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# Vanity in Human Life

A Comparative Study of the Role of Hebel in Qoheleth

and Wu in the Philosophical Thought of Wang Bi

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A thesis presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

Hsiao-Yung Liu (Samuel)

May 1999

協同神學院  
神學碩士論文

人生的虛空

虛空在傳道書中的角色與王弼之無的哲學思想之比較研究

---

本論文  
僅呈  
聖路易協同神學院解經神學系  
以完成  
神學碩士學位  
之部份要求

---

作者：劉 孝 勇

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of vanity may not seem very important in the whole history of salvation, but it cannot be ignored in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Indeed, the question and importance of the concept cannot be overemphasized when we want to understand Jewish wisdom on a deeper level and do a sufficient job in cross-cultural study. *Hebel*, the Hebrew word generally translated as vanity, has traditionally been considered as the theme of Qoheleth. However, what does it really mean? What kind of role does *hebel* play in Qoheleth? How does Qoheleth come to this thought? How does *hebel* relate to Biblical faith? Is the sense of vanity not a part of God's general revelation? These questions will be studied in this thesis.

Admittedly, the concept of vanity is also common in religions and cultures around the world. In particular, it has occupied a very important role in Chinese scholarly thought known as Buddhism's concept in a unique way, relating *wu* to major religious and philosophical schools. The concept of vanity in Buddhism is well known. During the third century A.D. a leading Chinese scholar, Wang Bi<sup>1</sup> (226-249 AD), devoted his efforts to the concept of *wu*, a Chinese term closely related to vanity and to *hebel*. Unique about Wang Bi is that his study included also Daoism and Confucianism. His philosophical discussion of the concept of *wu* not only created a new intellectual movement at that time, but also offers a point of contact of which a dialogue with the

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<sup>1</sup> For Chinese a person's family name must come first, then the given follows. E.g., "Wang" is the family name, and "Bi" is like the given name in English.

Hebrew concept of *hebel* can begin.

Dialogue, not monologue, is the only way to achieve mutual understanding. The Apostle Paul did not tell the Jewish message to the Gentile people of Asia Minor and Europe when he started his mission outside of Palestine. He said, "To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law...To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1Cor.9: 20-22) What would Paul have said if he were given the opportunity to evangelize the Chinese? It is believed that he would insist on preaching the Gospel rather as a Chinese than as a Jew. For this reason this topic has been chosen. It is hoped that this thesis will serve as a bridge between the Bible and Chinese thought insofar as both address a similar topic.

This thesis doesn't only provide a chance to dialogue, but also intends the expression of human common cry on vanity. A ballad by W. E. Henley may give the impression of vanity upon human life:

Life is a smoke that curls --  
Curls in a flickering skein  
That winds, and whisks and whirls,  
A figment thin and vain,  
Into the great Inane.  
One end for hut and hall!  
One end for cell and stall!  
Burned in one common flame  
Are wisdoms and insanities.  
For this alone we came;  
O Vanity of Vanities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The ballad is cited from G. C. Martin, *Century Bible, Proverbs* etc. by W. E. Staples in "Vanity of Vanities" in *Canadian Journal of Theology*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1955, 141.

The ballad demonstrates vividly that man is not able to do or think anything before vanity, the huge monster in the heart. Indeed, the sense of vanity encounters man when some valuable is lost, some one passes away and unbearable pain comes abruptly. No one can escape these misfortunes, and the sense or conception of vanity is for all. Qoheleth and Wang Bi provide us a good opportunity to see what this vanity really is.

The aim of this study is to increase the mutual understanding between the Old Testament and ancient Chinese thought. The methodology is both cross-cultural and exegetical. Without the effort of exegesis, an understanding of *hebel* would be colored by one's own assumptions and prejudices. The same thing is true of ancient Chinese philosophy. The concept of *wu* was first discussed not by Wang Bi but by Lao Zi<sup>3</sup> (in about the fifth century B.C.E.), the founder of Daoism. As a re-interpreter of *wu*, Wang-Bi developed the original meaning of *Lao Zi* and increased a new spirit for Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Wang Bi did not only open a new window for Chinese literature but also significantly influenced the political and social attitudes of his contemporary intellectuals. Hopefully after both Qoheleth's *hebel* and Wang Bi's *wu* are studied carefully by analyzing the text and their involved studies exegetically and cross-culturally, the true meaning of *hebel* and *wu* can be revealed, and comparison and evaluation in between can be done.

To make this thesis more understandable and faithful to the original meaning, the

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<sup>3</sup> Lao Zi (老子) is famous for his work, *Dao De Jing* (德道經). Lao Zi was thought as the contemporary of Confucius, but modern Chinese scholars (like 錢穆 Qian Mu) put the age of Lao Zi in Warring States Period (480-222 B.C.E.) according to modern literary critical methodology. Lao Zi, the term can mean either the author or the book traditionally. To distinguish both in this thesis, Lao Zi in italic will mean the book and in non-italic the author.



Hebrew and Chinese text will be used as much as possible and the English translations will accompany these texts in a parenthesis mark. ("()") is cited from the NIV Bible and "[ ]" is the translation by the author of this thesis.) All the Chinese translations are made by the author of this thesis and the English translations of special Chinese vocabularies adopt Han-Yu Romanization system (漢語拼音系統). This thesis will be divided into three main parts: *hebel* and its involved study (part one), *wu* and its involved study (part two) and the last part, a comparison and evaluation (part three). In the first two parts, the main structure will include: authorship (ch. I and ch. VIII), semantic and etymological understanding (ch. II and ch. IX), contextual and textual understanding (ch. III and ch. X), rhetorical understanding (ch. VI and ch. XI), socioeconomic or political understanding (ch. V and ch. XII), philosophical and theological understanding (ch. VI and ch. XIII) and a conclusion (ch. VII and ch. XIV) for each individual part. For the third part, namely comparison and evaluation (part three), the similarities (ch. XV) and different characteristics (ch. XVI) between Qoheleth's *hebel* and Wang Bi's *wu* will be provided and discussed, and then "beyond vanity" (ch. XVII) will follow. Some suggestions on mission for Chinese (ch. XVIII) and the conclusion (ch. XIX) for this part will end the part. A final conclusion will be given after these three parts and will conclude this thesis.

## PART ONE

### *HEBEL* AND ITS INVOLVED STUDIES

*Hebel*, the Hebrew word, can be simply defined as vanity, which is the favorite translation of most English Bible versions. To understand *hebel* the Book of Qoheleth<sup>4</sup> in the Old Testament doubtlessly is the main source to study. However the book is notorious for its enigmatic text and miscellaneous interpretations. W. E. Staples starts his article "Vanity of Vanities" with these words:

The Book of Qoheleth, one of the shorter books of the Old Testament, has had, from a very early date, a profound influence upon English Literature. It has been asserted that no book in the Bible has been quoted so frequently. It has been all things to all people. The cynic, the materialist, the hedonist, and the evangelist, each has attributed to this Book his own concept of the meaning of life.<sup>5</sup>

Seemingly, on one hand, it is not easy to approach *hebel* in accordance with the nature of the book. On the other hand, the impact of this has had upon following generations is quite huge.

*Hebel* and concepts around it undoubtedly are understood as the main theme of the Book of Qoheleth by most scholars. But what does it look like? The purpose of the Book of Qoheleth seems not to convey teaching about God but rather to share what he had found in life and what is man's benefit from life. If the anthropocentric characteristic rather than the theocentric is the main concern in Qoheleth, then follows the

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<sup>4</sup> Hebrew Bible uses the title of Ecclesiastes as Qoheleth. And Qoheleth is also used for the self-introduction of the author. (cf. Ecc. 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:9, 10).

<sup>5</sup> W. E. Staples, "Vanity of Vanities", *Canadian Journal of Theology* Vol. 1, No.3, 1955, 141.

question: Why is it still included in the Jewish canon? Was it ever influenced by Greek thoughts according to some theologian's opinions? What kind of life does Qoheleth recommend in his book? What role does *hebel* play in the whole book? Rhetorical or metaphoric? Religious or philosophical? To unlock the riddle of *hebel*, Qoheleth needs to be examined more carefully and broadly.

The following chapters will explore the meaning of *hebel* in the Old Testament. The focus of this study will be 1) *Hebel* and the Author of Qoheleth, 2) Semantic and Etymological Understanding of *Hebel*, 3) Contextual and Textual Understanding of *Hebel*, 4) Rhetorical and Formal Understanding of *Hebel*, 5) Socioeconomic Understanding of *hebel*, 6) Philosophical and Theological Understanding of *Hebel*, and 7) Conclusion.

## CHAPTER I

### HEBEL AND THE AUTHOR OF QOHELETH

First of all, who is the contributor of the Book of Qoheleth, namely who is the author? What is the difference between Qoheleth as the title and Qoheleth as the author? The Hebrew title of Ecclesiastes is קהלת (Qoheleth), the name of the book and also possibly the author, which was translated into Ἐκκλησιαστής in Septuagint (LXX), and *Coeleth* in Latin Vulgate Bible. In fact, the Book of Qoheleth in English is a latinized form of the Greek translation, which means a member of the citizen's assembly<sup>6</sup>. However many traditional English Bible versions separate the book title and the author into different terms<sup>7</sup>. Quite a few English translators followed Luther's "*der Prediger*" to translate Qoheleth as "preacher". Does Qoheleth give a sermon in his book? It seems not. Apart from being the assembler or preacher, Seow suggests "gatherer"<sup>8</sup>, the other possible meaning for Qoheleth. In late Biblical Hebrew, it becomes clear that the feminine participles were used to denote functionaries or officials and then became masculine proper names<sup>9</sup>. Qoheleth "apparently derived from the Hebrew word *kahal*,

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<sup>6</sup> Choon-Leong Seow, 3 & 95-97.

<sup>7</sup> For the book title the uniform name is Ecclesiastes, and for the contributor Qoheleth is translated into "preacher" (KJV, NKJ, ASV, RSV, WEB, RWB, DBY, BBE, LXE) in most versions and "teacher" (NIV, NRS).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Seow, 95-96. In addition to the allusion to Solomon, the medieval commentators Rashbam and Rashi associated the name with the biblical skeptic mentioned in Prov. 30:1, Agur, which is interpreted to mean 'Gatherer' in Aramaic. The apparent feminine form of the word *qohelet* has prompted a few interpreters to think that it refers to the collection, which is personified as the author in a manner analogous to the personification of *hokma* "Wisdom".

<sup>9</sup> E.g., סופר (scribe) in Ezra 2:55; Neh. 7:57 and פכח הזביות (binder of gazelles) in Ezra 2:57; Neh. 7:59.

meaning 'congregation' or 'community'." as Robert Gordis suggests<sup>10</sup>. Qoheleth with some sense of original verbal force seems to preserve some functional meanings.<sup>11</sup>

If Qoheleth, the Hebrew term functions as an office and is supposed as the author's name, why are the chapters one and two in the book permeated with the Solomonic shadow?<sup>12</sup> Using the melody of vanity as an intensive contrast to Solomon's richness and wisdom, the author seems to get Solomon involved on purpose. And in Jewish tradition Solomon is assumed as the author as well.<sup>13</sup> In order to know Qoheleth's *hebel* better, it becomes unavoidable to deal with the superscription of Ecc. 1:1 and royal autobiography in chapter two, which obviously appeal to Solomon, the son of king David. Gordis suggests that:

The book of Koheleth is not a pseudepigraph, which the author seeks to attribute to Solomon, like "the Wisdom of Solomon." He impersonates Solomon, only in the opening section because he wishes to prove that both wisdom and pleasure are worthless as goals in life (1:16-18; 2:1-12), and Solomon had the reputation of possessing both in superlative degree.<sup>14</sup>

In keeping with the Solomon's background, the author of Qoheleth develops his message

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<sup>10</sup> See Robert Gordis, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ibid. 203-204. Gordis recommends two meanings, speaker and assembler, according this assumption; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 315. The lexicographer follows the same route to recognize the Qoheleth as a "speaker".

<sup>12</sup> In Ecc. 1:1 Qoheleth precludes his book by these words: "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem." And the autobiographical description in chapter two seems to imply the Solomonic authorship.

<sup>13</sup> Qoheleth's importance is shown by the one of the five "scrolls" (*megilloth*) and usually being read during the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles). Traditionally the authorship appeal to Solomon because its location among the Solomonic series (Proverbs, Qoheleth, Song of Songs) and Solomonic sapient implication (1Kings 4:29-34; 10:7)

<sup>14</sup> Robert Gordis, 204.

in the special skill different from other books of the Old Testament. The vanity-oriented terminology is the characteristic Qoheleth used to the most; nevertheless, the Qoheleth's vanity really looks odd for the salvation history<sup>15</sup>, doctrines<sup>16</sup>, and even to wisdom tradition<sup>17</sup>. No wonder that Murphy comments: "history shows that the interpretation of Qoheleth's book has been very contradictory: skepticism, pessimism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and others have all had their turn in the marketing of the work for the public."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> No words about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been mentioned as a formula (Gen 28:13; 32:9; Exo 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5). No memory on Almighty God's miracles and His power over enemy are recalled.

<sup>16</sup> Choon-Leong Seow, 51. Seow said that "one may follow the traditions and say that things will turn out all right, that every one will have their just recompense, but the truth is that reality contradicts the doctrine."

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 226-239 and also *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) Von Rad claimed that Qoheleth had lost the trust that characterized traditional wisdom, one may wonder if he ultimately had lost a deeper faith than those who "trusted". He rejected the easy acceptance of the tradition, questioning it severely, but ultimately he accepted God on God's terms. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, "The Faith of Qoheleth," *Word & World* 7 (1987): 253-260.

<sup>18</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 52.

