

CHENG XUANYING'S CONCEPTION OF THE SAGE IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

CHENG XUANYING'S CONCEPTION OF THE SAGE IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

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This thesis explores the role and concept of the sage in Cheng Xuanying's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*. The concept of the sage will be examined in light of Cheng Xuanying's participation in the Buddhho-Daoist court debates held in early seventh-century China. It will be argued that some aspects of Cheng Xuanying's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* may be related to developments within the court debates. Nevertheless, it will also be argued that many "Buddhist" elements of Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sage cannot be entirely explained by his interaction with Buddhists in the court debates. It will be shown that much of what constitutes his conception of the sage can be explained by the presence of sinified Buddhist thought in the early developing stages of Daoism in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.

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Introduction

In the early Tang 唐 dynasty (618- 907) a form of exegesis known as “Two-fold mystery,” or Chongxuanxue 重玄學, was in vogue among Daoist intellectuals. The word “Chongxuanxue” is derived from chapter one of the *Laozi* 老子, which says “Render it mysterious and again mysterious, the gateway to the myriad wonders (玄之又玄, 衆妙之門).”¹ The very name “Chongxuanxue” appears to be a restatement of this phrase *xuan zhi you xuan*, “render it mysterious and again mysterious.” What makes Chongxuan unique is the fact that it uses a form of dialectic reminiscent of the tetralemma, or “four propositions” (*siju* 四句) from Madhyamaka Buddhism. The tetralemma is a form of dialectic where each phrase negates the one prior to it (i.e., something exists, does not exist, both exists and does not exist, neither exists nor does not exist). A variation of this dialectic was used to interpret the *Laozi*, and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 as well. In the *Laozi*, however, the tetralemma was applied to the phrase *xuan zhi you xuan*; the first *xuan* 玄 comes to signify the sage’s non-attachment to being and non-being, while the second *xuan* signifies a third move beyond the former position of non-attachment to being and non-being. Like the tetralemma’s fourth proposition, this dialectical reasoning is meant to convince us that nothing remains after the second *xuan* is eliminated. The difference between Madhyamaka and Chongxuan thought, however, was that “Chongxuan” for the latter served as a prescription for ending one’s state of ignorance. In this sense,

¹ Translation by Sharf based on a Chongxuan reading of the *Laozi*. See Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 52.

“Chongxuan” becomes much like a remedy for ignorance, and signifies how an individual must continue to try and move beyond his or her current position, to transcend the state of understanding one possesses at that very moment.² Due to the presence of this style of tetralemma-like interpretation in Chongxuan texts, most studies in English pertaining to Chongxuan thought have usually focused on the exegetical and philosophical relationship between Chongxuan interpretations of the *Laozi* and use of this variation of the “tetralemma” therein.³

Previous studies of Chongxuan thought have thus tended to dwell on terminology found in Chongxuan texts which might appear to be derived directly from Buddhism.⁴ The common theory for explaining the presence of Buddhist terminology in Chongxuan thought is that the Chongxuan Daoists were in competition with the Buddhists in the court debates of the early Tang. Moreover, it is claimed that appropriating the tetralemma occurred in order for the Daoists to be able to compete with Buddhist argumentation. This thesis proposes to take a different approach to Chongxuan thought, through the conception of the sage as found in the “Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*” (*Zhuangzi shu* 莊子疏), written by Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631-652). My endeavour here, however, is to go beyond a mere description of Cheng’s conception of the sage. I hope to show that

² Ibid., 65.

³ See Sharf 2002, 61-68, Friederike Assandri, “Understanding Double Mystery: Daoism in the Early Tang as Mirrored in the FDLH (T 2104) and *Chongxuanxue*,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32:3 (September 2005), 427-440.

⁴ Terms such as the “three vehicles” [*sancheng* 三乘], “Dao nature” [*daoxing* 道性], or “law body” [*fashen* 法身]. In Buddhist thought, the “three vehicles” are the *triyāna* (three vehicles which carry living beings across over to nirvana). As for the other three, “Dao nature” is like “Buddhanature” and “law-body” is borrowed from the concept of the *dharmakāya*. For further details, see Sharf 2002, 68-69.

many attributes of Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sage often do resonate with Buddhist conceptions of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but cannot always be reduced to a direct Buddhist "influence" upon his work, or to him borrowing, pilfering, or actively appropriating Buddhist ideas in order to "compete." True, it is tempting to assume that the majority of Buddhist overtones in Cheng's commentaries might be the result of him actively appropriating such concepts for his own defence in the debates, but do we have direct evidence to claim that the Daoists were really at a disadvantage?

I will explore this question throughout this thesis, but on the whole I will try to emphasize that Chongxuan Daoists were not the first in Chinese history to be suspected of pilfering Buddhist ideas. That practice had begun as early as the late third and early fourth century, when the "conversion of the Barbarians" story was adopted as a polemical scheme to discredit Buddhism as being nothing more than Laozi's second rate form of Daoism.⁵ Moreover, it is around the fourth century that the Lingbao scriptures appeared, and many of them seem to have appropriated Buddhist concepts and teachings *en masse*—because if Laozi had spread Buddhism in the western regions and founded "Buddhism," then the true Daoism of China should have equal claim to such teachings. Among the many things the Daoists appropriated were ideas of all embracing salvation, and the presence of benevolent and compassionate celestial entities and deities in the heavens, wishing to "save" all beings. Interestingly, many of the same qualities are found in Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sage. This raises a number of questions. For one,

⁵ Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Daoists in Medieval China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 11-14

how do we know that Cheng Xuanying and the other Chongxuan Daoists had not appropriated a variation of the Madhyamaka dialectic under the same rationale?⁶ Would this not make sense if they spent so much effort trying to prove that tetralemma-like dialectics were present in Laozi's *Daodejing*?

Moreover, Friederike Assandri suggests that the Chongxuan Daoists may have had other links to Daoism in general outside of the court debates, yet it is unknown in what shape of from this relationship existed.⁷ My investigation will begin with a related question: to what extent are Cheng Xuanying's ideas pertaining to the sage, as seen through his commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, related to other Daoist literature? For there is evidence to suggest that Cheng was interested in Lingbao Daoism (with his commentary to the "Scripture of Salvation" [*Lingbao duren jing* 靈寶度人經] as proof of that). If this is true, then perhaps the presence of salvific ideas (such ideas as the compassion, kindness, and the all embracing affection of the sage) in Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi* had less to do with a direct influence from Buddhism *per se* and more with Cheng's role as a Daoist cleric. If we can accept the notion that Cheng had inherited a Daoism that already contained similarities with Buddhist thought, then the presence of salvific concepts in his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* may appear less scandalous or suspicious than we might initially believe. Of course, the above arguments do not change

⁶ This is not to say, of course, that I believe the Chongxuan Daoists were in any way nascent Madhyamaka Buddhists *or* using the tetralemma in the same way it was used in Indian Buddhist texts. As I will show in chapter one, even the Buddhists who incorporated Madhyamaka thought into their own were hardly consistent in their use of the tetralemma, often creating their own variations in the process. The issue here, however, is how the Daoists appear to have made a historical claim to the tetralemma as being originally "Daoist," which was part of the general agenda to make Buddhism appear as a second rate form of Daoism.

⁷ Assandri 2005, 430.

the fact that we will encounter the odd phrase or term in Cheng's commentary which does contain more "Buddhist" connotations. Generally speaking, the goal of this project is not to debunk or trivialize the implications of Buddhist terminology found in Chongxuan thought discussed in other scholarship, but to explore other avenues or theories as to how such terms and phrases may have arrived there.

In chapter one I will introduce the general scholarly opinion of Chongxuan thought among scholars like Friederike Assandri, Robert Sharf, T.H. Barrett, and Shiyi Yu, who feel that the majority of Chongxuan texts may in fact be heavily influenced by Buddhism, especially Madhyamaka. Assandri's work goes further, however, and suggests that much of the surviving Chongxuan literature from the seventh century is derivative of the form of Daoist thought that was used in the court debates in competition with Buddhism. Assandri balances this approach by making the point that the extent to which Chongxuan was involved with Daoism in general is still unknown.⁸ In the case of Cheng Xuanying, however, I will suggest that the very existence of his commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* may indicate that he took a great interest in other Daoist texts which already contained sinified ideas of Buddhist salvation. This text, which likely originated at the beginning of the fifth century,⁹ was read by both the elite Daoist clerics as well as lay Chinese in the Tang.¹⁰ Moreover, I will suggest that the presence of the Madhyamaka dialectic found in Cheng's commentaries to the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* may simply

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 374.

¹⁰ T.H. Barrett, *Taoism Under the Tang* (Floating World edition, 2006 [1996]), 81-82.

be a result of Chongxuan authors making another logical step in the “conversion of the barbarians” theory.

In chapter two I will attempt to show how Cheng Xuanying and modern commentators made attempts to deal with the composite nature of the *Zhuangzi*—the many different strands of thought in the text which often present contrasting visions of the role and function of the sage. First, I will show how the *Zhuangzi* accumulated more layers of interpretation and interpolation over time. This will enable us to understand how the process of accretion brought with it many different names for the sage—many of which are defined or explained differently from one another within the *Zhuangzi* itself. Second, I will attempt to show how, in Cheng’s conception of the sage, all these names became “epithets” for the same ultimate or ideal individual, and hence explain why he seems to make no distinction between them throughout his commentary. Despite Cheng’s vision for harmonizing the sage epithets, I will explore a few examples where we can detect Cheng’s dissatisfaction with certain passages of the *Zhuangzi*.

In chapter three I will provide some background information as to how, over time, aspects of the Chinese conception of the sage and the Buddhist bodhisattva or buddha were eventually “read” into one another. I will discuss how, before Buddhism had arrived in China, sages were also thought to “respond” to stimulus, but that it was not always clear what the object of their response was, or how the object was affected. Moreover, that there were a variety of different ways in which pre-Buddhist texts presented the figure of the sage. Some, like the *Zhuangzi*, emphasized otherworldly (or reclusive)

attributes for the sage, while others, like the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, focused on developing a theory of the ideal sage-kings of antiquity. Thus, the sages were those who respond and adapt to changes, maintain good government, uphold order, and, most importantly, placate the heavens through the potency of their ritual action and sacrifice. I will then examine how these themes appear in Daoist and Buddhist literature, seen through the metaphor of the mirror. Afterwards, we will examine how Cheng conceives of the sage's response to the world, along with certain terminology and phrases which can be traced back to Buddhist literature.

In chapter four I will try to prove that Cheng Xuanying was interested in texts that were not considered “legitimate” in the court debates by exploring his commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing*. I will review what is known about the political and institutional concerns of the Buddhist and Daoist debates, and how the court put severe restrictions on what texts were allowed to be presented in debate. I will then discuss how the issue of textual legitimacy in the debates makes Cheng's commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* all the more interesting, and reveals that he took an interest in texts not sanctioned for use in debate with the Buddhists. Then I will explore how, in the *Lingbao duren jing*, salvation is not brought by the sages, bodhisattvas, or Buddhas, but the celestial deities and beings of the Daoist heavens. This chapter will suggest that we may have proof that Cheng was well acquainted with such “illegitimate” literature, and thus we may be able to speak of a Lingbao influence in Cheng's conception of the sage rather than a strictly Buddhist one. In this way, it is possible that notions of salvation in Cheng's commentary

to the *Zhuangzi* have more to do with his profession as a Daoist cleric than his involvement with Buddhists in the debates. In other words, by exposing the extent to which ideas of “salvation” were as much a part of the Daoist tradition as the Buddhist tradition before the Tang dynasty, I hope to suggest that Cheng Xuanying’s use of the concept of salvation in his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* may not have been inappropriate or uncommon for his time.

Chongxuan and Cheng Xuanying

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to locate the author of the *Zhuangzi shu* (commentary to the *Zhuangzi*), named Cheng Xuanying, in his historical context, namely the early to mid-seventh century. First, I will explore the work modern scholars like Livia Kohn, Robert Sharf, and Friederike Assandri and their attempts to relate Cheng Xuanying and his commentaries to a “school” or intellectual tradition of textual exegesis known as “Chongxuanxue.” I will also discuss one of the more interesting features of Chongxuan thought, namely how authors like Cheng Xuanying often draw on quotations or allusions to the *Laozi* 老子 (or *Daodejing* 道德經) in conjunction with a style of interpretation reminiscent of Madhyamaka Buddhist dialectical logic, in particular the “tetralemma” or “four propositions.” I will then examine recent work by Sharf and Assandri, who attempt to relate Chongxuan thought to the context in which it was most active: the formal court debates between Buddhists and Daoists in the seventh century. While much remains unknown about the debates and how exactly the texts and their authors relate to them, scholars of Tang Buddhism and Daoism like T.H. Barrett, Sharf, and Assandri suspect that these Buddhist inflected interpretations of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* were used in (or partly originated from) those very debates with the Buddhists.

After surveying the available scholarship on Chongxuan thought in English, I will explore alternative reasons as to why this exegetical tradition may have appropriated

Madhyamaka thought, the tetralemma in particular. I will suggest that appropriation of the tetralemma by the Chongxuan Daoists may also be related to fourth century developments in early Daoist thought—where it was believed that the Buddha had in fact been Laozi, and thus Daoists were free to appropriate ideas from Buddhist thought *en masse*. That is to say, the early Daoists felt that whatever could be found in Buddhist scriptures was in fact originally Daoist in origin. In addition, I will briefly examine what is known of Cheng Xuanying's life and his interaction with Buddhists in the capital, his relationship with institutional Daoism, and the implications of his commentary to the "Scripture of Salvation" (*Lingbao duren jing*) —a Daoist scripture which was not sanctioned for use in the court debates. Overall, I will review how Cheng's affiliations with Daoism outside of the court debates may have been equally influential in the development of his thought.

The Possible Origins of Chongxuan Thought

Near the end of the Tang dynasty many *Laozi* commentaries were categorized by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933) into several different groups. He tried to distinguish between commentaries which used the *Laozi* for different purposes: political thought, the body, principles of cause and effect (in relation to phenomena), Chongxuan thought, and regulation of family and state.¹¹ While it is unclear why he chose to categorize them as such, we do know that he considered those affiliated with Chongxuan thought to rank

¹¹ Sharf 2002, 52-53.

second among the five.¹² Early scholarship done by Isabelle Robinet and Livia Kohn suggested that the *Laozi* commentaries categorized as “Chongxuan” by Du Guangting may have represented an actual school or sect of Daoist thought.¹³ The notion of an existing school, sect, or even lineage, however, has come into question in recent research by Robert Sharf and Friederike Assandri: both seem to agree that “Chongxuanxue” is more a convenient name for a host of related exegetical commentaries and works from the late sixth and early seventh centuries than evidence of an existing or self-conscious “school” or “lineage.”¹⁴

The term “Chongxuan,” however, appears in a number of early Buddhist materials as well. The presence of this term in Buddhist materials is a good example of the extent to which Chinese Buddhist and Daoist texts often shared terms and labels with a family resemblance to one another (though not always identical in usage or meaning). Robert Sharf points out that the term can be found in early Buddhist works by Zhi Dun 支遁 (314-366) and Sengzhao 僧肇 (374-414), and the list of Buddhist authors and texts which Sharf provides actually traces the use of this term all the way to the Tang dynasty.¹⁵ Of course, this does not necessarily prove that both Buddhists and Daoists were using the term in the same way—whether in the preceding centuries leading up to the Tang or during the debates therein. Sharf simply uses this evidence to make it clear that the court Daoists like Cheng Xuanying did not have a monopoly on the use of the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Livia Kohn, *Taoist Mystical Philosophy: The Scripture of Western Ascension* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 189.

¹⁴ Sharf 2002, 59-60.

¹⁵ Ibid., 59-60, 302 n. 109.

word “Chongxuan” in their writings or the use of the graph *xuan* 玄 in their names (like “xuan” in “Cheng Xuanying”).¹⁶ One seventh-century Buddhist of uncertain date named Xuanyi 玄嶷, for example, wrote with the specific aim of critiquing Chongxuan thought.¹⁷ In other words, the terms “chongxuan” and “xuan” were fashionable among both Buddhist and Daoist authors, and use of the either term in an author’s name or in a text did not necessarily determine one’s allegiance to either Buddhism or Daoism in the Tang.

The terms “Madhyamaka” and “tetralemma,” however, are usually conceived of as something belonging especially to Buddhist thought and exegesis. The story of Chinese “Madhyamaka” begins with the translations of the Kuchean scholar named Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshen 鳩摩羅什[? 344-413]), who was brought to the capital of Chang’an in 401.¹⁸ Through Kumārajīva’s translations and teachings the Chinese disciples who gathered around him were first introduced to the Madhyamaka texts and the dialectic of the “tetralemma.” As I mentioned in the introduction above, the tetralemma appears to exhaust all logical possibilities, where each step is refuted in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. In this sense, the four steps or propositions are thought to represent the negation of all logical possibilities: something exists, does not exist, both exists and does not exist, neither exists nor does not exist. The most prolific of Kumārajīva disciples, Sengzhao, used *variations* of the tetralemma, or tetralemma-like

¹⁶ Ibid. 59.

¹⁷ Ibid. 60.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

interpretation, in many of his treatises, which were collected in the “Treatises of Zhao” or *Zhaolun*. The following may serve as an example:

The Utmost person's [zhiren 至人] mind is empty ...lodged in Existence he is not existent; dwelling in non Existence he is not non-existent; dwelling in non-Existence he is not non-existent. Dwelling in non-Existence, he is not that which is not; Lodged in Existence, his is not that which is.

夫至人虛心...所以處有不有。居無不無。居無不無。故不無於無。處有不有。故不有於有。¹⁹

Though Chinese Madhyamaka thought dwindled by the end of the fifth century, by the sixth century it was revitalized through the work of Buddhist exegetes like Falang 法朗 (507-581) and his disciple Jizang 吉藏 (549-623).²⁰ By the seventh century texts like Wōnhyo's 元曉 (617-686) commentary on the *Pusa yingluo benye jing* 菩薩瓔珞本業經 began to make use of the term “chongxuan” in conjunction with dialectics specifically reminiscent of Madhyamaka.²¹

By the late sixth century, however, it would appear that the Daoists began using variations of the tetralemma in their own literature. It is quite clear that Chongxuan—as Assandri and Sharf are quick to remind us—owes much of its rhetoric and content to Buddhist Madhyamaka logic, namely the tetralemma.²² Assandri points out that this style of interpretation can be traced to several early Chongxuan sources which date from the

¹⁹ Words in italics are my own. Translation by Liebenthal. Walter Liebenthal, *Chao Lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968), 117. T 45, 1858, 159c.

²⁰ Ming-Wood Liu, *Madhyamaka Thought in China* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994), 85.

²¹ See T.H. Barrett, “Taoist and Buddhist Mysteries in the Interpretation of the *Tao-te ching*,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1982), (1): 38-39; Sharf 2002, 62.

²² Assandri 2005, 436 n. 4.

late sixth or early seventh century,²³ but Cheng Xuanying's commentary to the *Laozi* called "Preface and commentary in interpreting the *Laozi*" (*Laozi kaiti xujue yishu* 老子開題序決義疏) ranks among the first known commentaries to make extensive use of dialectics which seem reminiscent of—though not identical to—the tetralemma.²⁴ Variations of the tetralemma appear occasionally in Cheng's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*.²⁵ Overall, Sharf points out that the Chongxuan thinkers used variations of the tetralemma as a "remedy" for one's position or state of understanding, and thus "each of the four propositions is a corrective to that which precedes it, and none is considered absolute. The adept must ceaselessly aim for the Way (*tao*) of the middle by striving to transcend his or her current position."²⁶

Thus, Chongxuan texts may inspire a number of different impressions. As I will discuss in chapter two, modern exegetical and philosophical scholarship focusing on the *Zhuangzi* has rarely, if ever, considered the commentaries by Cheng Xuanying worthy of extended study. Paul Kjellberg admits that scholars and modern translators are somewhat indebted to (or even influenced by) Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, but he still considers Cheng's commentary to be overly Buddhist.²⁷ As for historical scholarship on Chongxuan thought, scholars of Tang Daoism like Shiyi Yu have also found that some in

²³ The *Benji jing* 本際經, "Scripture of the point of genesis," and the *Shenxuan jing* 升玄經, "Scripture of the profound ascension." For further details on these texts, see Assandri 2005, 431.

²⁴ Ibid., 429.

²⁵ For example, see Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, ed., *Zhuangzi Jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 78.

²⁶ Sharf 2002, 65.

²⁷ Kjellberg actually goes so far as to refer to Cheng Xuanying as a "Buddhist," see Paul Kjellberg, *Zhuangzi and Skepticism* [dissertation] (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993), 36, 38.

Chinese history, like Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200 CE), were not convinced that the Daoists knew how to properly read their own literature, and that Buddhists had somehow smuggled their thought into Daoist interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*.²⁸

Our task here, however, is not to question whether Cheng Xuanying's interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* was "accurate" philosophically, but to explore what historical circumstances may have played a role in developing Chongxuan thought. On the surface it may seem that the Daoists were favoured in the Tang. Indeed, shortly after the Tang rulers came to power they claimed to be the descendants of Laozi himself, for their surname "Li 李" was believed to have been Laozi's, the traditional author of the *Laozi* (*Daodejing*). Thus, by way of this association with Laozi, in the year 625 or 626, they declared that Daoism should be ranked first.²⁹ Be that as it may, there is little evidence to suggest that the first two Tang Emperors, Gaozu 高祖 (r. 618-626) and Taizong 太宗 (r. 626-649), showed any personal interest in the religion.³⁰ There is evidence to suggest, however, that the Tang rulers declared Laozi their ancestor and made Daoism the state religion primarily to cover up the fact that their family line was not entirely Chinese. Prior to the downfall of the Sui 隋 dynasty (581-618 CE), the homeland of the Li clan was located near the northwest border of China, and it seems that

²⁸ See Shiyi Yu, *Reading the Chuang-Tzu in the T'ang Dynasty* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing 2000). 123.

²⁹ Barrett 2006, 23.

³⁰ Barrett 2006, 23, 29.

they had often intermarried with many of the nomadic clans there.³¹ Early Tang society was quite aware of this fact, mainly because the Li's were known to possess excessive facial hair and an interest in foreign culture (such as importing Central Asian music at court).³² Thus, establishing themselves as descendants of Laozi supplied the Li clan with a respectable family lineage and all the credentials and social status fitting for *legitimate* political rule as "Chinese." In other words, though Daoism was ranked first among the three religions (Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism), it is possible that the Daoists did not feel as secure as they would have hoped. The debates, then, would have been one of the few arenas where they could attract the attention of the early Tang rulers and hopefully attain more than simply a cursory ranking as the state religion.

Thus, it is equally possible that the debates in the early to mid-Tang dynasty were themselves a major catalyst in developing Chongxuan thought, and the reason why the Daoists borrowed from Buddhist thought and terminology. Barrett also suggests that the Daoists may have found themselves at a significant disadvantage when it came to philosophical rhetoric in the debates, for Buddhist literature possessed a far more systematic and sophisticated set of terminology.³³ Sharf goes further, and suggests that scholars should be suspicious of the overbearing presence of tetralemma-like exegesis

³¹ Charles D. Benn, *Taoism as Ideology in the Reign of Emperor Hsuan-Tsung (712-755)*, Ph.D. Diss. University of Michigan (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995), 16-18. Also, see Barrett 2006, 27-30.

³² *Ibid.*, 17.

³³ Though Barrett is not specific as to which texts were in circulation at this time, we do know that many of the more sophisticated Buddhist philosophical texts were translated a century or more prior to the Tang debates. Madhyamaka texts had been translated by Kumarajiva in the fifth century, while the South Asian figures named Bodhiruci (Puti liuji 菩提流支 [sixth century]) and Paramārtha (Zhen di 真諦 [499-569]) had begun translating Yogācāra texts in the sixth century. See Barrett 2006, 27 and Sharf 2002, 5.

and Buddhist terminology (like the “three vehicles” [*sancheng* 三乘], “Dao nature” [*daoxing* 道性], or “law body” [*fashen* 法身]³⁴ found in Chongxuan literature.

...a Buddhist scholar casually glancing through the *Tao-chiao-i-shu*, the *Pen-chi ching*, or the works of Li Rung and Ch'eng Hsüan-ying might well conclude that these works were composed by nascent Buddhists whose familiarity with canonical Buddhist doctrine left something to be desired....It is unlikely that such large-scale borrowing is the result of peaceful coexistence and benevolent intellectual exchange. Given the political and social stakes in the seventh and eighth centuries, with both Taoists and Buddhists vying for prestige and state patronage, [such texts] may represent the concerted attempts by both sides to lay exclusive claim to a common conceptual terrain. Both could plausibly argue authority over the spiritual verities of the sages, expressed...in a pastiche of Buddhist and Taoism terms and motifs.³⁵

As Sharf explains, the interesting flip side to this argument is that eighth century-texts of Chan Buddhism, like the *Treasure-store treatise* (*Baozang lun* 寶藏論), contain extensive allusions to Daoist texts like the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*.³⁶ Chronologically speaking, he suggests that if Chongxuan thought represents the response of Daoist debaters to the Buddhists in the seventh century, then eighth-century texts like the *Baozang lun* may represent a Buddhist response to Chongxuan thought.³⁷ Overall, Sharf reminds us that Chongxuan literature, when placed in its historical period, may no longer appear as a simple evolutionary result of peaceful Buddhist and Daoist cross-fertilization.³⁸ The general point here, however, is that we must pay equal attention to the

³⁴ For further details, see Sharf 2002, 68-69.

