



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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A Brief Introduction to Wang Bi

Wang Bi was born in Shanyang County (now in Shandong Province). Famous Confucian scholars and the Changes scholars in the Three Kingdoms era, the main representative and one of the founders of Wei and Jin metaphysic. He wrote annotations for Daode Jing and Book of Changes, which had a great influence on later generations. Since most of the annotated editions of the Daode Jing in the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms were lost, Wang Bi's Annotations on Laozi's Classic of the Way and Its Power 老子道德經注 has become the earliest annotated edition of this book.

Wang Bi lived in a bureaucratic family. His great-grandfather was Liu Biao, who was the founder of the Jing zhou school of classical scholarship. His step-grandfather was the famous litterateur Wang Can 王粲, who was outstanding in talent and learning, and became famous at a young age. He was appreciated by Cai Yong 蔡邕, a famous litterateur and scholar at that time, and he gave Wang Can ten thousand volumes of books in his family collection. The books loaded with several carts later all belonged to Wang Ye 王业 (Wang Bi's father). This provided extremely favorable conditions for Wang Bi's growth.

Wang Bi was already very smart when he was young. When he was more than ten years old, he like Laozi, and his eloquence was outstanding, and he was as famous as Zhong Hui 钟会. He was known to officials and literatus at that time before he was an adult. At that time, He Yan 何晏 was also very surprised by Wang Bi's talent.

However, Wang Bi's official career was not smooth, because he only talked about Dao 道 after meeting with his boss Cao Shuang 曹爽 (a powerful official of the Wei state of the Three-Kingdoms Period), so he was despised by Cao Shuang. Later, Cao Shuang was killed, and Wang Bi was implicated in the case and lost his post. In the autumn of the same year, he died of plague at the age of twenty-three.

Wang Bi's life was short, but his academic achievements were outstanding. He is the author of three volumes of Annotations on Laozi's Classic of the Way and Its Power 老子道德經注、Laozi Zhilue 老子指略、Annotations on the Book of Changes 周易注、Zhouyi Lueli 周易略例、three volumes of Grand Elaborations of a Discourse on the Zhou Changes 周易大衍論、Elucidation of Doubtful Points in the Analects 論語

釋疑、one volume of Qiongwei Lun of Zhou Yi 周易窮微論, one volume of Yi Bian 易辯 and so on. However its achievement does not lie in the quantity of writings, but in its quality and originality.

The most important academic contribution of Wang Bi is that he integrated Taoism and Confucianism, thereby perfecting the ideological system at that time, which had a great influence on later generations and researchers of Confucianism. he used the Zhuangzi to clarify the Laozi, and then utilized insights from the Laozi to annotate the Changes and expounded his own philosophical views, creating a new generation in academics --- ‘Zhengshi Xuanfeng’. His research on the metaphysics of the Changes and the new viewpoints and new insights put forward by his ontology have a profound impact on the development of Chinese intellectual history in the future. The evaluation given by Mr. Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅 is that Wang Bi played the strongest voice of the times in philosophy. Although he flashed by like a shooting star and only lived for 23 years, he illuminated the world with his incredible genius and wisdom and pointed out the theoretical course of Wei Jin metaphysics. Wang Bi's three works on the Changes-Annotations on the Zhou Changes, Reductions and Models from the Zhou Change , and Grand Elaborations of a Discourse on the Zhou Changes his most influential (and only extant) work is his Annotations. Richard John Lynn terms this work “the first philosophical commentary on the Changes. His approach synthesizes Confucian, Legalist, and Daoist views, with Confucian views predominant.” It was incorporated into the Correct Meaning of the Five Classics as the best commentary. Which shows Wang Bi's great influence.

Wang Bi's commentary on Book of Changes is not concerned with the study of image-numerology, but with annotating Book of Changes from a speculative philosophical perspective. Wang Bi offered three major innovations to the text of the Changes. First, he inserted the relevant portions of the “Commentary on the Images” and “Commentary on the Decision” below each “Hexagram Statement” 卦辭

and “Line Statement” 爻辭. Second, he inserted the “Words of the Text Commentary” 文

言傳 within the chapters treating the Qian 乾 and Kun 坤 hexagrams, the only ones covered by this particular commentary. And third, Wang Bi commenced each chapter with the name and number of the hexagram, in imitation of the Mao commentary on the Poems. Ease of access to readers, then, as much as exegesis of meaning, was the merit of Wang Bi's edition. This version even resisted Zhu Xi's own efforts at textual reorganization, and it continues its seminal role as the received text today. Therefore, Wang Bi's commentary has an important position and influence in the study of Book of Changes.

Besides, his annotations have their own style and insights. Different from the style of study in the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties, instead of the cumbersome traditional method, it explores the main idea of thought. This enabled the reader to look at the text as a whole, focusing on the overall message rather than on linguistic details, an approach that led to new forms of annotation in the following centuries.

In short, Wang Bi replaced the cumbersome annotations of his predecessors with concise arguments, annotated the Book of Changes in a new way, combined Confucianism and Taoism, and created a new generation of Confucianism.

Above is my report for today, which includes references to the professor's book. Any criticism and feedback is welcome.