## CHAPTER II

### SEMANTIC AND ETYMOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF *HEBEL*

הבל the Hebrew word, namely *hebel* in a spelling form is simply vanity in definition. This word literally means "breath", "vapor"<sup>19</sup> and "vanity" the latinized word that most English Bible versions like to use.<sup>20</sup> The Hebrew word transferred metaphorically into being unsubstantial, worthless and meaningless by some Biblical authors<sup>21</sup> (Jeremiah, Isaiah, Proverbs, Psalms, Jonah, Job, and of course, the Book of Qoheleth) probably derives from its onomatopoeic phenomena. Seybold said:

Like corresponding terms in other languages (Gk. *Atmis, atmos*; German "*Atem, Odem*"), *hebel* is in all probability a special onomatopoeic word formation of Hebrew. This is indicated not only by its constellation of consonants and weak vowels, but also especially by its regular triliteral *qatl* structure, and by the absence of a common Semitic primary verbal root.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore the three consonants of *hebel*, namely ה, נ and ל are involved closely with the characteristic of airy stuff like vapor, breath, or puff, and its connotation like uncertainty, transience, ephemerality, and insubstantiality. The etymology of the Chinese character

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 76, and *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, 210-211. Also see TDOT, 313-320.

<sup>20</sup> Most of English Bibles like to use vanity for *hebel*, and the use of vanity in English has seemingly undergone necessary change linguistically. Vanity comes from Latin word, *vanitate* or *vanitas* that means "quality of being empty or vain" according to the explanation of *Webster's Dictionary*, while *Rogel's Thesaurus* has put vanity as conceit, egotism, affectation, pride arrogance, and so on, very negative terms with mentality. Cf. Roeget's entry on vanity in Inforpedia (Multimedia CD, Future Version Multimedia Inc., 1994).

<sup>21</sup> For example, הבל וריק in Isa. 30:7 means "Egyptians are vain and empty", namely "the help of Egyptians is worthless and useless". Or, הבל הזה מעשה in Jer.10:15 indicates idols are futile, unsubstantial or worthless. Also cf. Jer. 51:18; 16:19.

<sup>22</sup> Kiel K. Seybold, *TDOT*, 314. Seybold quotes Bertram's postulation and adds his own.

also has very strong onomatopoeic inclination.<sup>23</sup> For example, *xu kong* (虛空) that *Chinese Union Bible* used to employ to translate *hebel* in the Book of Qoheleth, and *wu* (無) which will be discussed in Wang Bi's thought later are onomatopoeic words as well.

The onomatopoeic *hebel* in a metaphoricalized process transformed into the concept of vanity (worthlessness or ephemerality) is quite common in the Old Testament and the Book of Qoheleth in particular.<sup>24</sup> Michael V. Fox contributes another metaphorical possibility on *hebel* of Qoheleth when he indicates that: "the best translation equivalent for *hebel* in Qohelet's usage is 'absurd, absurdity'."<sup>25</sup> In this article he supposes an action is morally good in principle, or at least neutral, but sometimes it does not yield what we consider proper results. Based on Fox's view, there is disparity between rational expectations and the actual consequences, and that is the reason that absurdity comes out. Fox's approach seems good but not thorough in all the verses of Qoheleth.<sup>26</sup> More all-round than Fox, Douglas B. Miller suggests the other possibility: *hebel* as symbol and says:

The author of Qoheleth adopted הבל, "vapor," as a symbol by which to represent the entirety of human experience. On the one hand, Qohelet has

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<sup>23</sup> Basically Chinese Characters come from Six Ways, namely 象形-Hieroglyph, 指事-Implication, 會意-Ideogram, 形聲-Onomatopoeic, 轉注-Trans-explanation, 假借-Loanword. Onomatopoeic words occupy more than 80% of all Chinese characters statistically.

<sup>24</sup> The metaphoric interpretation of *hebel* actually has won a couple of adherents like Douglas B. Miller, Daniel Fredericks and Kathleen A Farmer. See Miller's article: "Qohelet's Symbolic use of הבל", and Fredericks, *Coping and Farmer, Who Knows What is Good? Proverbs and Qoheleth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Michael V. Fox, "The Meaning of Hebel For Qohelet" (JBL 105/3, 1986), 409-427.

<sup>26</sup> For example, "כי כקול הסירים תחת הסיר כן שהק הכסיל ונמזה הבל" (Ecc. 7:6) "could be translated "For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity." *Hebel here* should not be absurd or absurdity, but worthless. Also cf. Ecc. 3:19; 11:8; 11:10.



taken הבל in three different directions, so that three senses, or "Referents," of the term may be discerned, each of which happens to be metaphorical. The three Referents of הבל are: "Insubstantiality," "Transience," and "Foulness."<sup>27</sup>

The onomatopoetic phenomenon in Semitic family is not too hard to find.<sup>28</sup> It is supposed that Qoheleth had received quite an impact from earlier authors of the Old Testament, Near-Eastern culture and even Greek philosophy in its post-Hebraic language according to his age.<sup>29</sup> Hummel in his isagogical introduction deduces that:

The occasion for such a recession in late times (if such it is) might be the similarity of later challenges to Yahwism under especially Greek influence to those current in earlier times. At very least, such a reissue of a newly topical work is as plausible as the once popular opinion that the writer of Qoheleth was himself heavily indebted to Stoic, Epicurean, or other Greek philosophic thought.<sup>30</sup>

Hence it is quite sure that Qoheleth's *hebel* was involved with multi-cultural backgrounds in this perspective.

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<sup>27</sup> Douglas B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic use of הבל" (JBL 117/3, 1998): 443.

<sup>28</sup>The root of Hebel in West Semitic, Seybold suggests, has far been attested elsewhere in later Aramaic dialects that were influenced partly by the OT: Jewish Aramaic (Babylonian), "warm breath or breeze, vapor"; Jewish Aramaic (the Targumim), "breath, vanity" (*haphel*, "to do vainly"); Syr. *hebla*, "dust, vanity," *habala*, "vapor"; Mandaean *habla*, *hbila*, "breath, vapor"; Nabatean *hblw*, a divine name. In South Semitic the root is authenticated as a loanword in Late Egyptian: *hbl* (הבל), "breath, wind"; so also in Ethiopic; in Old Arabic on encounter the name of a pre-Islamic deity called *hubal* that was worshipped in Mecca, then the noun *hibal*, "wind," in a poem from the sixth century A.D. Arabic also has *habalat*, "vapor", but an Akkadian equivalent of the root does not exist (probably the word *saru*, "wind, breath," has the similar role)

<sup>29</sup> In ancient Jewish tradition Solomonic authorship is most popular in interpreting Qoheleth. However, many modern scholars such as Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Young, Leupold, Harrison, Pfeiffer, Gordis, Ogden, Sheow, Seybold, Towner, Rankin and Murphy put the date of Qoheleth no more than five hundreds B.C.E., and quite a few of them vote for 250-300 B.C.E. Delitzsch gives his unfaltering terms: "If the Book of Qoheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the the Hebrew language." See his *Song of Songs and Qoheleth*, 190. Even in *Table Talk* Luther himself postulated that Solomon himself did not write the Book of Qoheleth, but it was produced by Sirach at the time of the Maccabees. -It is a sort of Talmud, compiled from many books, probably from the library of King Ptolemy Euergetes of Egypt.

<sup>30</sup> Horace D. Hummel, *The World Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 528.

## CHAPTER III

### CONTEXTUAL AND TEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF *HEBEL*

Does Qoheleth as a Jewish sage use *hebel* as other Biblical authors do? Ogden's answer for that seems positive:

It is a fact that in its occurrences outside Qoheleth, *hebel* means something equivalent to 'vanity', 'nothingness', 'vapor'. This is the sense we discover from its uses in Deu. 32:21; Isa.57:13; Jer. 8:19; 10:8; 51:18; Pro. 13:11; 21:6; Psa. 78:33, and many others; it addresses the notion of the uselessness, the powerlessness of idols, and the fruitlessness of much human endeavor.<sup>31</sup>

Basically Ogden's view is correct. However, Qoheleth's specific inclination may not have the totally same function with other books in the Old Testament. In this chapter the role of *hebel* will be presented contextually and textually in order to understand Qoheleth's nuance of *hebel* which he used to develop different from the other Scriptures to some extent. First of all, in the Old Testament there are five types categorized in all occurrences of *hebel* other than Qoheleth's. They are *hebel* 1) as a name and as descriptions of 2) words, 3) life, 4) foreign help, and 5) false gods.

#### A. *HEBEL* IN CONTEXT

##### A.1. *HEBEL* AS A NAME

(Gen. 4:2, 4, 8, 9, 25)

Surprisingly in its first occurrence, *hebel* appears as a name, namely Abel (Gen. 4:2,

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<sup>31</sup> Graham Ogden, "The Meaning of the Term Hebel" in his commentary *Qoheleth*, 17-18.

4, 8, 9, 25), the brother of Cain, and the son of Adam and Eve. Gen. 4:2 states that:

וַתִּסֶּף לְלֶדֶת אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָאֵלֶּל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה:  
(Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.)

Abel is delineated as a shepherd while his brother Cain a farmer by this paragraph. The first family of human beings was not so peaceful, because Cain killed his brother on account of sacrifice. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering but didn't respect Cain's, so Cain killed Abel due to his jealousy.

Abel's death as a righteous martyr has evoked some echo<sup>32</sup> in the New Testament.

The only comment on this murder in whole Bible is Heb. 11:4:

Πίστει πλείονα θυσίαν Ἄβελ παρὰ Κάϊν προσήνεγκεν τῷ θεῷ, δι' ἧς ἐμαρτυρήθη εἶναι δίκαιος, μαρτυροῦντος ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ δι' αὐτῆς ἀποθανῶν ἔτι λαλεῖ

(By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.)

Πίστει, namely "by faith", used here is a dative word, which functions as the motivation of the action. Accordingly Abel sacrificed on the basis of his faith to Yahweh; however the whole sacramental event ended up as a tragedy so different from what its faith-based quality ought to be. The meanings of *hebel* as a name here seems to convey a nuance of worthlessness or unbelievability.

Gen 4:25: [And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed."]  
שֵׁט (Seth) means "compensation" according to Hermeneutica: Bible Work 3.5 (Computer

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<sup>32</sup> Abel's death is respected as a witness of sin. See Mat 23:35; Luke 11:51; I Joh. 3:12.

Software, see note of Seth in Gen. 4:25). After Abel is "vain" and gone, Adam and Eve got their comfort and compensation from Yahweh. Does the name of Abel reflect Adam and Eve's feeling on the transitory nature of human life like Qoheleth (Ecc 2:16-17; 22-23; 3:19-21; 12:1-8)? Although Rankin postulates the allusion<sup>33</sup>, the question is still open.

## A.2. *HEBEL* AS DESCRIPTION OF WORTHLESS WORDS

(Job 21:34; 27:12; 35:16; Psa. 94:11; Pro. 21:6)

In the Old Testament most of the *hebel*-involved verses (Job 21:34; 27:12; 35:16; Psa. 94:11; Pro. 21:6) located in Wisdom Literature reveal falsehood (Job 21:34), ignorance (Job 27:12; 35:16), futility (Psa. 94:11), transience (Pro. 21:6) of human words. The negative meanings picture the human incomprehensibility and misunderstanding for the truth. The intended depreciation of the human words is implied to God's Words and His Will in contrast<sup>34</sup>.

Job 21:34 is quite good to explain the situation:

וְאֵיךְ תִּנְחַמְנִי הֶבֶל וְתִשׁוּבַתִּיכֶם נִשְׂאָר־מֵעַל:

(So how can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!)

The verse is the last in the second round of the conversations between Job and his three

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<sup>33</sup> O. S. Rankin, *The Book of Qoheleth*, 27. Rankin points out in the Book of Qoheleth there are echoes of the early chapters of Genesis.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Psa. 19:7-10 and Psa. 119. God's Word is perfect, trustworthy (Psa. 19:7), right, radiant (v.8), pure, sure, righteous (v.9), precious and sweet (v.10).

friends,<sup>35</sup> Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Job quite seriously criticizes his friends' views. In the chapter twenty of the Book of Job Zophar expresses a principle of retribution and concludes: "Such is the fate God allots the wicked, the heritage appointed for them by God." (Job 20:29) Here הלק and נלהת<sup>36</sup> are used to convey the strong inevitability of the event. On the contrary, what Job has observed is that the wicked prosper in society. The retribution has been turned upside down.<sup>37</sup>

The only thing Job knows about God is that he doesn't know anything, but ironically his friends seem or pretend to know everything. In keeping with *hebel*, Job's friends in Job's sight are too ignorant and false (in parallelism of Job 21:34) to know God (His Words, His judgment and His mystery). Job 27:12, 35:16 and Psa. 94:11 keep the same flavor likely but Job 35:16 is used on Job himself by his friends<sup>38</sup>.

There is another special case about worthless words. Pro. 21:6 uses a synthetic parallelism to emphasize the transitory nature of improper wealth by a lying tongue: (a fortune → fleeting vapor; by a lying tongue → of those who seek death)

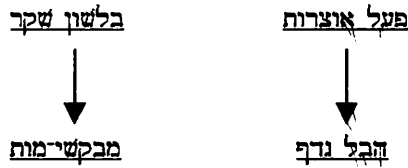
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<sup>35</sup> Job's conversation with his three friends has three rounds written in ch.4-27. Ch.4-14 is the first, ch.15-21 the second and ch.22-27 the last. The conversation always proceed from the friend's talk, then Job's reply follows.

<sup>36</sup> הלק (masculine, single, constructive) means portion, share, award and territory, while נלהת (fem, sing, con) means possession, property and heritage.

<sup>37</sup> Job argues: "Why do the wicked live and become old, Yes, become mighty in power? (Job 21:7)" and " How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does their destruction come upon them, The sorrows God distributes in His anger? (Job 21:17)" Job really don't know what's wrong with God or God's truth.