³⁵ Sharf 2002, 71.

³⁶ Ibid., 70-71.

³⁷ Ibid., 76.

³⁸ It is unclear, however, whether all texts identified as “Chongxuan” contain these terms or conceptual schemes that modern scholars today might identify as being directly borrowed from Buddhism. For

possibility that the Daoists had to pilfer ideas from Buddhist thought in order to be able to compete.³⁹

The question, however, is whether the Chongxuan Daoists were really at such a disadvantage in the early Tang, and if this forced them to be exceptionally creative in interpreting the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Even so, why would they choose to focus on these texts—and others like the *Benji jing* and *Shenxuan jing*—in the first place? It is true that the Daoists also had a plethora of texts at their disposal at this time as well. Be that as it may, one of the major issues in the debates was whether the texts presented by the Buddhists or Daoists were in fact legitimate classics or scriptures that could be traced through the dynastic histories.⁴⁰ As far as we know, all other texts that were not recorded in the official catalogues and histories were not used, for if there was no evidence that they had existed for some time then they were suspected of being forgeries.⁴¹ Of course, the only classics that could claim such status in this manner—and which the Daoists seemed interested in using—were the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. It is unclear, however, why the *Benji jing* and *Shenxuan jing* were accepted as legitimate texts in this regard.

Thus, there are now three primary theories as to why Chongxuan thought often focused on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* through Madhyamaka-like interpretation in the

example, in my research on Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi* I have not found many of the same terms and concepts Sharf found in the "Pivotal Meaning of the Daoist Teaching" (*Daojiao yishu* 道教義樞). Terms such as the "three vehicles" (*sancheng* 三乘), "Dao nature" (*daoxing* 道性), or "law body" (*fashen* 法身). Further research will, however, have to verify whether these terms appear in Cheng's commentaries to the *Lingbao duren jing* and the *Laozi*. It may be that the *Daojiao yishu* dates from the later half of the seventh or early eighth century, and represents a later development in Chongxuan thought.

³⁹ Barrett 2006, 26-27.

⁴⁰ Assandri 2005, 435.

⁴¹ Ibid.

debates: First, the Daoists may have felt that being ranked first among the three religions would not last if the Tang rulers were only using Daoism in order to legitimate their own rule. Second, the Daoists could hardly focus on other Daoist texts if they wanted to appear legitimate (and not have their arguments undercut by being accused of presenting texts that were considered forgeries). Third, once the Buddhists began presenting more sophisticated texts⁴² (with some being interpreted through Madhyamaka logic) it seems likely that it would have been in the best interests of the Daoists to begin a re-examination of their own classical texts, the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*; finding passages which could be read in much the same way as those from Buddhist texts but through a variation of the tetralemma.

Be that as it may, how do we know that that the Chinese of the early seventh century would have found Madhyamaka thought more persuasive or impressive in the court debates? Moreover, even if we assume that it was more impressive to the Chinese in debate, it is unclear when those involved in the debates—the Emperors, court officials, gentry, and Daoists—began to consider dialectical rhetoric like the tetralemma as more “sophisticated.” Before trying to answer the question of why Chongxuan might adopt variations of the tetralemma, however, I believe we should further explore what is known about the early debates (and general history) between Buddhism and Daoism.

It is important to remember that it was the Buddhists, and not necessarily the Daoists, who were at a significant disadvantage from the fourth to sixth centuries in the

⁴² According to Assandri the primary texts used by the Buddhists were the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. Ibid., 431.

court debates. The problem began with a theory that developed in the second century, called the “conversion of the barbarians,” where Buddhism was explained away as being founded by Laozi himself after departing for the west. It was based on Laozi’s biography in the *Shiji* 史記 (Historical Records), where Laozi is said to have left China due to his dissatisfaction with the decline of virtue of the Zhou 周 dynasty (1022-256 BCE).⁴³ Second-century CE texts like the “Biographies of the Immortals” (*Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳) added further narrative to the story, and depict Laozi as converting the barbarians of Central and South Asia to Buddhism.⁴⁴ As far as we know, at this point the Chinese did not consider the foreign religion to be a threat. By the year 300, however, the “Scripture on Converting the Barbarians” (*Huahu jing* 化胡經) appeared, and the “conversion of the Barbarians” theory was then used by the Daoists to discredit Buddhism and bolster the cultural superiority of the Chinese.⁴⁵ The Daoists apparently made extensive use of this story, and presented it in such a way as to undermine Buddhism as a legitimate teaching, for if Laozi had simply converted the Barbarians to a lesser form of Daoism (Buddhism) then what was the use of Buddhism for the state when the “authentic” Daoism had always been present in China? Two centuries later the debate over the origins of Buddhism was still a matter of contention among the Buddhists and Daoists. In the year 520 of the

⁴³ Kohn 1995, 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kohn mentions that one of the possible reason for this was the fact that, in the third and fourth centuries, the Chinese were becoming increasingly afraid of the power and presence of non-Chinese present in China. For example, a Xiongnu ruler had laid claim to the Chinese imperial throne, there were massive amounts of non-Chinese immigrating into China, and the Huns had increased their military activities. See Kohn 1995, 12.

Northern Wei 魏 dynasty, however, the court held a similar debate, and one of the “scriptures” that the Daoists presented, called the “Scripture on Opening the Cosmos” (*Kaitian jing* 開天經), was proven to be a forgery in the eyes of the court, and was subsequently destroyed.⁴⁶ Though the “conversion of the barbarians” theory endured, later debates and treatises attacking Buddhism—like Fu Yi’s 傅奕 (555-639) “Memorial on Reducing Buddhist Institutions and Recluses to Enhance the State and Benefit the People”⁴⁷—seem to have taken a different approach, and were more interested in convincing the court that Buddhism was economically harmful to the state.⁴⁸

Due to the elements of the pre-Tang debates between Buddhists and Daoists discussed above, is it possible that the presence of tetralemma-like logic found in Chongxuan texts is simply the result of Daoist thinkers making another logical step in the “conversion of the barbarians” theory? That is to say, is it possible that appropriating tetralemma-like interpretation seemed logical to Daoists because, according to tradition, Laozi had in fact spread Buddhism in India? If Laozi had written the *Laozi* (*Daodejing*) and then headed west to spread Buddhism (a “lower” form of Daoism) than how could Madhyamaka and its teachings of the tetralemma not be an *integral* part of the *Laozi* as well? Daoist polemics claiming that Buddhism was little more than a foreign version of Daoism can also be traced back to the Lingbao Daoist scriptures of the early fifth

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁷ The Chinese title is *Jiansheng sita sengni yikuo limin shi* 減省寺塔僧尼益國利民事.

⁴⁸ Fu Yi’s memorial complains that monasteries and temples, among many other things, are a drain on the state because the manpower and money used to maintain them could be used elsewhere. Also, it should be noted that the idea of Buddhist monks and nuns being unmarried is no longer attacked as if it is an affront to Chinese family values, but that *if* they married the throne would have a hundred thousand new subjects every year ready to serve the nation. For more details, see Kohn 1995, 180.

century.⁴⁹ The Lingbao scriptures, however, were the first Daoist corpus to have freely borrowed Buddhist ideas, mainly because the authors were convinced that whatever could be found in a Buddhist text must have originated from Laozi's original teachings in the western regions.⁵⁰ In other words, it is equally possible that the Chongxuan Daoists had come to the same conclusion regarding Madhyamaka thought, and thus appropriated the tetralemma for their own purposes. This theory, however, will require more direct evidence and far more research in the future.

Regardless of where or how Chongxuan thought originated, a cursory reading of the earliest texts reveals that the literature had already established itself with a full blown claim to cosmic authority, perhaps as early as the late sixth century. This occurs in the *Benji jing* and *Shengxuan jing*, perhaps the oldest texts containing Chongxuan exegesis, both of which were used by the Daoists in the debates of the seventh century (besides the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*). It is possible that they began to circulate as early as the end of the sixth century.⁵¹ The fact that the *Benji jing* was accepted in the debates as a “legitimate” text (as opposed to a “forgery”) may be significant here, for in it we find an excellent example of how the presence of “tetralemma-like” interpretation in Daoism was granted cosmic authority through a conversation between two Daoist celestial beings, named the “True One of Great Polarity” (Taiji zhenren 太極真人) and the “Sovereign of Great subtlety” (Taiwei dijun 太微帝君).

⁴⁹ Bokenkamp 1997, 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Assandri 2005, 432.

Taiwei dijun asked... “What is it, that which is called *chongxuan*?”
 Taiji zhenren answered: “The man with correct vision first makes all being empty; thus there is no clinging to being. Then he eliminates [the clinging to the concept of] emptiness...Then he who practices like this does not cling to emptiness or being. This is called *xuan* 玄, the mysterious. Then he eliminates this *xuan*, and nothing that could be obtained remains. This is called *chongxuan*, the gate of all mysteries.”⁵²

The “gate of all mysteries” is an allusion to chapter one of the *Laozi*: “Render it mysterious and again mysterious, the gateway to the myriad wonders (玄之又玄, 衆妙之門).”⁵³ In other words, the very name “Chongxuanxue” is a restatement of this phrase *xuan zhi you xuan* 玄之又玄, “the gate of all mysteries,” which likely meant, to the Chongxuan Daoists, that the *Laozi* was indeed the origin of the tetralemma.

Cheng Xuanying

Investigating the biography and commentaries of Cheng Xuanying may provide us with further clues as to how Chongxuan thought developed. Cheng is considered the most important exponent of Chongxuan thought, though this may have more to do with the fact that most of the work of other Chongxuan Daoists is no longer extant. Unfortunately, the extant biographies of the Chongxuan Daoists provide very little information either. In other words, we know very little about those who were involved with this style of Daoist interpretation and what roles they played in the debates with the Buddhists in the early Tang. Assandri has pointed out the interesting, though somewhat perplexing, fact that the Daoist tradition seems to have preserved little information on

⁵² Translation following Assandri, see Assandri 2005, 432.

⁵³ Translation by Sharf based on a Chongxuan reading of the *Laozi*. See Sharf 2002, 52.

these authors and their works, while the Buddhists who participated in the debates appear as heroes in Buddhist historical writings.⁵⁴

Though many of Cheng Xuanying's commentaries are still extant, the information on his life is also limited, and what we have at our disposal is circumstantial at best. The "New Tang History" (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書) mentions that he was called to the capital (Chang'an) by imperial decree⁵⁵ around the year 631. In another source, the "Continuation of The Biographies of Eminent Monks" (*Xugaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳) by Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667), we find that he participated in at least one debate with Buddhists around 636.⁵⁶ There is some evidence that he managed to defeat the Buddhists, and as a result Emperor Taizong decreed that Daoism was superior and had the temple of Laozi restored.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Daoxuan's account in the *Xugaoseng zhuan* mentions that Cheng lost the debate and left the court infuriated.⁵⁸ Shiyi Yu has also suggested that because he was, as far as we know, still active in the capital around 643, he may have been involved in the Buddhist and Daoist disagreements concerning the Buddhist treatise called "In Defense of what is right" (*Bianzheng lun* 辯正論) by Falin 法琳 (572-640).⁵⁹ The *Bianzheng lun* was in fact one of the largest treatises to appear in the Tang that attempted to defend Buddhism against the latter's critics, and the text

⁵⁴ Assandri 2005, 431.

⁵⁵ According to Shiyi Yu, this was another way of saying that a particular individual was "discovered" and selected by the Emperor himself. See Yu 2000, 53.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 56.

⁵⁷ Sharf 2002, 55.

⁵⁸ See Yu for a translation of Daoxuan's account, Yu 2000, 55-56.

⁵⁹ Yu 2000, 56.

incorporated many arguments from earlier Buddhist treatises that were used for similar purposes in the sixth and seventh century.⁶⁰ Shiyi Yu mentions that the altercation caused the Daoists to fall out of favor with Emperor Taizong, and resulted in the execution of the Daoist Qin Shiyong 秦世英 (d. 643) who at the time was Master of Doctrine at the Xi hua abbey 西華觀, though it remains unclear why he was executed.⁶¹ It seems that Cheng was later appointed to the same position, though the only source of evidence for this is his signature (which mentions his position at the Xi hua abbey) to the preface he wrote for his commentary to the *Zhuangzi*.⁶² It is still unclear when he may have been appointed to this position, but Shiyi Yu is convinced it must have occurred somewhere between 643 and 652, after Qin Shiyong was executed.⁶³ Later, in 647, the Emperor issued an edict to have the *Laozi* translated into Sanskrit, a project which involved many Buddhists and Daoists active in the capital at that time including Cheng and the famous Buddhist scholar and translator Xuanzang 玄奘 (600-664).⁶⁴ According to the *Xin Tangshu*, Cheng was banished by 652, though for unknown reasons.

Even though little is remembered of Cheng Xuanyong, evidence to be found in his biography, other sources, and his commentaries does point to at least two aspects of his life which may serve as a backdrop to interpreting his commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. For one, it is evident that Cheng Xuanyong is remembered as an individual who competed

⁶⁰ Kohn 1995, 185.

⁶¹ Yu 2000, 56.

⁶² See Cheng Xuanyong's preface in Guo 1961, 6; Yu 2000, 56.

⁶³ Yu 2000, 56.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

with Buddhism. On the one hand, as we saw above, Daoxuan usually depicts him as one who usually loses to his Buddhist opponents. On the other hand, other sources claim that he was much admired by the court for his ability to debate with the Buddhists.⁶⁵ It would seem that he is remembered in much the same way as other Daoists who participated in debates, especially as they are depicted in Buddhist sources. Livia Kohn, in her research on the somewhat obscure figure named Li Rong 李榮 (perhaps a younger contemporary of Cheng Xuanying), concluded that this later defender of Daoism—who was portrayed as a slow-witted debater—must have been an intimidating figure in order to become the object of such humiliation and criticism in Buddhist polemical writings. In the case of Cheng Xuanying, however, it seems difficult to say more than that he was very likely involved with the debates, but as to what extent is still unclear.

Be that as it may, even if we are to hypothesize that much of what is remembered of Cheng is historically accurate we are left with a somewhat confusing picture when it comes to relating the man to the writings attributed to him. On the one hand, Cheng Xuanying appears as a debater and commentator conscious of the debates of his time who—as far as we know—concentrated his efforts on those texts which were deemed “legitimate” exponents of Daoism (the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*) by the court debates. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that he was “Master of Doctrine” at the Xi hua abbey, and so it is clear that he was somehow affiliated with institutional Daoism—what was his relationship to institutional Daoism? If we were to judge simply by looking

⁶⁵ Ibid. 127. Also, see Sharf 2002, 55.

to his commentaries on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* we might be led to suspect that he had little interest in Daoist thought or texts apart from the *Benji jing*, *Shenxuan jing*, *Laozi*, and *Zhuangzi*. Indeed, Shiyi Yu has recognized that there are portions of Cheng's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* which appear to struggle with the more fantastic or other-worldly stories and descriptions of sage-like individuals often found there; those which often resonate with the "Daoism of immortals" (*xiandao* 仙道). Even his comments on the more infamous chapters of the *Laozi*—which speak of sages being able to walk amongst the tigers and water buffalo unharmed—are vague, and often avoid perpetuating supernatural interpretations of the sage.

We will return to this point below and in Chapter two, for now suffice to say that it might have been in Cheng's best interests to distinguish the *Zhuangzi* from medieval Daoist works if he and other debaters wished to establish the *Zhuangzi* as a legitimate text in the context of the debates. That is to say, if the "legitimate" texts were shown to be related to most other medieval Daoist texts that were considered "forgeries" in the court debates, then the genuine status of the former would have been seriously compromised. The issue of legitimacy was further amplified by Buddhist polemics, which often stated that all Daoist texts, other than the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, were in fact forgeries.⁶⁶ This may possibly explain why Cheng's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* often relates it to the *Laozi*, *Yijing* 易經, and other early texts rather than later ones. Cheng may have felt that citing texts that originated prior to the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-206 BCE) boosted the authority of his

⁶⁶ For further details on how Buddhists were interested in "defending" the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* against medieval Daoism, see Yu 2000, 125.

own commentaries, and distanced the *Zhuangzi* from other Daoist literature which did not appear in the historical records.

Nevertheless, to say that Cheng Xuanying, in his life apart from the debates, was entirely uninterested in other medieval Daoist literature (i.e., Lingbao, Shangqing 上清) would be a mistake, and there are a number of reasons for this. First, such a claim would have to explain how an extant commentary on the “Scripture of Salvation” (*Lingbao duren jing*), one of the central texts in Lingbao Daoism, is attributed to him.⁶⁷ As far as we know, the *Lingbao duren jing* was not allowed to be presented or used in the debates. We do know, however, that this scripture was extremely popular in the Tang, for there is even evidence that it enjoyed a lay as well as elite readership at this time.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, we must be aware of the possibility that this commentary may be falsely attributed to Cheng. I mention this only because, out the few extant commentaries attributed to Cheng, the *Lingbao duren jing* has received the least amount of attention from scholars, and so until a full comparison of Cheng’s extant commentaries appears in scholarship we will have to accept the attribution.

If it can be established beyond a reasonable doubt that the commentary is his, then we may have a better understanding of what Cheng’s overall conception of Daoism was.

⁶⁷ One of the four commentaries collected in the “Four commentaries on the Book of Salvation” (*Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin miaojing sizhu* 元始无量度人上品妙經四註). It seems that Cheng was not the first to comment on this scripture, as one of the four commentaries is attributed to a certain Yan Dong 嚴東 (fl. 485) seems to be the oldest. For further details, see John Lagerwey “Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin miaojing sizhu” in *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang Volume 2 (The Modern Period)*, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 712

⁶⁸ Barrett 2006, 81-82.

Though an in-depth study of Cheng's work on the *Lingbao duren jing* is far beyond the scope of this thesis, a cursory examination may be helpful here. Needless to say, the implications of there being an extant commentary on this scripture attributed to Cheng could be significant. Generally speaking, a few modern scholars of Daoism, namely Stephen Eskildsen and Stephen Bokenkamp, seem to agree that the early Lingbao scriptures were among the first to fully embrace, alter, and integrate Buddhist ideas.⁶⁹ As I mentioned above, this likely occurred because the "conversion of the Barbarians" theory had made pilfering ideas from Buddhism a seemingly legitimate practice as early as the fourth century.⁷⁰ The *Lingbao duren jing* is no exception in this regard. For example, in much the same way one might think of the Buddhist bodhisattvas, the *Lingbao duren jing* often speaks of the celestial beings as possessing great "benevolence" (*ci* 慈) and "affection" (*ai* 愛) aimed at bringing "salvation" (*du* 度) to all living beings.⁷¹

If the commentary to this scripture is indeed Cheng's, then it seems we may have to rethink how influential the Buddhists were on their Daoist counterparts in the debates. In other words, if Cheng was privately interested in the Lingbao corpus then he would not have had to pilfer *all* ideas (like affection, compassion, and salvific intent of the sages) from his Buddhist adversaries in order to compete with them, for the work, so to speak, had already been accomplished in the fourth and fifth centuries. It may be true that much

⁶⁹ Stephen Eskildsen, *The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*, (Albany State University of New York Press, 2004), 203 n.11; Bokenkamp 1997, 8.

⁷⁰ See Bokenkamp 1997, 8.

⁷¹ Ibid, 407-408, 417.

of the terminology Sharf identifies⁷² in Chongxuan literature was indeed lifted from Buddhist sources during the debates, but it is clear that certain concepts from Buddhism were already a part of Daoist thought by the Tang dynasty. We will return to this theme in chapter four, but for now it should be clear that infiltration of Buddhist ideas into “Daoist thought” did not begin with the writings of the Chongxuan Daoists like Cheng Xuanying, but with the early Shangqing and Lingbao literature.

Be that as it may, Shiyi Yu considers Cheng’s commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* as evidence for claiming that Cheng was one who tried to “bridge” the gap between the classic texts of Daoism like the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* and other Daoist works of the early medieval period.⁷³ Is it safe to assume, however, that Daoists, including the Chongxuan exegetes, made the same distinction between “classical” and “medieval” Daoism in the seventh century? It seems unlikely that the Daoists would have been thrilled by the prospect that they could not use the majority of their literature other than the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* in the debates. Moreover, despite Shiyi Yu’s opinion above, in chapter five of his *Reading the Chuang-tzu in the T’ang Dynasty* he actually finds evidence that Cheng, when distanced from the demands of the debates, may have made few distinctions between what constituted legitimate or illegitimate Daoist texts.⁷⁴ This comes from another account recorded by Daoxuan over a dispute between Buddhists and Daoists involved in the imperial translation project to render the *Laozi* into Sanskrit.⁷⁵

⁷² Sharf 2002, 68-70.

⁷³ Yu 2000, 58.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 127-128.

Among the many involved in the project were Cheng and Xuanzang, the eminent Buddhist translator. Both men were expected to work together and render the text into Sanskrit, which would then be distributed in India. Apparently the problem was that Cheng wanted the *Heshanggong* 河上公 commentary to the *Laozi* translated alongside the base text, but the Buddhists refused to do so because they asserted that it was not in fact a “legitimate” text. This appears to be the same basic argument made in the debates—that spurious scriptures and those which contained ideas of the “vulgar” arts of physical preservation were not legitimate texts.⁷⁶ Indeed, certain parts of the *Heshanggong* commentary do in fact resemble other medieval Daoist literature that is usually characterized as the “Daoism of Immortals,” which describes various methods of preserving the body, achieving immortality, or communing with spirits.⁷⁷ Was Cheng privately interested in other Daoist literature such as the *Heshanggong*? Or is the entire story a Buddhist ploy to undermine Cheng’s authority as a debater and respected Daoist in the capital? Such questions remain open for debate. Even if Daoxuan’s account is not an accurate portrayal of Cheng’s conception of the *Heshanggong* commentary, the existence of the Cheng’s commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* suggests that he was interested in Daoist thought apart from the “legitimate” texts used in the debates. In this

⁷⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁷ Of course, we have already mentioned the polemical motivations of Daoxuan’s accounts, and here we must be just as careful not to take his account at face value. Nonetheless, it does give us an idea of what many Buddhist intellectuals thought of medieval Daoism; that at least within the context of debates it would have been in their best interests to remind the Daoists—as well as those who might award either side with patronage—that such texts were spurious and unsophisticated works at best, or downright forgeries at worst. For further details, see Yu 2000, 127; Alan K. L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 152-153.

sense, the evidence suggests that as influential, competitive, and restrictive as the court debates may have been, we should be careful not to overemphasize their role in the development of Cheng Xuanying's thought.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The issues raised in this chapter may give one the impression that it is more useful to think of Chongxuan thought as an inevitable result of what happens after centuries of interaction with Buddhism—or a result of Daoist “dialogue” with Buddhism. Generally speaking, it is important to remember that Buddhism had been gaining momentum for several centuries, and shortly before the Tang the Buddhists had enjoyed extensive support and patronage under the brief Sui dynasty; so much so that it caused one Confucian scholar of the time to remark that “the number of Buddhist sūtras circulating

⁷⁸ From what we know of Cheng's biography, there may be some reason to believe that, before he was summoned to the capital in 631, he may have developed many of his ideas when he lived in seclusion at Yu Zhou 潞州, near present day Lianyungang 連雲港 city of Jiangsu 江蘇 province. As Yu has pointed out, by the Tang dynasty the name “Yu Zhou” indicated a secluded region of mountains that was home to many Daoists, according to Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (?-527). There is evidence, however, that it was also a set of mountains where Buddhists had constructed monasteries by at least the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-587 CE) (Yu 2000, 49), and so it is possible that Cheng had been exposed to Buddhist thought at an early age. It may also be useful, in this case, to keep in mind the recent scholarship by James Robson who has shown that sectarian writings have seriously distorted our view of Buddhist and Daoist history when it comes to identifying one particular mountain as “Buddhist” or “Daoist.” That is to say, the truth is that most mountain ranges probably contained an eclectic mix of devotees and monasteries from both parties (James Robson, “The Polymorphous Space of the Southern Marchmount [Nanyue].” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1) (1995): 225-226). Generally speaking, it is important to remember that co-existence within close quarters increased the chance that new forms of religion, religious practice, or trends in thought may have been produced from a smattering of elements from both religions. Indeed, this may be why Tang sources often give conflicting accounts as to what religion one or another individual might be affiliated with, especially those who operated far from the politics of the capital; for some sources often describe the same individuals as Daoists while others say they are in fact Buddhists (Barrett 2006, 44). Nevertheless, as to what form Cheng's early encounters with Buddhism took and how these experiences affected the development of his thought we will probably never be sure.

among the common people exceeds the Confucian classics many thousand-folds.”⁷⁹ Thus, it is unlikely that even intellectuals with little sympathy for Buddhism—whether they resided apart from the capital and the court debates or participated in them—were unfamiliar with Buddhist teachings. Others might go further, and say that Chongxuan is an example of the “cross-fertilization” of Buddhism and Daoism; hinting that it is somehow a product of a very natural process, another outcome of the pervasive influence of Buddhism on Chinese culture. Moreover, that may Buddhist ideas had already played a role in forming other native forms of religious thought, which can still be found in early Daoist texts like the Lingbao corpus. As we will see in chapter three and four, there may be some use in discussing issues like the “sinification” of Buddhism and the influence of this religion upon indigenous Chinese thought. Nevertheless, labelling a thinker as merely “syncretic” only obscures the complex historical events and processes which may have played a role in producing thinkers like Cheng Xuanying. On the one hand, we may never know if the “conversion of the barbarians” theory was as influential in Cheng’s day as it was in fourth century, where it played a role in the development of Lingbao Daoism. On the other, we may never know if the debates of the early Tang actually put the Chongxuan Daoists in enough trouble that they were moved to pilfer concepts and terminology from Buddhism in order to compete. It would seem that, for now, we will have to conclude that Cheng may have been drawing on the Daoist tradition as he knew it—which had already been subject to three or four centuries of Buddhist influence. As for the court debates, we cannot ignore the effect they may have had on the intellectual

⁷⁹ Weinstein 1987, 4.

climate of the early Tang. Nevertheless, until we can identify and distinguish between what was actually “pilfered” from Buddhism and what was already “present” within the Daoist tradition at the time, the question of where Chongxuan thought originated remains open to question. As for Cheng Xuanying and his alleged “Buddhist overtones,” we will have to do likewise, and content ourselves with the knowledge that, at least for now, we do not really know where the troubled debater begins and the Daoist ends in Cheng Xuanying.

