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Dissertation title: English Dissertation Title		
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Exploration of Sentences of *Shangde* 上德 and

***Xiade* 下德 in *Laozi* Chapter Thirty-eight**

《老子》第三十八章「上德」、「下德」句探析

A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

In fulfilment of the requirements for BA (Hons) in Sinology Degree

威爾士三一聖大衛大學

漢學文學學士

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Abstract

Chapter Thirty-eight of the common version of *Laozi* elaborates on the value sequence of ‘virtue’ (德), ‘human-heartedness’ (仁), ‘righteousness’ (義) and ‘propriety’ (禮), which embodies the core values of the book. However, the sentences of ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’ conflict with its following text ‘上仁爲之而無以爲，上義爲之而有以爲’, and also are not consistent with the degenerative order shown in of 德, 仁, 義, and 禮, in ‘失道而後德，失德而後仁’. There are many scholars during the past two thousand years participating in the discussion, and different versions of text arose, but none of them could solve the problem perfectly. In the last century, Mawangdui silk book *Laozi* was unearthed, and its sentence of ‘上德’ is as ‘上德無爲而無以爲’ and does not have the sentence of ‘下德’. This proves to be the most appropriate version that solves all the problems and makes the context clear and consistent. As for ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’, they refers to whether one is without unintentional or not in doing things.

Key words:

Shangde 上德 and *xiade* 下德, *wu yiwei* 無以爲 and *you yiwei* 有以爲, degenerative order, *Laozi* Chapter Thirty-eight

摘要

《老子》體現了其對德、仁、義、禮的價值認知，蘊含其核心價值觀念。然而，今本《老子》「上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲」與後文「上仁爲之而無以爲，上義爲之而有以爲」存在衝突，且不符後文「失道而後德，失德而後仁」等句所呈現之「德、仁、義、禮」每況愈下之次序。歷代學者於此爭議紛紜，版本眾多。然而，前代學者皆未能解通。唯有上世紀末出土之馬王堆帛書本，「上德」句作「上德無爲而無以爲」而無「下德」句最爲曉暢，使得文義豁然貫通。而諸德「無以爲」、「有以爲」所指，正是行爲背後無目的性與有目的性之不同。

關鍵詞：「上德」與「下德」、「無以爲」與「有以爲」、價值次序、《老子》第三十八章

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1. Introduction

Chapter Thirty-eight of the common version of *Laozi* elaborates on the value sequence of ‘virtue’ (德), ‘human-heartedness’ (仁), ‘righteousness’ (義) and ‘propriety’ (禮), which embodies the core values of the book. In some versions, the book is divided into two chapters: ‘The Classic of Virtue’ (德經) and ‘The Classic of Dao’ (道經), and Chapter Thirty-eight is at the first in the ‘Classic of Virtue’, which shows its importance. The text of the chapter in the common version *Laozi* is as follows:

上德不德，是以有德；下德不失德，是以無德。上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲。上仁爲之而無以爲，上義爲之而有以爲，上禮爲之而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之。故失道而後德，失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮。夫禮者，忠信之薄而亂之首。前識者，道之華而愚之始。是以大丈夫處其厚，不居其薄；處其實，不居其華。故去彼取此。¹

However, there are different versions and interpretations of the two sentences ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’. They links up the contexts and closely engage with the philosophy behind and thus, are very important. Therefore, although the problem is complex, there are still a large number of scholars during the past two thousand years participating in the discussion, but the problem is still full of debates.

According to the following contents from ‘失道而後德’ to ‘失義而後禮’, the five levels mentioned in the first half of the text – ‘上德’ (highest virtue), ‘下德’ (lower virtue), ‘上仁’ (highest human-heartedness), ‘上義’ (highest righteousness), and ‘上禮’ (highest propriety) – are arranged in an order of one-by-one deterioration. This can also be seen from the features used to describe the five levels. For example, the nature of ‘上德’ is ‘無爲而無以爲’. Even without delving deep into the meaning, there would not be any doubt that it conforms to the central tenet of *Laozi* – ‘無爲’ (no coercive actions) and thus is the best of all levels.² Compared with ‘上德’, the third level ‘上仁’ has degenerated from ‘無爲’

¹ Wang Bi王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), p. 93.

² For the word ‘無爲’, I adopted Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall’s translation: ‘non-coercive action’. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Dao bu yuan ren: bijiaozhexue shiyu zhong de laozhi* 道不遠人——比較哲學視域中的《老子》 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2006), p. 78.

to ‘爲之’ (coercive actions), but they both have the feature of ‘無以爲’. The feature of ‘上義’ is ‘爲之’ and ‘有以爲’, having changed from the absence (無) of 以爲 to the being (有) of it.³ The last one ‘上禮’ is given the worst description – ‘if there is no response, bares his arms to apply force’ (莫之應，則攘臂而扔之).⁴ From the features above, an order of deterioration is clearly shown, but the sentence of 下德 is written as ‘下德爲之而有以爲’ in the common version of *Laozi*, and therefore is same as the feature of ‘上義’. This is inconsistent with the degenerative order presented later. However, there are many different versions of this sentence advocated by scholars during dynasties. The reason is that in the circulation of *Laozi*, scholars noticed this problem and made alteration to the text according to their own understanding, but no matter how they changed it, it was for most of the time difficult to be consistent with the context. Therefore, scholars held their own opinions and the debates exist for two thousand of years.

Until 1973, the silk book versions of *Laozi* was unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb 馬王堆漢墓, which provided a more reliable and consistent version of text and almost solved the problem. However, there are still related issues needed to be further resolved. Firstly, it seems that there has been a lack of a more complete review of the discussion of previous scholars and moreover, there are misunderstanding towards each others’ interpretation among them. Secondly, after the excavation of the silk *Laozi*, the academic community still has not reached a consensus. Some scholars object to the silk version. Among these opinions, there are some questionable. Thirdly, if the issue of version is solved, the meaning of ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ still needs to be investigated and clarified.

This essay takes the above questions as its core. It will firstly explores the versions and interpretations in the past and restore the picture of the discussion. Secondly, it will explore into the two earlier versions – silk version from Mawangdui and the Han bamboo slips 漢簡 version collected by Peking University, and make examination through time and context, to find out the one that can be consistent with the whole context of the chapter and restore the original form of the it. Finally, on the basis of the determined version, the meaning

³ The phrase ‘以爲’ has many different interpretations during centuries and is a central problem that will be discuss later. Thus, I will not give it a translation here. However, it is obvious that ‘以爲’ refers to a negative state in the context of *Laozi*.

⁴ The translation for ‘莫之應，則攘臂而扔之’ is adopted from Paul J. Lin’s. Paul J. Lin, *A Translation of Lao-tzu’s Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi’s Commentary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), p. 67.

of ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ will be explored.

2. Review and examination of past debates

There are many different versions of the two sentences of ‘上德無爲而無以爲’ and ‘下德爲之而有以爲’ throughout centuries. For the first sentence, it is also written as ‘上德無爲而無不爲’ in other versions. For the second, there are even more different ones: ‘下德爲之而無以爲’, ‘下德爲之而有不爲’, ‘下德爲之而無不爲’ and so forth. When the two sentences are combined, the results will become more diverse. In this section, the existing different versions will be examined one by one to clarify the disputes.