<sup>38</sup> Job 35:16: "Therefore Job opens his mouth in vain; He multiplies words without knowledge."



Here the "thought rhyme" is used rather than "word rhyme", and the first line keeps the definite relation with the second. Therefore *hebel* here is used to illustrate the words in the mouth of the wicked that seeks the wealth and is destined to death.<sup>39</sup>

### A.3 HEBEL AS DESCRIPTION OF WORTHLESS LIFE

(JOB 7:16; 9:29; PSA. 39:5, 6, 11; PSA. 62:9)

The metaphor of *hebel* in these verses implies worthless and out of control because life is beyond human knowledge.<sup>40</sup> In Job 7:26 Job loathes his life and doesn't want to live forever, for all of his misfortune comes from God.<sup>41</sup> Who can stand firm before God if He is so serious to a human being, His creature? Job concludes with כִּי־הֵבֵל יָמַי ("for my days are a *hebel*": breath) to express his life is worthless. The figurative terminology strongly displays his weak, ephemeral and worthless life psychologically. Job cried out: "Since I am already found guilty, why should I struggle in vain?" (Job 9:29)

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<sup>39</sup> What an interesting thing it is that the literal translation of NKJ puts *hebel* as "fantasy" but NIV as "vapor" literally.

<sup>40</sup> The nature of vapor is ephemeral and worthless (can't be grasped).

<sup>41</sup> God puts him under guard (Job 7:12), frighten and terrifies him (Job 7:14), gives him so much attention (Job 7:14), examines and tests him (7:18), makes him His target (Job 7:20), and doesn't forgive his sins (Job 7:21).

Here למִהֲזָה הַבֵּל אינֶנּוּ, the second half of the verse still effuses interrogatively the sense that a human being is on the scale of God and can't be allowed to do anything.

There is still a "Jeduthun's *hebel*" in the Book of Psalm. Jeduthun's psalms<sup>42</sup> occupy five sixth of *hebel* in all 150 chapters of Psalm. Jeduthun is the one of three music directors in the music ministry of Temple.<sup>43</sup> Psalm 39 made by David and sung by Jeduthun choir is a personal supplication with author's sincere confession.<sup>44</sup> Suffering from sickness, the author confesses all the judgments come from God.<sup>45</sup> All life of a human being on God's scales account as nothing.<sup>46</sup> Worthless and figurative<sup>47</sup> language and disappointment of life spread out all in this category of verses. It seems that Qoheleth's *hebel* might come from or be influenced by the impact of these verses.

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<sup>42</sup> "Jeduthun's psalms" means those sung by Jeduthun or Jeduthunites and made by Jeduthun. All of these psalms are Psa. 39, 62 and 77, including almost all the currencies of *hebel* in Psalm.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. I Chr. 16:38; 25:1-4; Neh. 11:17. David set apart some of sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals.

<sup>44</sup> According to psalmist's observation the reason everything or everyone is *hebel* is owe that the entire human life span is just nothing in the sight of God. In Psa. 39:5, 6, psalmist describes the human days as מַחֲוֹת (handbreadth) and human being just as הַבֵּל (*hebel*).

<sup>45</sup> Therefore the author said: "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you." (Psa. 39:7); "Save me from all my transgressions"(Psa. 39:8) and "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this." (Psa. 39:9).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. "Surely men of low degree are a vapor (*hebel*), Men of high degree are a lie; If they are weighed on the scales, They are altogether lighter than vapor (*hebel*).

<sup>47</sup> Figurative description except for *hebel* like "tongue, muzzle, fire, handbreadth, phantom and mouth" in Psa. 39 and "soul, rock, fortress, wall, fence, mouth, heart, refuge, scales and heart" in Psa. 62 spread over these two chapters.

#### A.4. *HEBEL* AS DESCRIPTION OF FOREIGN HELP

(Isa. 30:7; Lam. 4:17)

In the prophets *hebel* is used like uselessness or powerlessness when God's chosen people don't rely on Him but rather on other human force. Generally the visible (foreigner and idols) is better than invisible (God) in human understanding and preference. Take Isa. 30:7 for an example. King Hezekiah of Judah was trying to seek the help of Egypt due to the advice of his court officials, when strong and truculent Assyrian troops moved southbound and approached Jerusalem around the end of eighth century B.C.E. Judah decided to turn to Pharaoh for protection rather than their God. Nevertheless Egyptian help ends up to be *hebel*.<sup>48</sup> Why did Judah not seek God's help? כִּי in Isa. 30:9 is a pivotal word to lead a causal clause and give the reasons: they are a rebellious people, lying children and hear not God's Law. Similar to Isa. 30:7, *hebel* in Lam. 4:17 is used for the description of נֹרֵי לֹא יִשְׁעוּ ("a nation that can not save"), which is also related to Egypt.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> מצרים (Egyptians) is הבל (*hebel*) which means vain or useless, helpless. Yahweh called the מצרים as רהב הם שבת. רהב (*rahab*) is a sea monster in myth, described as הם שבת, namely "sitting still".

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Lam. 4 and Jer. 37:5-7.



## A.5. *HEBEL* AS DESCRIPTION OF FALSE GODS AND IDOLS

(Deu. 32:21; Psa. 31:6; Isa. 57:13; Jer. 10:3, 8, 14; 16:19; 51:18; Jon. 2:8; Zec. 10:2)

In an anthropomorphic atmosphere the negative delineation against false gods spreads over all Old Testament, especially in the prophets, because Yahweh is a jealous God<sup>50</sup>. *Hebel* as a metaphoric and figurative word is the one among the favorite terms prophets like to use concerning false gods and idols. There is the very famous parallelism in Deu. 32:21:

הֵם קִנְאוּנִי בְּלֹא־אֵל      כְּעִסּוּנִי בְּהִבְלִיהֶם

(They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols.)

The role of *hebels* includes "vain", "lifeless", "worthless", "useless" or "foolish" idols.<sup>51</sup> Prophet Jeremiah indicates the customs of Israelite people are "futile" (*hebel* is used here) in Jer. 10:3, because they cut down a tree to make idol. Isaiah gives a sarcastic voice: "When you cry out, Let your collections (idols) deliver you." In Isa. 57:13, however, רִיחַ will carry them all away and הַבֵּל will take them. How powerless and useless the idols are! *Hebel* in Old Testament<sup>52</sup> is not only used of useless idols but also, as by expression of those who trust them. Contrary to *hebel* of idols, Yahweh God acts as

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Exo. 20:5; 34:14; Deu. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Jos. 24:19; Eze. 39:25; Nah. 1:2.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, many English versions like NIV, NKJ, RSV and NRS have translated the *hebel* into idols or worthless idols (Hebrew text does not have "idol" the word). The transformation derived from the structure of synonymous parallelism. לֹא אֵל ( "who is not God" or "No God" should have a corresponding object in next line.)

<sup>52</sup> Except for verses mentioned above, see also Psa. 31:6; Jer. 10:8, 14; 16:19; 51:18; Jon. 2:8; Zec. 10:2.

omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

## B. *HEBEL* IN TEXT

Much evidences<sup>53</sup> point to the fact that the concept of *hebel* was not a new idea in Qoheleth's age, even though the *hebel* Qoheleth uses in his book seems to effuse a very different flavor. Is the role of *hebel* in Qoheleth different from the ones in other Scriptures of the Old Testament? And how does Qoheleth relate his *hebel* to other *hebels* in the Old Testament?

According to its contexts the use of *hebel* has two models. *Hebel* in sapient tradition means the nature of a thing is ephemeral, transient, worthless or unreliable, and most occurrences of them happen in sapient works and are used for the evaluation of human life and words<sup>54</sup>. The other tradition about *hebel* spread over prophetic works (only two occurrences happen to Deu. and Psa.) and points out the human stupidity to rely on foreign help and gods. *Hebel* is related to falsehood and delusion in this tradition. Both traditions provide some similarity when applied as "worthlessness" and "unreliability". But there exist three differences between these two:

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<sup>53</sup> Egyptian, Syrian, Mandaean, Nabatean, Ethiopic, Akkadian and Arabic has the similar idea etymologically and semantically. There is even also the book *A Dialogue about Human Misery* called "The Babylonian Qoheleth". Cf. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) and also W. Sibley Towner, *The Book of Qoheleth: Introduction, Commentary, And Reflections* (The New Interpreter's Bible), 274.

<sup>54</sup> The first three parts of "*hebel* in context is categorized in this tradition. However, strictly to say, the *Hebel*'s use as a name is still not clear and *hebel* as worthless words is also close to false-orientation in the prophetic tradition which will be given later. *Hebel* as a name (always translated "in vain") could be unreliable, injudicious or worthless, but can't say they are false like "false idol".

- 1) Sapiient tradition always keeps something unknown and unintelligible, but the prophetic doesn't. Prophetic tradition proclaims what is right and true. (subjectiveness vs. objectiveness)
- 2) Sapiient tradition emphasizes the ephemerality or partial knowledge for the truth, but the prophetic pictures absolute falsehood as an utterly negative response.
- 3) Sapiient tradition relates to human experience and sentiment in life, while the prophetic reflects God's Law and Israel history.

Obviously the use of *hebel* in Qoheleth seems more sapiient-oriented than prophetic-oriented. To be sure, it would be proven only after all the 38 occurrences of *hebel* in Qoheleth are studied in detail.

Inasmuch as M. Fox has categorized the various uses of הבל in Qoheleth<sup>55</sup>, all the uses of *hebel* in Qoheleth will be presented by five dimensions, namely the thematic role, mentality, human wisdom, human existence, and absurd fate. These verses with *hebel* will be underlined if categorized twice in different assortments (e.g., 2:1; 4:8), and put into a quadrate pane if thrice (e.g., 2:17; 2:23)

### B.1. *HEBEL* AS THE THEMATIC ROLE

(1:2; 1:14; 12:8)

הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים הַפֶּל הַבֵּל:

["Vanity of vanities," says the Qoheleth; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.](Ecc. 1:2)

The first sentence except for editorial 1:1 brings out the first question: "says the Qoheleth" suggests a "third person". The angle of the third person is obviously at odds

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. M. V. Fox., *Qohelet*, 38-44 and R. E. Murphy, introduction in *Qoheleth*, lix. *Hebel* the term is applied to toil and its products (e.g., 2:11; 6:2), joy (2:1; 6:9), wisdom (e.g., 2:15), speech (e.g., 6:11), human existence (e.g., 2:12), death ("days of darkness," 11:8), injustice in retribution (8:14).

with the terms usually used in Qoheleth, such as " I " (אני)<sup>56</sup>, " I saw" (ראיתי)<sup>57</sup> and " I knew " (ידעתי).<sup>58</sup> Timothy Polk observes that: "The argument from the third person breaks down because the 'says Qohelet' need not have any bearing on how the material in which it is found relates to the context."<sup>59</sup> The challenge is not so hard to deal with. First of all, there exist thirty occurrences of *hebel* through 1:2 to 12:8, and these uses of *hebel* do not seem to contradict one another. Secondly, 1:2 moves into 1:3f with great ease and cogency.<sup>60</sup> Last of all, 1:2 functions as thematic role as 12:8 to unify the thought of whole book.

"The 'says Qohelet' in 12:8 could be accounted for by considering the whole verse a duplicate of 1:2 and as 1:2 belongs to the third person superscription, 12:8 would go with the third person epilogue 12:9-10,"<sup>61</sup> thus emphasizes Polk thus.

Qoheleth, the book, is destined for melancholic color by its pessimistic threshold of *hebel*. The idiomatic repetition and *hebelim*, the plural forms of *hebel* serve as superlative function (Murphy, Seow, Rankin, Towner) as " king of kings" is the supreme

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<sup>56</sup> Total 19 times. It appears in Ecc. 1:12, 16; 2:1, 11, 12, 15, 18, 20; 3:17, 18; 4:1, 2, 4, 7, 8; 7:25, 26; 8:2, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Total 14 times. The word appears in Ecc. 1:14; 2:24; 3:10, 16; 4:15; 5:12, 17; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10; 9:13; 10:5, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Total 3 times. It appears in Ecc. 1:17; 3:12, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Timothy Polk, "The Wisdom of Irony: A Study of Hebel and Its Relation to Joy and the Fear of God." (SBTh 6, 1976): 6.

<sup>60</sup> Over and over in Qoheleth *hebel* occurs in the closest conjunction with the concept "toil" (מַלְאכָה) in order that the author can emphasize the consistent failure of human endeavors to bring in "profit" (רִיבִי) or to effect advantageous change of any sort. Without v.2, the unit of vv.3-11 is sure not to show up its characteristic thematic marker aphoristically.

<sup>61</sup> See Timothy Polk, 5.

king (Dan. 2:37; Ezra 7:12).<sup>62</sup> Hebrew like Chinese has neither a comparative nor superlative so that it needs to find some way to express the concept of "something extreme". So "vanity of vanities", namely "extreme vanity" is used to reflect extreme response for human life physiologically and mentally. Following the sapient tradition of *hebel*, the embracing terms as many scholars and English Bibles suggest might connote ephemerality, absurdity, meaninglessness, worthlessness, futility and so forth and is used to pave the way for coming words. Luther said that:

With these opening words he (the preacher) announces the theme and argument of the entire book, what he wants to talk about. He says that he is speaking about the highest and greatest of vanities, that men are extremely vain in all their endeavors, because they are not content with the things that are in the present; because they neither use these nor are able to enjoy the things that are in the future, they turn even the best of things to misery and vanity by their own fault and not by that of the things themselves. That this is the summary, you will easily see from the following, where you find him speaking about vanity, which men have in their own labors and endeavors, not in the things themselves.<sup>63</sup>

Did the opening words in the beginning and the editorial epilogue in the end, which seem odd to the atmosphere in the Book of Qoheleth, make the book acceptable more easily in sapient and Torah tradition?<sup>64</sup> Qoheleth really experienced a hardship in the process of canonization on base its characteristic of *hebel*. It is very possible that the book was adopted into canons because of its Solomonic authorship in the editorial

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<sup>62</sup> The juxtaposition of the singular and the plural of the same noun is the standard way in Hebrew to express the superlative. E.g., "servant of servants" = "abject servant" (Gen. 9:25), and "god of gods" = "highest god" (Deu. 10:17). Cf. Choon-Leong Seow, 101.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works Vol. 15: Note on Qoheleth*, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 13.

