

INTRODUCTION

Of the several hundred extant commentaries on the Lao Tzu,^a in China, Korea, and Japan, that by Wang Pi^b (226-249) is outstanding in several respects. For one thing, it is the oldest. For another, it is the first and most philosophical. Third, it reversed the strong trend at his time of interpreting the Lao Tzu in religious and superstitious terms. Most important of all, it not only raised the understanding of Taoism to the metaphysical level but lifted Chinese philosophy itself to that level as well. It is not an exaggeration to say that Chinese metaphysics began with Wang's commentary on the Lao Tzu.

Wang's work does not merely consist of explanations of terms and a supply of data but is a deliberation on philosophical ideas. As such, the commentary goes beyond the Taoist classic. For example, in chapter 29, Lao Tzu talks about the sage discarding the extreme, the extravagant, and the excessive, but Wang Pi interprets it as the sage's understanding of the nature of Tzu-jan^c (Self-so). In the same chapter, Lao Tzu speaks of the empire as "shen-ch'i,"^d a spiritual thing, that is, something sacred, but Wang Pi looks upon shen as having neither form nor spatial restriction, in contrast to ch'i, which is a concrete thing formed by an integration of elements. In chapters 8, 21, 38, and 42, Wang

goes beyond Lao Tzu and adds the concept of wu^e (non-being) to explain that while water is yu^f (being), Tao^g is nonbeing. Chapter 33 says that the wise person dies but does not really perish, but Wang talks about the everlasting Tao. In chapters 42 and 47, his departure from Lao Tzu is even more radical, for here he introduces the concept of li^h (principle). Similarly, in chapters 4, 6, and 38, whereas Lao Tzu speaks about the function of Tao and the universe, Wang goes a step further to discuss the substance which underlies their operation, thereby originating the concepts of substance and function (t'i-yungⁱ).

The foregoing shows that Wang Pi was primarily interested in fundamental concepts. We shall now briefly discuss some of them.

First and foremost is, of course, the concept of Tao. As it is central in the Lao Tzu, so is it central in Wang's commentary. In this he follows Lao Tzu fairly closely. Tao is the greatest of all things that can be named (25). It is ahead of all things (62). It is everywhere and operates all around (34). It is infinite (59). All things and all values originate from it (34, 41, 51). It has neither form nor restriction, is not confined to any thing or form, and is really unnameable. These characteristics make Tao permanent and constant (ch'ang^j) (1, 32). This aspect of constancy is perhaps more stressed than any other (16, 28, 32,

47); it is the Way for all times. The Tao of old can be used to master things of the present (14). Thus Tao is both in and above time, immanent and transcendent. It is the universal order and yet is above it.

Both the immanent and transcendental characters of Tao are implicit in the Lao Tzu, but Wang Pi brought in a new concept to explain how this was so. This is principle. The concept of principle is found in most ancient Chinese philosophical works. We encounter it in the Mo Tzu^{k, 1}, the Book of Mencius,² the Hsün Tzu^{l, 3}, the Chuang Tzu^{m, 4} and the Han Fei Tzu^{n, 5} among others. But its philosophical significance was not well established until the Wei^o period (220-265), especially in the persons of Wang Pi and Kuo Hsiang^p (d. 132), Kuo in his commentary on the Chuang Tzu and Wang in his commentary on the Book of Changes⁶ and the Lao Tzu.⁷

The word li does not appear in the Lao Tzu at all but many times in Wang's commentary: in chapters 5, 36, 38, and 79, it is used in the primitive sense of "to manage" or "to put things in order"; in chapter 38, the term is also used to denote moral principles. Elsewhere, however, the meaning is definitely philosophical. It is by principle that all things can be understood (15). It is the "ultimate principle" embodied in Nature, which, if followed, will bring fortune, but if disobeyed, will bring misfortune (42). It is not only the principle

of right and wrong but also the basis that combines all things into one because it possesses the quality of generality that governs all things (47). As Ch'ien Mu^q has pointed out, instead of talking about Tao, Wang Pi talks about principle in a number of places.⁸

It should be noted that Wang's doctrine of principle is more developed in his commentary on the Book of Changes and in his essays on it.⁹ Ch'ien Mu has listed nine instances where Wang Pi uses the term li to explain Change, including the use of such terms as t'ung-li^r (general principle), pen-li^s (fundamental principle), pi-jan chih-li^t (necessary principle), so-i-jan chih-li^u (principle by which things are), and chih-li^v (ultimate principle).¹⁰ In his essays, Wang Pi holds that Change is governed by principle; there is nothing that is not tied to it. It unites all things. It is one and universal. It transcends all phenomena. In his commentary on the Book of Changes, he sharply distinguishes principle, which is general, and facts, which are particular but he insists that the general principle can be discovered in any fact, so that the law of Change can be discovered in any event. As Ch'ien Mu has said, Wang practically anticipated all that the Sung (960-1279) Neo-Confucianists had to say about principle.¹¹

