化而稱極乎神也。夫唯知天之所為者，窮理體化，坐忘遺照，至虛而善應，則以道為稱；不思而玄覽，則以神為名。蓋資道而同乎道，由神而冥於神也。

⁶⁰ This sentence could perhaps be punctuated differently: “Spirit is the ultimate subtlety of transformation; when putting the myriad things into words, that which cannot be examined through form” 神也者，變化之極妙，萬物而為言，不可以形詰者也。 In the above rendering, however, I follow all punctuated editions of the text that I have found (see, for instance, *Zhouyi zhushu*, *Shisanjing zhushu zhengluben* 十三經註疏整理本 edition, *Shisanjing zhushu zhengl wei yuanhui* 《十三經註疏》整理委員會 ed. [Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000], 7.319). This rendering seems to me better because of the corresponding phrase “all change in the cosmos finds its ultimate source in the spiritual” 言變化而稱極乎神也 later on in the same passage.

⁶¹ Reading the variant 數爾 / 故兩。

⁶² This appears to be a reference to the *Zhuangzi*, another crucial text for Six Dynasties explorations of the obscure. See *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, 3.134; *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 6.224.

Here, as elsewhere,⁶³ Han Bo seems to suggest that knowing that we cannot understand the cosmos through our normal (“bright”) cognitive functions can help us to understand it in better ways, perhaps by what seems an almost meditative practice of allowing the *dao* to work through us. The *Zhengyi*, however, reinterprets Han’s comments as pertaining only to a particular political context.

Zhengyi, on Han Bo: When Han says, “They rely upon the *dao* and become the same as the *dao*,” he is referring to the sages establishing teachings. These teachings take their material from the *dao*, and effect transformation through non-doing (*wuwei*). After these teachings have been established for some time, then the sages can be at one with the *dao*, *wu* both within and without. When Han says, “they go by the spiritual and thus blend darkly with the spiritual,” he is saying that when the sages establish teachings, they model the unfathomability of the spiritual. They have no form and no clear direction in handing down their teaching, so after a long time, this teaching is gradually able to merge darkly with the spiritual, becoming unfathomable. This all refers to the beginning of a sagely reign. At that time, although the sages model the *dao* and model the spiritual in having no constant substance, they cannot be completely *wu*. Only after having their practices established for a long time can they arrive at being completely negative and thus unfathomable.

云蓋資道而同乎道者，此謂聖人設教。資取乎道，行無為之化，積久而遂同於道，內外皆無也。云由神而冥於神也者，言聖人設教，法此神之不測，無體無方，以垂於教。久能積漸而冥合於神，不可測也。此皆謂聖人初時雖法道法神以為無體，未能全無。但行之不已，遂至全無不測。⁶⁴

The *Zhengyi*’s interjection here that Han must be discussing the beginning of a sagely reign highlights the urgency of its denial that people besides sages—ideally, sage kings—ought to seek to embody or understand *wu*, an implication that is not found in either the thought of Wang Bi or Han Bo. Neither Wang nor Han suggests that others besides sages cannot learn to appreciate and accord with the *dao*, at least to some degree; for Wang, indeed, Laozi was not a sage, and yet wrote one of the most important explanations of its character. And while there is no question that the thought of Wang Bi, at least, had political implications at its core, the idea that sages become *wu* by “establishing teachings” is entirely foreign to his thought, which instead emphasizes that rulers

⁶³) See *Zhouyi zhushu* 7.148b, 7.154b-55a, 7.156a-b, and 8.171a, among other examples.

⁶⁴) *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.149a-b.

should embody negativity by avoiding taking determinate positions.⁶⁵ For the *Zhengyi* here, by contrast, sages become *wu* by temporarily departing from negativity through the establishment of teachings that will, after a sufficient interval, allow their shaping activity to become unfathomable to their populace. Although such teachings involve words and images and thus belong inevitably to the realm of “actuality,”⁶⁶ once they have been established for a long time, they come to seem “so-of-themselves” (*ziran*), to the point where the people follow them without feeling any compulsion. Thereafter, the sage-ruler both embodies *wu* “on the inside” (that is, in his having “no mind” [*wu xin* 無心], as all sages do),⁶⁷ and appears *wu* (i.e., void, vacant, quiescent, unfathomable) “on the outside” as well.

For the *Zhengyi*, the Classics are the remnants of the sages’ teachings. The *Zhouyi* itself started out this way, as an entry into the realm of “actuality” that sought to create a system whereby human society would function smoothly without the active intervention of sage kings. This system is the cosmos itself, as it is described in, and thus in a sense created by, the *Zhouyi*.⁶⁸

The truth⁶⁹ of the *Yi* contains both *wu* and *you*, but the images of the *Yi* are only within actuality: this is because when the sages created the *Yi*, they did so at base

⁶⁵ For Wang Bi’s political thought, see Wagner, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy*, 148-216. Wagner focuses, as most studies of Wang Bi do, on his *Daodejing* commentary; the political implications of his *Zhouyi* commentary are far more complex.

⁶⁶ *Zhouyi zhushu*, 1.4a.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 7.149a.

⁶⁸ To be clear, when I suggest that the *Zhouyi* created the “cosmos,” I am suggesting that it created the orderly, coherent system that Chinese culture has learned to recognize it to be and sustain it as being. The “universe,” as various states of *qi*, preexisted the *Zhouyi*, of course. But without the normative culture that Fu Xi initiated, it would be prone to disorder. For more on this point, see note 74 below.

⁶⁹ The word *li* 理, translated here as “truth,” was an important term of art in *xuanxue* and medieval Buddhism, often referring either to the inherent patterning of the world when it is allowed to be “so-of-itself,” or to the absolute truth of reality. In this sense, however, the term is generally used without a modifier; since the phrase here is “the *li* of the *Yi*” 易[之]理, it is not entirely clear whether we should read here something more like “the logic of the *Yi*” as a book. For an exhaustive history of the term *li* in the early and medieval periods, see Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought; Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2012) and *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2013).

to provide a teaching, and what a teaching provides it will basically provide within actuality. Therefore the “Xici” [section of the *Zhouyi*] says: “What is above form is called the *dao*”; the *dao* is negativity. “What is within form is called vessels,” and vessels are *you*. Therefore, when we speak about the *Yi* from the perspective of *wu*, it lies in the substance of the *dao*; when we speak about it from the perspective of *you*, it lies in the functioning of vessels.... Moreover, the *Yi* is imaging, and there is no thing that cannot be imaged. The sages created the *Yi* in order to provide a teaching, and this is why the *Qian zao du* says, “Confucius said: In the time of great antiquity, people had as yet no distinctions among them, and the myriad things were not yet differentiated, and did not yet serve as clothing, food, vessels, and tools. The sage king Fu Xi then looked up and observed images in Heaven, looked down and observed models in the earth, and looked in between and saw what was appropriate for the myriad things. Then he created the eight trigrams, in order to communicate the power of spiritual beings, and in order to categorize the characters of the myriad things. Therefore, the *Yi* is that which separates heaven and earth,⁷⁰ orders human relationships, and makes clear the way of the king. Thus, Fu Xi drew the eight trigrams, establishing the five [phases of] *qi* in order to establish the five virtues that correspond to them; and he imaged and modeled Heaven and Earth, making *yin* and *yang* accord so as to set in order the relationships of ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife. He measured out the seasons and established what was appropriate for them, created fishing nets [and plows] so that there would be fishing and plowing, and gave them to the people for their use. At this point the people were ordered, rulers and parents were honored, ministers and children were obedient, all things were harmonious, and all were at peace with their natures.” This is the basic meaning of their creating the *Yi* to provide a teaching.

易理備包有无而易象唯在於有者，蓋以聖人作易，本以垂教，教之所備，本備於有。故繫辭云：形而上者謂之道，道即无也。形而下者謂之器，器即有也。故以无言之，存乎道體；以有言之，存乎器用…且易者，象也。物无不可象也。作易所以垂教者，即乾鑿度云：孔子曰：上古之時，人民無別，羣物未殊，未有衣食器用之利。伏羲乃仰觀象於天，俯觀法於地，中觀萬物之宜。於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。故易者所以斷天地，理人倫，而明王道。是以畫八卦，建五氣，以立五常之行；象法乾坤，順陰陽，以正君臣父子夫婦之義。度時制宜，作為罔罟，以佃以漁，以贍民用。於是人民乃治，君親以尊，臣子以順，羣生和洽，各安其性。此其作易垂教之本意也。⁷¹

⁷⁰ Note that surviving versions of the *Qian zao du* with Zheng Xuan's commentary read either “govern heaven and earth” or “continue heaven and earth” (經 / 斷 or 繼 / 斷) here. This is one of several ways in which the *Zhengyi*'s interpretation of this text seems to be different from Zheng Xuan's. See Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi, *Chōshū Isho shūsei*, vol. 1, 20.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.4a-b.