2.1. ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’⁵

In the existing previous annotations, ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’ (People of highest virtue do not do things coercively and do not ‘以爲’. People of lower virtue do things coercively and do ‘以爲’) is the earliest version. Heshang Gong 河上公’s *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經注 and Yan Zun 嚴遵’s *Daode zhenjing zhigui* 道德真經指歸, both in Han dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), are representatives of it.

2.1.1. Heshang Gong’s *Daode zhenjing zhu*

Heshang Gong’s *Daode zhenjing zhu* is the earliest of the existing annotations of *Laozi*. The *Laozi* text and his annotations related are listed as follows in the table:⁶

<i>Laozi</i> ’s text	Annotations of Heshang Gong
上德無爲	言法道安靜，無所改爲也。
而無以爲，	言無以名號爲也。

⁵ However, among the existing annotations of *Laozi*, there are some of them in which the annotations of a scholar does not coincide with the *Laozi*’s text that it has quoted itself. This is due to misunderstandings and false alterations by readers reading these annotations afterwards. Therefore, the editions of different scholars listed in the following titles are based on what the scholar originally meant rather than what is written in their annotations.

⁶ All Heshang’s annotations in the table were quoted. from Heshang Gong 河上公, ‘*Daodezhenjing zhu* 道德真經注’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成, ed. by Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and 陳紅星 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 1, p. 156.

下德爲之	言爲教令、施政事也。
而有以爲。	言以爲己取名號也。
上仁爲之	上仁謂行仁之君，其仁無上，故言上仁也。爲之者，爲仁恩也。
而無以爲，	功成事立，無以執爲。
上義爲之	謂義以斷害也。
而有以爲。	動作以爲己，殺人以成威，賦下以自奉也。
上禮爲之	謂上禮之君，其禮無上，故言上禮。爲之者，言爲禮制度序威儀也。
而莫之應，	言禮華盛實衰，盛僞煩多，動則離道，不可得應也。
則攘臂而仍之。	言煩多不可應，上下怨爭，故攘臂相仍引也。

Heshang Gong interprets ‘無爲’ as ‘to follow the tranquility of the Dao and do not do changes and actions’ (法道安靜，無所改爲), whereas for the feature ‘爲之’ shared by 下德, 上仁, 上義 and 上禮, he gives different interpretations according to their nature: ‘to conduct education and orders and dealing with government affairs’ (爲教令，施政事), ‘to practise human-heartedness and do favour’ (爲仁恩), ‘to get rid of scourge’ (爲義以斷害), and ‘to formulate propriety and rules, and to impose order for the manner of rites’ (爲禮制度，序威儀).⁷ However, Heshang Gong’s version has a key problem: the sentence of ‘下德’ makes the context unreasonable. As mentioned earlier, the five levels of ‘上德’, ‘下德’, ‘上仁’, ‘上義’ and ‘上禮’ should be a sequence of degeneration, but the feature of ‘下德’, if we look the sentence as a whole, is exactly the same as that of ‘上義’; and if we look at its features separately, the feature of its ‘爲之’ is certainly inferior to ‘上德無爲’ and is same with ‘上仁’ and ‘上義’, but its feature of ‘有以爲’ is actually not as good as that of ‘無以爲’ of ‘上仁’ and confusingly, is same as that of ‘上義’. In this way, it does not correspond to the degenerating order of ‘virtue (德) → human-heartedness (仁) → righteousness (義) → propriety (禮)’ as shown in later text from ‘失德而後仁’ onwards. Regarding this, Heshang’s annotation only gives it a far-fetched explanation by using ‘having nothing to do with reputation’ (無以名號爲) to explain the ‘無以爲’ of ‘上德’, using ‘acquiring reputation for one self’ (爲己取名號) to interpret the ‘有以爲’ of ‘下德’, using ‘Accomplishments have been made and things are done and there is nothing to do with manipulation’ (功成

⁷ Heshang Gong 河上公, ‘Daodezhenjing zhu 道德真經注’, p. 156.

事立，無以執爲) to explain the ‘無以爲’ of ‘上仁’, and using ‘to act for the sake of self’ (動作以爲己) and so forth to interpret the ‘有以爲’ of ‘上義’.⁸ He puts ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ into a new semantic context each time according to what 德, 仁, 義, 禮 mean respectively. He did not give a consistent interpretation and thus seems far-fetched.

2.1.2. Yan Zun’s *Daode zhenjing zhigui*

In Yan Zun’s *Daode zhenjing zhigui* 道德真經指歸 that we see today, the *Laozi* text is written as ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而有以爲’, different from Heshang Gong’s.⁹ Later scholars rarely had doubts about this. For example, Gao Ming 高明 quoted, ‘Only Yan Zun’s version goes as “上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而有以爲”’.¹⁰ However, in fact, the version that Yan Zun saw should be ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’, that is, ‘無不爲’ should be ‘無以爲’ and therefore is the same as Heshang’s version. There are two pieces of evidence.

Firstly, Yan Zun interprets the sentence of 上德, saying:

上德之君，……神無所思，志無所慮，聰明玄遠，寂泊空虛。……故恬淡無爲，而德盛于玄域；玄默寂寥，而化流於無極。……天下味味喁喁，皆蒙其化而被其和。若此者元無，絕而不知爲之者何誰。¹¹

Looking closely at this paragraph, the previous texts ‘神無所思，志無所慮’ [having no thoughts in one’s mind], ‘恬淡無爲’ [tranquil and has no coercive actions] and ‘玄默寂寥’ [mysterious and lonely] are the interpretation of ‘上德無爲’, whereas the last sentence ‘若此者元無，絕而不知爲之者何誰’ [Things like this are void in themselves. It cannot be known who has done it] emphasizes that an emperor of virtue does not take his own merits in his heart. He has no ‘self’ and no coercive actions, and therefore treats all the merits as ‘void’ and ‘it cannot be known who has done it’. From this aspect, it should be the interpretation for ‘無以爲’ rather than ‘無不爲’, because the latter means ‘there is nothing that cannot be done’ and is no connection with Yan Zun’s commentary, whereas ‘無以爲’ is closer to it.

Secondly, Yan Zun’s *Zhigui* was annotated by Gushen Zi 谷神子 afterwards,

⁸ Heshang Gong 河上公, ‘Daodezhenjing zhu 道德真經注’, p. 156.

⁹ Yan Zun 嚴遵, ‘Daode zhenjing zhigui 道德真經指歸’, in *Zhengtong daoze 正統道藏* (Shanghai: Hanfen lou, 1923), Dongshenbu yujuelei 洞神部玉訣類, Book 375, Neng shang 能上, vol. 7, p. 1a.

¹⁰ Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozhi jiaozhu 帛書老子校注* (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1996), p. 2.