In thus interpreting the process of Change on the basis of principle, Wang Pi effectively overthrew the tradition of Han (B.C. 206-220 A.D.) scholars

who explained Change in terms of portents, strange phenomena, the interaction of man and Nature, and the influence of the Five Agents of Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth on human affairs. In doing so, he put Chinese scholarship on a rational and philosophical basis. What is more, he established a metaphysical system in China for the first time. So important is his commentary on the Book of Changes that the leading Neo-Confucianist, Ch'eng I^w (1033-1107), recommended it among the first three commentaries for students to read, although he, as severe critic of Taoism as were all Neo-Confucianists, said that Wang Pi really did not understand Tao but merely explained it with the ideas of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.¹² Still, it is true that he penetrated more deeply into the meanings of the Lao Tzu than he did the meanings of the Book of Changes.

One of the concepts in the Lao Tzu into which he penetrated most deeply is that of nonbeing. In saying that all being comes from nonbeing (1), that Tao has no shape, no name, and so on (14), and that things depend on nonbeing to function (11), Wang Pi is essentially repeating Lao Tzu. However, while Lao Tzu says that being and nonbeing produce each other, thus putting them on equal footing, Wang Pi considers nonbeing far more fundamental. According to him, only through nonbeing can Tao complete things and put them in order (23). Nonbeing is the mind (essence) of

Simplicity, which is Tao (32), as well as the mind of Heaven and Earth (38). To attain the constancy of Tao, it is necessary to achieve its vacuity and nothingness to the infinite and extreme degree (16). There can be no unity of things without it (42, 47). And only when there is nonbeing can being perform its function (38). Furthermore, Wang says, "Although it is valuable to have nonbeing as function, nevertheless there cannot be substance without nonbeing" (38). In other words, although nonbeing serves well for things to function, it must not be forgotten that it is substance. As such, nonbeing is original substance (pen-t'i^X).

This is clearly not the nonbeing that is opposed to being. In Lao Tzu the dichotomy still exists, Wang Pi thought Lao Tzu was not free from being but hoped for nonbeing and that was why he always "taught what he considered to be inadequate," that is, the nonbeing that was lacking in his philosophy.¹³ For this reason, Wang Pi considered Confucius to be superior to Lao Tzu, because, according to him, Confucius "embodied nonbeing" whereas Lao Tzu could only embody being.¹⁴ Since nonbeing is fundamental, it is the center of his philosophy. As T'ang Yung-t'ung^Y has observed, Wang's metaphysics consists in regarding nonbeing as the original substance.¹⁵

Wang Pi often equates nonbeing with "roots" (pen^Z) (38, 39, 52, 57, 58, 76) and "Mother" (1, 28,

39, 52, 59). "Mother" is Tao in its aspect of producing and completing things, whereas pen is Tao in its aspect of being fundamental. Pen as being fundamental is by no means absent in the Lao Tzu,¹⁶ but Wang stresses it much more strongly, and, moreover, diametrically opposes it to mo^{aa} or branches. Pen and mo, what is essential and what is subsidiary, or what is basic and what is secondary, are clearly distinguished. In fact, he was the first to treat pen-mo as a metaphysical question in Chinese history, although in its practical sense, the term is found in the Great Learning.¹⁷ By the roots he means non-being, Tao, principle, the Mother, original substance, and by branches he means the world in operation. He says, "The Mother should not be discarded and the roots should not be lost If one discards one's Mother and uses her son, and if one discards the roots and goes towards the branches, . . . there will surely be trouble" (38). On the surface, Wang seems to be a pure transcendentalist looking upon the world of events as subordinate. But that is not the case. This is what he says: "Mother is the roots and son is the branches. One should find the roots in order to understand the branches" (52). Again, "Hold on to the Mother in order to preserve the son Honor the roots in order to promote the branches" (38). In short, he maintains that roots and branches are of equal value.

This can best be seen in his concept of substance and function. The word t'i does not appear in the Lao Tzu, but in Wang's commentary it occupies a key position (4, 6, 23, 25, 38). According to him, it is the ultimate (6). This means that it is Mother, roots, and nonbeing all rolled in one.