<sup>64</sup> Proverb with basic doctrine of "the fear of God" is the best representative of Wisdom tradition while Torah always bring Israelites back to God's Commandment and salvation history. But Qoheleth seems at odd of both.

prologue (1:1) and divine encouragement in the editorial epilogue (12:9-14). The Solomonic authorship is very reasonable deduction from the position of the Book of Qoheleth between Proverbs and Canticles<sup>65</sup>, both of which are specifically, attributed to Solomon in the superscriptions of text itself.<sup>66</sup> The thematic terms of *hebel* seem distant from Biblical tradition, but the God-oriented intent<sup>67</sup> help to save the whole thing back regardless of controversies caused later.<sup>68</sup>

The last verse (12:8) of Qoheleth except for the editorial epilogue (12:9-14) concludes the book with nearly a whole copy of the opening verse, which serves obviously as a conclusion to the message of Qoheleth to echo Ecc.1:2. Deane contributed his view:

Ending with the same burden, with which it began - nothingness of earthly things. Koheleth has laboured to show this, through all circumstances and conditions, and he can only re-echo his melancholy refrain.<sup>69</sup>

The reason that Ecc. 1:14 is included in this category is its following and intensifying the thematic thought of 1:2 and using הכל (*hakol*, the everything). The third

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<sup>65</sup> It is observed that in a old Tannaitic source, the order of the Kethubim is given as Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Qoheleth, Canticles, Lamentations, Daniel, Ester, Ezra and Chronicles.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Can. 1:1; Pro.1:1; 10:1; 25:1.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (12:13) and "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (12:14)

<sup>68</sup> Gordis indicates that: The subject of its canonicity was one of the classic controversies between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, but ultimately the more liberal view of the Hillelites, the Koheleth "defiles the hands ritually," that is, is canonical, prevailed. Yet even after its position in Scripture was officially recognized at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C. E., discussions as to its status continued. Cf. Robert Gordis, 41.

<sup>69</sup> W. J. Deane Proverbs, *Qoheleth, Song of Solomon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950) 303.

person use of Qoheleth (1:2) is transformed into first person in vv.12-14. The first person and *תחת השמש* (under the sun) the phrase employed here is supposed to reinforce the inclusiveness and unavailability which has been given by superlative form (vanity of vanities).

### B.2. *HEBEL* RELATED TO MENTALITY

(2:1, 17, 23; 4:4; 4:8; 4:16; 5:10; 6:9; 7:6; 9:9; 11:8; 11:10)

Many scenarios of *hebel* flow out from the deep heart of Qoheleth with many kinds of psychological and mental response. The chart below will help to know what kind of mental response to human life gets involved with Qoheleth's *hebel*. *Hebel*, the mental word, when mixed with other mental contexts, will bring out some different positive or negative results. Take Ecc. 2:1 for example. Qoheleth thought in his heart that "come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." However, this "positive" mentality ends up as a "negative" *hebel* (P→N mode). It is so natural in Ecc. 2:17 that the hatred (negative mentality) of the work under the sun brings about the other negative mentality (*hebel*, N→N mode). Ecc. 9:9 reminds us that "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless (*hebel*) life that God has given you under the sun." The cherishing manner, a positive mentality is triggered by the negative truth, *hebel*-like life (N→P mode). The mental response on *hebel* can be surveyed by this chart:

Verse	Hebrew	Mentality	Positive \ Negative
2:1	טוב / שמחה	Mirth; Pleasure	P→N

2:17	רע / שנא	Hate; Distress(or Grief)	N→N
2:23	לא־שכב / כעס / מכאב	Sorrow (or Pain); Vexation (or Anger); Restlessness	P→N
4:4	קנאה	Jealousy	P→N
4:8	לא־חשבע / עמלו	Toil (or labor); Discontent	P→N
4:16	שמע	Rejoice	P→N
5:10	לא אהב / לא־ישבע	Discontent; Rapacity	N→N
6:9	נפש	Desire	P→N
7:6	שחק	Laughter	N→N
9:9	עמל / אהבת	Love; (Cherishing)	N→P
11:8	ישמה	Rejoicing; (Cherishing)	N→P
11:10	והעבר רעה / כעס	Sorrow-removing; Evil-passing; (Forbearance or Self-control)	N→P

According to this chart Qoheleth's mental reflection is not so hard to detect when his *hebel* is used. First of all, in Ecc. 2:17; 5:10; 7:6 the negative motivation that keeps apace with its equivalent result (N→N)<sup>70</sup> reflects his feeling of absurdity in the context. In the model of "Positive→Negative" the Qoheleth's style of *hebel* depends upon his commitment with the principle of retribution and his logic (mirth, pleasure, and success in ruling) but end up negative results at last (vanity, vexation, jealousy, and discontent). All of his strenuous efforts just come out for nothing, which is beyond his logic. Even in his thinking, a man should deserve something good according to what he has toiled and worked in the principle of retribution, but it ends up negatively (vanity, vexation, jealousy, Positive→Negative). So the mental response is based strongly on his scrutiny of retribution in human life. Doubtlessly the mentality infused with *hebel* and other mental terminology make Qoheleth categorized into pessimism, or cynicism, the theories related

<sup>70</sup> Qoheleth's hate of life (N) (2:17) derives from his observation that the wise dies as a fool (N)(2:14-16). Therefore he is upset of the absurdity. It is natural that the hate of his life (for the absurdity), the negative motive, brings out the feeling of vanity, the negative result. Similar cases like 5:10 (Discontent [N] v.s. rapacity [N]) ; 7:6 (laughter of a fool [N] v.s. vanity [N] ).



to mentality.

The last three items related to *hebel* in the chart seems to turn his usual mentality upside down. Instead of the abhorrence of life he encourages a teaching of appreciation. The *hebel*-oriented attitude of the love of marriage (9:9), rejoicing (11:8) and self-control (11:10) is built on the concept of counter-*hebel*.<sup>71</sup> In this N→P model the encouragement to cherish makes Qoheleth assumed as an optimism (in pursuit of happiness). The negative sense of *hebel* turns out a positive attitude, which also provides a clue for the ending message of divine encouragement (God's judgment, the fear of God).<sup>72</sup>

### B.3. HEBEL RELATED TO HUMAN WISDOM

(2:15, 17, 19, 21; 26; 4:16; 7:6)

Wisdom itself is always one of the key topics in sapient tradition; nevertheless, Job and Qoheleth seem at odds with this tradition. The main concern of wisdom focus on the fear of the Lord ( יראת יהוה ) which is the beginning of wisdom.<sup>73</sup> The suffering of the righteous Job has brought many troubles and controversies not only for Job and his four friends but also for innumerable Christians and theologians to come. As for Qoheleth, we can't find the exact term "the fear of Yahweh" in his whole work except for

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<sup>71</sup> Counter-*hebel* indicates that a man should cherish what he has and do his best to improve his life by getting rid of the evil.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Ecc. 11:9, 10 and 12:13, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Pro. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Psa. 111:10; Job 28:28.

the similar one, the editorial ending of the last chapter: "fear (imperative tense) God and keep his commandments for this is man's all."(12:13)

Although the name of Yahweh and its relevance with wisdom are not mentioned, we can't say Qoheleth ignores the traditional concern. There are still 51 times of *hakam* (חכם), the wise (or wisdom) and 18 times of fool, *kesil* (קסיל) mentioned in Ecc. 1:4-12:7.<sup>74</sup> Qoheleth said: "To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." (Ecc. 2:26) Apparently there should be the tradition that human wisdom comes from God,<sup>75</sup> however, the kind of wisdom seems unreal to Qoheleth himself.

Qoheleth, the sage challenges the authority of wisdom he had received and cries the question (Ecc. 2:15):

וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי כְּמִקְרָהּ הַכְּסִיל גַּם אֲנִי יִקְרַנִּי וְלִמָּחָה חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אִזּוּ יוֹתֵר  
וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי כְּמִקְרָהּ וְדַבַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי שְׁנִים־זֶה הַכֹּל:

(Then I thought in my heart, "That fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?")

Following the observation of Ecc. 2:13, 14, the question becomes so penetrating. אני וראיתי, "but I see" in Ecc. 2:13, which play the similar role like אני נגם, is an emphatic expression), "but I know", brings out two quotations (v.13, 14)<sup>76</sup> which are just

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<sup>74</sup> O. Loretz, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 167-180 and R. Murphy, *Qoheleth* (Dallas: Word Books, 1992) 26-32.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Exo. 28:3; 31:3, 6; 35:31, 35; 36:1, 2; Deu. 34:9; 1Kings 3:9, 11, 12, 28; 4:29; 10:24; 1Chr. 22:12; 2Chr. 1:10, 11, 12; 2:12; 9:23; Ezr. 7:25; Job 11:6; 12:13, 16; 39:17; Pro. 2:6, 7; Isa. 11:2 Dan. 1:17; 2:20, 21,23; 5:11; 9:22.

<sup>76</sup> About quotation, see Gordis' *Koheleth*, XII., "The Style-His Use of Quotation", 95-108.

the representatives of wisdom tradition: wisdom is superior to stupidity, and the wise to the fool. But in 2:15b the uses of the interrogative "למה" (why, for what) display that the reality run counter to these teaching. The wise and the fool will come to the same result, namely "death", so to be wise is not better than to be a fool (Ecc. 2:16). Barton indicates:

The fact that death buries the wise and the foolish in the same oblivion, makes Qoheleth pronounce great wisdom vanity, in spite of the fact that he has just seen in wisdom the advantage of reality.<sup>77</sup>

Due to the helplessness of this situation Qoheleth starts to hate his life (v.17) and everything becomes distressing, and no more than *hebel* (v. 15, 17, 19, 21). According to Gordis' observation, the *hebel* with the fear of God means "to be conscious of His limitless and unfathomable power and to be aware of the uncertainty and brevity of life."<sup>78</sup>

The *hebel*-oriented terminology of Qoheleth on wisdom was interpreted historically but not to the point. The hyperbolic story (Ecc. 4:13-16) expressed by two kings has caused some conjectural possible pairs: Abraham and Nimrod (Targum makes the contrast that way), Joseph and Pharaoh (Luther, Towner and the Midrash tradition), David and Saul, Cyrus and Astyages (Delitzsch), the high priest Onias and his nephew Joseph, Herod the Great and his son Alexander (Graetz), Ptolemy Philipator and Antiochus III (Hitzig), Antiochus Epiphanes and Demetrius I (Winckler), Antiochus

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<sup>77</sup> George Aaron Barton, *The Book of Qoheleth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 82.

<sup>78</sup> Gordis, Robert, *Koheleth: the Man and His World: a Study of Qoheleth* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 247.

Epiphanes and Alexander Balas (Haupt).<sup>79</sup> However the historical assumption is not sufficient and relevant with the point in these verses. Murphy put the tantalizing aspect of 4:7-16 as the contrast between 2:18-22 and complaint in 4:7-8, so he postulates that: "the possibility that a fool inherits the fruit of one's toil. There is no real contradiction; both are instances of vanity."<sup>80</sup> Seow approach the semi-historical event the other way with these words: "Qohelet is observing a reality of life: people will always gravitate toward the new underdog-turned-hero. Every generation will have its new hero."<sup>81</sup> Murphy has done the better job than Seow here. The pivotal function of the event is to serve as instance to intensify helplessness and worthlessness of human wisdom, which is only understood syntactically but not sociologically (Seow) or historically. That is why the idiomatic phrase "הבל ורעיון רוח" (vanity and grasping for the wind) of Qoheleth's favorite is arranged in the ending of chapter four.

Another *hebel* quoted in context of human wisdom is located in chapter seven. The metaphor expressed by a synthetic parallelism: "For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is *hebel*." (7:6) The "שחק הכסיל" (the laughter of the fool) compared with "כקול הסירים" (crackling of thorns) is not the main concern of the verse but its ridiculous result caused by unwise choice. There is the "כי" (*ky*, literally "because") which followed by the metaphor and functions with the other "כי" in v.7 as a conclusion for former verses. The protasis provides a cause for former

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. G. A. Barton, 113-122.

<sup>80</sup> See Murphy, *Qoheleth* (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 43.

deduction. The anthropological wisdom focuses on the earthly stuff, such as honor, life and death, human feeling, sympathy (vv. 1-7) once they were treated improper and *hebel* would come.<sup>82</sup>

What is interesting is that *hebel* in 7:6 is echoed strongly and pessimistically by v.14 regardless of the approval and encouragement of wisdom in vv.1-12. "Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?" (v.14) The human wisdom becomes useless because everything is in God's control and beyond human understanding. Accordingly Von Rad suggests three basic insights for Qoheleth:

1. A thorough, rational examination of life is unable to find any satisfactory meaning; everything is "vanity";
2. God determines every event;
3. Man is unable to discern these decrees, the "works of God" in the world.<sup>83</sup>

Qoheleth himself testifies to the idea. In v.14 Qoheleth use a preposition "לעמית" (juxtaposition) to indicate that God presents good (טוב) and evil (רע) in front of man so that he could not find out (שלא ימצא) anything behind him.

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<sup>81</sup> See C. L. Seow, *Qoheleth*, 191.