The basic point that the *Zouyi zhengyi* is arguing in this passage is that although the teaching of the *Yi* is provided within the realm of *you*, it is based upon the inherent principles of *wu*: when we follow the teachings prescribed by it, our understanding may remain limited to actuality, but we are nonetheless in accord with the *dao*. According with negativity, however, involves for most of us not sitting in a meditative forgetting (as Han Bo tends to suggest), but rather partaking in a whole system of actuality, one that was in fact created for the first time by the sage king Fu Xi as a means of ordering his society. Before Fu Xi created the figures of the *Yi*, his populace saw no distinctions between themselves and no distinctions between things: they lived in a state of undifferentiated chaos, with no heaven, no earth, no tools, and no social roles. Fu Xi's intervention was to conceptualize the cosmos and encode that conceptualization in the written forms of the trigrams and the hexagrams, so that others could perceive what he directed them to see. Equipped with the *Yi*, his subjects could see a cosmos where before they had seen chaos: they knew heaven above and earth below, recognized *yin* and *yang*, and understood that these cosmic regularities prescribed normative meanings for their own relationships (lord is *yang* with respect to subject; wife *yin* with respect to husband, etc.).⁷² In recognizing the cosmos that Fu Xi had allowed them to see, they thus learned to behave in a way conducive to the creation of an orderly, flourishing society, and thereby to the maintenance of an orderly cosmos. And in time, Fu Xi's cosmos would come to seem "natural" to his populace, and they would forget that it was he who had first directed them to be respectful and subservient. This is what the *Zhouyi zhengyi* means, later on, when it says that "only sages can make the *dao* of heaven and earth operate and bring together the achievements of heaven and earth... for they conceal their traces and hide their function, their affairs being in the realm of negativity... [such that people] only see their nurturing achievement, but do not see the means by which they nurture, just as they see the strength of the sun and moon in shining, but not the means by which they shine."⁷³

⁷²) It may be worth noting that, again, this is not how Zheng Xuan reads the *Qian zao du* passage. Instead, Zheng argues that Fu Xi invented the hexagrams because the natural harmony that prevailed before his time had begun to break down; the teaching that the *Yi* provided thus did not create understanding so much as it forestalled incipient misunderstanding. See Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi, *Chōshū Isho shūsei*, vol. 1, 19-20.

⁷³) *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.144b. For a very similar set of arguments, see *Liji zhushu* 21.422b-23a.

In arguing that “the logic of the *Yi* contains both *you* and *wu*,” and in suggesting that the governance of the sage kings operated “in the realm of negativity,” the *Zhengyi* wants to have it both ways: both denying that we (most of us) can have any direct understanding of why the cosmos works as it does, and also affirming that we can nonetheless live in a society that is rooted in the *dao*.⁷⁴ The cosmos that “This Culture of Ours” has taught us to see, in other words, is a construction of the ancient sages, one that does not manifest their secrets; at the same time, it is itself a work of negativity, and it is normative for us, the world upon which our society must be based. This duality often explains the ambiguity of the *Zhengyi*’s language when it describes the relationship between the text of the *Yi* and the cosmos that it both represents and creates.

The *Yi* is *xiang* [representing, or imaging]; its lines are *xiao* [imitating, or effecting]. The sages had what it takes to observe above and examine below, and so they *xiang*’ed Heaven and Earth and nurtured all kinds of beings; they had what it takes to make the clouds circulate and the rain spread, and so they *xiao*’ed the four seasons in order to give birth to the myriad things. If one follows the *Yi*, then the Two Norms [that is, *yin* and *yang*, also the broken and unbroken lines of the hexagrams] will be ordered and the many things harmonious; if one goes against it, then the Six Positions [of the hexagrams] will be overturned and the five phases will be in disorder. Therefore, a king in his every movement should take as his standard the Way of Heaven and Earth [that the *Yi* provides], and not let any single thing lose its nature; he must harmonize with the proper course of *yin* and *yang*, and not let any single thing receive harm from them. Therefore, with the *Yi* one can complete and guide the universe and communicate with the spiritual beings. It is the means by which a dynasty might have no end, the means by which its fame might never decay. If its *dao* were not extremely mysterious and wonderful, how could it participate in these things? It is the great creating of Qian and Kun [names,

⁷⁴ See *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.147b-48a: “To completely know the myriad things, to take joy in heaven and know its command, to pacify things on their land and make them honest in their benevolence, to mold and to circumscribe heaven and earth, and to completely bring to fruition the myriad things, continuing on day and night: this is in all cases the accomplishment of spirit. Those who created the *Yi* went by spirit that is so-of-itself (*ziran*) to create a teaching. They wanted to make ‘sages’ [here, later rulers] use this spiritual *dao* throughout the empire. Even though this is the work of the spiritual, it is also the work of the ‘sages’ [who follow the *Yi*]” 知周萬物，樂天知命，安土敦仁，範圍天地，曲成萬物，通乎晝夜，此皆神之功用也。作易者，因自然之神以垂教，欲使聖人用此神道，以被天下。雖是神之所為，亦是聖人所為。

respectively, for the first graph and heaven, and the second graph and earth], and that which gives benefit to the people.

夫易者象也，爻者效也。聖人有以仰觀俯察，象天地而育羣品；雲行雨施，效四時以生萬物。若用之以順，則兩儀序而百物和；若行之以逆，則六位傾而五行亂。故王者動必則天地之道，不使一物失其性；行必協陰陽之宜，不使一物受其害。故能彌綸宇宙，酬酢神明，宗社所以無窮，風聲所以不朽。非夫道極玄妙，孰能與於此乎？斯乃乾坤之大造，生靈之所益也。⁷⁵

A number of the crucial terms in this passage are ambiguous in a way that is difficult to represent in translation. To *xiang*, for example, is either to give form to something or to make an image of it;⁷⁶ to *xiao* is either to imitate something, or to render it effective.⁷⁷ In the first sentences of this passage, both senses of both terms are in play, for the *Yi* is at once the book that the sages wrote, imaging and imitating the universe's transformations, and at the same time also the normative transforming of the universe itself.⁷⁸ Similarly, the terms Two Norms and Six Positions refer both to structures in the world and also to the lines and positions of the trigrams and hexagrams that form the core of the *Zhouyi*. The king, therefore, must pattern his behavior upon the cosmos in order to preserve the cosmos; if he fails to do so, the regularities that the *Zhouyi* describes and prescribes will not obtain.⁷⁹ For the cosmos to be the normative source that it must be for the maintenance of a stable and harmonious society, in other words, it is necessary for us to see it as such.

⁷⁵ Ibid., "Zhouyi zhengyi xu," 2a.

⁷⁶ This ambiguity, which is essential to the Zhengyi's interpretation of the text, is discussed more clearly at *ibid.*, 1.11b and 8.166b, the latter of which reads: "If [Fu Xi] had not made the eight trigrams, then the virtue of spirit would be blocked and hidden. Once he created them, if they are taken as models and imaged, then they will cause the virtue of spirit to freely circulate. As for 'categorizing the truth of the myriad things,' if he had not made the *Yi*, then the truth of things would have been impossible to know. Now that he has made the eight trigrams in order to categorize and give images to the myriad things, the truth of these things can all be known" 若不作八卦，此神明之德，閉塞幽隱。既作八卦，則而象之，是通達神明之德也。以類萬物之情者，若不作易，物情難知，今作八卦以類象萬物之情，皆可見也。

⁷⁷ For the possibility of this latter reading, see *ibid.*, 7.158b.

⁷⁸ In this respect, the Zhengyi's interpretation of the *Yi* is close to the reading of the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 in Willard Peterson, "Making Connections: 'Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations' of the *Book of Change*," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42 (1982): 67-116.

⁷⁹ For this point, see Meyer, "The Correct Meaning," 123 and 144.

Much the same point is made, again, in the *Liji zhengyi*. When the “Yueji” 樂記 chapter of the *Liji* says that “music is the harmonizing of heaven and earth,” the *Zhengyi* comments,

This says that those who created music [i.e., the sages] *fa*'ed and *xiang*'ed the harmonious *qi* of heaven and earth. Since they made their music harmonious, therefore heaven and earth also became harmonious. When the previous section of the text said that “Ritual is the separation of heaven and earth,” it was saying that those who instituted ritual [the sages] *fa*'ed and *xiang*'ed this separation; and since their institution of ritual got its proper measure, it was also capable of making it so that heaven and earth were differentiated. When this section of the text says that “Music is the harmonizing of heaven and earth,”⁸⁰ it is [similarly talking about] *fa*'ing the harmonious *qi* of heaven and earth.

言作樂者，法象天地之和氣。若作樂和則天地亦和。前經云：禮者天地之別，言制禮者法象之也。若制禮得所，亦能使天地別異。此經樂者樂之不和，則是法天地之和氣。⁸¹

Here again the *Zhengyi* is using pointedly ambiguous language. Just as to *xiang*, we noted above, is either to give form to something or to make an image of it, so too can the word *fa* 法 either mean to provide a model *for* something or to take one's model *from* it. Music and ritual, in other words, both take their normative forms from the cosmos as it should be, and they are also responsible for making sure that the cosmos remains what it should. The translation above, in fact, is more positive than the original, in which the second sentence, like its counterpart in the discussion of ritual, is actually in the conditional: “*if* we make music that is harmonious, *then*...” The implication is clearly that it is possible for the universe to slip from its normative order; indeed, it is almost guaranteed to do so if we do not follow the principles laid out for us by the sages. As the *Zhengyi* subcommentary to the “Yueji” says a few lines earlier:

Only sages know how to bring together heaven and earth, and thus they can institute ritual and create music without any mistakes. If one without sagely under-

⁸⁰ The received text is garbled here due to a copying error, though the original sense is not difficult to reconstruct. See *Liji zhushu*, *Shisanjing zhushu zhengliben* edition, 37.1278, which emends 此經樂者樂之不和 to 此經樂者天地之和, following the reading of several early editions. As Ruan Yuan notes, other editions read 此經樂者樂之和.