His concept of substance and function is perhaps the most creative in his philosophy. The thirty-eighth chapter of the commentary may be said to be a treatise on it. It deals with the relationship between Tao as substance and te^{ab} (virtue, character) as function. As roots and branches go together, so substance and function must go hand in hand. "As nonbeing is its (virtue's) function," Wang says, "all things will be embraced Although Heaven and Earth are extensive, non-being is the mind. . . . Therefore if one destroys oneself and one's ego, then all people within the four seas will respect and will come to him from far and near" (38). In other words, with nonbeing as substance, all things will function well. At the same time, "Although it is valuable to have non-being as function, nevertheless there cannot be substance without non-being." That is to say, substance and function involve each other. In the ultimate sense, they are identical. This has become a general pattern in Chinese philosophy. As I have said in an earlier work:

This is the first time in the history of Chinese thought that substance and function are mentioned together. In the Book of Changes, it is said that "the state of absolute quiet and inactivity when acted on, immediately penetrates all things."¹⁸ Neo-Confucianists interpreted the two states as substance and function, but they are so only by implication. The concepts of substance and function definitely originated with Wang Pi. They were to become key concepts in Chinese Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism.¹⁹

The correct way to function, whether in the universe or in the human world, is to follow Tzu-jan, which means Nature, being natural, self-so, and so on. The term appears in the Lao Tzu five times but twenty-four times in Wang's commentary, in almost one-third of the eighty-one chapters.²⁰ He frequently uses such terms as yin^{ac} (to follow, in accordance with),²¹ jen^{ad} (leave things alone),²² and shun^{ae} (to follow, to obey).²³ Where Lao Tzu talks about concentrating one's vital force (10), possessing no body (13), traveling wisely (27), taking no action (37), or having the greatest skill (45), Wang Pi has added tzu-jan as the cause. The same explanation is offered for the wise man not to talk (56), for serving Heaven (59), for spiritual beings not to harm people (60),

for being able to do things without studying (64), and for the ruler to keep the people ignorant (65).

Elaborating on Lao Tzu's idea, Wang Pi says, "Heaven and Earth leave Tzu-jan alone. They do nothing and create nothing. The myriad things manage and order themselves If one discards oneself and leaves things alone, then everything will be in order" (5). Again, "If one acts according to Tzu-jan without creating or starting things, things will therefore reach their goal" (27). When things are left alone, they will all arise, have support, and be preserved (38).

To Wang Pi, however, Tzu-jan is not merely following Nature. It is, he says, "something that cannot be labeled and something ultimate" (25). What is this ultimate? There is no doubt that in Wang Pi's mind it is the roots, the original substance, or the Mother. In short, it is Tao in the highest sense. "The Tao of Tzu-jan is like a tree," he says. "The further we go to the branches, the further away are we from the roots" (22). With reference to the operation of the universe, to follow Tzu-jan means to follow principle (15). With reference to the ways of man and things, to follow Tzu-jan means to follow their nature (hsing^{af}). "The nature of the myriad things is Tzu-jan. It should be followed and not be interfered with" (29). Blindness, and so forth, results because one does not act in accordance

with his nature and destiny but, on the contrary, injures his Tzu-jan (12). "Always follow the nature of things, he urges (27, 36, 41). When Tzu-jan prevails, all is well and nothing is wanting, for Tzu-jan is self-sufficient (20). Moreover, it has infinite potentiality." Heaven and Earth...leave things in the state of Tzu-jan...and they cannot be exhausted (5). It is like the standard of a circle. If it is followed, the number of circles that can be drawn is unlimited (25). For Tao itself, it does not oppose Tzu-jan and therefore it attains its nature (25).

The one who realizes Tzu-jan to the highest degree is the sage. "The sage understands Tzu-jan perfectly and knows the condition of all things. Therefore he goes along with them but takes no unnatural action. He is in harmony with them but does not impose anything on them....Things will then be contented with their nature" (29).

From the preceding, it is clear that Wang Pi has raised the philosophy of Lao Tzu to a higher level. In so doing, he inaugurated a new era in the history of Chinese philosophy and in several ways anticipated Neo-Confucian thought, especially in the concepts of substance and function and those of nature and principle.

Having surveyed Wang's philosophy, we may now proceed to give a brief account of his life and

commentary.

Wang Pi (courtesy name, Fu-ssu^{ag}) was born in 226 in Kao-p'ing^{ah} county, Shan-yang^{ai} Prefecture,²⁴ in Shantung Province. His grandfather, Wang K'ai^{aj}, fleeing from political turmoils and rebellions, went along with a clansman Wang Ts'an^{ak} (177-217) to Ching-chou^{al}.²⁵ The governor of Ching-chou Province, Liu Piao^{am} (144-208), had attracted more than a thousand outstanding men of literature and thought. At first, he wanted to give his daughter in marriage to Wang Ts'an, but finding him ugly and Wang K'ai handsome, took Wang K'ai instead as his son-in-law. K'ai had a son Yeh^{an}, who had two sons, Hsüan^{ao} and Pi.