<sup>82</sup> There is a "גם" (*gam*, denoting addition and it's literal meaning is "also" or "moreover, see BDB pp.168-69) in the phrase "וגם זה הבל" (This also is vanity). So the conclusion of Hebel is inclusive of v.4 and v.5 and play a role in sequent "כי" (v.3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13) which used for the indication of difference between the wise and the fool. The 7:1-14 looks like a entire unit according to MT.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 226-237.

#### B.4. *HEBEL* RELATED TO HUMAN EXISTENCE

(2:17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 6:2, 9, 11, 12; 7:15; 8:10, 14; 9:9; 11:8; 11:10)

Qoheleth's style of *hebel* on human existence is found in some verses like Ecc. 6:1-12 (4 occurrences in chapter six). First of all, in 6:2 the earthly riches, wealth and honor a man has will be useless before the death. This is *hebel*. Without life everything becomes nonsense. The *hebel* in 6:9 follows the two questions about the indifferentiation of the wise to the fool and the cleverness of the poor in 6:8, so it functions as a response for human existence. O. S. Rankin observes the meaning of 6:9 this way: "the meaning is that satisfaction is better than perpetual longing, than the wandering of desire."<sup>84</sup> The observation is good but not appropriate, for basically the verse is adduced for intensifying the concept of ephemerality and worthlessness on human existence (cf. 6:1-6). On the balance of death there is no advantage (יִתְרָה) in everything human (v.11).<sup>85</sup> Human life is just like *hebel* or shadow (צֶלַל) passing away (v.12). Presented are the three serious questions by Qoheleth here (vv.10-12): "what is the advantage for man," "who know what is good for man in life?" and "what will happen after human life?" The three existential questions picture how Qoheleth's *hebel* is used and felt in his book. M. V. Fox echoes these questions impressively with these words:

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<sup>84</sup> See *Interpreter's Bible* (old version), 62.

<sup>85</sup> Qoheleth use the phrase "מה־יִתְרָה לְאָדָם" (what is the advantage or superiority for man?) interrogatively to annotate Hebel.

"Life is unchangeable; therefore it is pointless to argue with God. And the future is hidden."<sup>86</sup>

The dense use of *hebel* in chapter two leads to a culmination in Qoheleth. There are 8 occurrences of *hebels* used in just 24 verses, more than one fifth of 38 times of all *hebels* in Qoheleth. The four *hebels* related to human existence in Ecc. 2:17, 19, 21, 26 are also mentioned in the discussion of human wisdom once, while the two of existential *hebels* in 2:17, 23 are also overlapped in the category of mentality. Four of these eight occurrences in chapter two are included in the last section of this part (*hebel* related to absurd fate). The multi-overlapped use of *hebels* here just reveal the complex of strong melancholy in Qoheleth's inner world, which sheds light on mentality, wisdom, existence and incomprehensive fate of human being. Accordingly the quantity of *hebel*-use is a phenomenon of the complicated complex of Qoheleth: everything is *hebel* (ephemerality, worthlessness, uselessness, out of control) on the balance of death, namely the most serious challenge of human existence.

The autobiographic delineation in 2:25 gives an imperial picture that no body could enjoy better than Qoheleth himself (for who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than he). He is good (טוב) enough before (לפני) God to deserve all the work of gathering (לאסוף) and collecting (לכנס)(v.26). Unfortunately all of these will belong to others and come to *hebel* once he has died (also cf. v. 17, 21, 23). No matter how good or righteous a man is, the outcome of his life is not guaranteed, for Qoheleth had seen

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 223.

(רִאיהוּ) many things turned upside down.<sup>87</sup> The helplessness and worthlessness of life is revealed wholly by the pictorial word, *hebel*. The pessimistic and fatalistic nuance of Qoheleth exists in this feeling.

Struggling with confusion, the Israel sage tries to appeal to the wisdom tradition for help. The protagonist with the terminology of the first person employs an emphatic conjunction word "נִם" (literally, even or surely)<sup>88</sup> to express the truth he used to insist: "I surely know it will be well with those who fear God." (8:12) And "but it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God." (8:13) The phrase or implication of "the fear of God" also appears in 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 12:13. Nevertheless, as it is mentioned once the wisdom tradition can't solve his problem.<sup>89</sup> Between expectation (by fear of God) and disappointment (*hebel*) Qoheleth keep on wrestling and fighting.

In his inner world he need to cherish what he deserves as his portion (חֵלֶק, also can be "share", "territory", "award" and so on)<sup>90</sup> for fear that the days of vanity would come

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<sup>87</sup> Both Ecc. 7:15 and 8:10 use "רִאיהוּ" (I saw or I have seen). The Hebrew word infuses the sense that personal impression or insight is involved. What disturbs Qoheleth's heart is the incomprehensible phenomena that the just perishes in his righteousness and the wicked prolongs his life in his wickedness (7:15, also 8:14). As unacceptable as 7:15 is that the wicked is buried without any trouble (8:10).

<sup>88</sup> נִם, even, here is used to stress on a particular word. See BDB p.169 and my footnote 76.

<sup>89</sup> Absurdity and injustice in society and history always make him disappointed, so in the beginning and ending except for editorial prologue and epilogue he only gives the inclusive phrase, "vanity of vanities, everything is vanity".

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Ogden appendix article in his *Qoheleth*, 22-26. Ogden indicates: "As Qoheleth presents it, the invitation to enjoyment appears paradoxical because of his view of human experience; he urges enjoyment in a life-setting remarkable for its frustrations and unanswered questions." (p.153) The change of his attitude can not be called "paradoxical" for the earthly enjoyment is more tangible and fetchable than the enigmatic fate in God's hand. The impetus of desiring enjoyment is very natural when under mountain-like vanity and threat in human life. I would like to call this reflection of mentality "to cherish".



(9:9; 11:8). It is difficult to tell from 9:9 and 11:8 whether Qohelet advocates hedonism or a strong, vibrant marital relationship or promiscuity. Longman postulates that:

The commands to enjoy life continue, but with a steady reminder that this is not the ultimate solution to the question of meaning. Specifically, Qohelet tells his listeners to enjoy life in the company of their wives. That is their reward, though life is ultimately meaningless.<sup>91</sup>

Due to this sense and encouragement Qoheleth is always misunderstood as an optimist or an Epicurean; nevertheless, he does not conclude that way after surveying the whole book. The encouragement of enjoyment is the only positive way he could choose in his *hebel*-like life. Furthermore he also encourage youth to do self-control against the vanity caused by evil (רעה) (11:10), for God will judge all (11:9). It is an existential war with vanity. Qoheleth never surrenders to fight for his existence. After the study of *hebel* related to human existence, the Qoheleth's style of *hebel* will be observed in absurd fate.

#### B.5. *HEBEL* RELATED TO ABSURD FATE

(2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23; 3:19; 4: 7, 8; 4:16; 6:2; 6:11, 12; 7:15; 8:10, 14)

Many occurrences of *hebel* happen in Qoheleth's response for absurd fate.

Following Webster's definition of "absurd"<sup>92</sup>, we find out many *hebel* uses in Qoheleth are very involved with these. No wonder that Michael V. Fox in his article "The

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<sup>91</sup> See Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Qoheleth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 230.

<sup>92</sup> *Webster's Dictionary* defines "absurd" as 1. ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous; 2. having no rational or orderly relationship to human life, lacking order or value; 3. the state or condition in which human beings exist in an irrational and meaningless universe and in which human life has no ultimate meaning.

Meaning of *hebel* for Qohelet" gives the idea:

The best translation equivalent for *hebel* in Qohelet's usage is 'absurd, absurdity,' ... The essence of the absurd is a disparity between two terms that are supposed to be joined by a link of harmony or causality but are, in fact, disjunct.<sup>93</sup>

The observation helps to know a huge distinction exists between the expectation and the fact. The fate Qoheleth has observed is so absurd that everything becomes *hebel*.

Below is given the chart prepared and arranged by this author, including all the verses in Qoheleth relating to absurd fate and *hebel*:

Verses	Expectation	Fact	Result
2:1	Joy→Enjoyment	Being foolish	<i>hebel</i>
2:11	Work and Toil→Reward	No gain	
2:15, 17	The Fool→Death	All will meet Death	
2:19, 21, 23	I have labored → I control.	Another one who does not labor controls.	
3:19	Death→Man could be better than beast.	The same with man and beast	
4:4	Labor and Achievement→ Neighbor's Admiration and Appreciation	Neighbor's Jealousy	
4:7, 8	My Toil → I, my son or my brother enjoy.	Nobody enjoy.	
4:16	Wise young king with great achievement→ People's favor	People end up displeasing him.	
6:2	God's Blessing→The one who receives enjoys.	The one other than he enjoys.	
6:11, 12	The solid and positive things multiplied.→ Man benefits.	Meaningless things and days multiplied (No benefit).	
7:15; 8:10; 8:14	The righteous do righteousness and the wicked do wickedness→Receiving life and death they deserve.	The righteous die in their righteousness and the life of the wicked is prolonged.	

Browsing the chart above, the result of *hebel* is used to describe something missing from the original expectation. What is the original expectation? The righteous and the

<sup>93</sup> See M. V. Fox, "The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet" (JBL, 105/3, 1986): 409.

wicked should be rewarded appropriately. The human affairs of life should happen and end in their order. Everything on earth should be in control. However, in fact, what Qoheleth has observed disappoints him. Everything runs counter to the way it should. Here we can feel the disequilibrium between the principle of retribution and the inept fact. The feeling and judgment for human life becomes concrete into this metaphorical term, *hebel*. Seow contributes his opinion:

For Qohelet, the realities of the world are not easy to grasp. They are contradictory and incomprehensible. Everything is ephemeral and illusory - like *hebel* ("vanity"),... Moreover, Qohelet seems to make the point that any apparent orderliness of the world is only an impression, for upon closer examination one finds evidence to the contrary.<sup>94</sup>

The Book of Qoheleth may be considered as cynicism, skepticism or fatalism, for throughout the whole book thus the kind of thought flows unceasingly.

Frankly to say, as a Jewish sage, how can Qoheleth confine himself in this *hebel*-like absurd fate regardless abundant heritage of God's Law and salvation history in past?

In his book *God at Work in Israel* Von Rad comments:

Precisely a mental attitude like that of post-Solomonic wisdom, which has become aware of its rational powers and organizational opportunities and has ventured so close to the limits of the human realm, is reticent with respect to the ultimate ground of the world. There exists, I believe, a very close connection between that almost hybrid apprehension and traversal and interpretation for the world on the one hand, and on the other, that knowledge about the absolute limit that exists for human discovery, where it concerns the divine ground of the world. The skepticism of the preacher in Qoheleth is rooted in the distant past!<sup>95</sup>

Indeed Qoheleth has projected his thought in the distant past, which the history cannot

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<sup>94</sup> See, Seow, *Qoheleth*, 42.

<sup>95</sup> Von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, 34.

limit but only God is able to control. The distant view for life order is not only planted in his heart but also rooted in the hearts of people around the world. The cry for vanity in life is the same both in the West and the East, with Christian and non-Christian. It was given to human beings as general and mysterious revelation while the whole universe was created in the beginning by Almighty God. However, this God found this way will be the terrible God, the hidden and unknown God as Qoheleth has shown by his *hebel*.

## CHAPTER IV

### RHETORICAL AND FORMAL UNDERSTANDING OF *HEBEL*

In his book *Qoheleth* displays high-qualified rhetorical skill with *hebel*. Robert P. Warren, the famous rhetorical scholar, has defined so-called "rhetoric" this way: "Rhetoric, more specifically, is the art of using language effectively."<sup>96</sup> To understand more the concept of *Qoheleth's hebel*, it is necessary for us to get into his effective and impressive language rhetorically. The contextual and textual relevance has been approached in the previous analysis and what is following will be the understanding of *hebel* by means of some phrases, words, structure, coherence, and the atmosphere built by the Israel sage, an aesthetic genius.

#### A. PHRASES

(1:14; 2:11, 17, 21, 26; 4:4, 8, 16; 6:2, 9)

*Qoheleth's hebel* usually accompanies some idiomatic phrases. The phrases used with *hebel* in *Qoheleth* are: chasing after the wind (רעהו רוח) in 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9 and (רוח רעיון) in 1:17; 2:22; 4:16; great evil (רעה רבה) in 2:21, evil business (ענין רע) in 4:8, and evil disease (חלי רע) in 6:2. These phrases help the sage to build the thought parallelism in order that his *hebel* is more penetrating.

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<sup>96</sup> Robert P. Warren, *Modern Rhetoric* (the fourth edition, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1979), 5.

" רעות רוח " and " רוח רעיון " are the Qoheleth's favorite in the atmosphere of ubiquitous *hebel*. The רוח as oft-quoted topic in sapient tradition plays an important role to back the idea of *hebel*.<sup>97</sup> The translation of רוח has two possible ways namely wind and spirit.<sup>98</sup> Since the phrase occurs frequently in close proximity with *hebel*, quite a few scholars have considered it an explanatory of *hebel*. W. E. Staple derives the words "רעות" and "רעיון" from a root "רעה".<sup>99</sup> The Aramaic cognate of this word means "to take pleasure (in)," "to desire," and is related to the Hebrew "חשד". This derivation seems to have been in the mind of the authors of the LXX when they translated the phrase "רוח רעות" by *προαίρεσις πνεύματος*, which can only mean "choice (will or purpose) of the spirit." With this the Arabic substantially agrees. The Syriac reads *tropho druho*, "vexation of spirit" and Targum follows the Syriac by "a breaking of spirit." The Vulgate Bible supports spirit as well.<sup>100</sup> The important versions help to prove רוח as a subjective genitive and its meaning of "spirit". Therefore in Staple's interpretation<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For examples, many cases about "wind" displayed as inheriting wind (Prov. 11:29), restraining wind (Prov. 27:16), gathering wind (Prov. 30:4), windy knowledge (Job 15:2), and windy words (Job 16:3; cf. 6:26; 8:2). This רוח used indicates there something futile or meaningless.