¹¹ Yan Zun 嚴遵, ‘Daode zhenjing zhigui 道德真經指歸’, vol. 7, p. 3b.

whom was thought to be Tang (618 – 907 CE) scholar Tang Kuo 馮廓 by Chao Gongwu 晁公武.¹² Gushen Zi's annotations were also given to *Laozi's* text. He notes '上德無爲': 'Everything develops naturally' (物自然也); notes '而無不爲': 'to credit accomplishments to the Nature' (功歸天也); notes '下德爲之': '(to wreck spirit in vain' (枉精神也) and notes '而有以爲': 'to credit accomplishments to oneself.' Gushen Zi interprets '無不爲' and '有不爲' using the idea of crediting accomplishments to Nature or oneself. However, the phrase '有以爲' could certainly be explained as 'crediting accomplishments to oneself', but 'to credit accomplishments to Nature' does not match with '無不爲'. Looking closely at its meaning, it is rightly explained in the way of '無以爲' rather than '無不爲'. Moreover, it is '無以爲' that is opposite to '有以爲', which further proves that if the text Gushen Zi saw was '無不爲' but not '無以爲', he would have not interpreted them using another opposite phrases of '功歸天' and '功歸人'. In addition, in the note for Yan Zun's words, Gushen Zi said '所謂上德無爲而無以爲' [This is what it means by '上德無爲而無以爲']. It can be seen from this that the sentence of '上德' in the version of Yan Zun that Gushen Zi saw was '無以爲' rather than '無不爲'. If this is not the case, his comments should not violate Yan's explanation; even if he disagrees with Yan, he would have given specific explanations.

Based on the above two points, it can be seen that the version of Yan Zun and Gushen Zi was originally '上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲', exactly the same as Heshang's. The reason why '無以爲' is written as '無不爲' in the book that we see today might be the wrong alteration of later generations according to other texts.

Since it is the same as Heshang's version, it also has the same problem at the order of the five levels. Yan Zun's words '若此者元無，絕而不知爲之者何誰' is the interpretation of '無以爲' of '上德', but throughout his annotation for the sentence of '下德爲之而有以爲', there is no explanation for '有以爲'. For the sentence of '上仁', Yan says, 'The emperor's goodness flows everywhere. He possesses but not take them.'¹³ This explains the '無以爲' of '上仁'. For the sentence of '上義', Yan says, 'He owns land, passes on heirs, and have endless

¹² Chao Gongwu 晁公武, *Junzhai dushu zhi jiaozheng* 郡齋讀書志校證, collated by Sun Meng 孫猛 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), p. 468.

¹³ Yan's original words: '德流四海，有而不取'. Yan Zun 嚴遵, 'Daode zhenjing zhigui 道德真經指歸', vol. 7, p. 5a.

descendants.’¹⁴ This explains the ‘有以爲’ of ‘上義’. His interpretation does not fully explain and distinguish between ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’, and the context in which he puts in explanation changes back and forth and not consistent. Gu Shenzi’s notes have the same problem. He explains ‘無不爲’ (ought to be ‘無以爲’) of ‘上德’ as ‘to credit accomplishments to the Nature’, explain ‘有以爲’ of ‘下德’ as ‘to credit accomplishments to self’, explains ‘無以爲’ of ‘上仁’ as ‘to surrender kingship to sages’,¹⁵ and explains ‘有以爲’ of ‘上義’ as ‘to pass the throne to descendants’.¹⁶ It can be seen that the interpretation strategy of Yan Zun and Gushen Zi is similar to Heshang’s, that is, putting the two ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ in different semantic contexts and giving ‘以爲’ different meanings. Their interpretations appear right, but it cannot be comprehensible unless the semantic context changing is allowed. This might not be the original meaning of *Laozi*. Let me ask, if the ‘有以爲’ of ‘下德’ means ‘to credit accomplishments to self’, then ‘上仁’ is inferior than ‘下德’, does not it also credit them to self and why *Laozi* defines it as ‘無以爲’? Similarly, if the ‘無以爲’ of ‘上仁’ means ‘to pass the throne to descendant’, then ‘下德’ is at a higher level than ‘上仁’, does not it also pass to descendant and why *Laozi* defines it as ‘有以爲’? Therefore, it is clear that Yan Zun and Gushen Zi’s interpretations are still not able to bridge the meaning of the context.

2.2. ‘上德無爲而非以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’

Song (960–1279 CE) scholar Ye Mengde 葉夢得 wrote an annotation *Laozi jie* 老子解. His version is ‘上德無爲而非以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’.¹⁷ Compared with Heshang’s version, the only difference is that it changes ‘無以爲’ of ‘上德’ to ‘非以爲’. The two characters 無 and 非 are synonymous, and therefore his interpretation is also the same as that of Heshang. Ye says,

無德無爲者，道也，德能體之，而有無敢欲爲之心，德猶在焉。至於爲之而有

¹⁴ Yan’s original words: ‘有土傳嗣，子孫不絕’. Yan Zun 嚴遵, ‘Daode zhenjing zhigui 道德真經指歸’, vol. 7, p. 5a.

¹⁵ Yan’s original words: ‘禪聖賢也’. Yan Zun 嚴遵, ‘Daode zhenjing zhigui 道德真經指歸’, vol. 7, p. 1a.

¹⁶ Yan’s original words: ‘傳子孫也’. Yan Zun 嚴遵, ‘Daode zhenjing zhigui 道德真經指歸’, vol. 7, p. 1a.

¹⁷ Ye Mengde 葉夢得, ‘Laozi jie 老子解’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成, ed. by Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 3, p. 552.

以爲，則每下矣。¹⁸

His understanding is the same as that of other annotations mentioned above. However, how he interprets ‘上仁’ and all the sentences afterwards is not available, because his *Laozi jie* was lost, and what we see now is only the version compiled by Qing (1644 – 1912 CE) scholar Ye Dehui 葉德輝 from the quotations of other annotation works.¹⁹ Unfortunately, both *Laozi* text and Ye Mengde’s commentaries from ‘上仁’ onwards was lost. However, even if his commentaries still exist, it can be inferred from the version of the text that it is difficult to avoid the problem of the five levels.

2.3. ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而有不爲’

In Wei (220–266 CE) scholar Wang Bi 王弼’s *Laozi daodejing zhu* 老子道德經注, it goes as ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲’，²⁰ same as Heshang’s version. Many scholars of later generations, seeing this, have no doubts of it. For example, Qing scholar Bi Yuan 畢沅 and Xi Tong 奚侗 and contemporary scholar Gao Heng 高亨, all quote it as this.²¹ However, the text of *Laozi* that Wang Bi saw should not be this. It should be ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而有不爲’. Namely, the two 以 were originally ‘不’. This can be inferred from the annotations of him.

2.3.1. The sentence of ‘上德’

Looking at the sentence of ‘上德’, the text in Wang Bi’s book is ‘上德無爲而無以爲’, but his commentary is not consistent with it. Inferring the meaning of the text, it is actually based on the understanding of ‘上德無爲而無不爲’. There are two proofs. Firstly, Wang says:

¹⁸ Ye Mengde 葉夢得, ‘Laozi jie 老子解’, p. 552.

¹⁹ Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星, Foreword to ‘Laozi jie 老子解’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 3, p. 546.

²⁰ Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 93.