Ts'ai Yung^{ap} (132-129), the famous scholar who, by imperial command, collected the texts of the Six Confucian Classics²⁶ and had them inscribed on stone in 175, possessed a library of about ten thousand books. At his old age, he gave the collection to Wang Ts'an. After Ts'an's death, his son was involved in a rebellion and was executed. The collection then came into the hands of Wang Yeh. Thus from his childhood, Wang Pi had access to perhaps the best library of the time.

There is no question that Wang Pi was a genius. He had a brilliant mind and loved to argue. As a teenager, he was fond of the Lao Tzu and the Chuang Tzu. When he was twenty, he went to visit his father's colleague P'ei Hui^{aq} (fl. 230-249). At

that time, his father was a director of the grand secretariat in the state of Wei^{ar} at its capital Loyang and P'ei Hui was a director of the department of civil personnel. P'ei asked him why Confucius did not talk about nonbeing whereas Lao Tzu did. Wang Pi expressed the radical opinion that Lao Tzu was not free from being (as opposed to nonbeing) and that was why he always taught what he considered to be inadequate.²⁷ At that time, Ho Yen^{as} (190-249) was minister of the department of civil personnel. He always had many guests, including able talkers. He presented his superb ideas to Wang Pi and asked if the youngster could refute him. Refute he did! Then he himself proceeded to deliberate, giving both questions and answers and none could match him.²⁸ Greatly impressed with him, Ho Yen declared, "One may discuss with him the boundary between Heaven and man."

In the middle of the Cheng-shih^{at} period (240-249), Ho Yen was considering Wang Pi for a directorship in the imperial chancellery when a position became vacant. Instead, the appointment went to Wang Li^{au}, recommended by Ho Yen's rival to Regent Ts'ao Shuang^{av} (d. 249), who actually controlled the kingdom of Wei. As a result, Wang Pi was made a departmental director. Soon after he assumed office, he asked to see the regent alone without any attendant around and for more than an hour talked about

philosophical principles and nothing else. Ts'ao Shuang chided him for this.

His fame soared. He and Ho Yen became the celebrated scholars of the Cheng-shih period.²⁹ Although Kuo Hsiang's commentary on the Chuang Tzu was often mentioned together with Wang's on the Lao Tzu, Kuo was regarded as inferior to Wang.³⁰ Wang's discussions were considered as "the sound of the Cheng-shih period" and "the sound of gold."³¹ Before Ho Yen finished his commentary on the Lao Tzu, he went to see Wang Pi. As Wang Pi expounded on the ideas of Lao Tzu, Ho Yen could not say anything except "yes, yes." Thereupon he gave up his commentary on the Lao Tzu and wrote the Treatise on Tao and Te instead.³²

Wang Pi's ability did not measure up to his official responsibilities but he did not care. Being good at music and at the game of throwing arrows into a distant pot, he enjoyed social parties at which he could demonstrate his skill. In literary composition, he was not Ho Yen's equal, but in exceptional natural gifts he far surpassed Ho. Because of this, he often snubbed others. Naturally, many did not like him. He was at first friendly with Wang Li and Hsün Jung^{aw} (233-263), but because he lost the position to the former, he hated him, and his friendship with the latter did not last long either. In 249, when Ts'ai Shuang was killed in a power struggle,

Wang Pi was dismissed from office. In the fall of that year, he encountered a pestilence and died suddenly. He was twenty-four and was the youngest Chinese philosopher to die at an early age. He had no son but a daughter who was married to Chao Chitzu.^{ax} It was from this family that Chang Chan^{ay} (fl. 310) found six chapters of the Lieh Tzu^{az} which he eventually annotated.³³ Incidentally, Chang Chan's mother was Wang Pi's first cousin.³⁴

The present translation is based on the Ssu-pu pei-yao^{ba} (Essentials of the Four Libraries) edition, a reproduction of the Chü-chên^{bb} (Collected treasures) edition of the Wu-ying^{bc} Palace of 1775. It contains an epilogue dated 1115 by Chao Yüeh-chih^{bd} (1059-1129) which says that the work was called Tao-te ching^{be} (Classic of the Way and virtue) but not divided into two parts, that there were many mistakes, and that he made a copy of it in October. There is also an epilogue by Hsiung K'o^{bf} (c. 1111-c. 1184). He said that the Wang Pi commentary was very rare and he found one only after a long search. After he published it, he came upon Chao's version. Since it was not divided into two parts or chapters, he thought it was an old edition. He therefore copied it and, in 1170, published it. Following these two epilogues, there is the portion on Wang Pi's commentary from the Ching-tien shih-wên^{bg} (Explanations of words in the classics) by Lu Te-ming^{bh} (556-627).