⁸¹ *Liji zhushu*, 37.672a.

standing tries to do so, he will certainly make mistakes. If one mistakenly institutes ritual, then venerated and lowly will be confused and disordered, just as if one were mistaken about identifying the earth [from heaven], and disordered high and low.... The previous section spoke of the truth of music, the offices of music, the substance of ritual, and the institution of ritual. This was what the Former Kings alone had. The Classic is telling us that the Former Kings alone were capable of having these four things.

惟聖人識合天地者，則制禮作樂不誤。若非聖識則必誤。誤制禮則尊卑淫亂也，猶地體誤則亂於高下也 ... 前經論樂之情，樂之官，禮之質，禮之制，是先王所專有也。言先王獨能專此四事。⁸²

Human Nature and the Sages

To summarize, then, both the *Zhouyi zhengyi* and *Liji zhengyi* focus their cosmology around an obscurity at the heart of things. This obscurity is the source of the manifest cosmos, and it is capable of being properly understood only by sages, who translate their understanding and embodiment of this obscurity into representational forms and governmental actions that bring society into harmony with its mysterious patterns. In the words of the *Zhengyi* subcommentary to the “Quli” 曲禮 chapter of the *Liji*,

The *dao* is a name for that which opens the communication between things and saves them. All things go by it and come into actuality. It gives rise to them but takes no credit for them, gives them actuality but does not brag about it. It is void and negative, silent and quiescent, going along with things and transforming, and thus being that which gives rise to heaven and earth, so subtle and miraculous that it is unfathomable. Sages are capable of being at one with the nature of heaven and earth, and since their loving nurturance is like [the *dao*], we [also] call it *dao*. This refers to the constant *dao*.

今謂道者，開通濟物之名，萬物由之而有，生之不為功，有之不自伐，虛無寂寞，隨物推移，則天地所生，微妙不測。聖人能同天地之性，其愛養如此，謂之為道。此則常道。⁸³

Here, the “Quli” chapter is discussing the government of the earliest sage kings, which “modeled itself upon the *dao* that is the Great Yi [i.e., negativity], and put it into practice ... [through] Fu Xi’s drawing the

⁸²⁾ Ibid., 37.669b-70a.

⁸³⁾ Ibid., 1.16b.

eight trigrams [of the *Yijing*].” For reasons that the *Zhengyi* does not explain, however, later sages encountered ages wherein the “constant *dao*” could not be practiced in precisely this way, and so they had instead to practice other virtues: first charismatic power (*de* 德), then benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), and finally ritual (*li* 禮). The sages, however, never changed: “sages always embody in their persons [the possibility of] these five things, so when they meet with a situation that can be *dao*’ed, they practice the *dao*; when they meet with a situation that can be *de*’ed, they practice charismatic power; when they meet with a situation that can be *ren*’ed, they practice benevolence... in each case following the time and responding appropriately to things.” As a result, even though the forms of sagely governance change over time, we should not imagine that “in the ages they practiced benevolence and righteousness, that they did not match with the *dao* or practice charismatic power as well.”⁸⁴ All sagely governance is the operation of the *dao*, which is itself defined by its subtly and miraculously adapting itself to things without a fixed form.

The sages are capable of responding with perfect appropriateness because, as the *Maoshi zhengyi* says, “sages embody negativity (*ti wu* 體無) and thus cannot be named by the name ‘human’ (*buke yi renming er ming* 不可以人名而名).”⁸⁵ Here, the editors are in fact quoting Wang Bi in order to explicate a comment by Zheng Xuan, again displaying their attempt throughout the series to synthesize their chosen commentators. And though this is among the series’ most radical articulations of the difference between sages and normal people, that difference is marked elsewhere as well. In the *Zhengyi*’s subcommentary to Kong Anguo’s preface to the *Shangshu*, for example, we read that the primal sage Fu Xi had “a snake’s body with a human head”; the sage king Yandi 炎帝, sired by a “numinous dragon” (*shenlong* 神龍), had a “human body and an ox’s head”; and the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, whose mother was impregnated by a flash of light surrounding the Big Dipper, had “horns and a dragon face.”⁸⁶ Not all of the sage kings were so visibly distinct from other sorts of humans, of course, especially in later ages; they remained,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1.16b.

⁸⁵ *Maoshi zhushu*, 19.713a.

⁸⁶ *Shangshu zhushu*, 1.5b-6b. For the series’ other discussions of the strange physical forms of the early sages, see *Zhouyi zhushu*, 8.167a and *Liji zhushu*, 14.281b.

however, distinct in terms of their underlying negativity. As the *Maoshi zhengyi* explains in the continuation of the passage citing Wang Bi, “only a sage can exhaust the deep secret (*ao* 奧) of *Qian* and *Kun*; King Wen 文王 [a sage] could thus do this, but King Tai 大王 [a great worthy] could not.”⁸⁷

In its subcommentaries to the *Liji* and the *Shangshu*, the *Zhengyi* ranks human capacities and characters on a nine-rung ladder, from sages down to fools.⁸⁸ In its commentary to the first lines of the “*Zhongyong*” 中庸 chapter of the *Liji*, for example, the *Zhengyi* explains the statement “Heaven’s command is called human nature”—a line that would become crucial to the radically different reading of the Classics given by latter-day Neo-Confucians from Li Ao 李翱 (772-841) to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) and beyond⁸⁹—as stating that different people are fated to have different capacities for understanding.

Heaven at base has no form, and it gives no verbal commands. It is only that humans resonate with what is so-of-itself (*ziran*) and are born, and there are among them virtuous and foolish, auspicious and inauspicious, as if heaven had given a command that made them that way; this is why one’s nature is called, “the command of heaven.” Laozi says, “The *dao* at base has no name, so we force a name upon it in calling it *dao*.” It is only that humans of themselves resonate and are born, and among us there are strong and soft, good and bad; some of us are benevolent, others righteous, others polite, others wise, others trustworthy. All of this is what is so of itself for our heaven-given natures.... In resonating with the five phases, which in human beings become these five constant virtues, those that receive a full complement of pure *qi* become sages, and those who receive a scanty quotient of murky *qi* become fools. From the sage on down, and from the fool on up, people receive more or less; this cannot be talked about as one, so people are split into nine ranks. Confucius said, “Only the wisest at the top and the most foolish at the bottom cannot change.” Beyond these two, people are changed by the things that their minds pursue, therefore the *Lunyu* says, “Our natures are close, but we become distant through habit.” This is referring to the people in the middle seven ranks.

⁸⁷ *Maoshi zhushu*, 19.713a.

⁸⁸ See *Shangshu zhushu* 4.61a.

⁸⁹ For Li Ao’s reading of the “*Zhongyong*,” see T.H. Barrett, *Li Ao: Buddhist, Taoist, or Neo-Confucian* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992). For Zhu Xi’s, see Daniel K. Gardner, *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 107-30.

天本無體，亦無言語之命。但人感自然而生，有賢愚吉凶，若天之付命，遣使之然，故云天命。老子云：道本無名，強名之曰道。但人自然感生，有剛柔好惡，或仁或義或禮或知或信，是天性自然…但感五行，在人為五常，得其清氣備者則為聖人，得其濁氣簡者則為愚人。降聖以下，愚人以上，所稟或多或少，不可言一，故分為九等。孔子云：唯上智與下愚不移。二者之外，逐物移矣。故論語云：性相近，習相遠也。亦據中人七等也。⁹⁰

According to the *Zhengyi* here, each of us is born with a different nature, the result of a complex set of conditions in the resonance of universal *qi* surrounding our conception and birth.⁹¹ Through education and experience, most of us can become either better or worse than we start out; sages, however, are born with “a full complement of pure *qi*” that guarantees that they will become sages, no matter what their experiences or their education are like. And though the rest of us are malleable to one degree or another, as the *Zhengyi* says later in the same chapter, we are not capable of becoming sages.

To work hard at imitating the utmost integrity [of heaven] is the *dao* of mankind (*ren zhi dao* 人之道)… But when it comes to “integration is the *dao* of heaven,” only a sage is capable of this. This refers to not working hard and yet naturally doing the right thing, not thinking and naturally getting it right, at ease and without concern and yet naturally hitting the target of the *dao*. This is because sages’ nature matches with the *dao* of heaven and what is so-of-itself (*ziran*).

人能勉力學此至誠，是入之道也…誠者天之道也，天之道也唯聖人能然。謂不勉勵而自中當於善，不思慮而自得於善，從容間暇而自中乎道。以聖人性合於天道自然故云。⁹²

Regular humans and sages, that is, have different “ways”: it is for them to always be right, and for us to imitate (*xue* 學) what they do. Unlike us, sages are described (in the *Liji zhengyi* and the *Shangshu zhengyi*) as “born knowing it” (*sheng er zhi zhi* 生而知之); (in the *Zhouyi zhengyi*) as “having no minds,” as “having reached the extreme of negative spirituality, and when it comes to the *dao* of transformation, mysteriously

⁹⁰ *Liji zhushu*, 52.879a-b.