<sup>98</sup> In most modern English Bible versions " רעות רוח " and " רוח רעיון " the two phrases are always translated into "a chasing after wind" (NIV/1973, NRS/1989), "grasping for the wind" (NKJ/1982), "a striving after wind" (ASV/1901, RSV/1952), while the early English versions prefer "spirit", the other meaning of רוח, to its literal approach "wind". The phrase was translated as "vexation of spirit" (Luther/1526, KJV/1611, YLT/1862, WEB/1833) before the twentieth century.

<sup>99</sup> See W. E. Staple, "The Vanity of Qoheleth" (JNES, April 1943): 96-98.

<sup>100</sup> The Vulgate renders the phrase in five different ways: *afflictio spiritus* (1:14), *afflictione anime* (2:11), *cassa sollicitudo* (2:26), *cura superflua* (4:4), and *praesumptio spiritus* (6:9).

<sup>101</sup> W. E. Staples, "The Vanity of Qoheleth", 97. Staple indicates that: "When, therefore, our author (Qoheleth) says that a thing is *hebel*, *reuth ruah*, he wishes to infer that that thing is incomprehensible in so far as reason is concerned but that, in spite of that, man must continue to strive, driven on by his *ruah*. The terms, therefore, are not synonymous at all; they describe the same thing from two different points of view."

*hebel* and רוח mean the same, incomprehensible from these two different points of view.

To sum up, the phrase רעות רוח might function as the supplementary for *hebel* in the meaning of either spirit (synthetical parallelism) or wind (synonymous parallelism).

The other phrases like great evil (רעה רבה) in 2:21, evil task (ענין רע) in 4:8, and evil disease (חלי רע) in 6:2 are not so common but function like רעות רוח as well. Following 2:18-19, v.21 stresses on the helplessness of toil and wisdom in the matter of inheritance, therefore the injustice happens. The "evil task" of Ecc. 4:8 accompanied with *hebel* indicates destined sorrow under the unlimited toil. The reason the task is evil is that the payer could not enjoy what he had paid for. The evil disease (חלי רע) in 6:2 is made in contrast to 5:18 (English version, v.19). In 5:18 God gives people "wealth and possessions" and "allows them to eat of it", but in 6:2 God does not allow them to eat of it. It is the same God who allows and prohibits so that man cannot understand and reflect appropriately. The incomprehensibility makes Qoheleth feel evil and *hebel*. In other words, the three phrases with three "evils" try to express that human life is out of human control and God controls everything. The indictments of "evils" also intend to present embarrassment for the traditional view.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 91. According to Ogden's postulations the wisdom tradition, as reflected in statements such as Prov. 13:12, 25 as well as those in the deuteronomic stream (e.g., Deu. 8:10), held firmly to the notion that material success, tangible possessions, evidenced divine blessing which was the consequence of living in a manner pleasing to God. They took literally the view that God blessed in material ways those who obeyed him, and by logical extension determined that one who had much of this world's goods must be the one who pleased God. It was therefore axiomatic that by adhering to the sage's advice a person would not only discover wisdom, but would also know material benefits and the satisfaction and pleasure they could bring.

## B. VOCABULARIES

The words Qoheleth usually uses in 1:2-12:8 have a special phenomena, namely repetition. Doubtlessly these vocabularies repeated again and again have created an environment in which the concept of *hebel* is cultivated and developed abundantly. From the beginning of the superlative "*hebel*" ("*hebel* of *hebelim*") to the end of that there should be some causality related to the repetition. Loretz, contributes on the statistics of Qoheleth's favorite words in Ecc. 1:4-12:7 as following<sup>103</sup>:

Vocabulary	Meaning	Occurrence	Vocabulary	Meaning	Occurrence
עשה	Do	62	סכל	Fool	13
חכם	Wise	51	רוש	Wind	13
טוב	Good	51	מוה	Die	13
ראה	See	46	רשע	Wrongdoing	12
עת	Time	37	זדק	Just	11
שמש	Sun	33	ענה	Trouble	10
אכל	Trouble	33	רעות/רעיון	Chase	10
רעה	Evil	30	שלט	Power	9
הבל	Vanity	29(in all 30)	זכר	Remember	8
כסיל	Fool	18	חלק	Portion	8
ששש	Joy	17	כעס	Vexation	7
אכל	Eat	15	חפץ	Affair	7
יש	There is	15	הלל	Folly	7
יתר	Profit	15	כשר	Succeed	5

Following are the oft-repeated phrases<sup>104</sup>:

Key Word/Words	Meaning	Occurrence
הבל	In various formulate, e.g. "this also is vanity"	38
שתה אכל	Eat/Drink	5

<sup>103</sup> O. Loretz, *The Vanity of Qoheleth* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 179. For the data on the compiled statistics, and whole theory see 167-180. The statistic chart is designed by the author of this thesis.

<sup>104</sup> See Murphy, *Qoheleth*, xxix.



עמל	Toil	8
אשר נעשה; כל/חמעשה	All/Deeds that are done	9
תחת השמש	Under the sun	27
מיידע	Who know?	4

The astounding statistics presents the special literary inclination of Qoheleth: "out of all the words appearing in chaps. 2-11 there is a variation of between 29.1% (ch. 2) and 14.1 % (ch. 11) for the favorite words: among the 2643 words (Ecc. 1:4-12:7) we count 562 favorite words, thus 21.2%".<sup>105</sup> The literary habit reflects specifically on the concept of *hebel* as the phenomenon is concerned. The theory of the five categories, namely *hebel* as the use of thematic role and related to human mentality, human wisdom, human existence and the absurd fate is strongly supported by these vocabularies.

### C. STRUCTURE

Structural criticism is not the main concern in this conceptual study, but Qoheleth, a genius of word play, does not let go any chance to display his literary brilliance. A. G. Wright introduces the amazing discovery that the whole book of Qoheleth is controlled by some numerological patterns. His theory mainly comes from the lead of the clear repetition of key phrases within the book. Below are the structural configurations:

- 1) The book has 222 verses, and the midpoint occurs at 6:9/6:10, as the Masoretes also noted. This observation is not simply to be dismissed by the statement that verse division did not exist in Qoheleth's day.
- 2) The numerical value of the Hebrew letters in הבל הבלים הכל הבל, (Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!) in the inclusion (1:2; 12:8) is 216. And there are 216 verses in 1:1-12:8.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. xxix.

- 3) In 1:2 "vanity" (הבל *hebel*=5+2+30=37) is repeated three times, yielding a numerical value of 3 x 37, or 111, which is the number of verses at midpoint (6:9).
- 4) The numerical significance of "vanity" (=37) is underscored by the fact that it occurs 37 times (if one eliminates the very doubtful second הבל *hebel* in 9:9, as many scholars have done, independently).
- 5) The numerical equivalent of רברי, "words of," in the title (1:1) is 216. This would be the title of a book of 216 verses: 1:1 -12:8, exclusive of the epilogue.
- 6) In the epilogue 6 additional verses have been added to reach the number 222. A hint of this can be seen in ויתר in 12:9, 12, which can be understood to say "six additional"; ו = 6, and יתר = additional.<sup>106</sup>

*Hebel*, the word is highlighted to the most by this structure and striking numerological arrangement. Hebrew alphabets with number<sup>107</sup> are operated like mathematics. Not only the theme of the book can be projected forward but also the whole content connected tighter in the structure.

## D. COHERENCE

### D.1. COHERENCE WITH OTHER SAPIENT WORKS

Inasmuch as the concept of *hebel* is not supposed to be created by Qoheleth but seemingly is developed from the other works in the Old Testament, how is it related to these works, especially sapient works? H. D. Hummel points out the general comparative argument in allegedly parallel developments and comments:

Qoheleth is widely understood as part of a late revolt against "wisdom orthodoxy," especially its allegedly rigid doctrine of reward and retribution for good or evil. There is no doubt that wisdom all over the ancient Near East entered into a crisis in late Old Testament times, but not clearly for any further

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<sup>106</sup> See A. G. Wright, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 45, 1983.32-43. And cf. Murphy, *Qoheleth*, xxxii-xli, also "Studies in Israelite Wisdom", ed. J. L. Crenshaw (New York: KTAV, 1976) 245-66.

<sup>107</sup> Every Hebrew alphabet represents for a number.

reason than the general cultural dissipation of the times in connection with the breakup of the old Semitic empires and Alexander's program of Hellenization.<sup>108</sup>

Accordingly the concept of *hebel* seems at odd to the sapient tradition, but not so unfamiliar for the entire environment.

Furthermore, what is the tradition of wisdom literature? If Blank's definition is correct<sup>109</sup>, the Books of Job and Qoheleth with quite a quantity of whole wisdom literature should not excluded from the tradition. The so-called biblical wisdom tradition should be formed by all sapient works but not only on the positive response of retribution (Proverbs). In fact, Qoheleth's *hebel* contributes to approach the true wisdom from different direction. The wisdom he provides is the wisdom beyond human knowledge and the veridical wisdom rather than the horizontal one (the God-controlled wisdom rather than the man-controlled wisdom). Encountering with the impulse of Hellenic world, the *hebel* possibly contributes to its similarity of Hebrew-style as well. All in all, in view of coherence we can't judge Qoheleth's work is different drastically from other sapient works, but it just very "special" and like the cognate brother of Job.

Later than Qoheleth, Ben Sirach and The Wisdom of Solomon, the traditionalists of wisdom, probably based on the sense of compensation that tries to retrieve something lost in Qoheleth and Job. Over and over Ben Sirach comes back to traditional wisdom (Proverbs) and Law. R. E. Murphy could touch the heart of Ben Sirach, for he says:

The security preached by Proverbs is jarred by the experience of Job and buffeted

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<sup>108</sup> See Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 528.

<sup>109</sup> See *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 856-857. S. H. Blank defines the literature of wisdom this way: "what the wise men taught and wrote has been preserved in part in the biblical books of Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth, in some of the Psalms, and in brief passages in other context."

by the hard-nosed insistence upon vanity by Qoheleth. Unruffled, Sirach seems to put it all together again with his emphasis on traditional wisdom and Law. Perhaps the most surprising twist is the appearance in the Diaspora of the Wisdom of Solomon. Here Greek language and culture make a significant entry into the Bible, but under the aegis of Solomon, no less. Wisdom and salvation history come together; both are recognized as integral to the experience of the People<sup>110</sup>.

So Ben Sirach's intention apparently is to recover. The Wisdom of Solomon appeals to the mantle of Solomon and speaks in his name (e.g., 9:7-8, 12), perhaps because of the desire of retrieving Qoheleth's Solomon and fitting into Solomonic wisdom tradition. The counteraction of these two books and editorial appendix (prologue and epilogue) of Qoheleth represent the unfamiliarity to the deep insight of Qoheleth's wisdom and his *hebel*. Von Rad insists that Qoheleth stands firmly in the wisdom tradition and says that:

No other collection of proverbs, not even that of Sirach, presents such clearly defined intellectual characteristics. In the questions that he asks, Koheleth stands firmly in the wisdom tradition. He is concerned to 'investigate' events and happenings, and he asks himself what then is 'good' for man.<sup>111</sup>

## D.2. COHERENCE WITH ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT

What does Qoheleth's *hebel* look like when arranged in the whole environment of the Old Testament? Could the *hebel* compete with the Biblical faith in the Old Testament? The Old Testament never hides the dark side of men, no matter how great they are (e.g. Abraham, Moses, David), let alone the cry of Qoheleth in his darkness.

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. R. Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 94.

<sup>111</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 227.

Notwithstanding, the three main components, God's Words, Torah and the salvation history in the Old Testament tradition are wholly absent in Qoheleth. When God did not answer man in His Words, and took away any principle of Law, and "saving history was no longer seen," "faith have to go to pieces."<sup>112</sup> Darkness becomes darker and vanity becomes the vainest (vanity of vanities = the vainest) without God. Nevertheless, God in Qoheleth does not disappear but only hides Himself. Yahweh who keeps covenant and mercy (שמר הבית וההסדר)<sup>113</sup> has become God who judges (Ecc. 3:17; 11:9; 12:14), gives task and even evil task to men (Ecc. 1:13; 3:10), and watch over human oath (Ecc. 8:2). This is God with whom he is unfamiliar.

Basically the unknown God in Qoheleth is still not known very well in other parts of the Old Testament.<sup>114</sup> Yahweh spoke to Moses: (Exo. 33:19b)

וְחַנְּתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶחָן וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶרְחַם

The literal meaning of the sentence is: "and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and will have pity on whom I will have pity." In New Testament Paul follows Exodus and take Jacob-Esau for example to prove that the Israelite is God's chosen people.

Using very similar terms with Hebrew, Paul says: "Ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ καὶ οἰκτιρήσω ὃν ἂν οἰκτίρω" (Rom. 9:15, 18) to describe the unknown God who does as He will. The

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<sup>112</sup> Von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, 153.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Deu. 7:9, 12; 1Kings 8:23; 1Chr. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4.

<sup>114</sup> Job give the question that: "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7) In the Lam. 5:7 Jeremiah cried out to God: "Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?" And there is the other case mentioning this unknown God in Pro. 16:9 (In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.)

Qoheleth's *hebel* is human natural response when man encounters with this unknown and Almighty God. Longman comments on the intangibility of God in these words: "God's sovereignty is affirmed by Qoheleth (3:9-18; 7:13-14; 8:16-9:1; 11:5), but this sovereignty actually calls into question God's concern for his people. He has a plan but does not reveal it to his people and those who want to know what it is. (3:11; 8:16-17; 11:5)"<sup>115</sup> Accordingly what Qoheleth has presented by *hebel* coincides on the mysterious nuance of the Old Testament.

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<sup>115</sup> See Longman, *Qoheleth*, 35.