The commentary has gone through a number of changes in title, format, and wording. It is called Lao Tzu tao-te ching^{bi} (annotated by Wang Pi) in the Sui shu^{bj} (History of the Sui dynasty, 581-618),³⁵ the Yüan-yen hsin-chi tao-te^{bk} (New record of profound words on the Way and its virtue) in the Chiu T'ang shu^{bl} (History of T'ang dynasty, 618-907),³⁶ the Hsin-chi yüan-yen tao-te in the Hsin T'ang shu^{bm} (New history of the T'ang Dynasty),³⁷ and Lao Tzu chu^{bn} (Commentary on the Lao Tzu) in the Sung shih^{bo} (History of the Sung dynasty).³⁸ According to Takeuchi^{bp}, the use of the terms "new record" and "profound words" was common in the T'ang Dynasty for Taoist works, especially in the Lao Tzu and the Chuang Tzu.³⁹ As already noted, the work became rare in the Sung period. In the middle of the Wan-li^{bq} period (1573-1619) of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Chang Chih-hsiang^{br} (1496-1577) published the Chao version of 1115. It has become the standard edition and has formed the basis for other editions in both China and Japan. It was collated in 1782 according to the Yung-lo ta-tien^{bs} (Great library of the Yung-lo period, 1403-1428) edition. The Yung-lo edition, however, contains only the first part of the Wang Pi commentary. Modern collations have been made by T'ao Hung ch'ing^{bt} (1860-1918), Liu Kuo-chün^{bu}, Hatano^{bv}, and Yen-ling Feng.^{bw} Hatano's study is virtually exhaustive. Tao's collation is essential and Yen

has improved upon it. Liu's collation is based on only two commentaries.

A number of points concerning the Wang Pi commentary has been debated by scholars for years. One is whether the commentary is indeed the oldest extant commentary on the Lao Tzu. The earliest commentary on some Lao Tzu passages is, of course, that in the Han Fei Tzu. The bibliography section of the Han shu^{bx} (History of the Former Han dynasty, B.C. 206-8 A.D.) lists three commentaries but these have disappeared.⁴⁰ Later bibliographies list ten before Wang and five of Wang's time.⁴¹ All of them have been lost.

The oldest extant commentary on the Lao Tzu text as such is probably the "Hsiang-erh"^{by} commentary. Only Part One of that commentary has survived. Neither its date nor its author is known, though some have suggested that Chang Ling^{bz} (fl. 156), the founder of the Taoist religion, was the author.⁴² Of the seven-hundred-odd Chinese commentaries and about two hundred and fifty Japanese commentaries on the Lao Tzu written in the last sixteen hundred years, about four hundred are still extant. Beyond any dispute, the oldest extant complete commentaries are those by Wang Pi and Ho-shang Kung^{ca} (Old man up the river).

The two commentaries have also been the most popular. Yen Ling-fen has listed thirty-four

editions of the Wang Pi commentary and thirty-three
 of the Ho-shang Kung commentary.⁴³ The former is
 strictly philosophical and therefore has appealed to
 intellectuals while the latter is a religious in-
 terpretation and therefore has appealed to devout
 Taoist followers. Ho-shang Kung is supposed to
 have lived in the second century B.C. If he ever
 lived and ever wrote a commentary, that must have
 disappeared very early. The present Ho-shang Kung
 commentary, in the opinion of most scholars, came
 after the Wang Pi commentary. Eduard Erkes, who has
 translated the Ho-shang Kung commentary into English,
 strongly maintained that it existed before the
 second century,⁴⁴ and offered three arguments for
 the early dating. The first is that Kao Yu (fl. 205)^{cb}
 interpreted the word hsüan^{cc} in his commentary on
 the Huai-nan Tzu^{cd} as heaven.⁴⁵ Since the term
 comes from the Lao Tzu and Ho-shang Kung interpreted
 it as heaven, Erkes thought that Kao Yu must have
 known about the Ho-shang Kung commentary. Erkes
 does not explain why Ho-shang Kung could not have
 borrowed from Kao Yu. His second argument is that
 Mou Tzu^{ce} mentions that the Classic of Te has thirty-
 seven chapters,⁴⁶ which is the arrangement of the
 Ho-shang Kung commentary. But whether Mou Tzu
 existed in the first or third century is by no means
 a settled question. Erkes offers the preface to the
 commentary ascribed to Ko Hsüan^{cf} (fl. 210) as his
 third argument, but the preface contains too many

fantastic accounts and anachronisms to be reliable.⁴⁷ According to Ma Hsü-lun^{cg}, the first mention of the Ho-shang Kung commentary did not take place until the fourth century, and its first listing in a catalogue was in the Liang period (502-527).⁴⁸ Remarking on the two commentaries, Takeuchi, noting that where the Wang Pi commentary has archaic words and difficult expressions the Ho-shang Kung commentary has standard words and plain expressions, said that obviously the latter is a later product.⁴⁹ These two scholars are not alone in this majority opinion.