The *Zhuangzi* and Cheng Xuanying's Conception of the Sage

Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to show how Cheng Xuanying and modern commentators made attempts to deal with the composite nature of the *Zhuangzi*—the many different strands of thought in the text which often present contrasting visions of the role and function of the sage. First, I will show how the *Zhuangzi* accumulated more layers of interpretation and interpolation over time. This will enable us to understand how the process of accretion brought with it many different names for the sage—many of which are defined or explained differently from one another. Some appear more celestial and roam beyond the mundane world, while others appear worldly. Second, I will attempt to show how, in Cheng's conception of the sage, all these names became “epithets” for the same ultimate or ideal individual.

In order to do so I will have to explore chapters one and thirty-three of the *Zhuangzi*, where the text lists different names for the sages in terms of their function or nature, like “spirit” (*shen* 神), “utmost” (*zhi* 至), “genuine” (*zhen* 真), and “sagely” (*sheng* 聖). I will also introduce the work of several modern scholars, like Burton Watson, Victor Mair, and A.C. Graham, and their interpretation of these different names for the sage. Then I will examine Cheng Xuanying's interpretation of the different names for the sage, especially how he uses the lists of names for the sage in chapter one and thirty-three. I will try to show how his interpretation attempts to harmonize the many different names for the sage as found in the *Zhuangzi*, and how his commentary goes farther and actually

increases the number of epithets that can apply to the sage. In other words, this chapter is an attempt to make sense of how Cheng made the best of a very complicated and difficult situation, where the text in question presented multiple interpretations (some of them conflicting) of what it meant to be a sage. By doing so I will be able to show how Cheng attempts to harmonize the often conflicting ideological and conceptual baggage attached to the different epithets for the sage, such as Confucian thought and ideas similar to the “Daoism of the immortals.”

The Zhuangzi

The history and thought of the *Zhuangzi* has been discussed at length elsewhere, but a brief synopsis of essential scholarship and the issues raised therein will suffice here. This will also be helpful in distinguishing what exactly modern scholarship has done with the *Zhuangzi* and where this project fits within that discourse. Moreover, it will give us a good idea of just how composite the *Zhuangzi* is, and thus a greater appreciation for what was required of Cheng Xuanying’s commentary; for it seems likely that Cheng would have wanted to present an interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* that was convincing to those present at the court debates. In order to do so he would have had to explain how such a composite text was in fact the product of a single thinker named Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (370-301 BCE). The ways in which the *Zhuangzi* has been studied in the last century has varied considerably. Early endeavours sought to recover or reconstruct the earliest strata of philosophical/religious thought within the text and distinguish it from later accretions,

such as the last twenty-six chapters of the text. In general, modern scholars such as A.C. Graham and Paul Kjellberg have considered the first seven chapters, or the “Inner Chapters” of the work, to represent the earliest and most thought provoking in terms of philosophy and sometimes even mysticism.⁸⁰ Scholars are often more interested in particular themes and chapters within the Inner Chapters, with chapter two, the *Qiwulun* 齊物論 or “Discourse on evening things out,” being one of the more famous examples. Scholars like Graham and Kjellberg tend to agree that these seven chapters preserve the more authentic or original voice of the text, that of Zhuang Zhou, or Zhuangzi, an obscure but possibly historical figure from the fourth century BCE.⁸¹ In addition, scholars have usually focused their efforts on locating the philosophy of the text in its historical roots—the turbulent mid-Warring States period (475-221 BCE)—and comparing it with the Confucian, Mohist, and legalist thought of the time.⁸² Recent scholarship often goes farther, and attempts to compare this recovered thought or exegesis (the details of which often differ from one interpreter to the next) to other modern forms of philosophy. In some cases, writers have narrowed their focus to a comparison of the Inner Chapters and various philosophical treatises from ancient Greece.⁸³ Others, such as Youru Wang, have

⁸⁰ For an example of mystical interpretation, see Roth “Bimodal Mystical Experience in the “Qiwulun,” chapter of the *Zhuangzi*” in *Hiding the World in the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 15-32. For a more traditional example see Tao Hongjing’s 陶弘景 (456-536) comments in *Zhen Gao* (HY 1010), 19.1b.

⁸¹ A.C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 3

⁸² Graham 2001, 3-32.

⁸³ Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p 1-25, 26-49.

attempted to pit the Inner Chapters against or alongside the writings of Derrida and other contemporary forms of postmodern thought.⁸⁴

Other scholars have been more interested in how exactly the *Zhuangzi* was compiled. The traditional account is that Liu Xiang 劉向 (77?-6 BCE) was the first to collate the text, while Guo Xiang 郭象 (252?-312 CE) was the first to edit it down to its present thirty-three chapters.⁸⁵ As for the issue of origins, there seem to be three primary positions among modern scholars. The first usually reflects the early work of A.C. Graham and Christopher C. Rand, who thought that the *Zhuangzi* as a whole suffered much mutilation and rearranging since the early second century BCE, and possibly at the hands of Guo Xiang much later.⁸⁶ Of course, while many might agree that the *Zhuangzi* is composite, highly interpolated, edited, and rearranged, scholars of the first position often disagree as to when exactly these changes took place. The second position often holds the traditional view that at least the Inner Chapters have remained largely free from substantial mutilation and tampering and can be dated comfortably to the late fourth century BCE.⁸⁷ One of the more sophisticated arguments in this area comes from the work

⁸⁴ Paul Kjellberg, on the other hand, has taken a more cautious approach in his Phd. dissertation, and devoted a few sections to investigating just how the philosophical orientations of many scholars in the twentieth century influenced their reading of the *Zhuangzi*. More importantly, his work attempts to trace how these philosophical/religious orientations had a profound effect on the conclusions scholars made concerning the “thought” of the *Zhuangzi* (or at least the Inner Chapters) and how these in turn affected their decisions on how to translate and present the text in English. For further details, see Kjellberg 1993.

⁸⁵ Scott Cook, ed., *Hiding the World in the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 13.

⁸⁶ Graham 2001, 3-32; Christopher C. Rand, “Chuang Tzu: Text and Substance,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* no. 11 (1983), 1-15.

⁸⁷ It is true that Victor Mair and A.C. Graham—the two most able translators of the *Zhuangzi* to date—both, like most, favor the Inner Chapters over the Outer and Miscellaneous, and (like the second position here) consider them the more stimulating philosophically. Both translators, however, claimed that editorial decisions were made as the *Zhuangzi* passed among its readers, and so they feel at liberty to cut and paste

of Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢. He finds that the Inner Chapters are little different from other texts thought to have originated during the mid-Warring States period (475-221 BCE) such as the *Laozi* 老子, *Lunyu* 論語, *Mengzi* 孟子, *Mozi* 墨子, and *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 insofar as they are consistent in using the single-character terms *dao* 道, *de* 德, *xing* 性, *jing* 精, *ming* 命, and *shen* 神. That is to say, the Inner Chapters do not possess the compounds of *daode* 道德 *xingming* 性命 and *jingshen* 精神 which are prevalent throughout the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and other later Warring States works such as the *Xunzi* 荀子, *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, and the *Lushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋.⁸⁸ Thus, by this estimation, the Inner Chapters are older than the rest of the *Zhuangzi* which can be no earlier than the late third and second centuries BCE. This position, however, stands in stark contrast to the third position held by Russell Kirkland, for he suspects that the thirty-three chapters of the *Zhuangzi* were, for the most part, written by Guo Xiang himself, even though Kirkland's argument is not as developed as the previous two positions. Kirkland does not really provide many details of this theory, but I believe the suspicion is founded on the fact that there is little evidence of the *Zhuangzi* existing as a text before Guo Xiang's commentary.⁸⁹ A recent find in Japan concerning a long lost preface written by Guo Xiang would seem to support this, for in it

sections or passages out of the Inner Chapters to remove these literary blemishes. In Graham's case, he also felt that more important sections of the Inner Chapters were actually misplaced or moved to other parts of the book and thus "restores" them—the most famous example of this being Chapter three of the *Zhuangzi*, which appears especially corrupt, and missing an introductory essay. See Graham 2001, 62.

⁸⁸ Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*. (Center for Chinese Studies: The University of Michigan, 1994), 55

⁸⁹ Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 30-36.

Guo admits that he revised the *Zhuangzi* substantially.⁹⁰ Be that as it may, new evidence will likely force all three positions to be re-evaluated, for a recent archaeological find from Fuyang 阜陽 has turned up a set of Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) bamboo slips which allegedly hold eight chapters (with two from the Inner Chapters) from the extant *Zhuangzi*.⁹¹

Overall, however, it would seem that few have been interested in how the *Zhuangzi* was read and received in China after it was edited by Guo Xiang. In fact, if one were to survey most of the scholarly work in English concerning the *Zhuangzi* one would find that many scholars and translators have been more interested in reading and translating the text apart from the Guo Xiang commentary. Granted, many translators and readers have found the commentaries helpful for difficult passages in the *Zhuangzi*. Nevertheless, the thought of Guo Xiang, or rather how he interprets the *Zhuangzi*, has not been studied at length except in a recent book by Brook Ziporyn,⁹² and scholars have generally considered the commentary by Cheng Xuanying to be helpful as well, but in the end have found his interpretations of the text to be overly Buddhist, and therefore philosophically misleading.⁹³ Some Tang intellectuals were equally taken aback by Cheng's work; for example, Barrett mentions that the eighth-century Huayan master

⁹⁰ Livia Knaul, "Lost Chuang Tzu Passages," *Journal of Chinese Religions* no. 10 (1982). 55.

⁹¹ Cook 2003, 14.

⁹² Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

⁹³ Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996, 37-40.

Chengguan 澄觀 (738-839) criticized Cheng for reading Buddhism into Daoist texts.⁹⁴

One other thing which many modern scholars share with some medieval thinkers is reverence for the Inner Chapters,⁹⁵ and so it should come as no surprise that many scholars themselves might find the commentaries “misguided” attempts to probe the depths of the *Zhuangzi* when much of the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters—some 2/3 of the book or more—are themselves singled out as lacklustre imitations of the Inner Chapters.

Another possible reason why the traditional commentaries were usually ignored is because modern scholars were more interested in actually translating the text in such a way that it would be clear enough, theoretically, for non-specialists to obtain a sufficient understanding of it without having to consult a commentary. The Chinese, on the other hand, usually read such texts with commentary because it was believed they facilitated greater understanding of the source text. By avoiding the commentaries, scholars like A.C. Graham, and to a certain extent Victor Mair, were forced to take some liberty with the text, and often felt it was necessary to cut, paste, or reword entire passages in order to facilitate better readability in their translations.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ T.H. Barrett, *Li Ao: Buddhist, Taoist, or Neo-Confucian?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 135.

⁹⁵ Yu 2000, 21.

⁹⁶ Of course, this method has not gone unchallenged in recent scholarship, and scholars like Shuiien-Fu Lin are beginning to question whether it was appropriate to cut and paste sections of text in and out of the Inner Chapters especially. See Shuiien-Fu Lin, “Transforming the Dao: A Critique of A.C. Graham’s Translation of the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Hiding the World in the World*, ed. Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 263-290.

Translators are thus at a disadvantage because there is no agreement on how to actually read the *Zhuangzi*. Simply put, scholars have seen the more fantastic, outrageous, or exaggerated use of description or language in the *Zhuangzi* in various ways. Many choose to see this from a purely metaphorical point of view; indicating that the text should not be taken literally or historically in instances where stories and bizarre individuals appear. This is explained in different ways, but usually it is emphasized by those who, like Victor Mair, try to stress the literary quality of the *Zhuangzi*; the “zaniness” or tongue-in-cheek qualities of the text.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, as we will see in the next section, when it comes to interpreting the *Zhuangzi* it often becomes difficult to know when and where the text is indicating that we should read it in a “literal” or “metaphorical” sense, or some combination of the two. Moreover, problems begin to multiply as soon as the search for coherent and logical philosophy begins therein—and as a result many who have attempted to smooth over the logical inconsistencies have had to resort to reediting and rearranging the text itself. Even so, Victor Mair—who admits that subjecting the *Zhuangzi* to logical or rigorous philosophical analysis may prove disastrous—found it necessary to remove what he considered to be interpolated or corrupt passages from the text. Thus, the goal was to present a smooth and coherent text for modern (and typically non-specialist) readers.

⁹⁷ Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 56.

Epithets of the sage in the *Zhuangzi*

How different are the sage epithets from one another? Can they be thought of as epithets in the strict sense as different names for the same individual? Did translators of the twentieth century and Cheng Xuanying really have any choice other than to ignore differences between descriptions? Indeed, the many different ways in which the various authors within the *Zhuangzi* interpreted the image and function of the sage can be dizzying. This is especially true in complicated descriptions where the sage proper or *shengren* 聖人, for example, came to be described in much the same way as the *zhenren* 真人 (genuine person), *shenren* 神人 (spirit person), *daren* 大人 (great person) and *zhiren* 至人 (perfected person), to name just a few.⁹⁸ That being said, there are also cases where they differ greatly from one another; while at other times one in particular may seem to embody qualities typical of them all, such as being a recluse, possessing supernatural abilities, but still engaging in qualities of an ideal king, ruler, or even official. Simply put, a thorough reading of the *Zhuangzi* will show that one has to get used to the idea that, in the majority of cases, the definition of each epithet can change from chapter to chapter, if not multiple times therein. At times they are altered drastically and sometimes only slightly. The *Zhuangzi*, in this sense, is not at all consistent in its descriptions for any given one. This should not be surprising, however, for most historical-critical scholars have come to accept that the *Zhuangzi* is a composite text containing sections that likely circulated separately or were composed at a later date.

⁹⁸ The word “sage” is being used as a shorthand label in this thesis to represent the many different names and labels which appear in the *Zhuangzi*, which usually refer to an ideal state of being for an individual.

Thus, differing descriptions of the sage and the very existence of different names for similar figures should not come as a surprise.

Even if we were to perform a survey of the Inner Chapters to see which epithets occur and where, we would find that they are hardly consistent. Of course, one could ask whether it is possible to know if there was originally only one epithet, or several; whether the Inner Chapters provide us with any evidence to theorize about one or another being the “original” that inspired the rest, or caused later editors to tag on other sections of the *Zhuangzi* because the texts seemed to share a common vocabulary concerning sage-like individuals. Moreover, whether the author of any given section of the text is aware of those we find today in other sections. All of this is difficult to prove, however, and it seems to me that it would first require one to survey all instances where the epithets occur and then begin the arduous process of eliminating which ones seem to be drawing on those within the Inner Chapters, the so-called earliest strata of the *Zhuangzi*. That being said, as we will see, it is likely that the Inner Chapters are just as corrupt (interpolated, edited, mutilated) as the rest of the *Zhuangzi*, and so until a definitive listing of “reliable passages” from the Inner Chapters relating to the epithets appears we will have to remain cautious.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Even if one were to accept the majority of A.C. Graham’s emendations to the Inner Chapters, one must still deal with the fact that each of the chapters therein are inconsistent in this regard as we move from one to the next. For example, as we will see, the *shenren* 神人 and the *shengren* 聖人 are commented on at length in chapter one of the *Zhuangzi*, the *shengren* and *zhiren* 至人 in chapter two, none in chapter three, the *shengren*, *shenren*, and *zhiren*, in chapter four, the *shengren* and *zhiren* in chapter five, the *zhenren* 真人 and *shengren* in chapter six, and the *shengren* and *zhiren* in chapter seven. Later research will have to try and pinpoint whether the epithets of the *shenren*, *zhiren*, and *shenren*, and *zhenren* can be traced to other fourth century texts. Other sources that have been tentatively dated (much like the Inner Chapters) to

It may be interesting to note that the *Zhuangzi*, however, provides a few passages which suggest these epithets are essentially different names for the same ultimate individual, or sage; that they can be “collapsed” in a sense, and come to signify the same state of being. Both traditional and modern interpreters, from Cheng Xuanying to A.C. Graham, have been eager to make use of these passages in much the same way, for it essentially solves the problem of interpreting the rest of the text where descriptions of these epithets differ. In effect, this would mean that when the *Zhuangzi* refers to any one of the epithets it is not necessarily *favouring* one over another but simply using different names at different times to express the many ideal qualities of the sage. Thus, the epithets of the sage are then supposed to be read as if they are in fact signifiers for the same state of ultimate sagehood. Nevertheless, what exactly should we do when these epithets differ from one another? It is important that we ask and attempt to answer this question, because it will be an important stepping stone to appreciating how Cheng Xuanying also attempted to reconcile the many different strands of thought in the text concerning the sage.

Before moving to Cheng Xuanying I will give a brief examination of how modern translators have met these challenges. Again, it should be noted that I do not

the fourth century BCE, like the *Neiye* 內業 (*Inward training*), occasionally refer to the *shengren*. But the *shengren* seems to have been a common label for the ideal individual in Warring States literature and so it should not be a surprise that it appears in the *Zhuangzi* at all. For example, the *shengren* is commented on in twenty-four separate chapters of the *Laozi*, and occurs three times in the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects of Confucius) (See Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao: Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). 59, 75). Also, see Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Laozi: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003). 235; Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont JR., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1998).

intend to survey every instance where descriptions of the sage epithets occur, for that would be far beyond the scope of this paper. The example I wish to use comes from the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* called “Free and easy wandering”¹⁰⁰ (*Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊), which is not only the first chapter in the text but is also the first to mention several epithets. In the first passage which deals with these mysterious individuals we find

...As for the man who rides a true course between Heaven and Earth, with the changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on? Therefore it is said: The utmost person has no self, the spirit person has no accomplishment, the sage has no name.¹⁰¹

Burton Watson considered these three types as “Not three different categories but three names for the same thing.”¹⁰² A.C. Graham, who is known for editing much out of the Inner Chapters,¹⁰³ seems to consider this first occurrence of these epithets as unproblematic as well, and provides no commentary. Victor Mair, another recent translator who is known to have edited out portions of the *Zhuangzi* in his translation, also makes no changes to this passage.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, if taken on its own, the passage could

¹⁰⁰ Watson 1968, 29.

¹⁰¹ Translation following Graham, with some changes. See Graham 2001, 44-45.

¹⁰² Burton Watson, *Chuang-Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 34.

¹⁰³ One of the better examples of this can be found in chapter six of the *Zhuangzi* in Graham’s translation. The opening part of this chapter discusses the *zhenren*, but half way through this opening section the subject changes, and is no longer the *zhenren* but actually the *shengren*, or sage proper. In addition, the passages which pertain to the *shengren* contain traces of what appears to be more Confucian or even Legalist thought. Both Victor Mair and Graham have them removed from their translation. For further details, compare the translations of Graham (2001, 85) and Mair (1998, 52-53) with the *Zhuangzi*, in Harvard-Yenching Institute, *Zhuangzi Yinde* 莊子引得 (*A concordance to Chuang Tzu*) (Beijing: Yanjing daxue tushuguan yinde bianzuanju, 1947 [Cambridge Reprint: Harvard University Press, 1956]), 16/6/17-18.

¹⁰⁴ Mair 1998, 5-6.

be said to be consistent, though it remains somewhat unclear as to how the three relate to one another.

If we turn to the rest of the *Zhuangzi*, however, we find that these three epithets never appear again as a group until the thirty-third chapter, called *Tianxia* 天下 or “All under Heaven,” which is the very last of the extant *Zhuangzi*.¹⁰⁵ The *shengren* and *zhiren* go on to become common epithets for perfected individuals of varying degrees throughout the text, but it would be a mistake to think that they are uniform or consistent from case to case. Later descriptions of the *shenren*, on the other hand, seem more in line with those typical of the “immortals” (*xian* 仙) than the more worldly dispositions of the other epithets. There are also some attributes of the *shenren* which seem comparable to those of the “spirit sorcerer” (*shenwu* 神巫), an individual capable of divination, control of the supernatural and natural world, and so on. For example, later in the *Xiaoyaoyou* we find that the *shenren* is singled out as a worthy individual, through the story that Jianwu 肩吾 heard from Jieyu 接輿, and is now re-telling to Lianshu 連叔.

I heard Chieh Yu say something... In the mountains of far-off [Gu she] there lives a [*shenren*], whose skin and flesh are like ice and snow, who is gentle as a virgin. He does not eat the five grains but sucks in the wind and drinks the dew; he rides the vapour of the clouds, yokes flying dragons to his chariot, and roams beyond the four seas. When the [numinous] in him concentrates it keeps creatures free from plagues and makes the grain ripen every year.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ The fact that these three epithets (*shenren*, *shengren*, and *zhiren*) do not appear again as a group until the *Tianxia* chapter is not so surprising if we consider the rest of the chapter itself. To say that the chapter is “syncretist” would be a mistake, however, because the author does not rank or favor any of the various pre-Qin thinkers or traditions he surveys, but simply laments at length how they all originated from one source, or “way,” and that the moment disputes began they had all lost it (the Way). In this sense, the moment division and different perspectives and argument began the Way had been lost.

¹⁰⁶ Words in brackets my own. Translation by Graham 2001, 46.

The *shenren* appears only several times in the *Zhuangzi*, and was never utilized to the same extent as the *shengren* or *zhiren* in other sections.¹⁰⁷ One of the possible reasons for this is the supernatural nature of these descriptions of the *shenren*, for they might have seemed somewhat baffling for readers who were also aware of other portions of the text which treated individuals with similar “numinous” or “spirit” qualities but in an unfavourable way; for it is never quite clear whether these potentially metaphorical stories¹⁰⁸ were in agreement with those found in other sections of the text, where similar individuals, such as the *shenwu*, or “numinous sorcerer,” are being mocked or criticized for relying on (or being proud of) their supernatural abilities.¹⁰⁹

A good example of this type of inconsistency can be seen if we compare this above story of the Gu she *shenren* and the character of Liezi 列子, as portrayed in the Inner Chapters. If one were to flip back to the previous discussion, just prior to mentioning the *shenren* 神人, *zhiren* 至人, and *shengren* 聖人, and consider it as a whole,

¹⁰⁷ The *shenren* is mentioned a total of 8 times in the *Zhuangzi*. See *Zhuangzi Yinde* 2/1/22, 2/1/28, 12/4/79, 12/4/82, 32/12/76, 68/24/95, 75/26/44, 90/33/4.