⁹¹ See *ibid.*, 52.879b-880a. This nine-rung ladder is not original to the *Zhengyi*; according to John Makeham, it first appears in transmitted sources in Huang Kan’s *xuanxue* subcommentary on the *Analects*, though it has intellectual roots in the Nine Grades System by which candidates were ranked for official office in the Han, as well as in the thought of Wang Chong 王充 (27–c. 100). See Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators*, 115–17, 156–69.

⁹² *Liji zhushu*, 53.894b.

connecting with it completely,” and as being “the only ones capable of understanding the *dao* (*wu dao* 悟道)”; and (in the *Liji zhengyi*) as “differing from humans in their numinous brightness (*shenming* 神明)” — this last description being another citation of Wang Bi (this time unmarked) within a subcommentary on Zheng Xuan.⁹³ All the rest of us, who are not sages, are to some degree limited by the unbalanced character of our inborn inclinations. Those who are given to benevolence, for example, see the *dao* as benevolent, and those who are wise see it as wisdom, leading each to get bogged down in a limited vision.⁹⁴

When the “Zhongyong” says that “following human nature is called *dao*” and “the *dao* is something that cannot be departed from even for a moment,” therefore, the *Zhengyi* does not take these statements as an affirmation of the omnipresence of the *dao* in all our lives (as would Zhu Xi, for example),⁹⁵ but rather as a warning about the necessity of expanding the individual natures we are all given. Just as we saw in the last section that heaven and earth could go awry if music and ritual were instituted by non-sages, so too could human society go radically off the rails without the guidance of such superior beings, who are capable of guiding what is good but unbalanced in our natures to better ends.

When the text refers to “the *dao*” and to it being “something that cannot be departed from even for a moment,” it means that the sages practice benevolence, righteousness, ritual, wisdom, and trustworthiness in order to teach and transform [their people]. The *dao* here is like a road (*daolu*), for the *dao* makes the different natures of various people open up and communicate successfully with one another, just as a road allows for humans to communicate with one another. When people travel, they should not leave the road even for a moment, for if they do, they get into difficulty and do not get through to one another; this is just how if one departs from the *dao* of goodness for even a moment, disasters will arise to afflict one’s person.

⁹³ See, respectively, *ibid.*, 52.888a-89a; *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.149a; *ibid.*, 7.147b; *ibid.*, 7.148b; and *Liji zhushu*, 7.131b. The idea that sages are different from normal people in their “numinous brightness” comes from an anecdote about Wang Bi recorded in a note in *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), 28.795, but it becomes a commonplace in Southern-Dynasties *xuanxue*. See, for example, the preface to Huang Kan’s *Lunyu jijie yishu*, “Lunyu yishu xu,” 1.

⁹⁴ *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.148b.

⁹⁵ See Zhu Xi 朱熹, annot., *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 17-18.

道也者不可須臾離也者，此謂聖人脩行仁義禮知信以為教化。道猶道路也。道者開通性命，猶如道路開通於人。人行於道路不可須臾離也，若離道則礙難不通，猶善道須臾離棄則身有患害而生也。⁹⁶

The sages, in other words, create a *dao* for the human world that allows the variously problematic predilections of its members to balance and broaden one another. They do this by practicing the five central virtues themselves to provide a model for their populations to copy, and also through instituting cultural forms like ritual and poetry, which allow them to “carefully control what external forces stir their people,” thus guiding the development of their populations’ characters in directions salubrious to the flourishing of society.⁹⁷ In this respect, ritual serves as “a dike built to prevent mountain-topping floods, or [as] the bit and whip used to drive the kind of horse that would overturn one’s carriage.”⁹⁸ Just as the *Zhouyi* was designed to create a coherent, functioning cosmos out of what would otherwise be a chaos, in other words, so too does the sagely institution of ritual work to forestall the fall back into chaos that would occur if we all followed the natural inclinations with which we are born.

⁹⁶ *Liji zhushu*, 52.879b.

⁹⁷ The source passage is *ibid.*, 37.666b-67a, but the idea is one of the most crucial, and most frequently repeated, of the subcommentary series. See also *ibid.*, 37.663b: “When people are born, they are quiescent: this is their heaven-given nature. Their nature is originally still and silent, and it does not contain the six passions. The arising of the six passions comes about through being stirred to movement through resonance with external things. Therefore, it is said [that these passions are] not of the nature. We can know that they are not of the nature in this way: if you bring a person into contact with affairs correlated to the six passions, he will definitely follow what he comes into contact with and move. Thus, we know that it is not his original nature.... Since the six passions move according to what is encountered, and are not directed by heaven-given nature, therefore the sages of previous ages who were in positions of authority created correct rituals and correct music in order to prevent [deviant passions]. They did not want bad things from the external world to stir their subjects” 人生而靜，天之性也。性本靜寂，無此六事，六事之生，由應感外物而動，故云非性也。所以知非性者，今設取一人，以此六事觸之，言此人必隨觸而動。故知非本性也。... 既六事隨見而動，非關其本性，故先代聖人在上制於正禮正樂以防之，不欲以外境惡事感之。It should be noted that the process supposedly works through a complex system of correlative resonance, by which emotions, events, and actions are linked through the sort of *qi* that they embody.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, “*Liji zhengyi xu*,” 3a-b.

Institutions and Classics

So far, most of our citations have derived from the *Zhouyi zhengyi* and the *Liji zhengyi*, the two most explicitly theoretical of the Five Classics. The same orientations we have traced thus far are also visible, however, in the other subcommentaries as well, and in particular in the way each responds to problems raised by a vision of sages as, by their nature, different from the rest of us and capable therefore of mediating a crucial mystery that we cannot understand. The first such problem is that, since the wisdom of the sages is beyond communication, the Classics that record their words threaten to become useless husks. The second is that the Classics that record the sages' words do not always seem to manifest transcendent understanding, since they sometimes involve important lacunae and include apparently human admissions of ignorance. The third is that not all of the Classics were, in fact, written by sages, and that their embodiment of such transcendent teachings is thus inherently suspect. It would seem indicative of the editors' awareness of the potential heterogeneity of the series and their efforts at consistency that they take up these questions consistently in the introductions to the *Shangshu zhengyi*, the *Chunqiu zhengyi*, and the *Maoshi zhengyi*, each of which thus responds to potential objections to the coherence of the Classics, as well as to longstanding issues within the *xuanxue* tradition.

The introduction to the *Shangshu zhengyi*, for example, raises explicitly in its first lines the core *xuanxue* issue of language's incapacity to communicate the *dao*. The *Zhengyi* editors might have been encouraged to take up this topic at the outset because of the relationship they saw between the *Zhouyi* and the *Shangshu*, first and second of the Classics as they ordered them. For the *Zhengyi* editors, this relationship went back to the quintessential "xuan-sage" (*xuan sheng* 玄聖) Fu Xi,⁹⁹ who created both the original trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yi*, and also the genre of the *Shu* (records of the ruler's speech), and did so for complementary purposes: "the eight trigrams [of the *Yi*] depict the images of the myriad things; written words [of the *Shu*] inscribe the names of the many affairs."¹⁰⁰ Yet just as the trigrams of the *Yi* were "only within actuality,"

⁹⁹ For the *xuanxue* tradition's investment in Fu Xi in particular, see Wang Baoxuan, *Xuanxue tonglun*, 7-11.

¹⁰⁰ *Shangshu zhushu*, 1.5b.

so too are the written words that recorded Fu Xi's and his successors' proclamations incapable of capturing the negativity at the heart of the sages' wisdom.

The *dao* is at base void and quiescent: it partakes neither of names nor of words. But since forms arise on account of the *dao*, and since things are picked out by names, thus all of the Classics and the histories [nonetheless] go by things and establish names. Things have a basic form, and that form becomes manifest through affairs; when sages and worthies expound their teachings, these affairs become apparent in speech; and when this speech pleases the hearts of the people, then it is "written down" in order to display a model. And since there is thus a method in this writing, it is called "The Written Down" (*Shu*)... Moreover, speech is the putting into sound of intentions; writing is the record of speech. For this reason, [the ancient kings] preserved speech in order to put their intentions into sound, and instituted writing in order to record their speech. Therefore, the *Zhouyi* says, "Writing does not exhaust speech, and speech does not exhaust intention." This means that speech is the "fishtrap and snare" of intention and writing and speech arise from one another.

道本沖寂，非有名言。既形以道生，物由名舉，則凡諸經史因物立名。物有本形，形從事著，聖賢闡教，事顯於言，言愜羣心，書而示法。既書有法，因號曰書 ... 且言者意之聲，書者言之記。是故存言以聲意，立書以記言。故易曰：書不盡言，言不盡意。是言者意之筌蹄，書言相生者也。¹⁰¹

This passage—ostensibly a gloss on the name of the text, the "Documents" or "The Written Down" (*Shu* 書)—will likely strike anyone unfamiliar with the problematics of the *xuanxue* tradition as strangely explicit about issues that seem obvious, such as the idea that speech might be useful for putting thoughts into sound. If the editors of the *Zhengyi* felt compelled to make this point, it is because earlier *xuanxue* thinkers had highlighted three passages from the "Three Obscure Texts"—all alluded to here—that suggested to them that normal sorts of language are insufficient for approaching the *xuan*: first, from the *Laozi*, that "the name that can be named is not the constant name"; second, from the *Yijing*, that "writing does not exhaust speech, and speech does not exhaust intention"; and third, from the *Zhuangzi*, that words are no better than a "fishtrap or snare."¹⁰² For Wang Bi, for

¹⁰¹ *Shangshu zhushu*, 1.5a.