## CHAPTER V

### SOCIOECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING OF *HEBEL*

In what kind of society did Qoheleth live? Does his *hebel* have any relevance with his social and practical life except for the Old Testament? We can find out that much of Qoheleth's *hebel* is the response for the social problem in his age.<sup>116</sup> According to its linguistic evidence Seow dates Qoheleth in Persian period, specifically between the second half of the fifth and the first half of the fourth centuries B.C.E. Seow point out: "This long has been considered a 'dark age' in the history of Israel on account of the paucity of information on it."<sup>117</sup> The social reality of that age is reflected on how Qoheleth arranges his expression. Seow also indicates:

Qohelet goes beyond the particular case to reflect on an unpredictable world where events seem to spin out of control and social order is completely disrupted. Individuals are vulnerable to all kinds of dangers in the rapidly changing economic world, it seems. At a macrolevel, there are social, economic, and political forces at work that are beyond the control of individuals.<sup>118</sup>

In that age coins gradually became popular and economic activities prospered more and more. People did not get rich and live better because of economic convenience; however, conversely more injustice and immorality happened at that time. Qoheleth attributes these unbearable phenomena to the divine source. In 7:13 he cries out: "For who can make straight what He has made crooked?" It is God who makes all these

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<sup>116</sup> The poor were oppressed (5:8); extortion and bribe is easy to find in society (7:7, 8); the righteous perish but the wicked live long (7:15). Injustice and unrighteousness are everywhere (8:10, 14; 11:6, 7).

<sup>117</sup> See Seow, Qoheleth, 21.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 32 and 324-328.

happen. Without God's permission nothing will happen; however, he did not look light of the man's responsibility. He also postulates: "Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices." (Ecc. 7:29)

Reviewing all of the terms and the aesthetic skills Qoheleth has used, we find out that everything valuable in society is not so liable. Success not really belongs to the fast, enjoyment not to the endeavoring, and reputation not to the wise. The necessary order in universe seems lost. That Qoheleth uses a very figurative and metaphorical concept like *hebel* to convey his disappointment and the sense of absurdity for life is very natural.



## CHAPTER VI

### PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF *HEBEL*

In view of the application and implication of the *hebel* there is still more room for us to consider. Is this word theological or just anthropological? Is it a super-ordered order if there must be an order in universe? The Book of Qoheleth has stirred much philosophical resonance from Epicureanism, Stoicism, hedonism, pessimism, optimism, skepticism, fatalism, materialism, agnosticism and cynicism, these important philosophical schools in human history, therefore it seems unavoidable to consider the concept philosophically. G. A. Thomas in his unpublished thesis has a quite inclusive research for these philosophical thinking.<sup>119</sup> Thomas suggests:

On the basis of Qoheleth, we will prove conclusively the fallacy inherent in each of these various types of thinking, and show that they are entirely unwarranted in the light of the God-centered, positive philosophy of life that Qoheleth teaches.<sup>120</sup>

Thomas' view reminds us of a vertical scope to see Qoheleth's *hebel* as it has been mentioned and discussed in the previous content. Accordingly the thought of Qoheleth is not just an anthropology but a theological anthropology if Seow's theory is acceptable.<sup>121</sup> Qoheleth's style of *hebel* not only unfolds as an aesthetic skill but also a

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. G. A. Thomas, *The Problem of Vanity in Qoheleth* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1946), 98-117.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Seow, *Qoheleth*, 54-60. Evaluating two different and defective postulations: Qoheleth as philosophical treatise supported by R. B. Y. Scott (Proverbs, Qoheleth) and theological one, the former ignore the explicit fact that the name of God has been mentioned for forty times and the later is not able to explain that the author did not intend to speak of God as a main concern. He creates a new term: theological anthropology.

metaphysical thinking. It brings human being in the presence of the Creator of the whole universe and makes them humble.

It is very possible for Qoheleth to keep the "חֹהוּ, בְּהוּ, הַשְׁךְ" (darkness, emptiness, formless) on the surface of "חֲהוּם" (depth, deep, abyss), Genesis' terms (Gen. 1:2) in mind when he starts to build the scenario of his *hebel*. When St. Paul exclaimed at the futility of creation (Rom 8:20), he said: "τῆ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη" (for the creation was subjected to futility). ματαιότητι, the dative word, is just the same Greek word with which LXX translates *hebel*. To our surprise, "ἡ κτίσις" here could be creation, what is created and "the created order".<sup>122</sup> If the created order is involved here and Paul keeps the book of Qoheleth in mind, the narrative of human corruption in Gen. 3 and even Qoheleth's *hebel* should be related. Luther associates the verse with 1:2 of Qoheleth and comments the verse with this idea:

For it is certainly true that if man, the old man, did not exist, there would be no vanity. For all the things that God made were "very good" (Gen. 1:31) and are still good, ... Therefore the creation becomes vain, evil and harmful from outside itself, and not by its own fault, namely, because it is perverted and regarded as better than it really is by the erroneous thinking and estimation or love and enjoyment of man, while at the same time man, who has the capacity to lay hold on God and be satisfied with only God alone, as far as the mind and the spirit are concerned,...

Obviously the creation order was perverted by the intrusion of sin. Sin separates man from God, the Creator; then the huge vanity takes place. *Hebel* in Qoheleth finds a broader scope theologically and metaphysically when evaluated from the angle of creation and human corruption.

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Bible Works 3.5, reference note of the word.

<sup>123</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Work, Lectures on Romans*, vol. 25 (St. Louis: CPH, 1972), 362-63.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION OF PART ONE

Qoheleth, the Israel sage, uses *hebel* to lead us into his inner world. The *hebel* defined as vanity is multifaceted in the Book of Qoheleth according to the study of the chapters of this part. Qoheleth does not try to persuade us and make us his followers. What he has caused in his book is just the projection and introspection of a deep faith. From different dimensions Qoheleth's style of *hebel* has been approached in its original taste as closely as possible, so application and comparison could be appropriate and effective.

Fundamentally the semantic and etymological understanding of *hebel*, the first two chapters of this study provides a basic knowledge for the word itself. *Hebel* is a kind of onomatopoeic word in post-Hebrew system. And its traits was facilitated thoroughly by the authors of Old Testament and Qoheleth himself in accordance with its deduced worthlessness, uselessness, ephemerality and moreover, meaninglessness with absurdity. It can be said there exists a *hebel* tradition in Old Testament because of its frequent occurrence (71 times) and Qoheleth, on purpose and especially, makes good use of it (38 times in 71 times) in order to convey his view for life. Qoheleth does not run counter to the tradition; however, he still grasps the chance to build his own style of *hebel*.

The relevant uses of all *hebels* in Qoheleth are divided into five categories in the chapter III, namely thematic use, mentality, human wisdom, human existence and absurd fate. The trait of Qoheleth's *hebel* have been shown up by means of the exhaustive

multi-analysis. Of course, the interlaced phenomenon of *hebel*<sup>124</sup> is unavoidable, but the interlacing just reflects the complicated complex in the author's heart. The observation of the rhetoric skill and form presented in chapter IV impresses us with the excellent literary talent of the author. The critic of its loose and non-topical structure and thought therein becomes unjust. What is specific for the literary body is its coherence with the wisdom tradition in deep sense and Old Testament theology. Inasmuch as it still coincides with whole Old Testament thought, Qoheleth's *hebel* is not necessary to blame in the rugged process of Qoheleth's canonization.

In the fifth and sixth chapter Qoheleth's *hebel* has been approached from the outside. The socioeconomic understanding is based on its dating. The study of the social environment is quite helpful to reveal the author's motivation. The philosophical and theological understanding of *hebel* want to discuss and assess the possibility of *hebel* when it encounters other thoughts. What is important here is the relevance of *hebel* with creation and sin. The purpose of the metaphysical orientation presented is to trace back to God, the only source of all, and also to prepare the comparison with *wu*, the *hebel* of a different people.

The purpose of this study focuses not on the book but the main concept in the book, *hebel*. Therefore, the discussion of multi-dimension is an attempt to understand the Qoheleth style of *hebel* more thoroughly. To reach this purpose is to let the author speak for himself and even let the concept speak for itself. This unquenchable thought in Old Testament helps us know more about the reality of life and how we should response to it.

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<sup>124</sup> The same Hebel could belong to two or three categories.

## PART TWO

### WU AND ITS INVOLVED STUDY

無, namely *wu* the Chinese word simply means " nothing", "there is/are not" or philosophical " non-being "<sup>125</sup> in its definition. In China and in all Chinese circles of the world this Chinese character has a long history both in etymology and philosophy. The word can be compatible with the English phrase "there is/are not" in the form of a verbal.<sup>126</sup> The great value of the word not only exists in its popularity in the general life of Chinese people, but also in its huge sway on Chinese philosophy.

The philosophy of Wang Bi concerning *wu* played a pivotal role in the whole history of Chinese thought. After the Han Empire (漢帝國)<sup>127</sup> consolidated all the land of China and ended the chaos caused by the destruction of the Empire Qin (秦帝國)<sup>128</sup>, all China continued the unification movement to control thought<sup>129</sup> in order that thought might serve politics faithfully. After Qin's unification and Han's well-development,

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. 辭彙(*Collections of Words*), 陸師成編( ed. by Lu Shy Cheng), 台北(Teipei): 文化圖書公司(Culture Publishing Co.), 1980, 507-510.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Ibid. The verbal use can be this way: 無心(*wu xin*)-there is not intention, 無私(*wu si*)-there is not selfishness. The word also can be used as an adverbial, meaning "against" (like 毋, *wu*), "for fear of" ("無乃"*wu nai*) and as a interjection, namely "Oh, Ah" in English.

<sup>127</sup> Han Empire (漢帝國 or 漢朝) is through 206 B.C.E. to 220 A.D.

<sup>128</sup> Qin Empire (秦帝國 or 秦朝) is through 221 B.C.E. to 206 B.C.E.

<sup>129</sup> For the convenience of ruling Qin, the first Empire in China history triggered a vast unification movement. Qin Si Huang (秦始皇, the first emperor of Qin) unified the language and measurement, and even killed intellectuals and burnt books (焚書坑儒) to control thought.

Confucianism, one among many scholastic schools, became more respected than all the other schools in the age of Emperor Han Wu (漢武帝). Thus thought became conservative, unified and intolerant of others. Meanwhile Daoism<sup>130</sup> and other thoughts could not emerge and prosper until the decline of the Han Dynasty. Wang Bi's *wu*, which was based on Daoism developed in this kind of environment.

After Wang Bi's biographical introduction in the following chapter, the concept of *wu* will be discussed as *hebel* was discussed in Part One. First of all *wu* will be approached linguistically and the Chinese style of vanity will be analyzed under the strong impact of Wang Bi; its Daoistic derivation will be detected as well. His style of *wu* will be narrowed down on his special use in his works and developed philosophically and religiously. To be sure, the translation problem in Chinese Bible will accompany the discussion to display the characteristic of Chinese mind.

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<sup>130</sup> Daoism could be put as Taoism and Daoist Taoist. For the unification all these two terms will be put as Daoism and Daoist for fear of confusion.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WU AND WANG BI

Wang Bi (王弼, 220 or 226 -249 AD), the best expositor and proponent of the concept of *wu* in the Wei Dynasty (220-265 A.D.), with He Yan (何晏, 190-249 AD), his colleague initiated a new ethos (or movement) among intellectuals called "*Xuan Xue*"<sup>131</sup> (玄學). Wang Bi was born in Jin-Shang of Shan-Dong (山東金鄉)<sup>132</sup>, and was the nephew of Wang Can (王粲), a famous scholar of the late Eastern Han Dynasty<sup>133</sup>.

Wang Bi was adept at Confucianism and Daoism. San Guo Zhi (三國志, *Three Kingdoms Chronicle*) comments about him in Zhong Hei's biography this way: "Bi (王弼)

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. 中華的智慧(*Chines Wisdom*) : 中國古代哲學思想精粹(*The Marrow of Philosophy and Thought in Ancient China*), 張岱年主編(ed. by Zhang Dai Nian), 上海(Shang Hai):上海人民出版社(Shang Hai People Press), 1989, p.166. The book has the interpretation for *Xuan Xue*: 『所謂「玄學」, 從字面上講, 就是「玄遠之學」的意思。魏晉玄學與兩漢哲學的一個明顯區別在於, 秦漢哲學多停留於事物的表面現象和外部聯繫, 魏晉玄學則力圖深入到事物本質和內部聯繫, 它所討論的中心是「本末、有無」問題。由於它學貴玄遠, 略於具體事物而醉心於抽象原理, 又以「三玄」(<周易>、<老子>和<莊子>)為基本經典著作, 故被稱為玄學。[ *Xuan Xue* is literally occultism. The occultism in the Wei Jin Dynasties (魏晉) makes itself different from the philosophy of Qin Han (秦朝 and 漢朝) by its earnest concern about nature and internal relationship, but the philosophy of Qin Han focuses on the skin-deep phenomena and the external relationship. *Xuan Xue* focuses on the topics of "priority" and "being". Therefore the reason of being called *Xuan Xue* exists in its mystery-oriented inclination, preference of abstractness to concrete-ness and its " Shan Xuans" (The Three Mysterious Classics): *The Changes, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi*. ]

<sup>132</sup> The city is called "山陽高平" (Shan Yang Gao Ping) in the Wei Dynasty.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, translator and compiler, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p.xv (Chronology of Dynasties). The historical line of ancient Chinese dynasties: Ch'in (Qin 秦朝, 221-206 B.C.) → Western Han (or Former Han, 西漢 or 前漢, 206 B.C.-8 A.D.) → Hsin (新莽, 9-23 A.D.) → Eastern Han (or Later Han, 東漢 or 後漢, 25-220 A.D.) → Three Kingdoms: Wei (魏, 220-265A.D.)+ Shu (蜀, 221-263 A.D.)+ *wu* (吳, 222-280 A.D.) → Western Chin (Western Jin 西晉, 265-317A.D.) → Eastern Chin (Eastern Jin 東晉, 317-420 A.D.)

loves to discuss Confucianism and Daoism, eloquent in words and clever in debate. His commentaries includes Yi and Lao Zi."<sup>134</sup> In the biography of He Shao (何劭) Wang Bi was described as: "young and wise to think, loving *Lao Zi* when ten years old, and good at debate and words."<sup>135</sup> And "He Yan as the Minister of Officials (吏部尚書) is very surprised at Bi, so he exclaims that: "Indeed Confucius mentions the inferior is respectable. As for this one, he is available to talk about the relationship between Heaven and human being."<sup>136</sup>

Wang Bi's academic works are the following: *Zhou Yi Zhu* (周易注, *The Commentary of Zhou Yi*), *Lao Zi Zhu* (老子注, *The Commentary of Lao Zi*), *Lun Yu Shi Yi* (論語釋疑, *Q and A of Confucius Analects*), *Zhou Yi Lue Li* (周易略例, *The Brief Illustration of Zhou Yi*), *Lao Zi Wei Zhi Lue Li* (老子微旨略例, *The Brief Illustration of Lao Zi's Bearing*) and *Da Yan Lun* (大衍論, *The Theory of The Great Change*).<sup>137</sup> Only the first two books are extant, but *Lun Yu Shi Yi* was scattered and quoted by some commentary collections of Confucius' Analects. For the last two books, just their name appeared in the chronicles.