¹⁰⁸ While there may be different ways to interpret this story of the *shenren*, it seems to me that the closing comments by Lian Shu in this section may have made it difficult for readers to know to what extent the story was supposed to be read as “metaphorical” or literal. Lian shu replies with “...This man [the *shenren*] no other thing will wound; though the great floods rise to the sky he will not drown, though metal and stone fuse in the great droughts and moors and mountains char he will not burn. From this man’s very dust and siftings you could smelt and mould a Yao or Shun” (Graham 2001, 46). Though Graham does not remove any of the text, one can only wonder if much of Lianshu’s reply is corrupt, for in between complaints on how most do not understand (such stories) and the abilities of the *shenren*, his lament is twice interrupted with criticisms of fools who try to make the business of the empire theirs, which seems to have little to do with the story. Regardless of how one might try to make sense of it all, we can say that the *shenren* throughout his miraculous doings is definitely seen as an individual worthy of awe, and yet has many characteristics of an immortal or sorcerer about him. It is possible that this is one of the problems Christopher C. Rand was referring to when he commented that the *Xiaoyaoyou* chapter contains multiple literary “tropes.” See Rand 1983, 25.

¹⁰⁹ Graham 2001, 96-97.

one would find that Liezi is actually criticized for practicing something very similar to the actions of the Gu she *shenren* above:

....Or that Lieh Tzu now, he journeyed with the winds for his chariot, a fine sight it must have been, and did not come back for fifteen days (Even so, there was something he failed to plant in his own soil)... even if he did save himself the trouble of going on foot, [he] still depended on something to carry his weight. As for the man who rides a true course between Heaven and Earth, with the changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on?¹¹⁰

The passages seems to suggest that the author thought Liezi (Lieh Tzu) had gone far but not far enough, because he still depended on his supernatural powers for his daily excursions. The ideal individual, at least according to this section, must depend on nothing but the changes of the “six energies” *liuqi* 六氣, or in Victor Mair’s translation the “six vital breaths.”¹¹¹ In general, it is clear that explaining away the epithets as pointing to the “same” individual in every instance that they occur poses some problems for interpreters on how to conceptualize or describe the sage. Whether one perceives the difficulty of literal or metaphorical interpretation to be an outright conflict, however, depends on how one chooses to read the *Zhuangzi*, as we mentioned above.

This is but one of many examples¹¹² of how even the Inner Chapters do not present a necessarily unified vision concerning the sage. It is possible that the confusion has more to do with interpolation than authorial intent, assuming that one could distinguish one from the other. Nonetheless, as far as we know, the question of multiple

¹¹⁰ Graham 2001, 44.

¹¹¹ Mair 1998, 5.

¹¹² For an extended discussion of textual problems and inconsistencies in the *Zhuangzi*, see Rand 1983, 58.

authors of the *Zhuangzi* would not have been an issue for Cheng Xuanying. For him the question was whether he could find some interpretive method in order to make sense of this and many other examples among the sage epithets as the *Zhuangzi* presented them.

Cheng Xuanying on the Sage

By the time Cheng Xuanying's brush met the *Zhuangzi* it was—as far as we can tell—much the same as the extant version today; a product of many different strands of thought from different periods and perspectives in Chinese history.¹¹³ And despite what we have shown above, Cheng Xuanying tries his best to prove that there are no contradictions in the *Zhuangzi* at all. In this way, he seems to take full advantage of all the epithets as if they are simply many names for the same ideal individual or being. Nevertheless, again, we need to be reminded that his task also differed from modern scholarship in the sense that his commentary functions much like a “translation” itself. For example, he consistently provides alternative characters as substitutes for those he considers to be obscure in the text. Often we find him paraphrasing or supplying compound constructions to clarify the meaning of the original text. This practice is just as

¹¹³ Generally speaking, it is unclear whether Guo Xiang really did alter the *Zhuangzi* considerably, and discard with chapters that are now no longer extant. Though it did not remain intact with the *Xiangxiu* 向秀 version of the *Zhuangzi*, a preface attributed to Guo Xiang was discovered where he admits that he found much of the text, as he received it, to contain works which were either derived from other texts or were spurious writings that were tagged onto the text over time. Of course, this post-face was only recently discovered in Japan, and its origins are somewhat unclear. It is unclear whether Cheng Xuanying and other medieval thinkers were aware of this. See Livia Knaul, “Lost Chuang-Tzu Passages,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* no. 10. (1982), 54-55. Nevertheless, according to Christopher C. Rand, the first Chinese scholars known to suggest that there were multiple authors from multiple eras in history present with the *Zhuangzi* began around the time of Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824 CE), about a century after Cheng Xuanying's time in the capital of Chang'an. See Rand 1983, 5.

much an interpretive method as well, and he often uses his alternate characters to draw out something he considers to be vital for understanding any given passage and which may not have been obvious to other readers. In this way he was able to render the classical (and often elliptical) prose and poetry of the *Zhuangzi* into a style that was more readable and understandable for his day, and it also gave him a chance to comment at length on much of the text's terminology and thought.

There are, however, multiple reasons why a commentator's craft might take this form, and so we must again consider the historical circumstances of his situation. As I mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, the inconsistencies in the *Zhuangzi*, especially those which resonated with the "Daoism of the Immortals" would have made the text an easier target for its critics. In this sense, the *Zhuangzi*'s textual integrity was a thorny issue. Philosophical investigations today rarely have the same problems, for they usually center their attention on the chapter called "Discourse on evening things out" (*Qiwulun*), or chapter two, as the heart of the text.¹¹⁴ Be that as it may, if it was of common opinion in Cheng's day that the entire *Zhuangzi* was in fact the work of Zhuangzi himself, then Cheng did not have the luxury of picking or choosing which sections of the text he favoured the most. It is possible, then, that part of his task was to make the bulk of the text a consistent and viable asset for the Buddhist and Daoist debates—because if he failed in this regard then the former group would be put at a significant disadvantage.

¹¹⁴ For a recent compilation of essays on the *Zhuangzi*, see Cook 2003, vii. In the acknowledgments we find that the book grew out of a panel held in Chicago on March 14, 1999, which focused on the *Qiwulun* chapter.

Thus, Cheng Xuanying had little choice but to find a way in which to synchronize the *Zhuangzi* and its epithets of the sage.

Before examining Cheng's general conception of the sage, it may be useful to know how he deals with these difficult passages in the *Zhuangzi*; those which, as hinted at above, often portray any one of the sage epithets as individuals who have attained miraculous powers and resemble the "Daoism of Immortals." It should be noted, however, that there is little use in speculating whether Cheng Xuanying really thought that other Daoist texts were forgeries, for as we have shown in chapter one it would be a mistake to think that he was not well acquainted with or at least aware of other Daoist literature. That being said, he often goes out of his way to interpret similar passages from the *Zhuangzi* (which describe some of the epithets of the sage in similar ways to the immortal) in, for lack of a better word, "metaphorical" ways. Indeed, such passages in the *Zhuangzi* might have been seen as questionable to some critics in the debates on the early Tang, and in this context it is not hard to understand why Cheng, perhaps as a critic himself, might favour the following interpretation in the story of the Gushe *shenren*, which we introduced above:

Zhuangzi

...[The *shenren*] rides the vapour of the clouds, yokes flying dragons to his chariot, and roams beyond the four seas.¹¹⁵

Commentary

[To have one's] knowledge illuminated and the numen pervasive, and using no-mind in following along with beings, [one is] thus said to "ride the vapours of the clouds;" [One is] not fast or hasty, [its just that]

¹¹⁵ Graham 2001, 44.

one's transforming appearance lacks constancy, thus, [Zhuangzi] says, "he yokes flying dragons...and roams beyond the four seas." 智照靈通, 無心順物, 故曰乘雲氣, 不疾而速, 變現無常, 故曰御飛龍...遊乎四海之外也.¹¹⁶

One might rightly ask what illuminated/numinous knowledge and no-mind have to do with "riding the vapours of the clouds" and "yoking flying dragons to his chariot," but Cheng's choice of words here is perhaps less random and obscure as one might think. After all, by the Tang, the compounds of *zhizhao* 智照 and *wuxin* 無心 were already standard terms in Buddhist literature. That is to say, using standard exegetical constructions would have been in his best interests if he wished to downplay the more literal "immortal" qualities of sages in the *Zhuangzi*. This may be true, insofar as being like an immortal might lead interpreters to think that the sage roams beyond the world because he is ultimately uninterested in what happens there; the troubles and suffering of other beings in particular. The term or construction of *zhizhao* occurs in hundreds of Buddhist texts, while *wuxin* 無心 can be traced back to the *Zhuangzi* and was later used to render Buddhist writings into Chinese.¹¹⁷ Both were also used extensively in the writings of the sixth-century Madhyamaka Buddhist writer, Jizang,¹¹⁸ who has already been identified as being one of Cheng Xuanying's many possible influences.¹¹⁹ Jizang

¹¹⁶ Guo 1961, 28.

¹¹⁷ For various uses of *wuxin*, see Sharf 2002, 176.

¹¹⁸ For example, see Jizang's "Treatise on the Profound [Teaching of the] Mahāyāna]" (*Dacheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論), T 45, 1853, 59.

¹¹⁹ See Robert Sharf's discussion of the parallels in style and content between Jizang and Cheng Xuanying in Sharf 2002, 67.

was also well known as an opponent of the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi*, and so it is not out of the question that much of Cheng's commentaries may be indirect responses to this criticism.

In Cheng's commentary to the *Laozi* we find a similar use of vague and difficult language—especially in those cases where the *Laozi* appears to be advocating a form of thought similar to the “Daoism of Immortals.” For example, chapter fifty of the *Laozi* presents a description of ideal individuals who are good at preserving life, and as a result wild animals will not attack them, and conventional weapons cannot harm them.¹²⁰ The traditional commentaries interpreted this chapter, and others, in different ways; the *Heshanggong* commentary seems to have taken the text literally, while scholars like Rudolf Wagner suggest that Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) took a more “philosophical” approach and claimed that individuals (presumably the sage) could avoid these threats by ridding themselves of their desires and cravings. In other words, that desires and cravings actually “offend” other beings and thereby cause them to become hostile towards normal people. Cheng's approach to this chapter is even harder to pin down, and he refrains from supplying quotations from other medieval sources or exegesis that might make the sage resemble an immortal. Cheng simply says that one who is good at “nourishing life” (*shesheng* 攝生) does so by “marvelously embodying genuine emptiness,” (妙體真空), and so on.¹²¹ Overall, this gives one the impression that his interpretation could be read in

¹²⁰ Robert C. Henricks, *Lao-tzu Te-Tao Ching: A New Translation based on the Recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 19.

¹²¹ See Rudolf C. Wagner, *A Chinese Reading of the Laozi: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 290; Cheng Xuanying, “Daode Jing Kaiti Xujue Yishu,” in *Jingzi Congzhu*, ed. Yan Lingfeng (Taipei: 1983), 509.

a variety of different ways, and agree with either one of the traditional interpretations by the *Heshanggong* or Wang Bi commentary.

Be that as it may, Cheng's choice of words is not always vague, for even though the sages preserve the purity of their numen (*ling* 靈) they still return to the common world and "follow along" with other beings. This may be one aspect of "returning to the world" which T.H. Barrett suggests is a central overtone of much Chongxuan thought.¹²² Indeed, later on in Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi* he speaks of this directly:

Zhuangzi

Hence plainness may be defined as what is unalloyed, and purity as keeping the spirit undiminished.¹²³

Commentary

[The sage is one] who blends his traces with the world amidst all beings, and yet supports them without getting mixed up [with them]. This is one who attains simplicity; he goes through transformations amidst the dust and dirt and yet the spirit is not lost. [This is a case] of one with utmost purity. So how could one repeatedly stand alone on a high mountain top? Or fold one's hands¹²⁴ and remain idle [in the world], and call this plainness and purity? This is indeed not correct! 夫混跡世物之中而與物無雜者，至素者也；參變囂塵之內而其神不虧者，至純者也；豈復獨立於高山之頂，拱手於林籟之間而稱純素哉？蓋不然乎！¹²⁵

The rhetorical question of whether a sage should remain on a mountain top seems to function as a counter argument to those (presumably in the debates) who might claim that the Daoist conception of the Sage is reclusive, and cannot compare with the bodhisattva's

¹²² Barrett 1982, 35-43.

¹²³ Mair 1998, 147.

¹²⁴ According to the CJKV-English Dictionary, the two graphs *gong* 拱 (to cup) and *shou* 手 (hands) can mean "To fold one's hands and do nothing at the time when there is something important to be done." CJKV-English Dictionary, "拱手."

¹²⁵ Guo 1961, 546.

more compassionate qualities in Buddhism. The question of whether Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sage is similar to the bodhisattva will be dealt with in chapter four. At this juncture it is more important to recognize that Cheng's commentary above may be a critique of the immortality quest, for Cheng makes it clear that the sage blends his traces with the world and assists other beings.

Is it possible, however, that there is another distinction here that Cheng is trying to make between the immortal and the sage? Eskildsen points out that some texts from the Lingbao and Chongxuan literature avoid suggesting that the sage (and other celestial beings or immortals) achieve *physical* immortality, or longevity.¹²⁶ Eskildsen goes on to say that the Lingbao scriptures were more interested in the immortality of spirit (*shen* 神), and referred to the body as a temporary place where the spirit would reside, but would eventually move on. Bokenkamp seems to agree that the *Lingbao duren jing*, for example, advocates a similar position.¹²⁷ If Cheng was of the same opinion as the Lingbao texts, then when he says “[the sage] goes through transformations amidst the dust and dirt, and yet the spirit 神 is not lost” it is possible that he meant to say that the sage will reside in the world but eventually ascend beyond it, and then manifest elsewhere. As we will see in chapter three and four, Cheng's often portrays the sage as one who responds to the needs of beings and descends into the common world. While Cheng is not always specific, this seems to suggest that the sage will eventually move on, as “his spirit roams the six directions” (*shen you liu he* 神遊六合) and eventually descends again to aid and benefit

¹²⁶ Eskildsen, 2004, 203 n.11.

¹²⁷ Bokenkamp 1997, 21-22.

other beings.¹²⁸ In other words, by making the distinction between immortality of the spirit and that of the body—and claiming that texts like the *Zhuangzi* spoke of the former rather than the latter—Cheng could have distanced his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* from the critiques of the Buddhists. As we have shown already in chapter one, the Buddhists would have been happy to portray the *Zhuangzi* as a text advocating physical immortality, for by doing so the text would have been discredited by being equated to the majority of other scriptures and texts in Daoism that were not considered legitimate in the court debates. Regardless of what Daoists like Cheng may have thought in private (away from the restrictions of the debates), there were other reasons why they would want to make the distinction between spiritual and physical immortality, for advocating the latter had been known to backfire on the Daoists in earlier debates, with fatal consequences. An account from one of Cheng's Buddhist contemporaries, Daoxuan, relates how some Daoists, after losing a debate held in 555, were punished for claiming that they were immortals by being told to jump from a cliff and disappear in flight. Needless to say, the account mentions how none managed to survive.¹²⁹

Cheng is equally ambivalent towards passages in the *Zhuangzi* which present a more Confucian conception of the sage. These passages are a problem, because they present a slightly different conception of the sage, where the rites (*li* 禮) are seen as integral for proper conduct of the sage and the government. According to one passage, the sage is supposed to think of the rites as the “wings” (*yi* 翼) which balance and assist

¹²⁸ Guo 1961, 218

¹²⁹ See Shiyi Yu's translation from the *Ji gujin FoDao lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡 in Yu 2000, 130.

human relations: “Because [the sage] regarded rites as the wings, he got along in the world.” 以禮為翼者，所以行於世也。¹³⁰ Cheng, on the other hand, qualifies this claim in the *Zhuangzi* by saying

Although the rites are the thin remnants of sincerity and honesty they are the chief way to govern the world, therefore if one does not study the rites one is not well established; without the rites one should not act, without the rites one should not speak, to be human and yet lack the rites [means] one will surely die quickly. If the rites are present in government, then it is needed! The “wings” [assist] human relations, only then one is able to act well in the world.

禮雖忠信之薄，而為御世之首，故不學禮無以立，非禮勿動，非禮勿言，人而無禮，胡不遄死。是故禮之於治，要哉！羽翼人倫，所以大行於世者也。¹³¹

Though this is only an isolated incident, it may be that Cheng was not entirely impressed by more Confucian ideas of good government.¹³² Other evidence for this is found later in chapter six, where he states “[when] the sage [leaves his] traces in rites and ceremony, they only shackle his form and nature.” 夫聖跡禮儀，乃桎梏形性。¹³³ At any rate, even though I have not found a case where Cheng directly contradicts the *Zhuangzi*, we can see from the above comments that when Cheng was faced with sections of the *Zhuangzi* which presented a more “Confucian” ideology his comments are often ambivalent. He thus takes the opportunity to make it clear that the sage should not be overly fond of the

¹³⁰ Harvard-Yenching Institute, *Zhuangzi Yinde* 莊子引得 (*A concordance to Chuang Tzu*) (Beijing: Yanjing daxue tushuguan yinde bianzuanju, 1947 [Cambridge Reprint: Harvard University Press, 1956]), 16/6/17-18.

¹³¹ Guo 1961, 239.

¹³² The first line which reads “Although the rites are the thin remnants of sincerity and honesty...” 禮雖忠信之薄 is taken from chapter thirty-eight of the *Laozi*: “As for propriety [禮], it’s but the thin edge of loyalty and sincerity...” 失禮者，忠信之薄. See Henricks, 98-99.

¹³³ Guo 1961, 271.

rites—for the rites are, at best, a starting point in one's education, suitable for dealing with mundane affairs.

As I have shown above, some of this content in the *Zhuangzi* contains variant if not divergent ideas on the sage, and it is not hard to see why any commentator, modern or ancient, would want to explain them away as being mere labels for the same ideal individual in order to facilitate intelligibility. Cheng Xuanying, however, seems to have taken advantage of the fact that certain passages where (1) several of the sage epithets are mentioned together, and (2) seemed quite brief and ambiguous in meaning. And living in a time and tradition riddled with divergent ideas on the sage and being in fierce competition with Buddhism meant that the following passages from the *Zhuangzi* may have been of great importance for his project:

Chapter one

...Therefore it is said: The utmost person has no self, the spirit person has no accomplishments, the sage has no name.

故曰：至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。

Chapter thirty-three

One who does not depart from the source may be called a Heavenly person, one who does not depart from the essential may be called a spirit person, and one who does not depart from the genuine may be called the utmost person. One who regards Heaven as the source, virtue as the root, the Way as the gate, and is revealed through change and transformation may be called a Sage.

不離於宗，謂之天人。不離於精，謂之神人。不離於真，謂之至人，以天為宗，以德為本，以道為門，兆於變化，謂之聖人。¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Both are my translations, with reference to Mair (1998, 334) and Watson (1968, 32). See *Zhuangzi Yinde* 1956, 2/1/21-22; 90/33/2-4.

This second passage from chapter thirty-three, *Tianxia*, further suggests the extent to which the *Zhuangzi* may be a highly composite text, for the epithet here called the *tianren* 天人, or “Heavenly person,” does not occur anywhere else in the text. The *Tianxia* chapter, however, has long been considered a product of the Huang lao 黄老 syncretists of the early Han dynasty.¹³⁵ It surveys many strands of pre-Qin thought and laments how disagreement among the hundred schools was in itself a sign that the Way had been divided and scattered—giving the impression that in antiquity all sages had followed one school of thought. In this sense, it is not surprising that this chapter would contain the most sophisticated attempt at unifying the sage epithets in the *Zhuangzi*. This chapter also helps to clear up any ambiguity in the first passage from chapter one on how the three epithets relate to one another, or whether they are actually referring to one individual. It is unclear, however, whether the authors of chapter one really intended that the different names all referred to “one” ideal individual.

Cheng Xuanying’s interpretation goes further than the *Tianxia* chapter and collapses most distinctions between the different names, and continues to use them separately in his commentary. It would seem that he assumes that his readers are equally aware of this, even as he begins to introduce different epithets for the sage not found in the *Zhuangzi*.¹³⁶ Even though it is obvious that he assumes a readership largely familiar with varying labels for the sage, the above passages from the *Zhuangzi* give us a chance

¹³⁵ See Graham 2001, 257.

¹³⁶ Such as “Genuine sage” 真聖 (Guo 1961, 482, 866, 879) and the 賢人君子, possibly from Guo Xiang’s commentary (Ibid., 693, 1066) which may mean something like “Virtuous individual of Gentlemanly [nature]” (Ibid, 204, 421, 478, 546, 693, 756, 1024, 1085).

to witness how he—and possibly others involved in the Buddhist/Daoist debates—might have explained the general role for these ideal individuals. Commenting on the passages from chapter one and thirty-three above, he says

Commentary to Chapter one

“Utmost” refers to his essence; “spirit” refers to his function; “sage” refers to his name. Therefore, as for essence we say “utmost”; as for function we say “spirit” and for name we say “sage,” but in truth [these are all aspects of] one thing. One indicates the extreme of the numinous by calling it “the utmost.” [As for the numinous it is said that] yin and yang cannot be fathomed, therefore it may be called “spirit.”¹³⁷ The rectification of names for all things, thus this may be called the sagely. One individual, as above, may have these three. [But] here [Zhuangzi] wishes to demonstrate that effort, function, and name are all extinguished, therefore he divides his discussion into three people [utmost, spirit, and sage]. As for these three individuals, they are [like] the previous text [in the *Zhuangzi*] [about] riding a true course through heaven and earth with the changes of the six vital energies as his chariot. [Zhuangzi] wishes to bring together these people who have the virtue of not depending on anything in order to display their essence and function, and that is why he uses these words.¹³⁸

至言其體，神言其用，聖言其名。故就體語至，就用語神，就名語聖，其實一也。詣於靈極，故謂之至；陰陽不測，故謂之神，正名百物，故謂之聖也，一人之上，其有此三，欲顯功用名殊，故有三人之別。此三人者，則是前文乘天地之正，御六氣之辯人也。欲結此人無待之德，彰其體用，乃言故曰耳。¹³⁹

Commentary to Chapter thirty-three

Uniting with the ancestor (source) and tallying with the root, this is a case of self-so. Pure and unadulterated is to be unmixed, this is a case of being spiritually wondrous. Lofty in nature and not artificial, this is a case of being attained to the utmost degree. One who regards self-so as the source, superior virtue as the root, the mysterious way as the gate, perceives mechanisms and omens, and accords with beings

¹³⁷ The difference between 神 and 靈 here is somewhat uncertain.

¹³⁸ Personal communication (translation) by James A. Benn, with some changes: Dept. of Religious Studies, McMaster University.

¹³⁹ Guo 1961, 16-17.

through change and transformation, such a one may be called a sage. [These are] the four named above, but in fact there is only one. Compliance [to the times are in] his efforts and [his] function. Therefore there are 4 names.
 冥宗契本, 謂之自然. 淳粹不雜, 謂之神妙. 凝然不假, 謂之至極, 以自然為宗, 上德為本, 玄道為門, 觀於機兆, 隨物變化者, 謂之聖人. 已上四人, 只是一耳, 隨其功用, 故有四名也.¹⁴⁰

It is clear that Cheng hopes his readers will understand that all names refer back to the one ideal individual. As for the commentary from chapter one, the concept of “essence” (*ti* 體) and “function” (*yong* 用) is somewhat unclear, and I have yet to find another example of this in Cheng’s commentary thus far. The concept of *ti* and *yong* can be found in *The Awakening of Faith*, a fourth or fifth-century Buddhist text (which may have originated in China).¹⁴¹ They also appear in the writings of Sengzhao, the eminent disciple of Kūmārajīva in the early fifth century.¹⁴² The concept of *ti* and *yong*, however, likely originated with writings of the Xuanxue 玄學 exegete Wang Bi.¹⁴³ Walter Liebenthal explains that for Wang Bi the concept of *ti* and *yong* indicates a move from a pure or unadulterated state to one of decay. Liebenthal explains this by saying “The Cosmos unfolds from an infolded (latent) state to an unfolded (manifest) one. These states are evaluated, the original one as blissful, the later one as decay.”¹⁴⁴ That being said, does this concept of *ti* and *yong* actually help us understand Cheng’s commentary? The first part of his commentary, which says “utmost” refers to his essence, “spirit” refers

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1066.

¹⁴¹ Yoshito S. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1967), 29.

¹⁴² Liebenthal 1968, 18.

¹⁴³ *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, “體用” (Article by C. Muller).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

to his function, and “sage” refers to his name,” is somewhat unclear. It seems to me that he is not following Wang Bi’s conception of *ti* and *yong*, for several reasons. First, we cannot say that when Cheng’s sage is amidst the world he is in a state of *yong*, at least insofar as *yong* for Wang Bi seems to imply a state of “decay.” As I will discuss in chapter three and four, this is because Cheng makes it clear that the sage, when mingling with beings, remains untouched by the impure nature or workings of the common world and human society.¹⁴⁵ Though the sage may mingle with lesser beings and follow along with them, associating with them and their impure activities does not harm the sage’s real (*shi* 實) and genuine (*zhen* 真) nature. In this way, regardless of whether the sage is currently beyond the world like a *shenren* or wandering with other beings like a *shengren*, his nature remains genuine and real and unaffected by his surroundings.