¹⁰² For *xuanxue* thinkers' engagement with these passages, see (for instance) Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 1-2, 609; and *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, 9.534.

example—whom the *Zhengyi* editors seem to be following in linking the second and third of these cautionary statements about language—the point of these passages was to suggest the attitude we should take towards authoritative texts: in order to get their meaning, we need to forget their words, which serve first as expedients for and ultimately as impediments to an understanding that necessarily transcends them. A similar attitude had characterized other *xuanxue* thinkers as well, including Guo Xiang, who saw the “Six Classics as merely stale traces” revealing little about the ever-transformable sages who made them,¹⁰³ and Huang Kan, who argued that “the Six Classics are merely the fishtrap and snare of the sages, and have no purchase on the fish or rabbit [i.e., the sages’ understanding].”¹⁰⁴ In citing these passages from the “Three Obscure Texts” in an account of why Fu Xi nonetheless created the written word, then, the *Zhengyi* is thus implicitly accepting the core of these *xuanxue* positions and also arguing against their implication that the Classics are therefore expendable. Wang, Guo, and Huang are right, that is, that the sages’ words, “written down” in the Classics, do not have a purchase on the *dao*. But these writings are nonetheless essential models for how we should understand things in the realm of actuality and conduct the affairs of government that deal with them.

In stark contradistinction from *xuanxue* thinkers like Wang, Guo, and Huang, in other words, the *Zhengyi* is suggesting that we do not need sagely insight into the esoteric obscurity of the *dao*: what we need are exoteric models upon which to pattern our behavior. That the Classics should be understood as providing such models is suggested, in the passage cited above, by the *Zhengyi*’s markedly counterintuitive gloss of the *Zhouyi*’s claim that “written words do not exhaust speech.” On its face, the *Zhouyi* passage in question would seem to suggest that writing is at a second remove from intention, a debasement even of speech; for the *Zhengyi*, however, speech and writing are both categorically removed from the sages’ obscure wisdom, the only difference between them being that transmitted writing fails to record everything the sages’ said in their lifetimes.¹⁰⁵ For the *Zhengyi*, therefore, there is nothing inherently lost in reading the sages’ words in the *Shangshu* versus hearing them

¹⁰³ Ibid., 5.304-5.

¹⁰⁴ Huang Kan, *Lunyu jijie yishu*, 3.60-61.

¹⁰⁵ See *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.157b-58a.

live, for the “Written Down” still contains the “models” (*fa*法) their speech was designed to provide—and indeed, the very act of writing these words down further models an institution by which the speech of the ruler will consistently be recorded to keep him cognizant of its weightiness.¹⁰⁶ When the *Zhengyi* suggests that “speech and writing arise from one another,” then, the point would seem to be that the *Shangshu* offers a model for the speech of later rulers, who will necessarily need to speak, but will not necessarily be sages themselves. As the *Shangshu zhengyi* explains in discussing why the sagely King Wu of Zhou 周武王 established divination as the method for resolving doubts:

The son of heaven [i.e., King Wu] was a sage, but his people were base and foolish. Given that sages are born knowing it, and have no need for divination, the only way that they can have an understanding [of how to act] that is the same as that of their people is if they, on the one hand, provide their people teachings, and on the other, hide the traces [of their exceptionality] in order to seem the same as the common.... Therefore, Laozi says, “Sages have no constant minds: they make the minds of the people their minds.” This is what is meant.

天子聖人，庶民愚賤。得為識見同者，但聖人生知不假卜筮，垂教作訓晦跡同凡…故老子云：聖人無常心，以百姓心為心。是也。¹⁰⁷

This is a point the series repeats in the *Zhouyi zhengyi*, the *Chunqiu zhengyi*, and the *Liji zhengyi*: the sages themselves did not need to rely upon divination, even the divination described by the *Yijing*, but designed the practice, rather, for the benefit of people who are not sages.¹⁰⁸ Beyond the specific issue of divination, this comment has implications for the entire institution of recording the sages’ words and deeds, which are implied here to be deliberately modulated to the capacities of non-sages. This modulation guarantees that the sages’ populations will be able to accept their teachings, and also provides a model for the words and behaviors of later rulers, for whom sagely insight will no longer be necessary. Instead of deriving their speech from an understanding of the *dao*, that is, later rulers can model their words upon what is “written down” in Classics like the *Shangshu*.

¹⁰⁶ See *Liji zhushu*, 29.545a-b.

¹⁰⁷ *Shangshu zhushu*, 12.175a. For a similar comment, see also 11.155a.

¹⁰⁸ See *Zhouyi zhushu*, 9.183a; *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, 9.165b; and *Liji zhushu*, 62b.

Much the same vision of the Classics as providing models for non-sagely action can, I think, be found in the *Chunqiu zhengyi* as well, though here the editors make relatively few obvious attempts to link their interpretation of this Classic to their interpretation of the others. Of all the subcommentaries, the *Chunqiu zhengyi* is the least explicit in its articulation of the ideas we have tracked so far; indeed, the editors' selection of Du Yu's 杜預 (222-285) commentary on the *Zuozhuan* as its authoritative interpretation would itself seem *prima facie* to match rather poorly with its vision of the sages as possessing superhuman virtues. In comparison to the other two traditions of *Chunqiu* exegesis, the *Gongyang* 公羊 and the *Guliang* 穀梁, the *Zuozhuan* is markedly less invested in the idea that Confucius encoded elaborate and obscure messages into the text, and Du Yu's commentary in particular sets itself against the major trends of Han-dynasty *Chunqiu* scholarship by arguing that the text neither represents a cosmic vision nor a declaration of Confucius' status as the "uncrowned king" (*suwang* 素王), qualified him to legislate through this text to all later dynasties. Instead, Du Yu saw the *Chunqiu* as merely the historical records of the state of Lu, edited—and in his view, often only lightly—by Confucius to bring the text back, as far as possible, into conformity with what it should have been, had the state scribes followed the norms of their office. Where Han exegetes had seen Confucius' sagely vision as latent within every word of the text, therefore, Du Yu instead described the *Chunqiu* as a document originally written by non-sages that Confucius had only gone part-way to fixing, leaving gaps and lacunae where the historical records could no longer be corrected based on surviving documents.¹⁰⁹ (It is worth noting that the *Zhengyi* has an easy escape here, if its editors were concerned to render this claim of Du Yu's consistent with its claims elsewhere regarding the omniscience of the sages: it could appeal to a principle discussed in the *Maoshi zhengyi*, that "Even though there is nothing that sages [like Confucius] do not know, he would not merely record [what he knew] casually"—that is, without a source text—because that would leave a dangerous model for latter-day non-sagely imitators. But the *Chunqiu zhengyi* does not say this explicitly.)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ For Du Yu's commentary, see Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Chunqiu xue shi* 春秋學史 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), 279-99.

¹¹⁰ *Maoshi zhushu*, 10.348a; the omniscience of the sages is also discussed at *Shangshu*

Even if Du Yu may have had a more mundane vision of Confucius than some of the Han-dynasty exegetes against whom he was arguing, however, the *Chunqiu zhengyi* does in a few places approve his commentary for reasons that seem, instead, continuous with its more transcendent vision of the sages. For example, where *Gongyang* 公羊 exegetes had claimed that the capture of the unicorn near the end of the *Chunqiu* saddened Confucius because it indicated that his quest to achieve legislative authority would not be realized in his lifetime, the *Zhengyi* concurs with Du Yu that Confucius would not have been upset:

The reason that Du Yu [criticizes the *Gongyang* tradition here] is that sages complete human nature and exhaust the spiritual, taking joy in heaven and knowing its command: they do not take pleasure in life and are not grieved by death. Therefore, when Confucius was in dire straits between Chen and Cai, he took up his zither and sang; when he dreamed of himself [enclosed] between two pillars, he supported himself on his staff and chanted. How could he fear death, weep tears that wet his lapels, or give vent to sighs about “his *dao* being at an end”? If he did these things, how would he be different from a common person, and how could he be called a sage?

云亦無取焉，不取之者，以聖人盡性窮神，樂天知命，生而不喜，死而不戚。困於陳蔡則援琴而歌，夢奠兩楹則負杖而詠，寧復畏懼死亡，下沾衿之泣，愛惜性命，發道窮之歎？若實如是，何異凡夫俗人而得稱為聖也？¹¹¹

Although Du Yu, for his part, seems merely to be disagreeing with the *Gongyang* tradition’s claim that Confucius was an uncrowned king in favor of a less overweening characterization of his ambitions, the *Zhengyi*’s description of the sage here is a tissue of quotations from *xuan*-inflected texts. The phrase “taking joy in heaven and knowing its command,” for example, derives from the *Zhouyi*;¹¹² “they do not take pleasure in life and are not grieved by death,” similarly, comes verbatim from the Southern-dynasties literatus Liu Jun’s 劉峻 (462-521) decidedly *xuan* essay “Discussion on Discerning [Heaven’s] Command” 辯命論.¹¹³

zhushu 4-53a. The *Chunqiu zhengyi* does not, so far as I have found, make this argument; indeed, it even says that when it comes to certain things, Confucius “had no way of knowing” (see, e.g., *Zuozhuan zhushu*, 1.7a). This may represent a genuine contradiction within the series.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1.19b.