Another question is the format of the Wang Pi commentary. Both Chao Yüeh-chih and Hsiung K'o thought that the commentary was not divided into parts or chapters. Editors of the Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao^{ch} (Essentials of the complete catalogue of the Four Libraries) perpetuated this opinion and explained the fact that the Ching-tien shih-wen is actually divided into the Tao-ching^{ci} (Classic of the Way) and Te-ching^{cj} (Classic of virtue) simply by saying that the arrangement is a later imposition.⁵⁰ But as many scholars have pointed out, the work has been divided into Tao-ching and Te-ching since Han times.⁵¹ As Wang Chung-min^{ck} has observed, Hsiung K'o was amazed at the absence of division into parts or chapters in the Chao Yüeh-chih edition only after he had published his. This clearly shows that his earlier

version was divided into parts and chapters.⁵²

The strongest proof that the original edition of the Wang Pi commentary had two parts and many chapters is a fact known to many scholars, namely, that Wang Pi himself refers to a "Part 2" in chapter 20 and "a later chapter" in chapters 23 and 28. It is not unusual for the same work to appear in different formats. In this case, whether it is called Lao Tzu chu or Tao-te ching chu, whether divided into parts and chapters, and whether in one volume (chuan^{cl}) or in two volumes (each part being a chuan) was of no real consequence. In its standard form, it has been divided into two parts from Han times and has been called the Lao Tzu chu, Tao-te ching chu, or Lao Tzu tao-te ching chu. The most radical departure is the edition in the Tao-tsang^{cm} (Taoist canon). It has four chapters. According to a Japanese writer, the reason for this is to conform with the fourfold division of the canon.⁵³

Still another question is whether the Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-li^{cn} (Brief presentation of the subtle ideas of Lao Tzu) was written by Wang Pi. In his biography of Wang Pi, Ho Shao^{co} (236-301) said that "in annotating the Lao Tzu, Wang Pi presented the essential ideas to achieve a rational system; he wrote the Tao-lüeh lun^{cp} (Brief discussion on Tao)."⁵⁴ Up to the Sung times, works bearing the titles of Lao Tzu lüeh-lun^{cq} (Brief discussion on

the Lao Tzu), Lao Tzu chih li-lüeh^{cr} (Brief presentation of the ideas of the Lao Tzu), Lao Tzu chih-lüeh^{cs} (Essential ideas of Lao Tzu), and Tao-te lüeh-kuei^{ct} (Brief conclusions on the Way and virtue), scholars like Wong Chung-min, N. Z. Zia^{cu}, and Yen Ling-fen agree, are the same work.⁵⁵ Most likely the titles were derived from Ho Shao's Tao lüeh-lun, which has disappeared long ago. However, Zia has suggested that while most of the Wang Pi commentary is in concise, classical style, passages in chapters 4 and 38 are not explanations but interpretations and the style is that of a short essay. Zia thought these passages may have come from the Lao Tzu chih-kuei.⁵⁶ This is an interesting suggestion, but we need concrete proofs.

In the Tao-tsang there is the Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-lun.⁵⁷ In 1946, Yen Ling-fen published it and vigorously maintains that it is by Wang Pi. He compares Wang Pi's commentary and the Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-li and points out that first, there are twelve instances of similar passages, and, second, three instances of similar literary construction and two instances of similar quotations from the Book of Change.⁵⁸ Mou Tsung-san^{cv} has hailed this discovery as a great contribution.⁵⁹

However, I have found Yen's identification difficult to accept. Surely there is a great deal of similarity between the Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-li and the Wang Pi commentary. Nevertheless, the

former seems to be a repetition or an elaboration. In addition, many basic ideas of the commentary are not found in the Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-li, such as those of constancy, honoring the roots, principle, the inadequacy of names, and so forth. The fundamental concepts of the commentary, particularly those of substance and function, nonbeing, oneness, following Tao and leaving things alone (yin, yen, shun), and Tzu-jan, are either totally absent or hardly present in the Lüeh-li. On the other hand, the literary style is simple and plain and does not have the elegance or the conciseness of the commentary. The work has sets of five such as the Five Grains, the Five Things, and the Five Notes, as well as the names of the Confucian, Moist^{CW}, and Legalist schools, which do not appear in the commentary. It seems to me that the work in question was written on the basis of the commentary by someone who did not quite understand Wang Pi's new philosophical ideas, especially the cardinal concepts of nonbeing, Tzu-jan, and substance and function.