Conclusion

By comparing Cheng’s commentaries to the passages in question from chapter one and thirty-three of the *Zhuangzi*, it seems to me that there are two important themes here which may help us understand his general approach to the sage. First, according to his commentary, any doubts concerning the consistency of use of the sage epithets in the *Zhuangzi* are swept away by the simple proclamation that all names, and perhaps even the qualities specific to them, can apply to any given sage-like individual. In this sense,

¹⁴⁵ Cheng qualifies this by saying “The Genuine people of old dimmed their radiance and mingled their traces [with the dusty world], avoided [crude human] workings...yet functioned [among] the human masses...How could this not be genuine and real?” 古之真人，和光降跡，逗機...而用人群...蓋非真實。Guo 1961, 519-520.

different names for the sage refer only to the sage's function (*yong*) at that given time, rather than his essence (*ti*). Perhaps the best example of this is Cheng's last comment on the Gushe *shenren* from chapter one, whom he refers to not as a "shenren" but as a "shengren" in his commentary:

Zhuangzi

In the mountains of far-off [Gu she] there lives a *shenren*...¹⁴⁶

Commentary

The sages...empty [themselves of] attachments and benefit beings. [They] manage to make the four seasons follow in sequence, the five grains to be abundant in harvest, [for the] people to be without calamity or affliction, [and keep] beings from dying young. The Sage's place in the world is to possess this ability.

聖人...虛懷利物。遂使四時順序，五穀豐登，人無災害，物無夭枉，聖人之處世，有此功能...¹⁴⁷

In sum, it seems to me that Cheng insists that his readers do not linger on the different names and types of sages which appear in the *Zhuangzi*. In Cheng's opinion, different names only signify different qualities of the sage (or function) that Zhuangzi has chosen to focus on at any given place in his book, and do not indicate that they differ in essence. In this way, Cheng makes few if any distinctions between the *zhenren*, *zhiren*, *shenren*, and *shengren*.

The above passage also serves as a general introduction to how Cheng Xuanying conceives of the sage's relationship to the common world. If otherworldly beings found in the *Zhuangzi* (like the *shenren*) are interested in helping other beings at all, they are thought to affect the world through the potency of their spirit. The *shenren* in this case

¹⁴⁶ Bracketed and italicized words my own, following the translation by Graham 2001, 46.

¹⁴⁷ Guo 1961, 28.

does just that, but dwells apart from society in the mountains of Gushe. The *Zhuangzi* seems to suggest that he aids society through some form of invisible response.¹⁴⁸ Cheng's commentary, however, shifts the focus of the entire story from the *shenren*'s ability to roam beyond the world to his role as a sage within it, where he manages to live among other beings. Thus the emphasis has changed from wandering beyond the dust and grime of the world to mingling with the world, which includes all beings found there. As I will explain in chapter three and four, Cheng's overall project is to depict the sage as one who descends into the common world, transforming and adapting himself as the situation demands in order to benefit other beings.

Overall, further research will have to focus on distinguishing how Cheng Xuanying conceived of the sage from other Daoist thought prevalent in the Tang. Moreover, it would be helpful to compare his descriptions of the sage with those of the extant Chongxuan literature used in the debates; the *Benji jing* and *Shengxuan jing*. It may be that he was interested in adapting the epithets of the sage, as found in the *Zhuangzi*, to encompass a more universal conception of Daoist sagehood that could resonate with other conceptions common in the early Tang dynasty. As I will explore in chapter three and four, it is equally possible that his ideas were influenced by Lingbao conceptions of celestial beings or Buddhist conceptions of the bodhisattva and Buddha. In general, however, it is also important to remember that the entire *Zhuangzi* had been read alongside other Daoist and Buddhist texts since at least the third century, many of which contained their own varying conceptions of the sage with different emphases.

¹⁴⁸ Graham 2001, 46.

Moreover, by the Tang there was already a vast amount of “sage-literature” which circulated and undoubtedly contributed to common conceptions of the sage. Even if we were to limit this field to simply “Daoist” texts the range of meaning ascribed to the sages at the time would have been immense. Livia Kohn has shown that what came to be known as a “sage” in Tang Daoism was often a convergence of many different strands of pre-Qin, Han dynasty, and early medieval literature—a collection of texts stretching from the Xuanxue commentaries on the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Yijing* to medical and Daoist ascension texts.¹⁴⁹ In other words, descriptions of the immortals became fused with models for the sage found in other early texts, stretching from the *Lunyu* to the *Laozi*.

¹⁴⁹ Kohn 1991, 139-163.

The Mirror Metaphor in Buddhist and Daoist Conceptions of the Sage

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to explore further attributes of Cheng's general conception of the sage, seen through the metaphor of the mirror. Here I will not linger to long on the implications of Cheng's involvement with the court debates, but investigate how his own writing resonates with Buddhist and pre-Buddhist literature that also used the mirror metaphor-simile¹⁵⁰ in describing the enlightened mind (usually of the Buddha), the compassion of the bodhisattva, and the sage. On the one hand, when the metaphor of the mirror appears in Cheng's commentary it seems to contain allusions to Warring States literature. In other words, at times Cheng's conception of the sage reminds us of traditional ideas of harmonious government and conduct of the sage and sage-kings found in the *Laozi*, *Lunyu*, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (The Masters of Huainan). On the other hand, the way in which Cheng presents the sage gives one the impression that something has changed, and the sage no longer appears as one solely interested in proper governing. Though we can still find traces of the "stimulus response" (*ganying*) theory in Cheng's commentary, it rarely implies that the sage is mediating the balance of the heavens and the earth through his ritual action and position as king. That is to say, Cheng conceives of the sage as one who is defined by his ability to respond to the needs of all beings rather than his ability to placate the heavens on their behalf as a ruler.

¹⁵⁰ Throughout this chapter I will avoid repeating the phrase "mirror metaphor-simile" by using "mirror metaphor" as a shorthand for both "metaphor" and "simile."

Be that as it may, exploring the concept of the mirror in Cheng Xuanying forces one to toe the line between the arguments discussed in chapter one. That is to say, on the one hand, Cheng's commentary that features the mirror metaphor is usually characterized by standard expressions which depict the sage responding to stimuli, such as "[When] things cause stimuli, there is thus a response..."物感斯應.¹⁵¹ At first this appears to be quite unremarkable given the pervasive influence of the *ganying* theory—which Sharf, for instance, has argued is paramount to Chinese Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thought.¹⁵² In other words, one might be tempted to say that Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi* was hardly exceptional in comparison to most other Chinese literature. On the other hand, as I will try to prove in this chapter, Cheng's conception of the sage and the mirror becomes somewhat complex as he begins to use terms like "no-mind" (*wuxin*) with clear Buddhist overtones, and the phrase "like a mirror hung in a high place" (*pi xuan jing gao tang* 譬懸鏡高堂) which can in fact be traced back to Buddhist literature predating the Tang dynasty. In this way, the sage's "response," is expanded by explanations of how he operates through "no-mind," and thus he harbours no attachment or discrimination towards beings; he is as empty as "a mirror hung in high place," any being may approach and be reflected within the "mirror." In this case one might be tempted to say that he had pilfered such ideas from Buddhist thought, especially since the phrase "like a mirror hung in a high place" can be traced to early Buddhist sources of the fifth century.

¹⁵¹ Guo 1961, 309.

¹⁵² Sharf 2002, 77-132.

Is this enough evidence, however, to say that he actually pilfered the idea from Buddhism? Are there other ways he might have acquired this phrase? It is possible that Cheng Xuanying had no direct connection to any Buddhist texts. Ideas of any sort were, of course, not bound simply to written texts in seventh-century China. Cheng could have encountered Buddhist ideas, pertaining to just about anything, while within the court debates, or even personal encounters with Buddhists or other Daoists for that matter. We also know very little about Cheng Xuanying's life. The historical records of his activities tell us very little about his activities in the court debates and his daily life in the capital. We do not even know for sure why he was called to court, what occupied his time for the twenty or so years he spent in the capital of Chang'an, and why he was eventually banished. Due to these reasons, it seems to me that tracing what may have influenced Cheng's ideas of the sage is near impossible in the case of the mirror metaphor—the best we can do is turn to the extant literature of today which was likely available to him in the early Tang dynasty.

Preliminary Considerations

Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sage seen through the metaphor of the mirror appears to have inherited elements of the more traditional Chinese conceptions of the sage as a "king" or ruler who acts through "stimulus-response" (*ganying*). In the *Huainanzi*, a collection of essays from the early second century BCE, the sage-king was believed to be one who receives stimulus (*gan* 感) from other beings or events in the

world and subsequently responds (*ying* 應), often through “non-action” (*wuwei* 無為). As an attribute of the sage or sage-king, the concept of *ganying* appears to be very old, for proto-forms of this idea can be found in early Daoist and Confucian literature of the Warring States period. In the *Lunyu* and *Laozi*, for example, we find the idea of *ganying* in its developing stages. In the *Lunyu* we are told that the sage-king Shun was able to govern the land well simply by “maintaining a simple bearing and facing south.”¹⁵³ In the *Laozi* the notion of *ganying* is characteristic of the Way (*dao*) itself, where we are told that the Way of Heaven is “not to speak yet skilfully respond, no one summons it, yet it comes on its own.”¹⁵⁴

At some point in the Warring States period, perhaps around the fourth century BCE, the metaphor of the mirror (*jian* 鑒/ *jian* 鑑/ *jing* 鏡) appeared in Chinese literature such as the *Laozi*, “Inward Training” (*Neiye* 內業 [350-300BCE]), and the *Zhuangzi*. At the moment it is still unclear which text may have been the first to use the metaphor. The metaphor, however, was used for different purposes among these texts. As I will try to demonstrate below, in the *Laozi*, for example, the mirror may have served as a metaphor for the mind. In the *Neiye*, a text which is possibly based on “biospiritual” practices in the fourth century BCE, the meaning of the metaphor is just as unclear as the *Laozi*. That is to say, it is unclear what the *Neiye* means when it states that the practitioner’s mind and body need to be properly aligned and tranquil in order for one to be able to “mirror things

¹⁵³ Sharf 2002, 90

¹⁵⁴ Henricks 1989, 44.

with great purity.”¹⁵⁵ In the *Zhuangzi* the mirror is used in a variety of ways, but perhaps the most interesting is in chapter five where it is used to describe the master-disciple relationship; how the disciples mind will come to reflect the perfect equanimity of the his master’s mind if the student remains in the sage’s presence for an extended period of time. I will return to these Warring States texts for further examination below. As for now, however, it is important to be aware of the fact that these texts, as far as I know, did not use the metaphor of the mirror in conjunction with notions of *ganying*.

Interestingly, it would seem that the mirror had been a metaphor in Indian Buddhist thought as well. Use of the mirror metaphor in Indian thought appears to have been so widespread that the scholar Alex Wayman called it a “Pan-Buddhist” phenomenon.¹⁵⁶ Thus, during the Six Dynasties period (220-582) usage of the mirror metaphor in China began to acquire new connotations due to an influx of Buddhist translations. Among the more popular Buddhist texts is the “Awakening of Faith” (*Qixinlun*),¹⁵⁷ which uses the metaphor of an empty mirror to symbolize the mind that is empty of cognition. This text considers the empty mirror, or mind, as one attribute of the “enlightened mind.” On the other hand, in the *Zhaolun* of the Chinese Buddhist Sengzhao, we find a blend of Xuanxue and Buddhist thought, characterized by a heavy reliance on the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Here the mirror also serves as a metaphor of the hidden or mysterious nature of the Buddha’s (and often the sage’s) mind.

¹⁵⁵ Roth 1999, 76-77.

¹⁵⁶ Alex Wayman, “The Mirror as a Pan-Buddhist Metaphor-Simile,” in *History of Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 4, (May, 1974).

¹⁵⁷ It is unclear where the *The Awakening of Faith* originated, there is some evidence, however, that it was written in China instead of India. For further details, see Sharf 2002, 311, n. 85.

Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sage in his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* is an eclectic mix of the ideas connected to the mirror metaphor (as used in Chinese and Buddhist literature) as well as the notion of *ganying*. The goal of this chapter is to try to sort out sections of his commentary which use the mirror metaphor, and try to distinguish where his comments resemble Buddhist usages of the mirror metaphor in particular. In order to sort out Cheng's conception of the sage in this case I will have to deal with a number of issues. First, I will compare a number of early models of the sage-king with later Chinese adaptations of the Chinese Buddhist model of the Buddha, or the bodhisattva, who usually possess minds void of emotion or attachment and "respond" to the needs of sentient beings. Second, we will have to deal with some terminology and phrases that appear in Cheng's commentary that can be traced back to Buddhist usages. One particular example is a conspicuous phrase which Cheng uses repeatedly in his commentary: "Like a mirror hung on a high stand." As I will show below, this phrase appears in different variations throughout Chinese Buddhist commentarial literature. Cheng uses this phrase as a way of describing how the sage responds to beings without being partial—the sage "reflects" or mirrors all that come before him without judgement like a mirror hung in a high place. In addition, Cheng repeatedly uses the term "no-mind" (*wuxin*) in his descriptions of the sage (which feature the mirror metaphor) to reinforce the notion that sages are impartial towards beings. Cheng usually closes his comments by reminding his readers that the sage is not even aware of why there is a response, or that one has even occurred. That being said, in many of these cases Cheng is not specific as to

what exactly the sage *does* in response, or what the outcome or effect his response has on those beings who receive it. To answer this question I will survey examples from Cheng Xuanying's commentary in chapter four, in particular those which resonate with the compassion or salvific abilities of the Buddhist bodhisattvas and celestial beings of the Lingbao Daoist tradition.

There are, of course, challenges in tracing how the literature produced by medieval Daoist writers like Cheng Xuanying might differ from any other form of Chinese literature, Buddhist or Daoist. As Sharf points out, most Chinese translators of Buddhist texts were at a significant disadvantage because they often had limited or no understanding of Buddhist languages and, even when they did, what they read would naturally be done with little historical or cultural understanding of India. This is of course just one reason why Sharf suggests that the very process of coming to terms with Buddhism in China was, for the most part, a one sided dialogue among and for Chinese concerns.¹⁵⁸ For example, even the *Zhaolun* of Sengzhao, the prodigious disciple of the translator Kumārajīva, contains as many allusions to classical Daoist texts like the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* as it does to Buddhist texts. Moreover, Sengzhao wrote his treatises in such a way despite the fact that he would have been one of the first Chinese Buddhist intellectuals to have access to more accurate Buddhist translations from Kumārajīva. In addition, the *Zhaolun*—despite containing being a blend of Xuanxue and Buddhist thought—continued to be favoured among the Sanlun exegetes and in later Chan

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 12.

Buddhist literature.¹⁵⁹ Due to these (and other) aspects of sinification, the two models, Buddhahood and sagehood, became hard to distinguish from one another as the Buddhist religion was, as Sharf says, transferred into a “Chinese idiom.”¹⁶⁰ And as much as the two models may have differed in certain respects, the parallels between the idea of the Buddha(s) as responding to the needs of sentient beings and the Chinese sage-king who, like the legendary King Shun, governs the world by simply facing South, were strong enough to facilitate continued sinification.¹⁶¹ In this way, even if we ignore the possibility that Cheng may have been writing with the express aim of defending and presenting the *Zhuangzi* as advocating a definition of sagehood comparable to the Buddhist bodhisattva or buddha, the subtle “Buddhist” flavour of his commentary should remain somewhat unsurprising.¹⁶²

Of course, there are many more texts in the Chinese Buddhist canon than we can possibly deal with in a single chapter, but research must be somewhere. Thus, I have decided that the best strategy would be to (1) lay out which texts we know were popular and (2) in circulation before the early Tang dynasty. Thus, I have decided to include examples from the *Qixinlun* (Awakening of Faith) and the *Zhaolun* by Sengzhao, which show two different stages of development in the Chinese Buddhist conception of the Buddha and bodhisattva, two texts which were also integral to the Buddhist tradition as it

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 100.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Other avenues of Chinese religious thought were equally affected as well, and the process was not limited to ideas of the sage-king; the later Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) scriptures of the fifth century, such as the *Lingbao duren jing*, told of a great cosmic being named “The Heavenly Venerable One of the Primordial Commencement” who resembled the Buddha, and placed emphasis on the salvation of the human community. See Kirkland 2004, 88; Bokenkamp 1997, 376.

developed in China. That is to say, the *Qixinlun* and the *Zhaolun* were, among others, extremely popular and subject to various commentaries throughout the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.¹⁶³ Needless to say, if these two texts were in vogue among Buddhist intellectuals then it is plausible that Cheng Xuanying was familiar with them as well.

Early Examples of the Mirror Metaphor in China

As for Chinese examples of the mirror metaphor, researchers have made additional discoveries of how it was used in other pre-Buddhist sources in China since Paul Demiéville wrote his pioneering essay, “Le miroir spiritual” (The Mirror of the Mind).¹⁶⁴ For example, by the mid-twentieth century, sinologists like J.J.L. Duyvendak began to suspect that the occurrence of *xuanlan* 玄覽, or “profound insight,” in chapter ten of the *Laozi* should have been read as *xuanjian* 玄鑑, or “profound mirror.” And in this way line three of chapter ten of the received text could be read as: “Can you clean and purify your *profound mirror* so as to be spotless (flawless)?” At the time most scholars followed Wing-Tsit Chan, who preferred to continue translating *lan* 覽 as “insight” or “vision.” Indeed, there was little reason to support Duyvendak’s ideas, for the major commentators like Wang Bi had typically read *lan* as “insight” and did not

¹⁶³ The *Qixinlun* was commented upon by Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592CE) (T 1843.44.175a-201c), twice by Wonhyo (617-686CE) (T 1844.44.202a-226a. and T 1845.44.226a-240c), and Fazang 法藏 (643-712CE) (T 1846.44.240-287). See Hakeda 1967, 9, 10, 11. The *Zhaolun* seems to have been immensely popular as well, and appears in the works of early Sanlun exegetes like Jizang all the way to later eighth-century texts like the *Treasure Store Treatise*. For a list of commentaries, see Sharf 2002, 37-38.

¹⁶⁴ Paul Demiéville, “Mirror of the Mind,” trans. Neal Donner, in Peter Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987), 13-40.

suggest that *jian* 鑑 should be read in place of *lan*.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, in 1972 a cache of texts was found at Mawangdui 馬王堆 and among them were two versions of the *Laozi*, (now referred to as Mawangdui “A” [MWDA] and “B” [MWDB]), where chapter ten of both held the variants of *jian* 監 (“to see, look at, inspect,” MWDB) and *lan* 藍 (“indigo,” MWDA) instead of *lan* 覽.¹⁶⁶ The rationale for adopting the reading *jian* 監 as “mirror” was that *jian* 監 could also mean “to mirror; mirror” much like the variant *jian* 鑑.¹⁶⁷ Thus, scholars realized that Duyvendak had in fact been right about reading *lan* 覽 as *jian* 鑑 (監), or “mirror.” At any rate, even though the phrase is no longer thought to mean “insight,” modern translators like Harold Roth maintain that *xuanjian* 玄鑑 refers to the mind of an individual.¹⁶⁸

Adding the *Laozi* to the list of pre-Qin texts that contained the metaphor of the mirror, however, did not draw much scholarly attention at first. The single occurrence of the mirror metaphor in chapter ten was simply added to the list of other metaphors like the “un-carved block,” the “mother,” and “water,” most of which appeared only briefly in the text but were developed in later commentaries like the *Heshanggong*, and thereby

¹⁶⁵ Rudolf G. Wagner translates Wang Bi’s commentary on this line as “[For a ruler] to clean and wipe the perception of That-which-is-Dark and to be able to [keep it] without blemish—ah!” See Wagner 2003, 148-149. The *Xiang’er* 想爾 ([The Dao] thinks of you) commentary, likely of the Celestial Masters sect of Daoism in the Hanzhong Valley (from the years 190 to 215) also has *lan*, but says “The human body reflects the image of heaven and earth. *Lan* means ‘expanse.’ ‘Flaws’ are evil deeds, these things in which the Dao is not pleased. You should cleanse and purify your whole body and, in your actions, ensure that you do no evil.” See Bokenkamp 1997, 90. Cheng Xuanying also read *lan* differently, and proposed that it be understood as *cha* 察 “discern; to examine.” See Cheng Xuanying 1983, 332.

¹⁶⁶ Wagner 2003, 148.

¹⁶⁷ Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 305, 343.

¹⁶⁸ Roth 1999, 151.

came to be associated with “mystical” practices.¹⁶⁹ Then Roth attempted to link the mirror metaphor and other forms of “mystical” (and what he calls “biospiritual”) practices found in the *Laozi* to another text called the *Neiye*, or “Inward Training.”¹⁷⁰ After an extended study and translation of this text, Roth argues that the *Laozi* contains several passages which run parallel to many found in the *Neiye* but concludes that the latter text predates the former.

While it is unclear how the mirror metaphor is used in the *Laozi*, Roth suggests that in chapter sixteen of the *Neiye* it is used to denote how people, if they are “aligned” and “tranquil,” will come to mirror all things in “purity”:

If people can be aligned and tranquil,
 Their skin will be ample and smooth,
 Their eyes and ears will be acute and clear,
 Their muscles will be supple and their bones will be strong.
 They will then be able to hold up the Great Circle [of the heavens]
 And tread firmly over the Great Square [of the earth]
 They will mirror things with great purity.
 And will perceive things with great clarity...¹⁷¹

Roth suggests that to “mirror things with great purity” is a “psychological” benefit of following such practices, whereas the first few lines of the passage deal with the physical benefits.¹⁷² Of course, the *Neiye*, like the *Laozi*, does not really provide us with many details as to what exactly these practices are. Roth maintains that the text advocates generating and retaining “vital essence,” or vital energy, and, more importantly, allowing

¹⁶⁹ Kohn 1991, 10-12.

¹⁷⁰ Roth 1999, 144-153.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 76-77.

¹⁷² Ibid., 120.

this energy to move freely within the body.¹⁷³ That being said, in the context of the “sudden” and “gradual” positions of enlightenment in Demiéville’s article, Roth maintains that the *Neiye* does not specify whether the mind (or as he says, the “activity of the numinous cognition”) is “developed” through such practices or is simply “discovered.”¹⁷⁴ That is to say, “developed” here is analogous to “gradual” as “discovered” is to “sudden.” However one might choose to interpret the mirror metaphor as it appears in the *Laozi* and the *Neiye*, it is possible that they inspired later usages of the metaphor, some of which found their way into the *Huainanzi* and possibly the *Zhuangzi* as well.

The *Huainanzi*, another text discussed in Demiéville’s article, represents a different stage of development in the use of the mirror metaphor. With the *Laozi* and the *Neiye* we can only speculate to what extent the author(s) were referring to the mind—or whether they were actually referring to the mind of the sage at all. The metaphor acquires different themes in the second-century BCE text *Huainanzi*, such as interacting with the common world and “uniting” with or leading other beings. These themes are not as developed in the *Neiye*, at least insofar as governing or ruling over the masses is concerned. Generally speaking, the *Huainanzi* seems to be one of the first to use this metaphor of the mirror in a way which combines ideas of sagehood like how the sage interacts and responds (*ying*) with his surroundings.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 111.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 151-52

The *Huainanzi* is thought to have been collected by Liu An 劉安 (?179-122), King of Huainan, sometime before 139 BCE, and was then presented to Emperor Wu Di (r. 141-87 BCE) of the Han dynasty.¹⁷⁵ Here not only do sages refrain from being governed by emotions but, as kings or officials, exercise rule over the masses, and mirror their movements on the Way (*dao*). Perhaps the best example comes from chapter one, called “Tracing Dao to its source,” (Yuandaoxun 原道訓), where the mirror is no longer simply a metaphor for the sage’s mind but a way of describing the sum of his activity in responding to the common world:

Hence, the person of great stature¹⁷⁶He knows the lay and the boundaries of the various divisions and quadrants of the cosmos. How is this so? It is because he has his hands on the control handles of *dao* and rambles in the land of the inexhaustible. Hence there is nothing you can do about the world. You can only follow what is natural in pushing the myriad things ahead. There is no getting to the bottom of the changes they undergo. You can only grasp the essential destination and lead them here. It is because the mirror and water do not, in anticipation, equip themselves with cleverness, that the shapes they come into contact with cannot but show themselves as they are.¹⁷⁷

In this case, the sage-king and his actions are not much different from the processes of the heavens, or *tian* 天. The important thing to remember here is that notions of the sage are now intimately linked with those of a benevolent “King” to a much greater degree

¹⁷⁵ Charles Le Blanc, “Huai nan tzu” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide, Early China Special Monograph Series*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California Berkeley, 1993), 189-190.

¹⁷⁶ A “dayi 大義,” is likely an epithet for the sage, it also appears in the *Daodejing* 38.