¹¹² See *Zhouyi zhushu*, 7.147b.

¹¹³ See *Wenxuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 54.2360. The phrase “they complete human nature and exhaust the spiritual” may also derive from a *xuanxue*

Although Du Yu's commentary provides only a slight opening for this sort of discourse, then, we can see here signs of the editors' basic vision of the radical distinction between sages and common people.

In keeping with what we have seen in their subcommentaries to the *Liji*, the *Zhouyi*, and the *Shangshu*, moreover, the *Chunqiu zhengyi* goes out of its way to suggest again that the main function of the sages is to provide exoteric models that can be imitated by non-sages, thereby creating and maintaining an intelligible cosmos out of what would, for most of us, otherwise seem a chaos. These ideas are at the center of its commentary to Du Yu's "*Chunqiu* preface" 春秋序, wherein, following Du, the *Zhengyi* explains that Confucius' goal in editing the Lu court records was to bring them back into alignment with the rules of history writing that had been established for the institution of the Lefthand Scribe¹¹⁴ by the sagely Duke of Zhou in the early days of the Zhou dynasty.

The establishment of ritual and the creation of music [for the Zhou dynasty] were the work of the Duke of Zhou. This makes clear that the recording of history and the offices of government were also established by the Duke of Zhou. Therefore, when [Du Yu speaks here of the] fifty rules of history writing (*wushi fafan* 五十發凡), this is all the old system that the Duke of Zhou established. One must understand that for everything the scribes recorded, there was the system instituted by the Duke of Zhou, as everything that the sages do prescribes a model. How could the Duke of Zhou, then, have failed to provide a basic form in establishing the office of the scribes?... Moreover, Confucius edited this text into a Classic. If the Duke of Zhou had not established a model, and the official scribes had merely written whatever they wanted, then what would Confucius have had to rely upon, and how would this text be worthy of being a canon and placed as a Classic alongside the *Documents*, the *Ritual*, the *Music*, the *Poetry*, and the *Yi*? From this, we can tell that the Duke of Zhou had instituted a settled system for the recording of history.

制禮作樂，周公所為。明策書禮經，亦周公所制。故下句每云周公正謂五十發凡，是周公舊制也。必知史官所記，有周公舊制者，以聖人所為動，皆有法。以能立官紀事，豈得全無憲章？... 且仲尼脩此春秋以為一經。若周公無法，史

text, as it appears in a letter from Xie Ju 謝舉 (d. 548) to a Buddhist friend of his as part of a discussion of whether the spirit is extinguished at death (see *Hongmingji* 弘明集 10, T. 2102: 52.65c). Taken apart, however, the phrases "complete human nature" and "exhaust the spiritual" are quite common, and indeed the whole four-character phrase appears twice in other surviving Tang texts without any apparent connection to Xie Ju's letter.

¹¹⁴ *Zuozhuan zhushu*, "Chunqiu zhengyi xu," 3a.

官妄說，仲尼何所可馮，斯文何足為典，得與諸書禮樂詩易並稱經哉？以此知周公舊有定制。¹¹⁵

Although the *Zhengyi* suggests that these “rules of history writing” had been instituted to record whether government actions “matched with the canonical method of the Zhou” or “diverged from the standards of Zhou ritual,”¹¹⁶ the rules it spends the most time discussing concern what might seem a rather minor issue, the *Chunqiu*’s method of recording the date at the beginning of each entry. For Du Yu, the *Chunqiu*’s consistent use of dates was an important point to make in light of his argument that the Classic was not an occult vision of the cosmos or a secret plan for designing an empire, but rather an honest-to-goodness history. For the *Zhengyi*, by contrast, it suggests that every feature of the text, down to its very dates, derives from the sagely institution of representational systems that differentiate one thing from another.

The sun is in heaven and follows heaven’s rotations. When it comes out, it is daytime; when it sets, it is night. Therefore, every time it comes out is called a “day.” Yet there was [previously] no way to differentiate whether one day came before or after another, so therefore the sages instituted the system of dates in order to record them.... Earlier years are more distant than later years, and later months closer than earlier months, so if we differentiate events by month and year, their closeness or distance from us is clear.

日之在天，隨天轉運。出則為晝，入則為夜。故每一出謂之一日。日之先後無所分別，故聖人作甲乙以紀之。…紀遠近者，前年遠於後年，後月近於前月，異其年月，則遠近明也。¹¹⁷

This is one of those moments—like the *Shangshu zhengyi*’s discussion of the usefulness of words—wherein the seeming obviousness of the point the subcommentary is making reveals the larger claims that underlie its vision of the Classics’ importance. Here the point would seem to be that even the most basic tools that we possess for making sense of experience and history are, in fact, the inventions of the sages, part of originally holistic systems they designed to shape the understanding and behavior of their populations. Even if the non-sagely scribes of Lu

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 1.9b-10a.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1.10a.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 1.7b.

were imperfect in their enactment of these systems, therefore, they were inevitably to some degree or another in accord with them. Confucius, for this reason, did not have to encode secret messages into the *Chunqiu* in order to use it as a tool of sagely instruction; it was enough to bring the scribes' imperfect records back into even better alignment with "the old established system of the Duke of Zhou, thus ensuring that the old canons would flourish anew, making clear to posterity the Duke of Zhou's method, and guaranteeing that later ages would have a standard" to rely upon in crafting their own historical records.¹¹⁸

The idea that texts written by non-sages can nonetheless be Classics if they make use of the representational systems of the sages is found in the *Maoshi zhengyi* as well. In this subcommentary, the main theoretical problem that the editors faced was the fact that nearly all of the poems in the Classic were supposedly written by non-sages, and, moreover, that many of them derived from and described eras of markedly bad government—threatening, it would seem, the possibility that the *Odes* might all contain the kind of sagely model (*fa* 法) that both the *Shangshu zhengyi* and the *Chunqiu zhengyi* described above as definitive of Classics. The *Zhengyi*'s solution here is to claim that, in fact, all of the poems in the *Shijing*—both the "Correct Odes" (*zhengfeng* 正風 and *zhengya* 正雅) of the sagely age and the "Changed Odes" (*bianfeng* 變風 and *bianya* 變雅) of the period of decline—"nonetheless represent the lingering model (*yifa* 遺法) of the [early Zhou] sages."¹¹⁹ According to the *Zhengyi*,

The creation of Changed Airs and Changed Elegantiae only occurred when the kingly way had just begun to decline, for when governance has just begun to fail it can still be diverted back to its right course. These poets used the old patterns to provide the rule to these new failures, hoping that their kings would come themselves to regret their actions and return to the correct way.... Because at these times the beneficence of the former sagely kings had not been exhausted, the people still knew correct ritual, and so used that ritual to try to save the age, writing the Changed Odes.

¹¹⁸⁾ Ibid., 1.10a.

¹¹⁹⁾ See *Maoshi zhushu*, 1.15b.

變風變雅之作，皆王道始衰，政教初失，尚可匡而革之，追而復之。故執彼舊章繩此新失，觀望自悔其心，更遵正道。... 是由王澤未竭，民尚知禮，以禮救世，作此變詩。¹²⁰

Where the *Zhengyi* here refers to “old patterns,” it seems in part to be referring simply to the ritual of poetry itself, which was instituted within the courts of the various domains to provide a means by which the sages could both shape and observe the emotional character of their populations.¹²¹ It may also, however, be referring to the editors’ claim shortly before this passage that “each poem [sung within the Zhou-dynasty system] had its normative form, and each normative form had its normative sound.”¹²² By making use of a normative ritual with normative music in order to display their own age’s divergence from those norms, then, the authors of the Changed Odes were in fact continuing to display the sagely model characteristic of a Classic. And once poetry ceased to embody such a model, as the *Zhengyi* claims it did shortly after the appearance of the Changed Odes, Confucius stopped including it in his collection.

Like all of the other Classics, moreover, the poetry in the *Odes* was for the *Zhengyi* editors a representational system that had once worked to provide a simulacrum of sagely understanding in a world that could, for non-sages, otherwise appear a chaos. Just as the hexagrams of the *Zhouyi* had been designed by the sages in part to provide a means for later non-sages to divine the incipient movements of the cosmos and thus to act with something approaching the efficacy of the sages themselves, for example, so too was poetry—which was reputedly collected from throughout the realm for presentation at the central court¹²³—an institution of the Zhou system designed to provide later governments the insight into the cycles of state fortune that the sages possessed innately.

The six emotions are [originally] still within, while the many things slosh around without; these things make the emotions stir, and when stimulated by things the emotions shift. In times of pure and peaceful governance, happiness and joy spread throughout the empire; in times of chaos, complaints and criticisms take

¹²⁰) Ibid., 1.16b-17a.

¹²¹) For this institution, see *Shangshu zhushu*, 3.47a and *Maoshi zhushu*, 1.11b-20.b.