In the course of her work on the Book of Changes,⁶⁰ Dr. Ariane Rump became interested in Wang Pi's commentaries. She made a translation of the commentary on the Lao Tzu. I have suggested changes, added most of the footnotes, and prepared the bibliography. It is hoped that this English translation will contribute to the understanding of

the Lao Tzu as a work of philosophy, will encourage Western scholars to pay more attention to this third-century metaphysician who is still largely unknown to the West, and throw some light on the importance of third-century thought in the development of Chinese philosophy.

Wing-tsit Chan^{CX}

NOTES

1. Mo Tzu, (by Mo Ti^{cY}, 468-376 B.C.), chapter 3, Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an^{cZ} (Four Libraries series) ed. 1:6b, 9:18a, 9:19b.
2. Book of Mencius, 5A:1, 6A:7.
3. Hsùn Tzu (by Hsùn Ch'ing^{da}, 313-238 B.C.), passim.
4. Chuang Tzu (by Chuang Chou^{db}, 369-268 B.C.), passim.
5. Han Fei Tzu (by Han Fei, d. 233 B.C.), Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ed., especially 6:7a.
6. In the Thirteen Classics.
7. For a story of the development of the concept of li in Chinese philosophy, see my "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept Li as Principle," in Tsing Hua^{dc} Journal of Chinese Studies, n. s. 4, no. 2 (February 1964), pp. 123-138; reprinted in Neo-Confucianism, Etc.; Essays by Wing-tsit Chan (Hanover, N.H.: Oriental Society, 1969), pp. 45-87.
8. "Wang Pi Kuo Hsiang chu I Lao Chuang yung li-tzu t'iao-lu^{dd}" (Cases of the use of the term li in Wang Pi's and Kuo Hsiang's commentaries on the Book of Changes, the Lao Tzu, and the Chuang Tzu), Hsin-Ya hsüeh-pao^{de} (New Asia journal), 1, no. 1 (April 1955), p. 137.
9. The Chou-i lüeh-li^{df} (Simple exemplification of the principles of the Book of Changes) in the Han-Wei ts'ung-shu^{dg} (Collection of works of the Han and Wei dynasties). For an English translation of part

1, the most important chapter, see my A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, pp. 318-319, and for an English translation of part 4 from the German, see Hellmut Wilhelm, Die Wandlung (Peking, Vetch, 1944), pp. 129-132; also in his Change, Eight Lectures on the I ching,^{dh} trans. by Carey F. Baynes (New York: Pantheon, 1960), pp. 87-88.

10. Op. cit. (see note 8), pp. 135-137.

11. Ibid.

12. I-shu^{di} (Surviving works), in the Erh-Ch'eng ch'üan-shu^{dj} (Complete works of the two Ch'engs), Ssu-pu pei-yao ed., 19:1b, 1:6a.

13. Liu I-ch'ing^{dk} (403-444), Shih-shuo hsin-yü^{dl}, chapter 4, section 8; English translation by Richard B. Mather, Shih-shuo hsin-yü, A New Account of Tales of the World (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 96.

14. Ibid.

15. Wei-Chin hsüan-hsüeh lun-kao^{dm} (Draft treatise on Wei-Chin [220-420] metaphysics), p. 50.

16. Lao Tzu, chapters 26, 39.

17. The text and chapter 10.

18. "Appended Remarks", Part I, chapter 10.

19. See my A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 323.

20. Lao Tzu, chapters 17, 23, 25, 51, 64; Wang's commentary, 2, 5, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 37, 41, 42, 45, 49, 56, 59, 60, 64, 65, 77.

21. Chapters 2, 10, 27, 29, 36, 41, 45, 47, 49,

51, 56.

22. Chapters 5, 10, 38, 81.

23. Chapters 12, 27, 37, 42, 65, 81. Also ts'ung^{dn} (to follow) in chapter 21.

24. Present Chin-hsiang^{do} county.

25. Its provincial seat was the present Hsiang-yang^{dp} county, Hupei province.

26. Book of Odes, Book of History, Book of Changes, Book of Rites, Spring and Autumn Annals, and Book of Music.

27. Shih-shuo hsin-yü (see note 13), chapter 4, section 8; Mather's translation, p. 96.

28. Ibid., chapter 4, section 6; Mather, p. 95.

29. Ibid., chapter 4, section 85, 94; Mather, pp. 137, 140.

30. Ibid., chapter 4, section 17; Mather, p. 100.

31. Ibid., chapter 8, section 51; Mather, p. 226.

32. Ibid., chapter 4, section 10; Mather p. 97.

33. Chang Chan's preface to the Lieh Tzu.

34. Ch'ü Yung^{dq} (fl. 1840), T'ieh-ch'in T'ung-chien Lou mu-lu^{dr} (Catalogue of the T'ieh-ch'in T'ung-chien Hall), chapter 18, Taoist school section, under Ch'ung-hsü chih-te chen-ching^{ds} (Pure classic of the perfect virtue of simplicity and vacuity). Most of this biographical material has been taken from the standard biography of Wang Pi by Ho Shao