¹⁷⁷ Roger T. Ames and D.C. Lau, *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to its source* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 69-73.

than even the *Laozi*.¹⁷⁸ Generally speaking, it would seem that the early Han dynasty enjoyed an influx of new ideas, as scholars and statesmen attempted to compete for patronage. Individuals seeking to impress the court and the Emperor would align themselves with a particular text or set of texts.¹⁷⁹ As for the *Huainanzi*, it may represent the attempt by Liu An, in preparation of the Emperor's visit to his court, to compile a text that would appear as a synthesis of the various forms of thought present in the early Han, and therefore be attractive to the Emperor. That is to say, ideas of how the sage accords with the Way in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, astronomical schemes in the YinYang 陰陽 texts, and those of proper government found in Legalist thought (*Fajia* 法家) were blended together to form a type of syncretic type of statecraft where the sage-king's everyday life had to accord with the seasons; regulating one's dress, food, and other activities were a practice that not only symbolized the sage-king's acting in accordance with the heavens but was constitutive of his sincere concern in placating those unseen forces for peace, harmony, plentiful harvest, etc.¹⁸⁰ The *ganying* of the *Huainanzi*, then, is based more on the sage-king's communion with the heavens and the earth than a direct or personal response to his subjects.

¹⁷⁸ Though the mirror metaphor appears several times within the *Huainanzi*, it is never used in a consistent way. For other examples of this, see Demiéville 1987, 18-21.

¹⁷⁹ Robin D. S. Yates, *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huanglao, and Yin-Yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 8-10.

¹⁸⁰ John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han thought: Chapters three, four, and five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 1-11.

Buddhist Examples of the Mirror Metaphor

Paul Demiéville in his “Le Mirrior Spirituel,” or “Mirror of the Mind,” seems to have been one of the first to trace how the metaphor of the mirror was used in a number of early Chinese sources as well as later Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. What he found was that the mirror did indeed serve as a metaphor for the mind in many cases, but usually each text that featured the mirror had its own understanding of what the mind was, and what needed to be done with it. That is to say, the metaphor, and hence the mind by extension, was conceived of in different ways between different texts. On the whole, however, Demiéville’s project sought to lay out which sources (texts in China and in India) were forerunners of how this metaphor was later used in eighth-century China; in particular the poem written by Shenxiu 神秀 (606-706) and the response by Huineng 慧能 (638-713) found in the *Liuzu Tan jing* 六祖壇經 (The Platform sūtra of the sixth patriarch).

In the two poems, cited below, Demiéville sees the mirror as becoming not only a metaphor for the mind but a way in which Chinese and Indian thought sought to illustrate the nature of the enlightenment as either happening through “sudden” or “gradual” means. He defines “gradual” as more analytical, an approach which may involve a number of different methods (ethical and devotional endeavours, or meditative methods) to lead an individual to realization.¹⁸¹ As for “sudden,” it indicates that awakening, enlightenment, or realization occurs outside of “temporal *conditions*, causal or otherwise, without first

¹⁸¹ Demiéville 1987, 15.

having to engage in the practice of *looking*...at it...things are perceived ‘all at once,’ intuitively, unconditionally, in a revolutionary manner.”¹⁸² The first passage from the *The Platform Sūtra* represents the “gradual” position, and the second the “sudden” position:

The body is the bodhi tree.
The mind is like a bright mirror’s stand.
At all times we must strive to polish it
and must not let dust collect.

Bodhi originally has no tree.
The mirror also has no stand.
The buddha-nature is always clear and pure.
Where is there room for dust?¹⁸³

Demiéville’s investigation, however, seems to suggest that *The Platform Sūtra* was not only drawing on a well known metaphor in both Buddhist¹⁸⁴ and native Chinese texts, but also serving as a final response to the debate over “sudden” and “gradual” enlightenment, which could be traced back to the *Zhuangzi*, *Xunzi* 荀子,¹⁸⁵ and *Huainanzi*. Therefore, he considered these two poems to represent the two “extremes” between which other early discussions on the nature of the mind would fall.¹⁸⁶ Alex Wayman, on the other hand, sees both poems as being very much in line with Indian Buddhist works that predate the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ For further details, see Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 130-132. Translation taken from the John McRae, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, s.v. “Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch (Liuzu Tan Jing)” (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 655.

¹⁸⁴ For examples of a few salient examples of the mirror metaphor among Indian Buddhist texts, see Demiéville 1987, 13-17.

¹⁸⁵ The *Xunzi* is another pre-Han text which Demiéville identifies as containing a mirror-like metaphor, though here there is more emphasis on how the sage’s mind or temperament should be like clear water; if the mind is still and unmoved (like a barrel of untouched water) then the “impurities,” such as emotion, will settle to the bottom. Ibid., 21.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 16.

The Platform Sūtra, and concludes that Huineng's poem follows directly from the Indian *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.¹⁸⁷

There are, in fact, a great many texts in Buddhist literature which feature the mirror metaphor. Wayman has surveyed a number of these examples, and concluded that the mirror (or mirroring effect) was used to emphasize whatever point a particular Buddhist text or school of thought might be trying to make or argue. Usually this involved extensive debates on the nature of the mind, especially in Yogācāra Buddhism.¹⁸⁸ Another major dispute in Buddhism which often involved the mirror metaphor was the question of what transferred from one rebirth to the next.¹⁸⁹ That is to say, the mystery of how a person is able to see their perfect reflection within a mirror is equated to the mystery of rebirth itself (and the theory of transmigration); that the person's reflection in the mirror does not come into being through discursive (or intentional) thought, and should not be thought of as a direct form of "transfer" from one place to another.

Though Wayman cites many different examples of how the mirror was used in philosophical, Tantric, and ritualistic settings under the rubric of Buddhism, there is one which he does not mention: the "Awakening of Faith" (*Qixinlun* 起信論). This is probably because scholars have for some time suspected that the text originated outside

¹⁸⁷ Wayman 1974, 262.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 255-256.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 258.

of India, possibly within China.¹⁹⁰ Even so, the *Qixinlun* had a profound effect upon various traditions of East Asian Buddhism, such as Huayan 華嚴, Chan 禪 and Jingtu 淨土.¹⁹¹ Regardless of where the *Awakening of Faith* originated from, it contains a good example of how the mirror served as a metaphor for the Buddha's response to sentient beings:

First, [the essence of enlightenment is like] a mirror which is really empty [of images]. It is free from all marks of objects of the mind and it has nothing to reveal in itself, for it does not reflect any images....And none of the defiled things are able to defile it,¹⁹² for the essence of wisdom...is unaffected [by defilements], being furnished with an unsoiled quality and influencing all *sentient beings*...

一者如實空鏡。遠離一切心境界相。無法可現非覺照義故...又一切染法所不能染。智體不動。具足無漏熏眾生故。¹⁹³

For our purposes here, the most important aspect of the *Qixinlun* is how the mirror metaphor differs from many examples found in Wayman's article above: for although the discussion is still very much on the pure and unsoiled nature of "enlightenment," it nonetheless mentions how this enlightened being in fact influences other less than perfect beings—a theme which later appears in Cheng Xuanying's commentary.

As for Sengzhao, however, we find that he was perhaps one of the first to incorporate thought from the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and Madhyamaka Buddhism in his own

¹⁹⁰ For a discussion of the many problems in dating the *Qixulun*, see Hakeda (1967, 5-9) and Sharf (2002, 311, n. 85)

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹² This implies that these beings cannot defile the "mirror" even if they are impure. As we will see below, often Cheng Xuanying describes the sage in a somewhat similar way; as one who reflects all that comes before it (like the mirror) but is not swayed by common emotions or worldly attachments. For a few examples of how Cheng makes it clear that the sage lacks emotions, see Guo 1961, 11, 74, 221, 232, 282, 309, 421, 426, 446.

¹⁹³ Words in italics are my own. Translation by Hakeda 1967, 42, T 32, 1666, 576c.

writings. His seminal work, the “Treatises of Zhao,” (*Zhaolun*), seems to contain many of the same elements of native Chinese and Madhyamaka Buddhist thought to be found in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Of course, here the Buddhist influence is far more obvious than in Cheng Xuanying, but allegedly the Daoist flavour of his writings are explained by the fact that Sengzhao was first interested in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* before reading the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, and thereafter decided to focus his attention on Buddhist writings.¹⁹⁴ Overall, we can still detect the classic notions of the sage typical of the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Huainanzi* in his writings:

Therefore the sage empties his mind, and the real is illuminated [therein]. From morning to evening [he is] always and yet never cognizant. He dims his radiance, covers his light,¹⁹⁵ and yet the mind is empty and the mirror is dark. [For he] conceals his wisdom, hides his intelligence, and yet he alone is aware of what goes on beneath the surface (of things). (In the mirror of her mind) Prajñā reflects what is totally concealed (from our eyes), yet does so without cognition (of objects). The spirit possesses [the ability] to respond to [our] needs, and yet [his action] lacks deliberation. Therefore he alone rules through the world [systems]...Although his spirit [resides in other] world [systems], from morning to evening [he is present] throughout the land...¹⁹⁶

是以聖人虛其心而實其照。終日知而未嘗知也。故能默耀輶光。虛心玄鑒。閉智塞聰。而獨覺冥冥者矣。然則智有窮幽之鑒。而無知焉。神有應會之用。而無慮焉。神無慮。故能獨王於世表...神雖世表。終日域中。¹⁹⁷

...The sage’s role in the world...He guides without leading forward and when he feels (himself needed) he responds like the echo in a deep valley, like the image in a clear mirror.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Liebenthal 1968, 6.

¹⁹⁵ This phrase can be traced back to *Daodejing* 56.

¹⁹⁶ Italicized words my own translation, following Liebenthal. See Ibid., 67-68.

¹⁹⁷ T 45, 1858, 158a-b.

¹⁹⁸ Liebenthal 1968, 113,

然則聖人之在天下也。寂莫虛無。無執無競。導而弗先。感而後應。譬猶幽谷之響。明鏡之像。¹⁹⁹

In both sections the perfected being in question here is in fact the “sage” proper, or *shengren*, though with Buddhist overtones—such as his ability to rule and move through world systems. The mirror is used to emphasize slightly different attributes of the sage, such as how he actually conceals his mind, wisdom (*zhi* 智), and intelligence (*cong* 聰) from the world. Be that as it may, it is clear that the sage here is continually present and “has the ability to respond” to the needs of other beings, as seen in the second section above. As we will see, the ability to respond to beings regardless of the absence of cognition is a theme in which Cheng Xuanying took a great interest, and is found in most situations where Cheng discusses the sage at length (see below). Overall, as we begin to explore Cheng’s conception of the sage, we will find that he shared many of the same ideas and concerns over the nature and function of the sage’s mind as found in the *Zhaolun*. Further research, however, will have to decide whether we can say for sure that Chongxuan thinkers like Cheng Xuanying were intimately familiar with Sengzhao’s writings.

The Mirror Metaphor in the Zhuangzi and the Commentary of Cheng Xuanying

The *Zhuangzi*, however, is somewhat more interesting because—as we witnessed in chapter two—Cheng Xuanying approaches the text with several considerations in mind, one of which requires him to see the entire text as the work of Zhuang Zhou himself. Once again, this requires him to deal with the composite state of the *Zhuangzi* and find

¹⁹⁹ T 45, 1858, 158b.

some way to unify the multiple philosophical and religious ideas therein. As we have shown in chapter two, it is not unusual to find very different descriptions of the sage in the *Zhuangzi* itself.²⁰⁰ In the context of the mirror metaphor, however, there are two cases where the metaphor appears within stories that express a critique of conventional societal norms. After surveying the use of the mirror metaphor in the *Zhuangzi*, I will show how Cheng chooses to interpret these passages. Cheng chooses to see the mirror as a metaphor for how the sage should properly interact with the world and other beings; responding to the needs of other beings and leading them to completion. As we will see, the way the *Zhuangzi* uses the metaphor in these cases sets it apart from most of the literature we have examined thus far, and in many ways sets itself far from the concerns of Cheng Xuanying's commentarial project as well.

At the beginning of chapter five of the *Zhuangzi*, titled “The signs of fullness of power,” (*Dechongfu* 德充符) we find that the mirror is again a metaphor for the tranquil mind of the ideal individual. In the first story, a disciple asks Confucius about his opinion of a teacher named Wang Tai 王骀 (who has lost his foot, indicating that he committed some offense and was punished),²⁰¹ who has a very different approach to sagehood:

His concern is for himself, he uses his wits to discover his own [mind], his [mind] to discover the unchanging [mind] beyond it. Why should others congregate around him?...[Because] none of us finds his [own] mirror in flowing water, we find it in still water. Only [that which is] still can stop those who stopped there [to see themselves within

²⁰⁰ As I outlined in chapter two, there is no scholarly consensus as yet on when the *Zhuangzi* was compiled. Thus, my choice to discuss the *Zhuangzi* after “earlier” textual examples of the mirror metaphor is simply because (1) we have no way of knowing for sure when the text was compiled and (2) the mirror metaphor-simile is far more developed.

²⁰¹ Graham 2001, 76.

it]....as for others, they may then follow him, but why would he want to make others his business? ²⁰²

We may better understand what the “mirror” stands for in this story if we look at the second story from the Dechongfu. Here we find that one student, by insisting on the social privileges of his title (as Prime Minister), manages to offend another student, named Shen Tujia 申徒嘉, because the former insists that they not be seen coming and going together (because Shen is also missing a foot like Wang Tai in the first story above). In response Shen says:

If your mirror is bright the dust will not settle, if the dust settles it's that your mirror isn't bright. Keep company long enough with a man of worth and there will be no crime in you. ²⁰³

The point of the story is that if the mirror, or mind in this case, is “bright” (*ming* 明) then the Prime Minister would be able to reflect or mirror the master's teaching (or the master's mind). In both stories, the mirror seems to serve as a metaphor for the master-disciple relationship. ²⁰⁴ The first story seems to suggest that the reason people crowd around sages is that they are drawn to them for the same reason they are drawn to see themselves in still water and not rushing water; only in still water can one see one's own reflection. This of course brings to mind ideas of equanimity, tranquility, and stillness: ideal conceptions of a sage's mind. Nonetheless, the second story goes further and suggests that even those in the company of sages are not guaranteed results if they persist in holding onto worldly things like personal titles. In this story we also get the impression

²⁰² Bracketed words are my own, but the translation follows Graham (2001, 77) and Demiéville (1987, 18).

²⁰³ Graham 2001, 77.

²⁰⁴ This usage of the mirror metaphor appears to be unique to the *Zhuangzi*; as I have not found a similar case or example in any other text.

that the one who has truly committed the “crime” is the Prime Minister, by reminding the other student of customs and conventions of the world which interrupt his equanimity.

In both episodes we find characters that are called sages but have lost a foot (or possibly both feet), which seems to suggest that they had committed some crime or offence and were maimed as punishment. Though their bodily form has been maimed, their virtue (*de* 德) remains whole. This seems to be a narrative scheme in the stories from chapter five of the *Zhuangzi*, suggesting that the sage is supposed to be independent of all that occurs outside of him, including society. Thus, even maimed figures can become sages of such potency that other individuals begin to follow them, regardless of the fact that the followers know their master was punished and shunned by society. Ironically, even Confucius—as an icon of societal norms and values—is made a mouthpiece for this narrative scheme when, in the first story from chapter five, he admits that he would have gone to study under Wang Tai if he hadn’t squandered his time. In this way, though these stories feature the mirror as representing the mind of an ideal individual (or how if one is in the company of sage they may eventually “mirror” the qualities of a sage) they are nonetheless part of a larger critique of conventional social customs.

Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* contains other examples of the mirror metaphor, one of which, found in chapter seven, called “Responding to Emperors and Kings,”

(*Yingdiwang* 應帝王),²⁰⁵ presents the basic model that Cheng Xuanying follows in his own commentary. Here the more radical ideas of how the sage should separate the self from societal norms and conventions are less obvious, and Cheng subsequently exploits the ambiguity for his own ends:

Zhuangzi

Thoroughly embody unendingness and wander in nonbeginning. Thoroughly experience what you receive from heaven but do not reveal what you attain. Just be empty, that's all. The mind of the [utmost] man functions like a mirror. It neither sends off nor welcomes; it responds but does not retain. Therefore, he can triumph over things without injury.²⁰⁶

Commentary

Now [like] a mirror hung in a high place, beings approach and are thus reflected [within]. The utmost person is void [like a mirror] and [then] responds, this is also the meaning [here]...Beings come and go but the mirror does not welcome them or send them off. Those who approach are reflected, and will not be hidden or concealed, [yet] the wisdom of the sage itself is void and concentrated; neither dark nor bright. [When] things cause stimuli, there is thus a response, but the response does not involve the mind, for nothing is escorted away or welcomed back. So how could there be any emotion in the hidden and obscure [nature of the sage]?

夫懸鏡高堂，物來斯照，至人虛應，其義亦然...夫物有去來而鏡無迎送，來者即照，必不隱藏。亦猶聖智虛凝，無幽不燭，物感斯應，應不以心，既無將迎，豈有情於隱匿哉！²⁰⁷

The phrase *pi xuan jing gao tang* 譬懸鏡高堂, “like a mirror hung in a high place,” (or in other cases simply *yuan jing* 懸鏡, “a hung mirror”) seems to have originated in Buddhist

²⁰⁵ A.C. Graham suggests that it was the “Syncretist” editors of the second century BCE that likely compiled the *Zhuangzi* into its present form, and were likely responsible for the compilation of episodes found in the seventh chapter, “Responding to Emperors and Kings.” See Graham 2001, 94. Within this chapter we find many of the same themes taken up in the *Huainanzi* above, where the potency of the sage is no longer simply measured by his ability to model himself on the Dao, refine the vital energies, or retire from society, but how he is able to use what he has perfected in himself for proper rule or leading the masses.

²⁰⁶ Bracketed words my own. Translation by Mair 1998, 71.

²⁰⁷ Guo 1961, 309.

texts.²⁰⁸ It occurs at least eight times in Cheng's commentary.²⁰⁹ I have been unable to locate it anywhere else in the Daoist Canon (*Daozang* 道藏), although there are a number of variant examples of this phrase among many commentaries and texts scattered throughout the Buddhist Canon. Perhaps the earliest is the *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (Record to Spread and Clarify [Buddhism]) by Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518).²¹⁰ A commentary on the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* ("Sūtra of the Great Decease," *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經) attributed to Zhiyi's 智顗 (538-597) principal disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561- 632) also has the phrase "like a mirror hung in a high place."²¹¹ It also appears in the *Zhonglun xushu* 中論序疏, "Commentary to the preface of the *Madhyamakaśāstra*," by Jizang (549-623). Here we find that Jizang is also interested in playing upon the impartial nature of the mirror: "a mirror hung in a high place [may] serve as an analogy; although images come and go the mirror does not produce or extinguish them," 懸鏡高堂為喻。像雖去來鏡無生滅。²¹² In addition, one Buddhist contemporary of Cheng Xuanying to use this phrase was Daoxuan.²¹³

It would seem that many later Buddhist commentators would continue to use this term. For example, a commentary on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* ("Flower Adornment Sūtra,") called the *Dafangguang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏 attributed to Chengguan

²⁰⁸ There do not seem to be any cases where variant characters for "mirror" are used, including *xuan jian gao* 懸鑑高 and *xuan jian gao* 懸鑒高.

²⁰⁹ Guo 1961, 32, 88, 232, 309, 407, 413, 541, 1094.

²¹⁰ 白彼而言懸鏡高堂。白此而言萬[25]像斯歸。T 52, 2102, 42b.

²¹¹ 如懸鏡高臺。T 38, 1765, 11b.

²¹² T 42, 1824, 17c.

²¹³ 懸鏡高堂一念難靜。T 52, 2103, 331a.

澄觀 (738-839 CE) says “and still [like] a mirror hung in a high place, the myriad images are thus reflected,” 猶懸鏡高堂萬像斯鑑.²¹⁴ Another commentary collected on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (also attributed to Chengguan) called the *Dafangguang fo huayan jing suishou yanyi chao* 大方廣佛華嚴經隨疏演義鈔 says “The mirror is hung in a high place, then with no-mind the void illuminates; and the myriad images are therefore reflected [within] because [it does not] choose between the beautiful and ugly,” 懸鏡高堂即無心虛照。萬像斯鑑則不揀妍媸故。²¹⁵ Here we notice the idea of how the mirror reflects or illuminates all that come before it because it operates in a state of *wuxin*, which again means “no-mind,” or “without mind,” much like the sage does in Cheng’s analysis above (and below).²¹⁶ Overall, it is unclear whether Cheng was directly borrowing a common phrase from Buddhist commentators who came before his time (like Sengyou, Guanding, and Jizang) or simply using a common phrase that was in vogue during the mid-seventh century. One the whole, however, it seems likely that it was originally a Buddhist phrase.

In many other cases where we find Cheng using this metaphor he is usually trying to emphasize three other important attributes of the sage: (1) The nature of the sage that may seem similar to a monarch or king, (2) how this sage or sage-king operates through *wuxin* or “no-mind” and (3) how no-mind contributes to the sage’s impartial response to

²¹⁴ 猶懸鏡高堂萬像斯鑑。T 35, 1735, 637a.

²¹⁵ 懸鏡高堂即無心虛照。萬像斯鑑則不揀妍媸故。T 36, 1736, 291b.

²¹⁶ A very similar passage is repeated in the *Zongjinglu* 宗鏡錄, or “Record of the Mirror of Orthodoxy,” by Yanshou 延壽 of the Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279): “Just like a mirror hung in a high place, with no mind the void illuminates, and the myriad images are thus reflected. [It does] not choose between the beautiful and ugly,” 如懸鏡高堂無心虛照萬像斯鑑不簡妍媸。T 48, 2016, 909b.

the needs of other beings. In this way, by combining the notion of a king to one who operates through no-mind the metaphor of the mirror is expanded, and comes to encompass not only how the sage-king might interact with disciples but ultimately with the world as a whole. Returning to the story of the Gu she *shenren* from chapter one we find

Zhuangzi

The age has an incessant urge towards misrule, who are these people so eager to make the business of the empire their own?²¹⁷

Commentary

...The masses are divided and chaotic, therefore [we] must seek a great sage monarch to oversee pacification [of the world]. [He must be like] an empty [undirected] boat²¹⁸ or hanging mirror; responding and [receiving] stimuli [through] no-mind. Therefore the *Laozi* says: “act without acting, serve without concern for affairs.” And again: “When someone wants to take control of the world, he must always be unconcerned with affairs. For in a case where he’s concerned with affairs, he’ll be unworthy, as well, of taking control of the world.

...蒼生離亂。故求大聖君臨安撫。而虛舟懸鏡，應感無心，誰肯勞形弊智，經營區宇，以事為事，然後能事。故老子云為無為，事無事。又云取天下常以無事，及其有事不足以取天下也。²¹⁹

At first glance, Cheng’s lament is somewhat unusual, for other than the “chaotic” nature of the masses his following commentary is not entirely congruent with the passage in question from the *Zhuangzi*. Of course, one might be persuaded to say that Cheng’s ideas of the sage-king were congruent with traditional ideas of proper Kingship (in addition to how the mirror metaphor is used) in the *Huainanzi*, and to certain extent the *Laozi*.

²¹⁷ Graham 2001, 46.

²¹⁸ The “empty boat” appears later as a simile for how the Sage interacts with the masses again, though here it stands as an example of how the sage floats adrift and simply “follows along with the masses,” 大順群生. See Guo 1961, 767.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 32. Quotations of the *Daodejing* taken from Henricks 1989, 17, 32.

Moreover, by including two substantial quotations from the *Laozi* (*Laozi*) in the above passage—not to mention numerous quotations from that classic throughout his entire commentary to the *Zhuangzi*—we might be tempted to label him as one of many intellectuals who inherited ideas of the sage-king from classical Chinese thought.

Be that as it may, can we so easily pass over the presence of lengthy quotations from the *Laozi*, and the conflation of “sage” and “king” into one ideal individual?²²⁰ In their introduction to *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to its Source*, a translation of chapter one of the *Huainanzi*, Roger T. Ames and D.C. Lau identify “syncretic” thought as a “a way of thinking and living that came, and continues, to be characteristically ‘Chinese.’”²²¹ That being said, as we discussed in the introduction, simply labelling a thinker or text as “syncretic” does not excuse us from trying to relate the text to its historical setting. It seems to me that Cheng’s choice to invoke the *Laozi* is not so random as one might think. As I have tried to show in chapter one above, the historical circumstances surrounding the Buddhist and Daoist debates of the seventh century require us to be more sceptical when dealing with Cheng Xuanying’s commentary. Friederike Assandri reminds us that we need to ask whether the political implications of Chongxuan commentaries reflect many of the issues specific to presenting and defending texts in debate.²²² If Cheng was attempting such a feat, then his argument would have benefited substantially from including two somewhat related quotations on “sage-monarch” governing from the *Laozi*.