²¹ Bi Yuan 畢沅, ‘Laozi daodejing kaoyi 老子道德經考異’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成, ed. by Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 9, p. 742. Xi Tong 奚侗, ‘Laozi jijie 老子集解’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成, ed. by Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 13, p. 16. Gao Heng 高亨, *Chongding laozhi zhenggu* 重訂老子正詁, 2nd edn. (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1948), p. 85.

是以上德之人，唯道是用，不德其德，無執無用，故能有德而無不爲。不求而得，不爲而成，故雖有德而無德名也。²²

In this paragraph, Wang gives commentary to the contents related to ‘上德’. However, all the text of *Laozi* is covered except one part – ‘無以爲’ – there is no any related explanation for it. Surprisingly, he mentions ‘故能有德而無不爲’, which means Wang exactly interpret the text in the way of ‘無不爲’ rather than ‘無以爲’.

Secondly, in Wang’s commentary for the two sentences of ‘上德’ and ‘下德’, there is no any mentioning of ‘無以爲’. The first time of its appearance is in the part where he comments for ‘上仁’. His words in context is as below:

下德求而得之，爲而成之，……故下德爲之而有以爲也。無以爲者，無所偏爲也。……而愛之無所偏私，故上仁爲之而無以爲也。²³

This is where ‘無以爲’ appears the first time. In this paragraph, ‘故下德爲之而有以爲也’ serves as a conclusion of his commentary for ‘下德’, and the words afterwards are the comment for ‘上仁’. The sentence ‘無以爲者，無所偏爲也’ echoes with the the description of ‘上仁’, which is ‘愛之無所偏私’. It can be inferred that if the sentence of ‘上德’ that Wang saw was as ‘上德無爲而無以爲’, then his explanation for ‘無以爲’ would have been given earlier but not such late.

Some scholars spotted these. Qing scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 says in *Zhuzi pingyi* 諸子平議 about the sentence of ‘上德’,

The phrases ‘無爲’ and ‘無以爲’ seem to be indistinguishable. The following text goes, ‘上仁爲之 而無以爲’. The meaning of ‘無爲’ and ‘爲之’ are totally different, but they (上德 and 上仁) are both described as ‘無以爲’, which obviously makes no sense... It being written as ‘無以爲’ (in the sentence of ‘上德’) is a mistake due to the similar description of ‘上仁’.²⁴

Another Qing scholar Xi Tong 奚侗 says, ‘Today, Wang Bi’s version is referred to as “無以爲”, which was a change made by somebody who did not understand it

²² Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 93.

²³ Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 93-94.

²⁴ Yu Yue’s original words: ‘無爲與無以爲，似無所區別。下文云：上仁爲之，而無以爲。夫無爲與爲之，其義迥異，而同言無以爲，其不可通明矣。……今作無以爲者，涉下上仁句而誤耳。’ Yu Yue 俞樾, *Zhuzi pingyi* 諸子平議 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954), p. 152.

according to Heshang's version. This is clear if we look at Wang's annotation.²⁵
Jiang Xichang 蔣錫昌 also think so.²⁶

2.3.2. The sentence of '下德'

For the sentence of '下德', Wang Bi's version today is written as '下德爲之而有以爲'. However, according to his annotation, the text he saw should be '下德爲之而有不爲'. There are two proofs. Firstly, He says,

下德求而得之，爲而成之，則立善以治物，故德名有焉。求而得之，必有失焉；
爲而成之，必有敗焉。善名生，則有不善應焉。故下德爲之而有以爲也。²⁷

In Wang's annotation, there is explanation for *Laozi* text of '下德不失德' and '下德爲之', but there is no related comments for '有以爲'. However, looking closely at his words – he three times makes comparison between 下德's feature of '爲之' (coercive actions) and their opposite consequences: '得' (gain) and '失' (lost), '成' (accomplish) and '敗' (failure), and '善名生' (the generation of concept of 'good') and '不善應' (the response of 'bad'). He is emphasizing the opposite outcomes – '有不爲' (limitations of the person's actions). All these are explanation for '有不爲' rather than '有以爲'.

Secondly, Wang says, '凡不能無爲而爲之者，皆下德也，仁義禮節是也' [Those who cannot act according to non-coercive actions all belongs to the level of 下德, namely, 仁, 義, and 禮節].²⁸ From this, for Wang's understanding, '仁', '義', '禮' are included in '下德'. This can proof that the version he saw and explained was '無不爲'. This is because he interprets '無以爲' as '無偏私' (no partiality) and '有以爲' as '有偏私' (with partiality).²⁹ If the feature of '下德' was '有以爲', then he would not have consider '下德' to include '仁', '義', and '禮', because if '下德' is partial, how could it include the non-partial '上仁'? If it was so, it would seem that

²⁵ Xi Tong's original words: '今王弼本亦作「無以爲」，是淺人據河上本所彊改。觀王注語自明。' Xi Tong 奚侗, 'Laozi jijie老子集解', p. 16.

²⁶ Jiang Xichang 蔣錫昌, *Laozi jiaogu 老子校詁* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), p. 245.

²⁷ Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi 老子道德經注校釋*, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 93-94.

²⁸ Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi 老子道德經注校釋*, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 94.

²⁹ Wang comments on '上仁': '無以爲者，無所偏爲也。.....而愛之無所偏私，故上仁爲之而無以爲也', and comments on 上義: '忿枉祐直，助彼攻此。' This shows that he interprets '無以爲' and '有以爲' as whether one has partiality or not. Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi 老子道德經注校釋*, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 94.

‘下仁’ is even superior to ‘下德’, and the degenerative order will be more confusing. Therefore, Wang’s version should originally be ‘下德無爲而有不爲’ rather than ‘下德無爲而有以爲’. This is also supported by Tao Hongqing 陶鴻慶, Ma Xulun 馬敘倫, and Jiang Xichang 蔣錫昌.³⁰

However, Some scholars have a different conclusion, thinking that the text that Wang saw should be ‘下德爲之而無以爲’. Boduoye Tailang 波多野太郎, Rudolf G. Wagner, and Bai Xi 白奚 all support this. They mainly rely on two arguments. Firstly, Song scholar Fan Yingyuan 范應元’s *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德經古本集注 quoted Wang Bi’s words as ‘下德爲之而無以爲者，無所偏爲也’.³¹ Secondly, they think Wang’s words of ‘無以爲者，無所偏爲也’ follows the sentence of ‘故下德爲之而有以爲也’ and thus should be explaining ‘下德’ rather than ‘上仁’.³² However, these arguments are questionable and not true. There are three proofs. Firstly, as analysed above, Wang’s saying of ‘無以爲者，無所偏爲也’ connects with ‘愛之無所偏私，故上仁爲之而無以爲也’ and therefore it explains ‘上仁’ rather than ‘下德’. Secondly, Wang says, ‘將明德之上下，輒舉下德以對上德’ [To clarify the highest virtue and lower virtue, *Laozi* arises ‘下德’ in contrast

³⁰ Tao Hongqing says, ‘下德爲之而有以爲，以字亦當作不，與上句反正互明。他書雖無可印證，然可以注義推之。注云：下德求而得之，……故下德爲之而有以（亦當作不）爲也。此正釋經文有不爲之義。……若此句作有以爲，則與上義句無所區別，而與上仁、上禮諸句不相融貫矣。……疑王氏所見本正作有不爲，今作有以爲者，涉上義句而誤，注又沿經文之誤也。’ Tao Hongqing 陶鴻慶, *Du zhuzi zhaji* 讀諸子札記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), p. 2.