¹²²) Ibid., 1.16a.

¹²³) Ibid., 1.15b-16a and 1.17a-b.

form in songs. For the writer, these songs express pent up feelings, and for listeners, they are enough to block their deviations and to encourage them to follow the right. Poetry comes out of nature and emotion, and matches with the scales and pitch pipes; therefore, it is said that to resonate with heaven and earth, and to move the ghosts and spirits, there is nothing better than poetry. This is the use of poetry: its benefit is great! The arising of sadness and happiness is a mysterious part of what is so-of-itself (*ziran*); the beginnings of joy and anger are not within human control. Therefore, swallows and sparrows express their feelings in their chirping, and simurghs and phoenixes dance and sing. Thus, the antecedents of poetry's logic are at one with the creation of the universe, and the use of poetry's traces changes according to its cycles.

六情靜於中，百物盪於外。情緣物動，物感情遷。若政遇醇和，則歡娛被於朝野；時當慘黷，亦怨刺形於詠歌。作之者所以暢懷舒憤，聞之者足以塞違從正。發諸情性，諧於律呂，故曰感天地，動鬼神，莫近於詩。此乃詩之為用，其利大矣。若夫哀樂之起，冥於自然；喜怒之端，非由人事。故燕雀表啁噍之感，鸞鳳有歌舞之容，然則詩理之先，同夫開闢；詩迹所用，隨運而移。¹²⁴

This is a distinctively *xuan* vision of the poetic process, rooting even commoners' natural production of song in the obscure *dao* through a vocabulary drawn from *xuanxue* thinkers like Guo Xiang.¹²⁵ By simply giving vent to their feelings, the *Zhengyi* claims, common people provide insight into the more-mysterious workings of the cosmos that would otherwise be beyond the vision of a non-sagely king. That does not mean, of course, that every expression of genuine emotion is worth making into a Classic; only the poems that were institutionalized by the early Zhou sages and chosen by Confucius displayed truly normative emotions. Yet by instituting some such poems as a standard, the sages aimed to train later, non-sagely courts to recognize deviations.¹²⁶ The early Zhou sages thus provided the later rulers of the dynasty with a means by which they could respond to subtle changes in the mysterious layers of reality without having to fully understand them.

In treating poetry as a means of divining the "universe's cycles," then, the *Maoshi zhengyi* clearly aligns it with the *Zhouyi*. Yet there are echoes

¹²⁴) Ibid., "Maoshi zhengyi xu," 3a.

¹²⁵) The keywords here are *ziran* 自然 and *ming* 冥, both of which are terms of art in Guo Xiang's system. *Ziran*, of course, was in wide use throughout Chinese thought; the idea that one could be "mystically indistinct from *ziran*" (*ming yu ziran*), however, is unmistakably redolent of *xuanxue*. For uses by Guo Xiang himself, see *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu*, 5, 245 and 7, 370.

¹²⁶) For this process, see *Maoshi zhushu*, 1.13b.

here of the other Classics as well. The *Liji zhengyi*, for example, makes a similar claim about ritual, suggesting that it too serves a hermeneutical function by providing rulers a behavioral standard against which to discern the emotional vicissitudes of their subjects, which would otherwise be beyond their perception.¹²⁷ The *Chunqiu* too had represented a system of demarcating different categories of events, thus making it clear whether historical actions happened recently or long ago, and whether or not they matched with the Zhou system of ritual. And the *Shangshu* had likewise given form to what was formless, allowing non-sages to have at least some contact with sagely intentions that were ultimately beyond words. In all these ways, then, the *Zhengyi*'s vision of the Odes recapitulates the points made throughout this paper about the crucial obscurities of the cosmos and about the sages' institution of cultural forms that mediate them to our limited faculties. And if the *Maoshi* can echo the other four Classics in all these ways, I hope to have suggested, it is because the *Zhengyi* interpretation of each is underwritten by this common structure.

Directions for Further Research

The continuities across subcommentaries identified in this paper raise a methodological problem. Over four-million characters in length, and drawing upon a large number of heterogeneous sources produced over nearly a millennium, the *Zhengyi* inevitably contains inconsistencies,

¹²⁷⁾ See *Liji zhushu*, 22.432a: "When people submerge their hearts and thicken their faces, their internals and externals can diverge, and their holding within a mind of desire and aversion, since it has no physical form, cannot be fathomed and understood. Therefore, the beauty or ugliness of their character can be entirely secreted within the mind, and one cannot see its appearance on the outside.... If a ruler of men wants honesty and integrity, [and thus needs] to exhaustively understand the beauty or ugliness of his subjects' emotions, then, how can he do this other than through ritual? Ritual's ability to make known the human mind lies in the fact that [its external forms] concern the mind, and thus the mind necessarily becomes visible on the outside. If a person's emotions are all good and his virtues are unobstructed, then in every action he will completely match with ritual requirements. If, however, his emotions are evil and partial and his virtues are lacking, then in every action he will depart from the model" 人深心厚貌，內外乖違，包藏欲惡之心，既無形體，不可測度而知。故美惡皆在其心，外邊不見其色。... 人君欲誠慤專一，窮盡人美惡之情，若舍去其禮，更將何事以知之哉？禮所以知人心者，有事於中心，貌必見於外。若七情美善，十義流行，則舉動無不合禮。若七情違辟，十義虧損，則動作皆失其法。

internal contradictions, and intellectual tensions of the sort that have discouraged scholars from attempting to articulate a coherent account of the positions it takes with regard to the crucial questions of seventh-century thought. Its length, moreover, likely guaranteed that for much of the history of its use, up until the series began to be printed at state expense, few people would have been able to make personal copies of it in its entirety and even fewer would have had the time or the resources to read its every word carefully; for most readers, then, questions of the larger coherence of the *Zhengyi's* interpretation of the Classics may have receded behind an interest in individual passages and in the sorts of interpretive problems that were tested on the exams. Indeed, a cursory review of citation practice in surviving Tang texts suggests that the *Zhengyi* only begins to be cited regularly in surviving materials around the turn of the ninth century, and then primarily to justify nice points of interpretation, rather than the sorts of larger visions I have attempted to draw out here.¹²⁸ The methodological problem, then, is how we think about the ideas of a series like this historically, taking into account simultaneously the editors' apparent attempts to find at least basic sorts of coherence within the Classics and their exegetical traditions, their manifest failure to do so at every point, and the categories through which the complicated results of their efforts were received over the six centuries when their work represented the government standard of canonical interpretation. Although answering this question is plainly beyond the boundaries of a paper of this length, there are three directions in which I believe future research might pursue it.

The first is in the direction of government policy. The positions staked out by the *Wujing zhengyi* clearly have political implications, and probably had political effects over the course of the series' use. More research needs to be done to determine precisely what these implications and effects might have been, but the ideas discussed here provide at least a starting place. In their suggestion that the Classics represent the remnants of institutional models that provide exoteric approximations of sagely insight into obscure topics beyond the perception and understanding of most people, the editors of the *Zhengyi* make a strong case for the importance of Ru-learning, the perils of traditions of thought

¹²⁸ See, for example, *Quan Tang wen*, 437.4458a, 574.5799b, 856.8983a, and 865.9067b.

centered around esoteric topics (such as Buddhism and Daoism, for example), and the importance of government standardization of culture. It is worth noting, however, that the *Zhengyi* series does not suggest that this standardization will be unproblematic, or that Ru-learning will be capable of solving all, or even most, of the problems that will arise in its course. In his treatment of the *Maoshi zhengyi*, Steven Van Zoeren has written elegantly about the tension between the series' exegetical strategy—which pays extremely close attention to the language of the Classics, interpreting every word as if it might potentially manifest a sagely intention—and its claim that the texts of the *Odes* were no longer sufficient to their own interpretation in their current form, divorced from the lost music that had originally accompanied their performance in the early Zhou court.¹²⁹ Something of this conflict colors the *Zhengyi* interpretation of each of the Five Classics, as in each case, the editors' introduction to their work foregrounds the problems both in the compilation of the Classics (which in the case of the *Shangshu* and *Shijing* Confucius compiled from a fragmentary archive; in the case of the *Chunqiu* he produced through editing laconic and imperfect records; and in the case of the *Liji* was compiled by Han scholars after the loss of the ritual classic that Confucius had himself transmitted) and in the transmission of their interpretation.¹³⁰ Although the editors are convinced, therefore, that the sages did once create a perfect set of institutions and exoteric models for the maintenance of state and cosmos, they are also conscious that those perfect models have not survived in their entirety. In suggesting as it does at several points that the institutions of the Five Thearchs and Three Sagely Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) differed from one another in their implementation,¹³¹ then, the

¹²⁹ See Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, 139-45.

¹³⁰ See *Shangshu zhushu*, "Shangshu zhengyi xu," 3a-b, *Maoshi zhushu*, "Maoshi zhengyi xu," 3a, *Zuozhuan zhushu*, 1.7a, and *Liji zhushu*, "Liji zhengyi xu," 3b-4a. This internal conflict has also been noted by Mark Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 234.