²²⁰ Cheng later uses the same epithet of *shenjun* 聖君 for other mythical leaders like Huangdi 黃帝, Yao 堯 and Yu 禹. See Guo 1961, 32, 140, 243, 616.

²²¹ Lau and Ames 1998, 3.

²²² Assandri 2005, 434-435.

Again, this is because the *Laozi* was one of the only texts which could be traced through the historical records (and was therefore considered legitimate).²²³ In addition, we should remember that the Li family, the Tang rulers, traced their family name back to Laozi himself, the putative author of the book that bears his name.²²⁴ And if the Tang ruling family claimed to be descendant from Laozi, then quoting extensively from his book, the *Laozi*, would have been in Cheng's best interests if he wished to be favoured in the debates. And again, what were the ultimate goals of these debates? What could be gained from emphasizing the *Zhuangzi*'s potential for providing a classical Chinese conception of proper government? What would have been the advantage of reading the *Zhuangzi* in such a way, and make it seem as if the ideals of the classical Daoist sage and those of a king are moulded into one ideal? As Assandri points out, the reason may be related to the fact that those who participated in the court debates could not hope to win patronage by way of argumentation alone; in the end their ideology, whether Buddhist or Daoist, had to be attractive to those who were looking for useful tools for governing (which most likely would have been the Emperor himself). That is to say, any ideology which hoped to attract royal patronage had to reify and reinforce the political aspirations of the Emperor and his state.²²⁵

²²³ Ibid., 435.

²²⁴ Benn 1977, 14-20.

²²⁵ Assandri says "a religious community in return had to offer ideological tools for governing and, additionally, possibly divine sources of legitimation and had to assure the good will of the gods or supernatural powers to help the King in his endeavors. See Ibid., 433.

The second idea we find Cheng using in conjunction with the mirror metaphor in the above passages is that of “no-mind.”²²⁶ The first thing we will examine here is how he uses it to expand on the theme of the sage’s impartiality, a critical attribute of the sage found in the *Zhuangzi* itself.²²⁷ The sage, like a mirror, is impartial to whoever might approach, and thus Cheng says “Beings come and go but the mirror does not welcome them or send them off,”²²⁸ and this theme is repeated throughout his commentary. At times his thoughts on various subjects may seem to have little to do with whatever passage from the *Zhuangzi* he might be commenting on, but in the following case from the “Qiwulun,” chapter two of the *Zhuangzi*, it is not so difficult to understand his logic; for impartiality requires that there be no room for emotion:

Zhuangzi

To have achieved this understanding but not be conscious of why it is so is called “The way.”²²⁹

Commentary

Now the utmost person has no-mind, upon [receiving] stimuli he thus responds, for example, like the clear mirror, like the empty valley,²³⁰ abiding by the myriad beings, through the shapes and sounds of the common masses, not knowing why it is so, not knowing that which responds. So how could [such a one] possess emotion in being good or wicked, or be related to what is beneficial and harmful? ...This may be called the self-so of the Way.

²²⁶ It seems as though this term originated in the *Zhuangzi* as well. See *Zhuangzi Yinde* 1956: 29/12/6 and Sharf 2002, 176.

²²⁷ Chapter six, titled “Dazongzhi,” or “The Great ancestral teacher,” contains one of the more developed sections on this theme in the *Zhuangzi*. For a full translation of this, see Watson 1968, 77-80.

²²⁸ Guo 1961, 309.

²²⁹ Mair 1998, 16.

²³⁰ This would seem to be an allusion to *Laozi* 15: “Those of old who were good at forging their way (*dao*) in the world...so vast and vacant, like a mountain gorge.” See Ames and Hall 2003, 97-98.

夫至人無心，有感斯應，譬彼明鏡，方茲虛谷，因循萬物，影響蒼生，不知所以然，不知所以應，豈有情於臧否而係於利害者乎！以法因人，可謂自然之道也....可謂自然之道也。²³¹

The line in question from the *Zhuangzi* itself describes the ideal nature of one who has attained the Way; one that does not in fact know it to be “The Way.” In this sense, we can see why Cheng would utilize the metaphor of the mirror, for it gives him a chance to re-emphasize the sage’s impartial reception of stimuli (*gan* 感) and subsequent (impartial) response (*ying* 應). Being impartial also means the sage is unaffected by emotions—a theme we see repeatedly in Cheng’s commentary.²³² Thus Cheng’s conception of the sage here is very much in line with classic ideas of the sage-king of the *Huainanzi* who is not governed by (or who lacks) emotions, and yet continues to commune with the world through stimulus-response (*ganying*).²³³

In other sections of his commentary where the mirror appears, Cheng may not always speak of the sage having “no-mind” but perhaps of his ability to “forget.” We have seen this already in one of the above quotations: “abiding by the myriad beings...[and] not knowing that which responds.”²³⁴ While he does not use the theme consistently when describing the sage in general, for him it does seem to be an important way in which he wishes to use the mirror metaphor. At one point he mentions how, like the mirror, the sage even forgets how he is able to “reflect” or “illuminate” other beings when he encounters them:

²³¹ Guo 1961, 73.

²³² For example, see Ibid, 11, 74, 221, 232, 282, 309, 421, 426, 446.

²³³ Sharf 2002, 92-93.

²³⁴ For other examples, see Guo 1961, 78, 98, 230, 546, 867.

Again, like hanging a mirror in a high place; where beings come and are thus reflected. [As for] understanding how to reflect, one does not know whence it originates. This may be called ‘already [being able to] reflect and yet having forgotten [how]’; [one who] has forgotten is then able to reflect.²³⁵

又譬懸鏡高堂，物來斯照。能照之智，不知其所由來，可謂即照而忘，忘而能照者也。²³⁶

The idea of sages “forgetting,” *wang* 忘, can be traced back to the *Zhuangzi* itself.²³⁷ On the other hand, the last line which reads “This may be called ‘already [being able to] reflect and yet forgotten [how]’; [one who] has forgotten is then able to reflect,” may in fact be an awkward gloss on “double forgetting” (*jianwang* 兼忘). This term can also be traced to the *Zhuangzi*,²³⁸ but when used by Chongxuan thinkers it often carries with it Chinese understandings of Madhyamaka thought, where the first stage of “forgetting” involves detachment from being, and the second as detachment from nonbeing.²³⁹ In this case, the sage first forgets how to reflect (and becomes detached from being/interacting with the common world), and then forgets that he is in fact “reflecting” at all, and yet continues to act. In this way, we are to understand that “double forgetting” comes to include more than simply forgetting self and others, as it does in the *Zhuangzi*.

²³⁵ What exactly Cheng means by “reflect” or “illumination” is unclear. I do believe, however, it has something to do with the salvific qualities of the sage’s response to stimulus from other Beings, which I will discuss in chapter four.

²³⁶ Ibid., 88.

²³⁷ *Zhuangzi Yinde* 1956, 7/2/92.

²³⁸ Ibid., 37/14/10-11.

²³⁹ Sharf 2002, 66.

Conclusion

What are we to make of Cheng's generous use of the term "no-mind," and does it bring any other Buddhist connotations with it to his larger project of using the mirror as a metaphor of the sage? He goes on to use the term "no-mind" alongside the mirror at least four more times,²⁴⁰ but generally the term "no-mind" appears repeatedly throughout his entire commentary. In one case he takes the well known saying from chapter seven of the *Zhuangzi*: "The Utmost person uses his mind like a mirror 至人之用心若鏡," and rephrases it as "The sage, without mind, is like a mirror 聖人無心若鏡."²⁴¹ Once again, we are faced with the question of whether it is really permissible to say that Cheng is quite aware that he is utilizing a more "Buddhist" or "Daoist" interpretation of no-mind. It is clear that questions concerning the nature of no-mind dominated Buddhist intellectual discourse throughout the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries.²⁴² That being said, were Cheng Xuanying and the Chongxuan Daoists able to differentiate between Buddhist discourse on the term and how the term was used *in* the *Zhuangzi*? It seems unlikely, primarily because a Daoist like Cheng would have had to be able to differentiate between the two, and be aware of the fact that the term no-mind had appropriated Buddhist connotations after being used extensively in early translations of Buddhist literature.

²⁴⁰ Guo 1961, 145, 385, 412, 464.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 385.

²⁴² Sharf 2002, 175-176.

“Salvation” in Cheng Xuanying’s Conception of the Sage

Introduction

This chapter will explore how Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas of universal salvation came to be an important element in both Chinese Buddhist and Lingbao Daoist literature. First, I will introduce a few seminal examples from Buddhist literature which feature the bodhisattva or Buddha(s) aiding other beings. Second, I will examine how the idea of salvation is used in the early Lingbao Daoist scriptures. Then I will examine one of the more important Lingbao texts, the “Scripture of Salvation” (*Lingbao duren jing*), and selections from a commentary written on this text that is also attributed to Cheng Xuanying.

The goal of this chapter is to not dwell upon the implications of the court debates and to speculate where and when Cheng may have “pilfered” ideas of salvation from his Buddhist adversaries or their literature. As I discussed in chapter one, the political and institutional concerns of the Buddhist and Daoist debates put severe restrictions on what texts were allowed to be presented in debate (see chapter one), where only legitimate texts (*Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Benji jing*, and the *Shengxuan jing*) were allowed. The fact that certain texts were considered legitimate and others illegitimate, however, makes Cheng’s commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* (which, as far as we know, was an illegitimate text according to the court) all the more interesting. It is interesting insofar as the existence of the text allows us to discuss how Cheng took an interest in texts not sanctioned in the debates, texts which were a part of the larger Daoist tradition.

What are the implications of being able to consider Cheng a “Daoist” of his day, one that was interested in Daoist literature not used in the debates? If we have proof that Cheng was well acquainted with such literature, then perhaps we can speak of a Lingbao Daoist influence in Cheng’s conception of the sage rather than a strictly Buddhist one. For in the *Lingbao duren jing*, for example, salvation is not brought by the sages, bodhisattvas, or Buddhas, but the celestial deities and beings of the Daoist heavens. That is to say, it is possible that notions of salvation in Cheng’s commentary to the *Zhuangzi* have more to do with his profession as a Daoist cleric than his involvement with Buddhists in the court debates. By exposing the extent to which ideas of “salvation” were as much a part of the Daoist tradition (with the Lingbao scriptures in particular) as the Buddhist tradition before the Tang dynasty, I hope to suggest that Cheng Xuanying’s use of the concept of salvation in his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* may not have been inappropriate or uncommon for his time. Moreover, that all of his ideas pertaining to the subject of salvation cannot be explained away as a mere consequence of him being exposed to “Buddhist thought” and subsequently appropriating ideas *from* Buddhism for his own uses. In other words, if ideas on salvation were already an integral part of the Daoist tradition by the Tang dynasty, then it seems right to explore where Cheng fits within that tradition.

The Bodhisattva Ideal in China

Generally speaking, Chinese Buddhist texts do not display a uniform or consistent definition of what the bodhisattva path encompasses. The Buddhist scholar Lewis Lancaster points out that from the earliest translations of Buddhist literature into Chinese in the second and third centuries the term “bodhisattva” was used primarily as a title or epithet for the Buddha himself.²⁴³ In attempting to establish a bodhisattva typology, another Buddhist scholar, Jan Yün-hua noted that the Buddhist canon contains many different types of bodhisattva literature. Many early texts, for example, were interested in discussing philosophical problems, such as why a bodhisattva may or may not pass into extinction after achieving realization.²⁴⁴ In general, however, Jan identifies three types of bodhisattva literature. (1) Literature which told the Birth-stories (*jātakas*) of the Buddha’s past lives, (2) precepts, cultivation practices and vows for the attainment of bodhisattvahood and (3) manifestations of the bodhisattvas, in particular those cases where they respond to beings in need.²⁴⁵

As I discussed in chapter three, Cheng’s conception of the sage is similar to that of Buddha(s) or Bodhisattvas insofar as they respond to the needs of beings. The ability to respond is, of course, a required attribute of Jan’s third group above. Here the bodhisattva responds by displaying compassion and willingness to save all sentient

²⁴³ Lewis R. Lancaster, “The Bodhisattva Concept: A Study of the Chinese Buddhist Canon” in *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, ed. Leslie S. Kawamura (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), 153.

²⁴⁴ Yün-hua Jan, “The Bodhisattva Idea in Chinese Literature: Typology and Significance” in *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, ed. Leslie S. Kawamura (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), 125.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 126-127.

beings, and will descend into the world to do so if required. But before I examine more of Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi* it seems important that I explore how this third group developed in early Chinese Buddhist thought.

As for the bodhisattva ideal, there is significant evidence of a developing tradition through the late Han dynasty and Six Dynasties period (220-582) in bodhisattva literature as well as sculpture. In the Northern Wei (386-534), for example, veneration of the bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 (He who hears the sounds of the world) was likely extremely popular by the early fifth century, for 197 images of the bodhisattva were found at the Longmen 龍門 caves.²⁴⁶ As for literature, later Chinese authors like Fu Liang 傅亮 (374-426) and Lu Gao 陸杲 (459-532) composed works testifying to the miraculous efficacy of Guanyin; his ability to bring mercy and salvation to those in need.²⁴⁷ There are also “scriptures” which likely originated within the Six Dynasties period, like the “The Avalokiteśvara Sūtra of King Gao” (*Gaowang guanshiyin jing* 高王觀世音經), which gives a detailed account of the benefits one might gain from reciting the scripture: not to be harmed by flames, swords, or suffer death.²⁴⁸ The bodhisattva ‘ideal,’ in this sense, was then well established by the late sixth century. At this point the Sui dynasty became a great patron of Buddhism, and there is even evidence that members of the royal family

²⁴⁶ Jan, 1978, 140.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 141. 誦經滿千遍 念念心不絕 火焰不能傷 刀兵立摧折 恚怒生歡喜 死者變成活 莫言此是虛 諸佛不妄說. T 85, 2898, 1425c. Many of the same benefits appear in chapter twenty-four of *Lotus Sūtra*, which focuses on the benefits of calling on Guanyin in dire situations, and the many different forms he may manifest himself as in order to save other beings. See Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia Press, 1976), 320-324.

took bodhisattva vows. For example, the prince Yang Guang 楊廣 of the Sui took the bodhisattva vows for lay Buddhists from Zhiyi himself.²⁴⁹

Other important texts like the *Awakening of Faith* and the *Zhaolun*, which we have already introduced in chapter three, present different conceptions of the bodhisattva ideal. As for the *Awakening of Faith*, the bodhisattvas appear to respond to other sentient beings but with the intent of “salvation” for all: “All Buddhas and bodhisattvas desire to liberate all beings. Their [liberating vow] spontaneously permeates [all beings], they manifest activities in response [to the needs of beings] as they see and hear them.”²⁵⁰ In another section we find, “The fourth [vow] is the means of...universal salvation. This is to take a vow that one will liberate all sentient beings, down to the last one, no matter how long it may take to cause them to attain the perfect nirvana.”²⁵¹ The *Awakening of Faith*, however, presents a conception of the bodhisattva that differs from the *Zhaolun*. As we discussed in chapter three, in the latter text we find that attributes of the Daoist sage and sage-king were read into those of the Buddha and bodhisattva. Sengzhao provides an overview of how the Buddha achieved enlightenment and made a vow to liberate all beings: “....until finally in great compassion [the Tathāgata] threw himself into the sea of suffering. Upward he rose to grasp the hidden root [of Existence] and

²⁴⁹ Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China Vol. 3: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906. Part 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 117.

²⁵⁰ Translation by Sharf 2002, 107. Also, see Hakeda 1967, 63. 一切諸佛菩薩。皆願度脫一切眾生。自然熏習恒常不捨。以同體智力故。隨應見聞而現作業。T 32, 1666, 578c.

²⁵¹ Translation by Hakeda 1967, 84. 四大願平等方便。請發誓願盡未來際。平等救拔一切眾生。令其安住無餘涅槃。T 32, 1667, 589b.

downward then bent to hand it to the helpless and agonizing [people].”²⁵² It is somewhat interesting that similar ideas are used in the *Zhaolun* to describe the sage, who “[whether] looking down [to Earth] or looking up [to Heaven], adapts to transformations, responding [and] uniting with [beings] without end.”²⁵³ In another section we find “The sage’s role in the world...He guides without leading forward and when he feels (himself needed) he responds like the echo in a deep valley...”²⁵⁴

The Concept of Salvation in the Lingbao Daoist Scriptures

In chapter three I discussed how Chinese conceptions of “stimulus-response”—seen through the activity of the sage and sage-kings—affected the way the Chinese would come to understand Buddhist models of the bodhisattva and Buddha. Yet there remains the question of how the bodhisattva ideal affected Chinese conceptions of the sage and other forms of celestial or heavenly beings that we find in early Daoist literature. Eric Zürcher identified “early Daoist literature” as a corpus of texts that developed alongside Buddhism from the later Han to the early sixth century.²⁵⁵ The Lingbao (Numinous treasure) scriptures began to appear around the year 400, and were unique in that they were the first known to have adopted and modified ideas from Buddhism, all the while claiming that the foreign religion was founded by Laozi when he left for the west to

²⁵² Translation following Liebenenthal 1968, 108. 終大悲以赴難。仰攀玄根。俯提弱喪...全能出生入死。與物推移。T 45, 1858, 158a.

²⁵³ 聖人...所以俯仰順化。應接無窮... T 45, 1858, 153b.

²⁵⁴ Liebenenthal 1968, 113. 然則聖人之在天下也。寂莫虛無。無執無競。導而弗先。感而後應。譬猶幽谷之響。T 45, 1858, 158b.

²⁵⁵ Eric Zürcher, “The Buddhist Influence on early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural evidence,” in *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 66, No.1-3. (1980), 84-85.

convert the barbarians.²⁵⁶ Indeed, Zürcher considered the Lingbao scriptures as containing some of the best evidence of a Buddhist “influence” on indigenous Chinese religion—to such an extent that he suggests it might be more useful to consider them as “Buddho-Taoist hybrids.”²⁵⁷ That being said, in the context of “salvation” and “mercy” as concepts in the Lingbao texts, what we find is that celestial beings and immortals are able to manifest such ideals on behalf of other beings. For example, Zürcher points out that we find expressions like “extending kindness to help all living beings” (愍濟羣生); “with tender love widely to save” (慈愛度救); “let me think of all beings and widely open the bridge (of salvation) (願念一初廣開橋梁); “in order that all may reach release” (咸得度脫).²⁵⁸ In general, however, Zürcher suggests that some Daoist texts went even further than Buddhism in stressing universal concepts of salvation. This is because some texts claimed that a single *qi* 氣 was present in all entities, and thus Daoist adepts would do well to care for plants and minerals as much as their own children.²⁵⁹ Thus, the Chongxuan exegetes like Cheng Xuanying did not have to turn to Buddhist literature in order find concepts of salvation, for they were already a part of the Lingbao corpus.

In this way, as pervasive as ideas of the bodhisattva were in Buddhist writings, it is important to remember that by the Tang dynasty, notions of “compassion” and “salvation” were no longer simply the concern of the Buddha(s) and bodhisattvas but also the celestial beings found in “Daoist” literature. That is to say, salvific concepts were no

²⁵⁶ Bokenkamp 1997, 8.

²⁵⁷ Zürcher 1980, 85.

²⁵⁸ For an extensive list of Lingbao scriptures containing similar attributes, see Zürcher 1980, 134 n. 91.

²⁵⁹ See Zürcher 1980, 135 n. 95-96.

longer simply the property of Buddhist literature and discourse, for it seems likely that, to a Tang Daoist, such concepts would have seemed equally established in Daoist literature.²⁶⁰ Due to their popularity, it would seem that texts like the *Lingbao duren jing* were considered scripture from the moment they began to circulate, perhaps as early as the fourth century.²⁶¹

Thus, by the time Cheng Xuanying began to write his commentaries in the seventh century, the conceptual terrain had changed considerably. As we will see in a few selections from the *Lingbao duren jing* and Cheng's commentary to follow, there is no evidence to suggest that he, as a Daoist scholar and priest by profession, would have thought of "salvation" and "compassion" as being "non-Daoist" concepts, as if they were merely the concern of Buddhists and their celestial Buddha(s) and bodhisattvas. Of course, as far as we know, the Buddhist and Daoist debates of the seventh century forced Daoists to avoid presenting texts that were deemed illegitimate (due to fact that their existence in history was not attested to in the official histories). Yet this would not have stopped Cheng from interpreting the "legitimate" texts used in the debates, like the *Zhuangzi*, as containing ideas similar to the *Lingbao duren jing*.

We will now provide several selections from the *Lingbao duren jing* and Cheng's commentary in order to (1) demonstrate his relationship to other forms of Daoism apart

²⁶⁰ There would have been few reasons to feel inferior to the Buddhists, at least insofar as the *Lingbao* texts allowed the Daoists to claim that the deity "Celestial Worthy of Primordial Commencement" (元始天尊) was in fact much older than the Buddha. On this matter, Bokenkamp says "'Primordial Commencement' refers to the second and third of the 'three pneumas,' the primal and the inaugural, and signifies that the Celestial Worthy was born in the earliest differentiation of pneumas when the Dao first divided. He is thus, we are to understand, inconceivably more ancient than the Buddha." See Bokenkamp 1997, 376.

²⁶¹ See Bokenkamp 1997, 374.

from the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* and (2) how ideas of “salvation” and “benevolence” could be found within this particular Daoist scripture. Here we do not find the “compassion” and “benevolence” (慈悲) of the bodhisattvas, but the “benevolence and love” (*ci ai* 慈愛) of celestial beings, and it is difficult to identify differences between the two.

Lingbao duren jing

The inhabitants of this heaven, having encountered this scripture and its ritual practice, at once universally achieved salvation....They were benevolent and loving to all equally, so that they treated as family even those not of their own blood. The kingdom was harmonious and the people flourished, in joy and Great Peace.²⁶²

Commentary

...In movement [they] combine with the true and constant principle. Therefore they achieve benevolence and love equally, and treat as family even those not of their own blood. Those of old did not treat their relations alone as relations, or only their sons alone as sons; [for example] Yao and Shun abdicated the throne [to others], and were able to make all under heaven turn [to them]...

動合真常之理，故得齊同慈愛，異骨成親。古人不獨親其親，不獨子其子；堯舜授禪，能令天下歸心...²⁶³

Lingbao duren jing

(The Venerable gods) [return] the physical frame, raising the dead, They limitlessly provide salvation.²⁶⁴

Commentary

As for those who provide limitless salvation, for many aeons they provide salvation for beings so that they may attain the Way; and one cannot count how many [are saved]. This is why [the text] says "limitlessly providing salvation." This shows [how the worthy of] Primordial Commencement bestows compassion, [causes] the dead and living to cross over, establishes the gold palaces and jade halls...and vastly saves all within the nine heavens.

²⁶² Bokenkamp 1997, 407-408.

²⁶³ (HY 87) 2:194.

²⁶⁴ Bokenkamp 1997, 417.

无量度人者, 凡於劫劫之中度人成道, 非可算數, 故云无量度人. 此
明元始垂慈, 死生通濟, 置立金官玉殿...弘度九天之內...²⁶⁵

The first section of text and commentary is interesting because Cheng equates the sage-kings Yao and Shun with the inhabitants of the heaven in question, where the *Lingbao duren jing* was first recited (for a total of ten times) among a congregation of celestial beings. It is unclear, however, who Cheng is referring to when he says “Those of old” (*guren* 古人). It seems likely that he means Yao and Shun as well as the “sages” of old, as he often does in his commentaries to the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Whoever it may be, Cheng states that they also possessed universal “compassion” and “love.” By way of this association, it would seem that Cheng is no longer simply speaking of celestial beings who dwell in another heaven (as they do in the *Lingbao duren jing*), but those who existed or descended into *this* world, albeit that of the legendary kings of Chinese antiquity. The second section is somewhat different, for in Cheng’s commentary the Venerable Gods (*zunshen* 尊神) and the Celestial Worthy appear as beings interested in bringing salvation to those in need, as well as raising the dead. Cheng is especially interested in how they ceaselessly provide salvation—with the goal being attainment of the “Way” for all entities/beings. In this sense, these celestial beings are indeed quite similar to the bodhisattvas of the third type identified by Yün-hua Jan above, those who descend into the world to aid sentient beings.

²⁶⁵ (HY 87) 2:205.