Ma Xulun says, ‘上句當作無不爲，下句當作有不爲。如此本下句作無以爲，則與上仁句無別。如世本作有以爲，則與上義句無別，故決知當如此。’ Ma Xulun 馬敘倫, *Laozi jiaogu* 老子校詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), p. 369.

Jiang Xichang says, ‘「上德無爲而無不爲」，言上德之君，雖行無爲之治，而其功效則無不爲也。「下德爲之而有不爲」，言下德之君，雖行有爲之治，而其結果反有不爲也。’ Jiang Xichang 蔣錫昌, *Laozi jiaogu* 老子校詁, p. 245.

³¹ Fan Yingyuan 范應元, *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德經古本集注 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), p. 68.

³² Bai Xi says, ‘注文曰：「……故下德爲之而有以爲也。無以爲者，無所偏爲也」，「無以爲者」云云，顯然是承接上文解釋何謂「無以爲」，語氣一氣呵成，如果以「無以爲」解釋「有以爲」，則不合行文邏輯。因而此處注文疑本亦爲「無以爲」，傳抄者依據已經訛誤的經文改「無」爲「有」。’ Bai Xi 白奚, ‘Xihan zhujianben laozhi shouzhang “xiade wei zhi er wu yi wei” kaoshi 西漢竹簡本《老子》首章「下德爲之而無以爲」考釋’, *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究, 2 (2015), p. 28.

Rudolf G. Wagner says: ‘然而，范應元引用的王弼注卻作「無以爲」。這一論辯的合理性由這一事實得到確證：王弼接下來立即解釋了「無以爲」的意思。’ Rudolf G. Wagner, *Wang Bi laozizhu yanjiu* 王弼《老子注》研究, translated by Yang Lihua 楊立華 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2008), p. 545.

Boduoye Tailang 波多野太郎 has roughly same argument as Bai Xi and Wagner. Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 98.

with ‘上德’]. As the features of ‘上德’ and ‘下德’ were thought by him to be contrast, ‘下德’ should then be ‘爲之而有不爲’. Otherwise it will not be at the same level with 上德’s ‘無爲而無不爲’, because only ‘有不爲’ stands at the opposite to ‘無不爲’. Nor could ‘有以爲’ and ‘無以爲’ matches. Thirdly, as mention earlier, Wang considers ‘上德’ to contain ‘上仁’, ‘上義’, and ‘上禮’, but if the feature of ‘下德’ is ‘non-partial’, which is how Wang interprets ‘無以爲’, how could it be able to serve as a summary of ‘上義’ and ‘上禮’, which were thought to be ‘partial’ by Wang? This is a more powerful evidence, as single characters could be changed during the circulation of a book, but what an author means through the context is more persuasive and less possible to be changed. Therefore, Fan Yingyuan’s quotation of Wang Bi seems to be a mistake, with the five characters ‘下德爲之而’ being redundancy due to mis-copying or misunderstanding. This can be proved by that we do not see these five characters in today’s Wang Bi’s annotation. Therefore, Wang’s version should originally be ‘下德爲之而有不爲’, and both ‘有以爲’ and ‘無以爲’ are wrong.

2.3.3. The sentences of ‘上仁’ and ‘上義’

After restoring Wang’s version of the two sentences of ‘上德’ and ‘下德’, his understanding for ‘上仁’ and ‘上義’ is then needed to be examined, in which ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ are the core texts that determines whether he will be troubled by the problem of the degenerative order. Wang says,

無以爲者，無所偏爲也。……愛之無所偏私，故上仁爲之而無以爲也。愛不能兼，則有抑抗正直而義理之者。忿枉祐直，助彼攻此，……故上義爲之而有以爲也。直不能篤，則有游飾修文禮敬之者。尙好修敬，校責往來，則不對之間忿怒生焉。故上禮爲之而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之。³³

Wang interprets ‘以爲’ as ‘偏爲’ [partiality] – 上仁’s ‘無以爲’ means ‘無所偏爲’ [no partiality] and ‘愛之無所偏私’ [impartial love], whereas 上義’s ‘有以爲’ refers to ‘愛不能兼’ [the love that fails to be impartial] and ‘忿枉祐直，助彼攻此’ [to detest the abuser and protect the righteous, to help this and attack that],³⁴ and ‘上禮’ is even worse: ‘校責往來，則不對之間忿怒生焉’ [to argue back and forth

³³ Wang Bi 王弼, *Laozi daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, p. 94.

³⁴ Modified from Lin’s translation. Paul J. Lin, *A Translation of Lao-tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary*, p. 71.

about the details, and disagreement between two opposing parties would arouse anger and grudges].³⁵ This is how Wang interprets these three levels from the angle of ‘impartiality’ or ‘partiality’.

Looking at Wang Bi’s annotation for this chapter as a whole, his version should be ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而有不爲’. Here, ‘無不爲’ and ‘有不爲’ means the their outcome – although ‘上德’ does not involve coercive actions, it can bring everything to properness and there is nothing that cannot be done, whereas for ‘下德’, although coercive actions are adopted, there are always things unachievable. For ‘上仁’ and ‘上義’, his version is the same as Heshang’s, written as ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ respectively, and he interprets them as ‘impartiality’ or ‘partiality’. His interpretation solves the conflict between the five levels due to his unique text version of *Laozi*. However, his interpreting ‘以爲’ as ‘偏爲’ [partiality] does not comply with common sense and is far-fetched and needs further examination.

2.4. ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無以爲’

The version of ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無以爲’ was firstly seen in Tang scholar Fu Yi 傅奕’s *Daodejing guben pian* 道德經古本篇. It is said to be collated by Fu Yi through the version from Xiang Yu 項羽’s concubine’s tomb and other ancient versions.³⁶ However, the book has only the text of *Laozi* and no annotations. Therefore, Fu’s interpretation for the sentences of ‘上德’ and ‘下德’ could not be known.

In Song dynasty, Fan Yingyuan 范應元 wrote *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德經古本集注, in which his version of ‘上德’ and ‘下德’ sentences are same as Fu’s. He says in annotation for ‘上德無爲而無不爲’,

此句韓非、王訓、王弼、郭雲、傅奕同古本，河上公作「上德无爲而无以爲」，今從古本。此復釋「上德」也。謂上德者不言而信，不動而化，无爲而无不爲也。韓非云：「虛則德盛，德盛之謂上德，故上德无爲而无不爲也。」³⁷

For ‘下德爲之而無以爲’, he says,

³⁵ Modified from Lin’s translation. Paul J. Lin, *A Translation of Lao-tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary*, p. 70-71.

³⁶ Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星, Foreword to ‘*Daodejing guben pian* 道德經古本篇’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 1, p. 47.

³⁷ Fan Yingyuan 范應元, *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德經古本集註 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), p. 68.