quoted by P'ei fung-chih^{dt} (372-451) as a note to the biography of Chung Hui^{du} (225-264) in the Wei chih^{dv} (History of the state of Wei), chapter 28, and the "Pi pieh-chuan^{dw}" (Separate biography of Wang Pi) quoted in the note to the Shih-shuo hsinyü, chapter 4, section 4 (Mather, p. 95. See note 13).

35. Chapter 34, section on the Taoist school.

36. Chapter 47, section on the Taoist school.

37. Chapter 59, section on the Taoist school.

38. Chapter 205, section on the Taoist school.

39. Rōshi genshi^{dx} (Origins of the Lao Tzu), pp. 62-64.

40. By Lin^{dy}, Fu^{dz}, and Hsü^{ea},

41. The ten are: Lin, Fu, Hsü, Liu Hsiang^{eb} (77-6 B.C.), Yen Tsun^{ec} (fl. 53-24 B.C.), Mu-ch'iu Wang-chih^{ed} (c. 20 B.C.-22 A.D.), Ma Jung^{ee} (79-166), Sung Chung^{ef} (fl. 191-219), Yü Fan^{eg} (164-233), and Chang I^{eh} (fl. 221-239). The five are: Hsün Jung, Fan Wang^{ei} (d. 264), Tung Yü^{ej} (fl. 227-264), Chung Hui, and Ho Yen.

42. For a comprehensive account of the Hsiang-erh commentary, see Jao Tsung-i^{ek}, Lao Tzu hsiang-erh chu chiao-chien^{el} (The "hsiang-erh" commentary on the Lao Tzu collated and commented on).

43. Chung-wai Lao Tzu chu-shu mu-lu^{em} (Bibliography on the Lao Tzu in Chinese and foreign languages), pp. 373-377. See also Wang Chung-min, Lao Tzu k'ao^{en} (Inquiry on the Lao Tzu), p. 78,

where he lists fourteen Chinese editions and two Japanese editions (1770 and 1732).

44. Ho-shang Kung's Commentary on the Lao-tse.

45. Huai-nan Tzu^{eo} (by Liu An^{ep}, 179-122 B.C.), chapter 16, Ssu-pu pei-yao^{eq} ed. (Essentials of the Four Libraries), 16:6a.

46. Seng-yu^{er} (445-518), comp., Hung-ming chi^{es} (Essays elucidating the doctrine), Ssu-pu pei-yao ed., 1:12b.

47. Erkes, op. cit. (see note 44), pp. 10, 11. See my The Way of Lao Tzu, pp. 78-81 for a discussion on this question.

48. Lao Tzu chiao-ku^{et} (Lao Tzu collated and explained), pp. 2-3.

49. Rōshi qenshi, p. 86.

50. (Shanghai, Commercial Press, 1933 edition), p. 3033.

51. Hatano Tarō, Lao Tzu Wang chu chiao-cheng^{eu} (Wang Pi's Commentary on the Lao Tzu collated), Part III, pp. 189-190, 192-193, 200, 203.

52. Wang Chung-min, op. cit. (see note 43), p. 86.

53. Shimada Kan^{ev}, Ku-wen chiu-shu k'ao^{ew} (Inquiry on old works in the ancient script), chapter 1, quoted in Hatano, Part III, p. 197.

54. See note 34, herein.

55. Yen Ling-fen, Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-li, p. 5; Wang Chung-min. Lao Tzu k'ao, pp. 87-88; Zia (see note 56), vol. 2, p. 621.

56. "Hsien-ts'un Tao-te ching chu-shih shu-mu k'ao-lüeh"^{ex} (Brief inquiry on annotations and commentaries on the Classic of the Way and Virtue), Nan-hua Hsiao-chu Shan-fang wen-chi^{ey} (Collected works of the Nan-hua Hsiao-chu Shan-fang), vol. 2 p. 655.
57. Cheng-i^{ez} section, Ku^{fa}, Part I, no. 1245.
58. Lao Tzu wei-chih lüeh-li, pp. 6-15.
59. Ts'ai-hsing yü hsüan-li^{fb} (Capacity, nature, and metaphysics), p. 137.
60. Die Verwundung des Hellen als Aspekt des Bösem im I ching (Cham, Switzerland: Gut-Druck AG, 1967).