¹³¹ The *Zhengyi* is often explicit that the institutions of the Five Thearchs and Three Sagely Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou) differed from one another in their implementation, if not in their purpose. See, for example, *Liji zhushu*, 37.670b: "The Five Thearchs had different court music over time, and the Three Dynasties did not inherit one another's ritual... If one discusses the passions [stirred by] ritual and music, then the Sage Kings all used it in the same way... [But if one discusses their precise forms,] in the traces of ritual and music there were subtractions and additions, changing with the changing times [i.e. the changing situations of the early dynasties, not over the course of the dynasties]" 五帝既先後殊時不相共

series may be leaving room for government innovation in their own time, and potentially for claims that at least emperors and their highest ministers might possess the sort of sagely insight into the obscure that would allow them to create institutions that rivaled those of great antiquity.

Next, scholars might examine more closely than has been possible here the place of the *Wujing zhengyi* in its contemporary intellectual context. Friederike Assandri has suggested, for example, that tantalizing links seem to exist between the *Zhouyi zhengyi* and what remains of the Daoist Cheng Xuanying's 成玄英 (*fl.* 631-653) *Yijing* scholarship;¹³² certainly more research could be done on the understudied texts of early-Tang Daoism and their connections and contrasts with Classicism. Similar work might be done on the series' relationship with the various Buddhist schools of thought current at the time as well, since even though the *Zhengyi* editors claim to have purged from their texts Buddhist ideas that had crept into the *Zhouyi* subcommentaries they "corrected" for their edition,¹³³ there are obvious parallels between their vision of the sages and contemporary ideas about the Buddha. Both the sages and the Buddha, for example, understand a crucial mystery that is beyond direct articulation to beings of more diminished faculties; both, therefore, use "skillful means" (Skt. *upāya*, Ch. *fangbian* 方便) to lead benighted people to goals they cannot fathom. Yet where Chinese Buddhists by the Tang generally held that all beings are ultimately (over many lifetimes) capable of coming to understand the mysteries that the Buddha taught, the *Zhengyi* does not seem to hold out this possibility, effectively rejecting the ideas of universal Buddha-nature 佛性 or Dao-nature 道性 that were becoming increasingly influential in Buddhist and Daoist discourse of the sixth and seventh centuries. Finally, the series also seems likely to be intervening in contemporary Classicist debates as well. A number of the positions it stakes out can, for example,

同用一樂也，三王異世不相襲禮。...若論禮樂之情，則聖王同用也。...禮樂之迹，損益有殊，隨時而改。The editors never explicitly point out that the differences between sagely institutions could be used to license modern-day innovation, but I would suggest that the point was understood, since it was common in contemporary court discussions of ritual and institutional change.

¹³² See Assandri, "The *Yijing* and *Chongxuan xue*: An Onto-Hermeneutic Perspective," in *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38 (2011): 397-411.

¹³³ See *Zhouyi zhushu*, "Zhouyi zhengyi xu," 1b-2a.

easily be seen as arguing against the claims of sageliness that were being advanced in the period by people like Wang Tong 王通 (584?-617), who purportedly sought to compile continuations of the Classics that included poetry and history from the post-Classical period.¹³⁴ For the editors of the *Zhengyi*, this version of Classicism would seem fundamentally wrongheaded: because the Han and Six-Dynasties periods were not eras of sagely governance, their products should not generally manifest the sort of sagely insight that characterizes the original Five Classics. In order to better understand the intellectual contours of the seventh century, more precise comparisons along these sorts of lines would seem a promising avenue for explanation.

The third direction that future research might take in investigating the intellectual-historical significance of the *Wujing zhengyi* would involve looking into the effects that the series had upon the intellectual climate of the period in which it enjoyed government backing. In their commentaries, the editors of the *Zhengyi* demonstrate a humility that they seem to enjoin upon Classicists in general. To give just one example, the series repeatedly discusses the impossibility of answering, and the futility of speculating upon, certain basic questions about the universe. In the *Chunqiu zhengyi*, for instance, they take up the question of the nature of stars:

From antiquity to the present day, when shooting stars have reached the earth, everyone has said that they become stones.... Yet we do not know whether stars, when they are above, are actually stones, or whether when they fall they then transform into stones. The sages and worthies [of the Classics and their commentaries] do not tell us the answer to these questions, and so it is impossible to know. 古今之說星隕至地，皆言為石。... 不知星之在上，其形本是石也，為當既隕，始變為石。聖賢不說，難得而知。¹³⁵

The *Shangshu zhengyi* manifests a similar skepticism of our ability to know the shape of the cosmos:

The form of heaven cannot be known, for discussions of fathoming heaven appear only in this one discussion of armillary sphere and sighting tube.... As for the north

¹³⁴) For Wang Tong, see Ding Xiang Warner, *Transmitting Authority: Wang Tong (ca. 584-617) and the Zhongshuo in Medieval China's Manuscript Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹³⁵) *Zuozhuan zhushu*, 14.236a.

and south poles maintaining its two extremes, and heaven slanting and turning with the sun, moon, and stars—all of this was certainly understood in antiquity, but the model was lost in the Qin [bibliocaust].

上天之體，不可得知。測天之事，見於經者唯有此璿璣玉衡一事而已。…其南北極持其兩端，其天與日月星宿斜而迴轉，此必古有其法，遭秦而滅。¹³⁶

In instances like these, the *Zhengyi* seems both to prescribe and to model an epistemological cautiousness that matches well with its account of our limitations, at least those of us who are not sages. This intellectual cautiousness, indeed, underwrites the whole *Wujing zhengyi* project, which, as I said at the outset, sets itself the agenda of elaborating what its editors understand to be the most authoritative commentaries on the Classics and of trimming what they take to be their most authoritative subcommentaries, rather than coming up with novel interpretations or attempting to parse and synthesize the entirety of post-Classical scholarship in the way Mid-Tang intellectuals like Dan Zhu 啖助 (725-770), Zhao Kuang 趙匡 (n.d.), and Lu Chun 陸淳 (d. 806) would begin to do.¹³⁷ If the *Zhengyi* does work to find some common ground between these authoritative precursors, that is, that common ground is hardly the stifling orthodoxy the series is often understood to represent; instead, it might be better characterized as a stifling agnosticism, one that consistently emphasizes our inescapable dependence upon the remnants of the sagely tradition and the impossibility of our understanding topics that tradition does not explain in detail. And if this characterization of the series' intellectual orientations is correct, it is my hope that this paper might help future research to better ground within its intellectual-historical context the epistemological optimism of the so-called "Confucian revival" of the mid-Tang and Song, by seeing it as a reaction, at least in part, against an understanding of Classicist scholarship defined by the *Wujing zhengyi*'s vision of the general uselessness of human speculation into the obscure.

¹³⁶) *Shangshu zhushu*, 3:36b.

¹³⁷) For a basic introduction to these scholars' work on the *Chunqiu*, see Zhao Boxiong, *Chunqiu xue shi*, 384-398.

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Abstract

The *Corrected Interpretations of the Five Classics (Wujing zhengyi)* is a surprisingly neglected source for the study of medieval Chinese intellectual history. Often considered more of a political performance than an intellectual one, the series has been charged with heterogeneity in its attempt to put an end to the intellectual disputes of the period of division and to craft an orthodoxy for the nascent Tang dynasty. This paper will show, however, that the *Zhengyi* subcommentaries do articulate a coherent intellectual position with regard to a set of crucial questions about the cosmos, the ancient sages, and the culture that they inaugurated. Repurposing *xuanxue* arguments about the inherent obscurity of the *dao* and the cosmos, the *Zhengyi* argues that most of us cannot understand the source of normative values, and that therefore our only recourse is to limit our intellectual presumptions and follow the models provided by the ancient Sage Kings.

Résumé

Les *Interprétations corrigées des cinq Classiques (Wujing zhengyi)* ont, de façon surprenante, été assez négligées par l'histoire intellectuelle de la Chine médiévale. Elles sont souvent considérées comme un exercice politique plutôt qu'intellectuel ; leur ambition de mettre fin aux disputes de la période de division et de construire une orthodoxie pour la dynastie Tang naissante a débouché sur un résultat largement jugé comme hétérogène. Cet article montre au contraire que les sous-commentaires du *Zhengyi* articulent une position intellectuelle cohérente au regard d'un ensemble de questions essentielles concernant le cosmos, les anciens sages et la culture qu'ils ont créée. En recyclant des arguments venus du *xuanxue* qui affirmaient l'obscurité inhérente du *dao* et du cosmos, le *Zhengyi* avance que la plupart d'entre nous sont incapables de percevoir la source des valeurs normatives et que notre seul recours est de limiter nos présomptions à suivre les modèles offerts par les anciens sages et rois.

提要

在中古中國思想史研究中，《五經正義》這一資料出人意料地鮮受關注。它往往在更大程度上被認為是政治而非思想學術的產物，其內在的異質性被視為伴隨著一種意圖，即為分裂時期的思想學術爭論劃上休止符，以及為初興的唐代塑造正統學說。然而，本文將顯示：《正義》就一系列關於宇宙、古代聖王以及其所開創的文化等關鍵問題締結成了一種連貫自治的思想立場。通過對玄學關於“道”和宇宙的固有的不可知性的觀點加以修改和再利用，《正義》提出，大多數人不可能理解規範性價值的根源，因此，唯一可依賴的方式是限定人們的思想前提並遵循古代聖王所提供的模範。

Keywords

Wujing zhengyi – *xuanxue* – medieval – Classicism – epistemology