韓非、王誦、王弼、郭雲、傅奕同古本，河上公作「下德爲之而有以爲」，今從古本。此復釋下德也。謂下德爲之而无以爲者，爲其當然也，無私意以爲之。王弼云：「下德爲之而無以爲者，無所偏爲也。」今引韓非、王弼兩家註者，无它焉，姑以證古本也。³⁸

According to his text version, 上德's '無不爲' refers to its endless efficacy, whereas '下德' is interpreted in the way of '無以爲', which Fan uses '無私意' [no selfish intention] to explain. However, there are two major loopholes in this. Firstly, if, as he says, the feature of '下德' is '無以爲', then it is no any difference with '上仁', but from the following text of '失德而後仁' of *Laozi*, it can be inferred that they must be different. Otherwise, the sentence of '下德' would have no reason to be written down but a redundancy – Fan did not solve this problem. Modern scholar Bai Xi 白奚 has the same opinion as Fan's. He use Wang Bi's annotation of '凡不能無爲而爲之者，皆下德也，仁義禮節是也' and '極下德之量，上仁是也' to argue. He says,

其中「上仁」是「極下德之量」，也就是「下德」的最高層次，「上義」「上禮」則等而下之，每況愈下。「上仁」既然是「下德」之最，二者的表現就應該是一致的。³⁹

However, the problem of this has been identified before – as Wang Bi regards '下德' to contain other three levels, then, according to his comments, how could it be able to contain '上義' and '上禮' if its feature is '無以爲'?

Secondly, Fan quotes Han Fei Zi 韓非子 and Wang Bi's versions to support his, but not only his quotation of Wang Bi seems to be a mistake, but also he did not correctly understand Han Fei's meaning. Although Han's version is indeed written as '上德無爲而無不爲', it should be an false alteration made by later readers. It should originally be '上德無爲而無以爲', which is clear from his context. Han says in *Han Fei Zi* 'Jie Lao' 韓非子·解老,

所以貴無爲無思爲虛者，謂其意無所制也。夫無術者，故以無爲無思爲虛也。夫故以無爲無思爲虛者，其意常不忘虛，是制於爲虛也。虛者，謂其意所無制也。今制於爲虛，是不虛也。虛者之無爲也，不以無爲爲有常，不以無爲爲有

³⁸ Fan Yingyuan 范應元, *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德經古本集註, p. 68.

³⁹ Bai Xi 白奚, 'Xihan zhujianben laozhi shouzhang "xiade weizhi er wu yiwei" kaoshi' 西漢竹簡本《老子》首章「下德爲之而無以爲」考釋, p. 30.

常則虛，虛則德盛，德盛之謂上德。故曰：「上德無爲而無不爲也。」⁴⁰

This is all his commentary for the sentence of ‘上德’, but there is none related with ‘無不爲’ – all his interpretation is for ‘無以爲’. He says, ‘故以無爲無思爲虛者，其意常不忘虛，是制於爲虛也’ [For those who intentionally want to have no thoughts to reach the state of emptiness, their mind cannot get rid of this conception and are thus controlled by the pursuit for emptiness], and he concludes as ‘不以無爲爲有常則虛’ [Not take non-coercive action in mind unchangeably will help reach the real state of emptiness] – how he interprets is exactly in the way of ‘無以爲’. Gao Ming 高明’s *Boshu laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注 also spots this sharply.⁴¹ However, many scholars did not find this and thought Han Fei’s version was originally as it is today, such as Qing scholar Bi Yuan 畢沅 and Yu Yue 俞樾.⁴² However, from the above discussion, we see the versions of the sentence of ‘上德’ that Fan quotes as his support are not correct. Moreover, as for the sentence of ‘下德’, Fan says Han Fei’s version is same as his, but from the text of Han Fei Zi 韓非子 today, there is no mentioning of the sentence of ‘下德’, which is also proved by Gao Ming.⁴³ Therefore, it seems that Fan’s quotation of Han Fei Zi is also mistaken.

Then, Fu and Fan’s version of ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無以爲’ seems not reliable under the examination of the meaning of context and the previous versions that it relies on.

2.5. ‘上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無不爲’

It seems that none of the above versions of the previous dynasties have been solved the textual problem, and later scholars continued to explore. Qing scholar Xi Tong

⁴⁰ Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解, collated by Zhong Zhe 鍾哲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), p. 131.

⁴¹ Gao Ming says, ‘從韓非這段論述中，毫無「無爲而無不爲」之意，正是對「無爲而無以爲」之詮釋。仔細閱讀〈解老篇〉這段文字，自然會覺察到它所論述的內容，則與引文「無爲而無不爲」互相牴牾，足證引文原非如此。……不言而喻，〈解老篇〉引文既然有誤，而嚴、傅、范與樓古四本此文，也必經後人竄改，非《老子》原本之義。’ Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, p. 4.

⁴² Bi Yuan comments on the sentence of ‘上德無爲而無不爲’, saying, ‘《韓非子》與奕同。’ Bi Yuan 畢沅, ‘Laozi daodejing kaoyi 老子道德經考異’, p. 742.

Yu Yue says, ‘《韓非子·解老篇》作「上德無爲而無不爲也」，蓋古本《老子》如此。’ Yu Yue 俞樾, *Zhuzi pingyi* 諸子平議, p. 152.

⁴³ Gao Ming says, ‘驗之《韓非子·解老》篇，亦只言「上德」、「上仁」、「上義」、「上禮」，而無「下德」。’ Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, p. 4.

奚侗's *Laozi jijie* 老子集解 gives a new version: '上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無不爲' – the first sentence same as Fu Yi's, whereas the second is an altered one by Xi Tong himself. He interprets '無不爲' as '使萬物各順其性' [to make all things develop as their own nature].⁴⁴ He gives his reasons:

下德，則開物成務，不能無所爲也。然亦能使萬物各順其性。無不爲，河上、王弼本作有以爲。是下德與上義無別。范應元引古本作無以爲，是下德又與上仁無別。於理均不順，今爲改正。⁴⁵

Similar to Wang Bi, Xi also makes '下德' out of '無以爲' and '有以爲', and gives it the feature of '無不爲', which is then matched with '上德' and does not conflict with the '無以爲' or '有以爲' of '上仁' and '上義'. But his version is created himself, without any evidence and support of any previous version, as he says himself, '於理均不順，今爲改正' [All of them do not make sense, and thus I rectify it]. Therefore, his opinion can be a reference but not a determined conclusion.

Overall, from the above examination of previous versions and interpretations for the sentences of '上德' and '下德', these five versions have been discussed:

1. '上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而有以爲'
2. '上德無爲而非以爲，下德爲之而有以爲'
3. '上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而有不爲'
4. '上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無以爲'
5. '上德無爲而無不爲，下德爲之而無不爲'

Scholars had different opinions and even misunderstood each other. Some versions were falsely altered by readers in later generations. The diverse opinions and debates among scholars have been clarified through the above, but there seems not a version that is no problem.

3. Evidence of documents unearthed

Unearthed documents are an important basis for ancient texts. There are three

⁴⁴ Xi Tong says, '「無爲」者，清淨寧一，不先物而動。「無不爲」者，使萬物各順其性。' Xi Tong 奚侗, 'Laozi jijie 老子集解', p. 16.

