



Trinity Saint David

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☒ I have not used AI in my assignment

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☐ I have used AI in my assignment

CHAPTER READING AND PRESENTATION

CHAPTER 8 P.281-296

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-Overview-

- **8.2. The Metaphysical Turn of Confucian Learning**
 - **8.2.1. He Yan and Exegesis of the Analects**
 - **8.2.2. Wang Bi and the Metaphysical Turn in Classical Exegesis**
 - **8.2.3. Wang Bi's Exegetical Works**
- **8.3. Conclusions**

- **8.2.** The Metaphysical Turn of Confucian Learning

➤ Background

How did **ethereal intellectual musings** connect with practical **textual criticism**?

Apply musing to **the *Changes*** (周易)

- Traditional Daoist thinkers: **Zhuangzi** (莊子) → **Laozi** (老子) → **Changes** (through the Qin-Han era)
- **Wang Bi** (王弼)'s change: **Changes** → **Laozi** → **Zhuangzi**

- **8.2.1. He Yan and Exegesis of the Analects**

He Yan 何晏 (c. 195–249)

➤ Background

- From Nanyang, Henan (河南，南陽)
- Grandson of General He Jin (何進), adopted son of Cao Cao (曹操)
- Famous for both speculative thought and classical exegesis
思辨哲學與經學註解
- The greatest contribution to classical scholarship is *Collected Analyses of the Analects* (論語集解)
- For metaphysical subjects: *Disquisition on the Way* (道論)

“Pure conversations” 清談

➤ Background

- He Yan was the leading figure
- Private gatherings of literati, officials, and hermits (no rank)
- Like a philosophical salon
- Topics: Character evaluation, human nature, language, and **Three Mysteries** (三玄) 即《老子》《庄子》《周易》的思想
- Format: Two hosts (one proposes, one refutes) → audience decides winner by logic

The Anecdote with Wang Bi

➤ He Yan and Wang Bi on Laozi

- Before completing his commentary on Laozi, He Yan saw Wang Bi's work
- He admitted his own commentary had many failings
- He stopped annotating and instead composed his Disquisition on the Way and Its Power (道论)

He Yan's Main Contribution

➤ The Genre of Collective Commentary (集解)

- If Du Yu (杜預) combined classic and commentary, He Yan created the collective commentary genre
- Title jijie 集解 = “collected analyses” (adjective-noun)
- Innovation appeared earlier in China than in the West

He Yan's Main Contribution

➤ Comparison with the West

- In the West: Procopius (late 5th–early 6th century, Gaza) first developed the “catena” (chain commentary)
- N. G. Wilson: “A commentary consisting of excerpts from previous commentaries... each excerpt prefaced with the author’s name”
- Similar to He Yan’s method but appeared later

He Yan's Preface and Method

➤ He Yan's Preface to Collected Analyses

- “Now in assembling the excellent interpretations of the various masters, I record their surnames and names. Where I am uneasy about any, I somewhat modify or change them. The title is called *Collected Analyses of the Analects*.”
- Willing to hazard his own views (not purely passive compilation)

Regarding *Collected Analyses*'s evaluation

➤ Xing Bing's (邢昺 932–1010)

- He Yan's work “then assembled and collected the ‘interpretations and principles’ of the various masters in order to analyze the similarities of wording in the *Analects* and differences in meaning

乃聚集諸家義理以解論語言同而意異也。

He Yan Influence & Conclusion

➤ The Genre of Collective Commentary (集解)

- The culmination of Han classical learning on the *Analects*
- Not a completely new beginning, except in breaking with Zheng Xuan's ritual-focused approach
- most influential overall commentary from its compilation until Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) great commentaries

- **8.2.2 Wang Bi and the Metaphysical Turn in Classical Exegesis**

Wang Bi 王弼(226–249)

➤ Father's Background

- Father: **Wang Ye** (王業), born in Shanyang, Shandong (山東, 山陽)
- Grandson of **Liu Biao** (劉表) (through Liu's wife)
- **Liu Biao**: founder of the famous **Jingzhou school of classical scholarship**
- Emperor Wen ordered **Wang Ye** to become the adopted son of **Wang Can**
- **Wang Can's** own two sons were executed after a failed uprising
- **Wang Ye's** real father was a clansman of the same generation as **Wang Can**

Wang Bi 王弼(226–249)

➤ Background

- As lineal (though not blood) son of Wang Can, Wang Ye received: Wang Can's splendid private library and the full **Jingzhou school** perspective
- Grew up surrounded by the rich family library, Intellectual atmosphere including:
 - ① **Song Zhong's** commentary on **Yang Xiong's** Classic of Grandest Mystery (太玄經)
 - ② **Jingzhou school's** Sections and Lines Commentary on the Five Classics
 - ③ **Wang Can's** personal copy of Wang Chong's Discourses in the Balance (論衡)

Wang Bi's earthbound bent (入世)

➤ Core Argument:

- "Nothingness" (wu) is the foundation of the cosmos.
- In human affairs, the Way is enacted by following this non-directed, non-targeted approach to life and letting life and death, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty, fame and obscurity, and social stability and political chaos follow natural paths and cycles.

Wang Bi's earthbound bent (入世)

➤ Core Argument:

- Using Nothingness as the foundation (以無為本)
- Using Nothingness for application (以無為用)
- In Wei-Jin, Pure Conversation topics were insubstantial and irrelevant to human life.
- Wang Bi's Laozi is actually more grounded in human concerns.

- **8.2.3 Wang Bi's Exegetical Works**

Wang Bi's Main Works

➤ Exegetical Works

- Three categories of works:
- **Commentaries on Laozi:** Annotations on Laozi's Classic of the Way and Its Power + Models, Pointers, and Reductions in the Laozi 《老子道德經注》 《老子指略例》
- **Commentaries on Changes:** Annotations on the Zhou Changes, Reductions and Models from the Zhou Changes, Grand Elaborations of a Discourse on the Zhou Changes 《周易注》 《周易略例》 《周易大演論》
- **Commentary on Analects:** Elucidation of Doubtful Points in the Analects 《論語釋疑》

- **8.3. Conclusions**

Conclusions

➤ Key Takeaway

- He Yan and Wang Bi played key roles in the metaphysical turn of Confucian learning
- He Yan: Culmination of Han scholarship + creator of collective commentary
- Wang Bi: Reformed the Changes text and applied xuanxue to exegesis
- Connected ethereal musings with practical textual criticism and opened the path for Wei-Jin hermeneutics.

Thank you for your
patient listening.