“Salvation” and the Sage

Although Cheng’s conception of the sage includes the ability to respond without bias—as we discussed in chapter three above—it is not entirely clear what the sage does, or how he interacts with other beings. In the selections that follow we will find less emphasis on the sage’s ability to preserve harmony through proper “rule” over the masses like the sage-kings of early Daoist literature in the *Huainanzi*. Sages may appear to act in harmony with the seasons (such as the Gu she *shenren* of chapter one) and may seem otherworldly, but Cheng tends to place more emphasis on the fact that they immerse themselves in the “dust and dirt” of the common world and mingle with other beings regardless of whether the latter’s activities are unwholesome or not. Overall, for Cheng the sages are those who eventually come to benefit all things. This is quite interesting if we remember how the sage is actually conceived of in the *Zhuangzi* itself. For not only are there multiple epithets which emphasize different qualities of the sage, but often many of them appear to have little interest in worldly activities, concerns, or hardships.²⁶⁶ For example, as I discussed in chapter three, even though the sage in the *Zhuangzi* may appear distant and often aloof from society and its concerns (or even those of their own followers and students), Cheng chooses not to focus on this problem, and simply insists that the sage *will* respond on behalf of other beings when encountered.

Cheng Xuanying considers sages to be those who blend their traces (*ji* 跡) with the world and that of the common people, but remain untouched and untainted by human

²⁶⁶ For further details, see chapter three above, 84-87.

concerns, crude schemes or workings (*ji* 機), and attachments. Cheng is not always specific, but there is a subtle difference between the sage's aim of salvation for all beings and (cruder) human concern or attachment to worldly things. The word “*huai* 懷” for Cheng seems to embody ideas of human “attachment” or “grasping” for worldly things; a longing or yearning characterized by an overindulgence in emotion, which Cheng considers to be typical of common people. As we saw in chapter three, the sages are to be without mind and completely impartial to whatever they encounter. Nevertheless, in other sections of Cheng's commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, which we will discuss here, Cheng is compelled to speak of how the sages aim for the salvation of other beings. At one point he even admits that if the sage has sentiment at all, it is *only* aimed at saving other beings. Judging from the rest of his commentary, however, it seems clear that Cheng conceived of this form of “sentiment” as very different from common emotion.

Zhuangzi

The Perfect Man of ancient times made sure that he had it in himself before he tried to give it to others.²⁶⁷

Commentary

In former times of old those of the highest virtue emptied [themselves] of attachments and wandered the land. [They] made sure the Way was first established within themselves before trying to save and rescue other people; and there has yet to be one who did not have it within and yet was able to unite with other beings...

古昔至德之人，虛懷而遊世間，必先安立己道，然後拯救他人，未有己身不存而能接物者也...²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Watson 1968, 54.

²⁶⁸ Guo 1961, 134.

Zhuangzi

...and yet people really believed that [the *zhenren*] worked hard to get there.²⁶⁹

Commentary

Now, as for utmost individuals, their movement is like that of the clouds, when at rest like the spirit of the valley. Objects and cognition are thoroughly forgotten, the mind is void and the response subtle, so how could [they be] attached to things? [Their] sentiments are connected to saving and rescuing!²⁷⁰

夫至人者，動若行雲，止若谷神，境智洞忘，虛心玄應，豈有懷於為物，情係於拯救者乎！²⁷¹

In many respects one could argue that this seems to contradict Cheng's emphasis on the sage being like a mirror; where there appears to be no emotion, no preference, but simply a response to those in need. Indeed, what are we to make of this unspecified difference between the sage's sentiment and that of the common person? Whether or not the sage has emotions had been in dispute since before the Han dynasty in pre-Qin literature, including the *Zhuangzi*.²⁷² Robert Sharf points out that Han philosophers eventually came to an agreement that sages did not in fact have emotions, at least anything which resembled those of common people.²⁷³ On the other hand, the second-century Xuanxue thinker Wang Bi disagreed, and suggested that emotions were required for the sage to be able to join with other people: "Because his emotions are equal with other men, he cannot be without grief and joy in responding to other beings. Thus the sage's emotions enable

²⁶⁹ Words in brackets are my own. Watson 1968, 79.

²⁷⁰ For another example of how the sage's salvific aid is "without end" (拯濟無窮), see Guo 1961, 458.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 240.

²⁷² *Zhuangzi Yinde* 1956, 14/5/55-60.

²⁷³ Sharf 2002, 93.

him to respond to other beings, without becoming *attached* to other beings.”²⁷⁴ It would seem that Cheng does not go as far as Wang Bi does in this regard, for in general Cheng’s sages do not appear “worldly” in the conventional sense. Nonetheless, Wang and Cheng do agree that the sage does not become attached to those he responds to. They may roam about, mingle, and come to benefit common people, but they share few qualities with them.

Descending Into the World to Save Beings

Though the sage may be involved with other beings, and ultimately engaged in saving and rescuing them, Cheng is usually quite unspecific as to how the sage functions while among common people. His commentary does make it clear, however, that we are to understand that the sage does indeed come into contact with beings, and perhaps remains among them for a time.

Zhuangzi

The Perfect man of ancient times used benevolence as a path to be borrowed, righteousness as a lodge to take shelter in. He wandered in the free and easy wastes...²⁷⁵

Commentary

The Genuine people of old dimmed their radiance²⁷⁶ and mingled their traces [with the dusty world], avoided [crude human] workings²⁷⁷ and

²⁷⁴ Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World*, by Liu I-ch’ing with Commentary by Liu Chün (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 122; Sharf 2002, 93.

²⁷⁵ Watson 1968, 162.

²⁷⁶ Due to Cheng’s heavy reliance on the *Laozi* in his commentary it is possible that the phrase “dimmed their radiance” (*he guang* 和光) is an allusion to this text in particular, especially *Laozi* 4, 52, and 56.

²⁷⁷ The couplet “*duan ji* 逗機” may also mean “adapted to [different] situations.” In Buddhist thought *duanji* can also mean “adaption to capacities” of other beings, but I have found no evidence to support this reading.

yet carried out far-reaching affection, responded to beings and yet functioned [among] the human masses. How could they do other than take advantage of the dusty trails? Lodging [there] for a time; at times roaming about or staying still. How could this not be genuine and real? Furthermore, movement did not upset their stillness, and in responding [to beings] they did not separate from the genuine. Therefore they continued to wander free and easy, in this state of self attainment; back and forth through the boundaries of non-action.

古之真人，和光降跡，逗機而行博愛，應物而用人群，何異乎假借塗路，寄託宿止，暫時遊寓，蓋非真實。而動不傷寂，應不離真，故恆逍遙乎，自得之場，彷徨乎無為之境。²⁷⁸

Many of the same themes we encountered above with the mirror metaphor are reinforced here as well; the sage is continually responding to the needs of other beings, and benefiting them. The important point here, however, is that the sage blends his traces (or perhaps footsteps) with the dust and grime of the world. This phrase is used repeatedly by Cheng throughout his commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, and usually it means that the sage is not above engaging with worldly affairs, no matter how deplorable they may be.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, as we witnessed with his commentary on the mirror-like qualities of the sage, what usually follows is a qualification that the sage is untouched (or untainted) by these dreadful aspects of the common world, especially the cruder workings of other beings. Despite the impure nature of the world, Cheng's rhetorical question of "How could they do other than take advantage of the dusty trails?" seems to be a reminder to readers that the sages found in the *Zhuangzi*, in Cheng's opinion, are just as engaged in

²⁷⁸ Guo 1961, 519.

²⁷⁹ For further examples, see *ibid.*, 28, 75, 99, 122, 166, 177, 195, 219, 237, 255, 272, 301, 399, 519, 544, 575, 589, 633, 693.

the common world as other beings—no matter how different they may seem from common folk.

In addition, Cheng emphasizes that being able to be active within the world and yet untouched by its baser qualities is paramount to being “genuine” (*zhen* 真) and “real” (*shi* 實). Due to the presence of these ideas in Chongxuan thought, Stephen Eskildsen suggests that writers like Cheng Xuanying were likely influenced by the Lingbao scriptures, for those texts also speak of the “real” or “true” nature that exists within the body. Interestingly, Eskildsen also points out that both the Lingbao and Chongxuan texts advocate that the body was not in need of being preserved, and thus they deemphasize the role of physical immortality in their writings.²⁸⁰ In this sense, the “genuine” and “real” were attributes of the spirit, or numen, and not the body. This may explain why Cheng tends to deemphasize those sections of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi* which seem similar to the teachings of “immortality,” discussed in chapter one and two above. It may also explain why he suggests that sages are not prone to remaining apart from the world, and do not remain on mountain tops or hide in office.²⁸¹

Despite the fact that the sages lack emotions in the conventional sense, at times Cheng Xuanying will comment on their “kindness/benevolence” (*ci* 慈) and “compassion” (*bei* 悲), which we have already seen in Cheng’s commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* above.

²⁸⁰ Eskildsen 2004, 203 n. 11.

²⁸¹ For further details, see chapter two, 50-54.

Zhuangzi

Great strength is not obstinate.²⁸²

Commentary

...On the inside, gathering kindness and compassion; on the outside, a vast unification with [other] beings. Through this [the sages] are able to follow along with the dusty [world], to benefit and save the common people. With the self emptied [they] adapt to [crude human] workings, and to the very end [they are] never obstinate.

內蘊慈悲，外弘接物，故能俯順塵俗，惠救蒼生，虛己逗機，終無迂逆。²⁸³

Zhuangzi

Embrace the ten thousand things universally—how could there be one you should give special support to?²⁸⁴

Commentary

...Referring to the great sage's kindness and compassion, they embrace all things; level and even [throughout] and that is all, and to the very end their affection is never partial. For how could one consistently possess a mind [aimed at] rescuing and pardoning [beings] by favouring and sheltering [only some]?

...言大聖慈悲，兼懷庶品，平往而已，終無偏愛，誰復有心拯救而接承扶翼者也。²⁸⁵

The terms *ci* 慈 and *bei* 悲 are, of course, extremely common in Buddhist texts, and they indicate the “compassion” of the bodhisattvas.²⁸⁶ Buddhist sources usually distinguish between several forms of compassion. The lowest form seems to be of those who are moved to compassion due the suffering of other beings (*sheng yuan cibe* 生緣慈悲), also

²⁸² It would seem that Cheng interprets the original passage from the *Zhuangzi* differently from modern translators. Most have followed Watson, who translates this line as “Great Daring does not attack.” The first part of the following by Cheng (which we have omitted above) states that “*zhi* 忤” (attack) should be read as “*ni* 逆” (contrary; obstinate), and so it is possible that he interpreted the line “Great courage does not attack” (大勇不忤) as something similar to “Great strength is not obstinate.” See Watson 1968, 44.

²⁸³ Guo 1961, 87.

²⁸⁴ Watson 1968, 182.

²⁸⁵ Guo 1961, 586.

²⁸⁶ *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, “慈悲” (article by C. Muller).

known as “small compassion” (*xiaobei* 小悲). The mid level form of compassion is based upon the “awareness of the true nature of phenomena” (*fa yuan cibe* 法緣慈悲), which is characterized by a recognition of the “selflessness” of phenomena.²⁸⁷ The third level is reserved for the Buddhas alone, and is characterized by a complete abandonment of discriminating thought and an understanding of the equal nature of all things (*wu yuan cibe* 無緣慈悲).²⁸⁸ In many ways this third level resonates with what we have seen already of Cheng Xuanying’s conception of the sage in chapter three, where the sage (like a mirror) operates through no-mind, and is impartial to what he encounters. The first section above describes how the sage is moved to respond to the needs of beings, but in the second section Cheng makes it clear that the sage’s compassion, like that of the Buddha(s), is never partial and will never favour one being over another.

Be that as it may, we must look elsewhere for further details on what exactly the sage’s state of mind is like when engaged with beings *in* the common world. As I have mentioned before, Cheng Xuanying is not always generous with details, and often one can only guess at what the sages in fact are supposed to “do,” and what types of situations they actually encounter. I have yet to find an example where Cheng actually lists one or two conventional situations the sages may find themselves in. If I understand it correctly, however, in the following section he does give us a clue as to how the sage makes the best of a bad situation, and uses the less appealing aspects of the human social realm to his advantage in aiding other beings.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

Zhuangzi

Therefore, the sage has a place where he wanders, and considers knowledge as a curse, convention as glue, virtue as a social grace, and craft as commerce.²⁸⁹

Commentary

As for the Way of utmost individuals, they ascend into the Three Purities²⁹⁰ and their numen roams the six directions. Therefore they gather wisdom so as to relieve disaster and misfortune, [use] promises as a means to restrain inattentive minds, cultivate virtue so as to unite with the masses, and skill and cleverness as a means to benefit all kinds of sentient beings. These are the four affairs that common types [of beings] have. The Great sages compassionately rescue [them] by joining with the dust [of the world] and following along with [these] beings.

夫至人道邁三清而神遊六合，故蘊智以救殃孽，約束以檢散心，樹德以接蒼生，工巧以利群品。此之四事，凡類有之，大聖慈救，同塵順物也。²⁹¹

In this section it seems that Cheng has tried to link ideas of “compassion” and “kindness” to the worldly (and possibly negative) activities the sage may have to participate in. Indeed, Watson, Mair, and Graham have all taken this passage as an indication that the author(s) of the *Zhuangzi* consider knowledge, virtue, convention, and craft as undesirable things.²⁹² Cheng, however, puts a more positive “spin” on the passage, and thus each undesirable attribute becomes a way in which the sage actually tries to aid other beings. One might be tempted to say that Cheng implies that not only do the sages implement these negative aspects of human existence to better other beings, but they actually use them in their own affairs. Overall, the beginning and end of Cheng’s commentary above reminds the reader that no matter where the sages may roam (even if

²⁸⁹ Mair 1998, 49.

²⁹⁰ The heavenly abodes of the three celestial ones, Yuanshi Tianzong, Lingbao Tianzong 靈寶天尊 and Daode Tianzong 道德天尊.

²⁹¹ Guo 1961, 218.

²⁹² See Mair 1998, 49, Graham 2001, 82, and Watson 1968, 75.

within the Three Purities) they return to the world to rescue and follow along with beings, even if that means giving in to human conventions.

The Sage Responds and Saves Continuously

On the whole, at times Cheng Xuanying's conception of the sages of old goes even further, and so we find him asserting that these venerable figures not only respond to and mingle with other beings, but do so ceaselessly.

Genuine individuals respond to the world, are attentive to the stimuli [they receive] and thereby follow along with the times; when mingling with beings in their affairs they will always be well suited to the situation. Furthermore, with an empty mind, compassion, and affection, [they are] constantly wholesome in rescuing people, to such a degree that they equate with the Great Void. Therefore none can know their limit.

真人應世，赴感隨時，與物交涉，必有宜便。而虛心慈愛，常善救人，量等太虛，故莫知其極。²⁹³

Genuine individuals are congealed and still, responding to beings without set models, are compelled (by the matter) and then act, [but] never concerned with first being praised. Therefore, they are those who do not come to an end and continue to respond (as such).

真人凝寂，應物無方，迫而後動，非關先唱故，不得已而應之者也。²⁹⁴

[If] the mind is like still water, then a mass of beings will gather round. Thus there is a response but no emotion, kindness but no waste [of generosity]. [If] one is suitable and profitable in one's divine countenance, then to the very end there will be no [sign of] depletion.

心同止水，故能濬聚群生。是以應而無情，惠而不費，適我益我神色，終無減損者也。²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Guo 1961, 232.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 236.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 238.

Here Cheng seems to be reiterating the notion that the utmost sages are those who roam beyond the world but ultimately return to it on behalf of suffering beings. Like the celestial beings of the *Lingbao duren jing* or the cosmic bodhisattvas of Buddhism, the sages limitlessly provide for other beings. The last section translated here as “[If] the mind is like still water, then a mass of beings will gather round” seems to be an allusion to chapter five of the *Zhuangzi*, where Confucius is asked “Why should others congregate around him?” to which he replies “[Because] none of us finds his [own] mirror in flowing water, we find it in still water. Only [that which is] still can stop those who stopped there [to see themselves within it].”²⁹⁶

Conclusion

After reading selections from the Daoist and Buddhist sources here and comparing them to Cheng Xuanying’s conception of the sage, one might wonder if it is appropriate to ask whether there is any substantial difference between Cheng’s sage and the many celestial buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Daoist deities found in the texts we surveyed above. My investigation here will, of course, remain largely provisional until a full scale study of Cheng’s commentary to the *Lingbao duren jing* is undertaken. Ideally, an endeavour such as that would also need to compare its findings with Cheng’s commentary to the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* as well. Needless to say, until this is accomplished, we will have to be content with the idea that he could have possibly drawn his concepts of the sage from both Buddhist and Lingbao Daoist texts. Be that as it may,

²⁹⁶ Graham 2001, 77.

even my cursory investigation here seems to suggest that Cheng could have easily found ideas pertaining to salvation within his own Daoist tradition. That is to say, the compatibility of his ideas expressed in his commentaries to the *Lingbao duren jing* and the *Zhuangzi* on the idea of salvation suggest that he was not a debater *only* interested in the “legitimate” texts sanctioned by the court debates, but a Daoist who read and thought outside of those political restraints.

Conclusion

With these themes from chapter four in mind, I would like to return to a question I asked in chapter one: is it safe to say that Cheng was pilfering ideas from Chinese Buddhist sources for his own ends in the court debates? Throughout this thesis, I have tried to show that there is evidence to suggest that what we might consider to be “Chinese Madhyamaka” or “Chinese Buddhist” thought in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary to the *Zhuangzi* may in fact have more to do with his role as a “Daoist.” That is to say, the evidence suggests that many of his ideas could have easily been drawn from forms of Daoist thought already available to him in the early Tang dynasty, in texts stretching from the *Benji jing* to the *Lingbao duren jing*. If the *Benji jing* can be dated to the late sixth century, and already contained a variation of tetralemma-like exegesis, then it may go far in explaining why seventh-century Chongxuan thinkers like Cheng used a variation of the tetralemma in their own writings. In addition, if ideas pertaining to all-embracing salvation can be traced to fourth-century texts like the *Lingbao duren jing*, then it is possible that many of Cheng’s ideas on the subject of salvation can be traced to his commentary on this text. Thus, much of what we might consider to have been “borrowed” or “pilfered” from Buddhist thought by Cheng Xuanying for the court debates had clear antecedents in Daoist thought well before his time.

Be that as it may, questions remain concerning the details of what we explored in chapter three, namely how Cheng uses and describes the mirror metaphor. On the one hand, it seems safe to say that the way in which Cheng utilizes the phrase “like a mirror

hung in a high place” establishes a link between him and Chinese Buddhist thought, since the phrase appears to be of Chinese Buddhist origin. Of course, whether this means Cheng borrowed a common phrase used in the debates of his day or simply came across it while reading a Buddhist text is hard to say. The concept of “no-mind” is perhaps even more difficult to trace. Chongxuan Daoists might have been aware that the term was part of the *Zhuangzi*, but it is unlikely that Cheng was aware that this term—after being used in early Buddhist translation work—had been acquiring Buddhist connotations for several centuries before the Tang dynasty.

Nevertheless, the presence of a predominantly “Buddhist” phrase (“like a mirror hung in a place”) in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary to the *Zhuangzi* compels me to ask another question: to what extent do Cheng’s commentaries resonate with other Chongxuan texts, like the *Daojiao yishu*, where we find a great deal of Buddhist terminology? Is it possible that the *Daojiao yishu* represents a later development in Chongxuan thought? I would venture to say that we may need to reappraise the use of the category “Chongxuan thought” entirely, and ask how useful it is to consider Chongxuan thought even as an “exegetical tradition.” The problem is that even this cursory investigation here, into the role of the sage, has turned up no direct link between Cheng and texts like the *Daojiao yishu*. That is to say, it should go without saying that there is no reason to believe that these exegetes were consistent from one text to the next, and this may go far in explaining why the commentaries of Cheng Xuanying may have little to do with other texts like the *Daojiao yishu*, where we find a great deal of Buddhist

terminology. In this sense, until a chronology for the development of Chongxuan thought is worked out we will have to be cautious. Until that time, I will have to conclude that—at least in Cheng’s conception of the sage—there are few aspects of his commentary to the *Zhuangzi* which would suggest that he was pilfering Buddhist ideas and terminology for his own use in the court debates.

Rather than continuing to speculate on what might have been a Buddhist or Daoist “influence” on Cheng Xuanying, I think that we may be in a position to finally ask an important question concerning Chongxuan thought as a whole. First, I believe that we need to carefully reconsider what exactly constitutes a traditional or normative “Daoist conception of the sage” for the early Tang dynasty. Second, and more importantly, did Chongxuan exegesis dominate the early Tang so completely that the manner of Cheng’s exegesis would have been welcomed by most Daoists?

On the one hand, I am inclined to say that he was in fact very much in line with conceptions of the sage found in the Lingbao scriptures, and therefore was not a thinker on the fringes of Daoist thought. As we discussed in chapter one, we do know that the other Chongxuan thinkers of the early seventh century were interested in presenting “Daoism” as a religion that could compete with Buddhism in the court debates, and so, through their exegetical skills, they emphasized notions of all embracing salvation and Madhyamaka logic that could be “found” in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. On the other hand, do the ideas presented in the debates reflect only the opinions of those involved, namely the Chongxuan Daoist debaters? Or should we think of these commentaries and

texts as the exegetical musings of a few elite (but ultimately isolated) Daoists operating in the capital and involved in the court debates? After all, other Daoists may have had different opinions. For example, in 626 the Daoist priest Fu Yi (555-639) told Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626-649) the following:

“The Buddha was nothing more than a crafty barbarian who succeeded in deluding his own countrymen. Ill-intentioned men in China subsequently perverted the teachings of Chuang-tzu and Lao-tzu...and dressed up [the] doctrines in bizarre and mysterious language in order to mislead the uneducated masses.”²⁹⁷

What is interesting about Fu’s reply is that the original question from Taizong was about what the former thought about Buddhism in general.²⁹⁸ One can only wonder if Taizong actually asked what Fu thought of the “conversion of the Barbarians” theory, for if he did then Fu’s response would seem to make more sense. That is to say, it is unclear whether the “ill-intentioned men” in this passage are actually Buddhists. It seems likely to me that the passage is meant to include certain Daoists as well, and thus Fu may actually be criticizing Daoists who have tainted their own exegeses of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* with Buddhist thought. There is even evidence that early Chongxuan texts were already in circulation by 626, for Assandri has already pointed out that two of the Daoist texts used

²⁹⁷ Bracketed words are my own, translation by Weinstein 1987, 12. See Zizhi Tongjian 資治通鑑 192, 6029. 佛乃胡中桀黠，誑耀彼土。中國邪僻之人，取莊、老玄談，飾以妖幻之語，用欺愚俗。無益於民....

²⁹⁸ Even if one suggests that we should be wary of taking the account as a complete record of an actual “historical” conversation between Fuyi and the Emperor, one still needs to explain what the author intended here.

in the debates, namely the *Benji jing* and the *Shengxuan jing*, began to circulate at the beginning of the Sui dynasty.²⁹⁹

Nonetheless, perhaps the most striking aspect of Chongxuan thought is how little was recorded in Daoists sources about these exegetes. There is virtually no mention of them in the Daoist biographical and historical collections, while the Buddhists who were involved in the debates have extensive biographies and details of their encounters with Daoists in the debates.³⁰⁰ As biased as the accounts by Buddhists like Daoxuan may be, they are virtually the only source of information on the debates and details concerning the activities of the Chongxuan exegetes. Is it possible that the Chongxuan Daoists were not really prized by the rest of the Daoist community?

In order to begin answering our question perhaps the most sensible thing to do would be to perform an extensive survey of early Tang Daoist literature, but it might also be useful to explore sources for early Tang dynasty policy towards Daoism and Buddhism. Barrett mentions that there is some evidence to suggest that Cheng may have actually been sanctioned by the administrative wings of the government to write his commentaries and have them distributed in the provinces apart from the capital.³⁰¹ Presumably, the state might have been interested in having control over which texts were in circulation as well as overseeing “official” interpretations (or commentaries) of such

²⁹⁹ Assandri 2005, 431.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 2005, 431.

³⁰¹ Barrett 2006, 25-26.

texts.³⁰² Indeed, on the one hand, having the *Laozi* translated into Sanskrit for distribution in India indicates how far the Tang went to establish themselves as legitimate “Chinese” rulers, by advertising that even those who lived in India should know of Laozi’s teachings (and thus the power and legitimate rule of the Tang). Within their own borders, the Tang was also interested in keeping tabs on who could enter the Daoist clergy, and during Cheng’s time the government may not have even recognized other individuals as such which the Daoist church had already ordained.³⁰³ If Cheng was well known for his connections and co-operations with the political administration of the Tang, who were trying to exert control over the Daoist clergy (and define who could in fact become clergy),³⁰⁴ then it is likely that few Daoists would have been overly fond of him. Thus, as a clergy man himself, and later as the Master of Doctrine at the Xi hua abbey, it is likely that Cheng’s position in the capital was heavily political.

³⁰² If his commentaries were being distributed by the government to the far corners of the provinces, then we may have a reason as to why, out of all the Chongxuan Daoists, Cheng’s commentaries managed to survive while the others were largely lost.

³⁰³ Barrett 2006, 25.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

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