⁴⁵ Xi Tong 奚侗, 'Laozi jijie 老子集解', p. 16.

main documents unearthed in modern times that contain early *Laozi* version. One is the Guodian Chu bamboo slip 郭店楚簡. Another is that of Mawangdui silk book 馬王堆帛書. The third is the Han bamboo slip 漢簡 version collected by Peking University from overseas. Among these three, Guodian bamboo slip version is the earliest text, thought to be written in the middle of the Warring States Period (481–403 BCE). However, the tomb has been stolen several times and the content is missing. The Chapter Thirty-eight of the current *Laozi* is not included in it.⁴⁶ Therefore, the following will only discuss the Mawangdui silk book and the Han bamboo slip collected by Peking University.

3.1. Mawangdui silk book *Laozi*

Mawangdui silk book *Laozi* was unearthed in 1973. There are two versions: *jiaben* 甲本 and *yiben* 乙本. For Chapter Thirty-eight in today's *Laozi*, the content of *jiaben* is as below, with some parts lost:

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ 德上德无□□无以爲也上仁爲之□□以
爲也上義爲之而有以爲也上禮□□□□□□□□ 攘臂而乃之故失道而后德失
德而后仁失仁而后義□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ 而亂之首也□□□道之華
也而愚之首也是以大丈夫居其厚而不居其泊居其實不居其華故去皮取此⁴⁷

The content of *yiben* is relatively complete:

上德不德是以有德下德不失德是以无德上德无爲而无以爲也上仁爲之而无以
爲也上德爲之而有以爲也上禮爲之而莫之應也則攘臂而乃之故失道而后德失
德而句仁失仁而句義失義而句禮夫禮者忠信之泊也而亂之首也前識者道之華
也而愚之首也是以大丈夫居□□□□居其泊居其實而不居其華故去罷而取此⁴⁸

Importantly, both *jiaben* and *yiben* do not have the sentence of ‘下德’ between the sentence of ‘上德’ and ‘上仁’, but the meaning of the text is more consistent. Without the sentence of ‘下德’, the other four levels of ‘上德’, ‘上仁’, ‘上義’, and ‘上禮’ exactly match with the degenerative order expressed in the following text from ‘失道而後德’ to ‘失義而後禮’. Moreover, the features of the four then present a gradual and step-by-step change: ‘無爲而無以爲’ [non-coercive action

⁴⁶ Wang Chuanfu 傅富 and Tang Xuefeng 湯學鋒, ‘Jingmen guodian yihao chumu 荊門郭店一號楚墓’, *Wenwu* 文物, 7 (1997), p. 46.

⁴⁷ The symbol ‘□’ each refers to a character that is lost due to the fragmented silk. Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, p. 429.

⁴⁸ Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, p. 454.

and no 以爲], ‘爲之而無以爲’ [coercive action and no 以爲], ‘爲之而有以爲’ [coercive action and 以爲], and ‘莫之應則攘臂而扔之’ [If there is no response, bares his arms to apply force] – the degenerative order is then very clear. Gao Ming and Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 both support this.⁴⁹

Apart from the evidence from the meaning of context, there are two more proofs. Firstly, as for this chapter of *Laozi*, the silk version is the earliest text that has been found as far, and both *jiaben* and *yiben* do not have the sentence of ‘下德’, which can be a powerful documentary evidence. Secondly, *Han Fei Zi* 韓非子 quoted and explained all text from Chapter Thirty-eight of *Laozi* except two sentences, one of which is the sentence of 下德.⁵⁰ *Han Fei Zi* was written in late Warring State Period, little earlier than the silk book. From this, it can be inferred that both *Han Fei Zi* and the silk *Laozi* present the original form of Chapter Thirty-eight. Moreover, contemporary scholar Yang Shuda 楊樹達 wrote *Laozi guyi* 老子古義, in which he collects *Han Fei Zi*, *Huainan Zi* 淮南子 and other texts before the Qin 秦 dynasty to explain and prove the text of *Laozi*. For Chapter Thirty-eight, he finds these other sources for nearly every sentence except the sentence of ‘下德’.⁵¹ This means it does not exist in any other pre-Qin texts. From all these above, it can be seen that the sentence of ‘下德’ was added by people afterwards, but not its original, and Mawangdui silk version should be what it originally was.

⁴⁹ Gao Ming says, ‘德仁義禮之間各自差距如何？老子用「無爲」作爲衡量四者的標準，以「無爲而無以爲」最上，「爲之而無以爲」其次，「爲之而有以爲」再次，「爲之而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之」最次。據帛書甲、乙本分析，德仁義禮四者的差別非常整齊，邏輯意義也很清楚。今本衍「下德」一句，不僅詞義重疊，造成內容混亂，而且各本衍文不一，眾議紛紛。……由此可見，「下德」一句在此純屬多餘，絕非《老子》原文所有，當爲後人妄增。’ Gao Ming 高明, *Boshu laozhi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校注, p. 3.

Liu Xiaogan says, ‘帛書本作「上德」、「上仁」、「上義」、「上禮」，排列整齊有序，與下節「失道—失德—失仁—失義—後禮」的順序若合符節，而傳世本加入「下德」一句，以與「上德」對偶，卻使結構變得不合理。顯然是傳世本模仿上段「上德」、「下德」之對仗而加入「下德」一句，造成文義混亂。’ Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢, *Laozi gujin: wuzhong duikan yu xiping yinlun* 老子古今：五種對勘與析評引論 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2016), p. 395.

⁵⁰ Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解, collated by Zhong Zhe 鍾哲, p. 130-135.

⁵¹ Yang Shuda 楊樹達, ‘Laozi guyi 老子古義’, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成, ed. by Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基 and Chen Hongxing 陳紅星 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol. 12, pp. 206-209.

3.2. The Han bamboo slip *Laozi*

In 2009, Peking University accepted a batch of Han bamboo slips returned from overseas donation, among which there is an early version *Laozi*.⁵² Its version of the ‘上德’ and ‘下德’ sentences is unique: ‘上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之而無以爲’⁵³ – the first half is same as Heshang’s version, whereas the second half is as Fu Yi’s. As there is no annotation with this version, how the writer interpreted it could not be found, but as the second sentence is same with Fu’s, it will have the same problem in term of the degenerative order. However, Bai Xi supports this version. He uses Wang Bi’s version as a proof because he thinks Wang’s is the same as the bamboo version, but this is not the case, which has been proven in previous sections. Apart from this, Bai also argues in terms of the time of the documents. He says Fu Yi’s version is based on Xiang Yu’s concubine’s tomb and it should have been circulated in the Qin and Han times, even earlier than the silk book, and thus should be the original version.⁵⁴ However, this argument is questionable. The version from the concubine’s tomb is not seen today. As for Fu’s book, it was written in the Tang dynasty, much later than the Qin and Han, and the versions he referred to were more than only one. Thus we cannot say that they represent the earliest version. Moreover, as for the time, the Han bamboo slip was in the time of the Wu Emperor 武帝, later than the silk book version.⁵⁵ Moreover, Bai Xi seems to have misunderstood Wang Bi, and thus his argument might not be tenable.

From the discussion above, we see that the silk book version is the most consistent one, whereas the Han bamboo slip version might not be the original. Then, the version has been determined. In the following text, the interpretation of ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ of ‘上德’, ‘上仁’, and ‘上義’ will be discussed.

⁵² *Beijing daxue cang xihan zhushu* 北京大學藏西漢竹書, ed. by Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015), vol. 2, p. 123.

⁵³ *Beijing daxue cang xihan zhushu* 北京大學藏西漢竹書, ed. by Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所, vol. 2, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Bai Xi 白奚, ‘Xihan zhujianben laozhi shouzhang “xiade weizhi er wu yiwei” kaoshi 西漢竹簡本《老子》首章「下德爲之而無以爲」考釋’, p. 29.

⁵⁵ *Beijing daxue cang xihan zhushu* 北京大學藏西漢竹書, ed. by Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 北京大學出土文獻研究所, vol. 2, Foreword p. 2.

4. The interpretation of 無以爲 and 有以爲

The phrase ‘無爲’ is a core ideal in *Laozi*, which refers to ‘non-coercive action’, whereas ‘爲之’ is the opposite. Both of them are common vocabularies in the book. However, ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ are difficult to find a proper interpretation, but it is certain that the meaning of ‘無爲’ and ‘無以爲’ must be different, and so do ‘爲之’ and ‘有以爲’. Otherwise, the phrase the ‘上德無爲而無以爲’ does not have to repeat the same concept twice, and ‘上仁’ will not be described as ‘爲之’ and ‘無以爲’ at the same time.

But how should ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ be understood? There are mainly two different opinions. One is to interpret them as ‘partial’ or ‘impartial’, which is the interpretation of Wang Bi and has been discussed previously. The other is to consider them as ‘intentional’ or ‘unintentional’. If one does what one should do unintentionally, this is ‘無以爲’, and vice versa. For example, Song scholar Lin Xiyi 林希逸 uses ‘無心’ and ‘有心’ to interpret ‘無以爲’ and ‘有以爲’ respectively.⁵⁶ Fan Yingyuan uses ‘無所爲’ (the 爲 here means ‘for’, namely, ‘purpose’ or ‘intention’, but not ‘do’) to interpret ‘無以爲’.⁵⁷ Ming scholar Xue Hui 薛惠’s interpretation is similar.⁵⁸ Their words are different, but their meaning is the same. Among these two interpretations, Wang Bi’s interpreting ‘以爲’ as ‘偏爲’ [partiality] seems not in accord with the common meaning of the character, and the second interpretation is more appropriate. There are two proofs.

Firstly, it can be seen from the context. The text of 上禮’s ‘莫之應，則攘臂而扔之’ refers to that the implementation of ritual rules sometimes receives no response or compliance from others, and then those implementing the rules might force others. This shows an implication of ‘intentional’ – a utilitarian purpose behind the action and also a demand imposed at the same time on others. Following this implication and to look at the ‘無以爲’ of ‘上仁’ and the ‘有以爲’ of ‘上義’, they seem exactly refers to whether one is intentional in doing things or

⁵⁶ Lin Xiyi says, ‘「以」者，有心也。「無以爲」是無心而爲之也。’ Lin Xiyi 林希逸, *Laozi yanzhai kouyi* 老子虞齋口義, in *Laozi jicheng* 老子集成, ed. by Xiong Tiejie 熊鐵基 and 陳紅星 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2011), vol.4, p. 511.

⁵⁷ Fan Yingyuan says, ‘「上仁爲之，而無以爲」者，非以要譽也。無所爲而爲之也。’ Fan Yingyuan 范應元, *Laozi daodejing guben jizhu* 老子道德經古本集註, p. 69.

⁵⁸ Xue Hui says, ‘無以爲，謂無所爲而爲之；有以爲，謂有爲爲之。……上仁薰然慈仁，汎愛兼利，然至誠惻怛，猶無所爲而爲之也，故曰上仁爲之而無以爲。上義正直決斷，處物合宜，其心將以服人，故曰上義爲之而有以爲。’ Xue Hui 薛惠, *Laozi jijie* 老子集解, p. 301.

not. The former is without intention, and people of this level do things naturally without calculation. They do what they ought to do, but they just do them out of a natural impulse, as Xue Hui says, ‘至誠惻怛，猶無所爲而爲之也’ [People of this kind are completely sincere and full of sympathy, and they do things with no intention.]⁵⁹ Mencius says,

今人乍見孺子將入於井，皆有怵惕惻隱之心。非所以內交於孺子之父母也，非所以要譽於鄉黨朋友也，非惡其聲而然也。⁶⁰

Here, Mencius says a person with sympathy (惻隱之心) will go to save a baby who is about to fall into a well not because of he has acquaintance with the baby's parents, nor for the sake of reputation. This person is determined to do this out of such natural impulse. This is the meaning of 上仁's '無以爲'. As for 上義's 有以爲, as Wang Bi says by '忿枉祐直，助彼攻此', it involves the demand for others and intentions behind actions.

Secondly, the above interpretation of 無以爲 and 有以爲 can also be proved by other early texts. For example, *Wen Zi* 文子 says,

老子曰：慈父之愛子者，非求其報，不可內解於心；聖主之養民，非爲士用也，性不得已也，及恃其力，賴其功勳而必窮，有以爲則恩不接矣。⁶¹

It is exactly emphasizing that the real '仁' is without the intention to get reward from others (非求其報), and the opposite of it is '有以爲'. *Han Fei Zi* also interprets '無以爲' from this angle:

仁者，謂其中心欣然愛人也。其喜人之有福而惡人之有禍也，生心之所不能已也，非求其報也。故曰：「上仁爲之而無以爲也。」⁶²

Therefore, whether one is intentional in doing things or not should be the meaning of '無以爲' and '有以爲'.

⁵⁹ Xue Hui 薛蕙, *Laozi jijie* 老子集解, p. 301.

⁶⁰ Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), p. 239.

⁶¹ Xin Xing 辛鉞, 'Wenzi 文子', in *Yingyin wenyuange cikuquanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, ed. by Aixinjueluo Yongrong 愛新覺羅·永瑤 and Ji Yun 紀昀 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), vol. 1058, p. 343.

⁶² Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解, collated by Zhong Zhe 鍾哲, p. 131.

5. Conclusion

To conclude the discussion of this essay, there are mainly three outcomes:

Firstly, it reviews the main opinions of previous dynasties on Chapter Thirty-eight of *Laozi* through complex debates and differences. During this process, some of the misunderstanding and false alteration has been spotted and their original intention have been restored. More importantly, by examining the versions and interpretations offered by scholars, we found that Wang Bi and Xi Tong resolved contradictions among the different levels, but their opinions are untenable either in terms of literal interpretation or previous evidence of text. As for other scholars' versions, even the problem of the levels is not solved.

Secondly, this essay then examined the documents unearthed and found that the Mawangdui silk book version, which does not have the sentence of '下德爲之', is the most appropriate version. Compared to the silk version, the Han bamboo slip version is also analysed and finally proved to be questionable.

Thirdly, through the analysis of '無以爲' and '有以爲', we found that to interpret them as 'being intentional' or not is the proper way and in consistence with the context.

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2011)

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