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. 陶建國 (Tao Jian Guo), 兩漢魏晉之道家思想 (Daoistic Thought in Two Hans and Wei Jin), p.604. The Chinese quotation is that: 『弼好論儒道，辭才逸辯，注易及老子。』

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. The original quotation is that: 何邵傳曰：『弼幼而察惠，年十餘好老氏，通辯能言。』又：『何晏爲吏部尚書，甚奇弼。歎之曰：「仲尼稱後生可畏。若斯人者，可與言天人之際乎。」』

<sup>137</sup> See 林麗真 (Lin Li Zhen), "王弼 (Wang Bi)" in *中國歷代思想家 (Thinkers of Generations in China)* (台北 <Taipei>: 台灣商務印書館 <Taiwan Commercial Publishing House>, 民國六十七年版 <1978>), 1643.



Wang Bi lived in a world of chaos. After the decline of the great Han Dynasty whole China was divided into three parts: Wei (魏) in most of northern territory, Shu (蜀) in the west, and Wu (吳) in south-eastern.<sup>138</sup> Even though the mightiest Wei among the three kingdoms had tried her best to swallow the other two, she failed at last. War after war devastated all of China for decades. Poverty, injustice, rebellion and death spread over all the land, touching every one except for some superior classes like landowners, officials, and royal people in the old feudalistic society. Fortunately Wang Bi belonged to the aristocratic and privileged group. Not only due to his identification as being upper class but also his talent in thoughts and words, He Yan recommended Wang Bi to be an administrative official (尙書郎) when he was still young.

Wang Bi's commentaries on *Lao Zi* and the *Zhou Yi* aroused a new movement and emancipated the Chinese mind from the unified and ossified thought of the Han Dynasty.<sup>139</sup> However, the young official could not outlive his misfortune, and was deposed in a political change. Wang Bi died in his disease and deep distress (249 A.D.) at the age of 24, but all of these disasters should not hide his splendid achievement. The

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. the chronology of footnote 133.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. 羅宗強(Luo Zong Qiang), *玄學與魏晉人士心態(Xuan Xue and the Intellectuals' Manner in Wei Jin)*, 21-35. The unified thinking model is Confucianism. In Luo's observation of the Han Dynasty Confucianism has become the orthodoxical thought according to emperor's support and propagation. Secondly, Confucianism as a revivalism and conservatism at that time could bring the opportunity of being official for intellectuals and occupied all the time of intellectuals at the cost of other thoughts. Thirdly, the trivial study at that time focusing on Jings (經學) made intellectuals deficient in the ability of abstract thinking. After the authority of Confucianism declined due to the change of politics, many kinds of thoughts such as Daoism deriving from Warring States (戰國時代, 403-222 B.C.E.) came to being again.

thought of Wang Bi used to be called "Gui Wu Lun" (貴無論)<sup>140</sup>. His theory of *wu* is mainly reflected in his two commentaries, namely the commentaries of *Dao De Jing* (*Lao Zi*) and *Zhou Yi*. In the following sections, his *wu* will be understood from different angles. First of all, the basic understanding of *wu* must be introduced semantically and etymologically.

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<sup>140</sup> "Gui *wu* Lun" (The Theory of *Wu* as the Primary) is usually called by Chinese scholars such as 湯用彤(Tang Yong Teng), 趙書廉(Zhao Shu Lian), 任繼愈(Ren Ji Yu).

## CHAPTER IX

### SEMANTIC AND ETYMOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF *WU*

#### A. *WU* (無)

*Wu*(無), the Chinese character, is simply equal to "there is/are not". However, *Shuo Wen Chie Zi* (說文解字), the most authoritative lexicon in ancient China<sup>141</sup>, explains its meaning as 亡, and 无 which is the anomalous form of *wu* (無的「奇字」). The author of the book, Xu Shen (許慎) indicates that 无, the strange word is interchangeable with *Yuan* (元)<sup>142</sup>, which meaning literally is nothingness (*xu-wu*, 虛無). This specific form (无) is shaped by the defected and anomalous form of *Tian* (天), which inclines toward the northwestern and is used as a contrast to the perfect (天 *tian* is supposed to be

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. 說文解字詁林(Commentaries Collections of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*), 丁福保編 (ed. by Ding Fu Bao), 上海(Shang Hai): 商務印書館 (Commercial Publishing House), 民國十七年版 (1928). *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (說文解字), or "*Shuo Wen*" (說文) the abbreviated name, was written by Xu Shen (許慎) in the Easter Han Dynasty. *Shuo Wen*, the first organized systematically lexicon in Chinese history explains Chinese characters by acoustics, form and meaning, and focuses on the form of "Zhuan Shu" (篆書), a ancient Chinese calligraphy. It includes 9353 words, fourteen chapters and 540 parts. The every entry of the book includes three things: 1. the word itself (正文, 小篆), 2. the explanation of form and meaning (形與義的解釋), and the introduction of the multi-forms of the word (重文, 如古文或大篆).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. Ding Fu Bao quotes "*Chun Qiu Wei*" (春秋緯) this way: "*Yuan*, vapor or stream, derives from formlessness and shows up when it comes to exist. Both invisible and inaudible it is." (『元者也, 氣泉, 無形以起, 有形以分, 窺之不見, 聽之不聞。』) Another quotation coming from He Xiu's (何休) *Gong Yang Zhu* (公羊注, the commentary of 公羊傳[Gong Yang Zhuan]): "*Yuan*, namely vapor, derives from formlessness and shows up when it comes to exist. The heaven and the earth were created by *yuan*, which is the beginning of the heaven and the earth. Therefore it is appropriate that *wu* is interchangeable with *yuan*." (『元者, 氣也, 無形以起, 有形以分, 造起天地, 天地之始, 是无通於元之誼。』)

perfect according to its shape).<sup>143</sup> Duan Yu Chai (段玉裁), the famous lexicographer in Qing Dynasty (清朝), indicates 亡(*wu*) used for the explanation of 無(*wu*) is like "there is not", namely something lost or fleeting away<sup>144</sup>. According to some different archaic forms of *wu* Duan (段玉裁) thought 𣎵(*wu*), which literally means "abundance with trees"<sup>145</sup> should be the true original *wu*. However, *wu* was influenced by servile calligraphy (隸書) in the Han Dynasty and 亡 (*wu*), which used to be the standard explanation of *wu*, so it lost its original meaning and was used as "there be not" at last. *The Great Chinese Dictionary* (中文大辭典) also has the gloss that *xu*-虛 means *wu*, and it quotes as an evidence from *Dao De Jing* (Lao Zi): " All things in the universe arise

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.5718. The text of *Shuo Wen* about *wu* is: 『無, 亡也, 從亡𣎵聲。无, 奇字无, 通於元者。王育說天屈西北爲无。』 (*wu* 無, namely *wu* 亡, derives from *wu* 亡 with sound of *wu* 𣎵. *Wu* 无, the anomalous form of *wu*, is interchangeable with *yuan*. Wang Yu said that the heaven inclining toward the northwestern is called *wu*. Here the heaven concept as a whole becomes defective on account of its declination, so *wu* could be "defect from the perfect one" or "the shortness from the full". Some different edition put the explanation this way: 『無, 亡也, 從亡𣎵聲。无, 奇字無, 通於无者, 虛無道也。王育說天屈西北爲无。』 Most are the same except for "the way of *xu-wu*" (虛無道也).

<sup>144</sup> Cf. 中文大辭典 (*The Great Chinese Dictionary*), 林尹·高明主編 (ed. by Lin Yin and Gao Ming), 台北 (Taipei): 中國文化研究所 (Chinese Culture Institute), 民國五十六年六月版 (1967), 8720-8721. The dictionary comments Duan's commentary of *Shuo Wen* and indicates: "*Wu*, namely 'there be not', is *wu* 𣎵 originally. ... [Duan] The word means to forfeit or to lose as if something fleets away. Here is the formal calligraphy of *wu*. The informal form "無" is the changed form of "𣎵" from servile calligraphy. 𣎵 means abundance, which is contrary to the meaning of *wu*. It is odd that *wu* with 亡 as its meaning and 𣎵 as its pronunciation followed in gloss the pronunciation rather than the meaning when the servile calligraphy came to exist." (『亡也, 不有也, 本作𣎵(*wu*)。...[段注] 凡有所失者, 所未有者, 皆如逃亡然也。此有無字之正體, 而俗作無, 無乃𣎵之隸變, 𣎵之訓豐也, 與無義正相反。然則隸變之時, 昧於亡爲其義, 𣎵爲其聲, 有聲無義, 殊爲乖繆。』)

<sup>145</sup> 卅 in the middle part of 𣎵 is combined by double 艹 and means multitude in number. With the double trees (木) below 𣎵 should be *feng* (豐) in its original meaning. Cf. 正中形音義綜合大字典 (*Zheng Zhong Great Dictionary: Form, Phonology and Semantics*), 編者: 高樹藩 (ed. by Gao Shu Fan), 台北 (Taipei): 正中書局 (Zheng Zhong Publishing House), 民國六十三年八月增訂一版 (1974), 917.

from *you* (有). *You* arises from *wu* (無)." (天下萬物生於有, 有生於無)<sup>146</sup> because there is "the way of *xu wu* (虛無道也)" in *Shuo Wen* (說文, namely 說文解字) to gloss *wu*.

All in all, *wu* obviously is an onomatopoeic word like *hebel*. Although the original form (無) is contrary to the later and most popular one (無), orthodox tradition of *wu* is built by 無, 亡, and 无 as vapor-like form, defectiveness, non-being or "there is not", idiomatic use. Even more interesting is its equality to "*xu*"(虛) and "*kong*"(空), which will be presented in next paragraph. Accordingly it seems quite natural that *wu* was chosen to postulate the Chinese style of vanity by Lao Zi and Wang Bi.

#### B. *XU* (虛) AND *KONG* (空)

Both *xu* (虛) and *kong* (空) are synonymous with *wu* in Chinese classics, and interchangeable with one another. *The Great Chinese Dictionary* (中文大辭典) and *Words Sea* (辭海)<sup>147</sup> prove the impression of the use in their exhaustive collections<sup>148</sup>. This linguistic phenomenon reveals the synonymous-oriented use in ancient Chinese world. Many Chinese characters are interchangeable in case the connoted or denoted

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. *Dao De Jing*, ch. 40. Here the rendering also could be that: "All things in the cosmos arise from being. Being arises from non-being."

<sup>147</sup> *Words Sea*, Taipei: China Publishing House, 1975.

<sup>148</sup> With the evidence of classics *Words Sea* glosses *xu* by *wu* and *kong* (see 2522), and *kong* by *kong xu* and *xu wu* (cf. 2153). *The Great Chinese Dictionary* also put the three words the same way (cf. 12784 and 10564)

meanings are similar regardless of their different derivations. Interestingly the impact also happens in the enterprise of translation. *Xu kong* the combination phrase or individual word is chosen to exchange for *hebel* by Chinese Bible translators<sup>149</sup>; however, there is still *wu*, the other possible word standing by.

The reason the translators prefer *xu kong* to *wu* is quite clear. Because there are still 1518 occurrences of *wu* used in 1340 verses within the Chinese Union Bible (中文和合本聖經), the translators just intent to avoid the confusion caused by *wu's* common use ("there be not") and the special (Daoistic style). *Wu* is very easy to be associated with "non-being" or "nothingness" in Chinese understanding while used in particular or philosophically. *Xu kong* not only could be the special terms for *hebel* in reminding, but also its inverted form identifies itself from *kong xu*, the common use for Chinese.<sup>150</sup>

Both *xu* and *kong* belong to the combination words of onomatopoeia (聲) and form-definition (形義) in Chinese.<sup>151</sup> According to *Shuo Wen* (說文) *xu* (虛), the

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<sup>149</sup> *Chinese Union Bible*(和合本), the most popular in Chinese circle, *Lu Zheng-Tzong Chinese Bible* (呂振中譯本), and *New Translation of Chinese Bible*(聖經新譯本) translate *hebel* into *xu-kong* (虛空), the synonymy of two words for the same meaning ( ex. Ecc. 1:2- 虛空[xu kong]的虛空, 虛空的虛空, 凡事都是虛空). *The Catholic Chinese Bible* (思高聖經譯本), however, just use *xu* to exchange *hebel* ( Ecc. 1:2- 虛[xu]而又虛, 虛而又虛, 萬事皆虛).

<sup>150</sup> Generally Chines like to use *kong xu* to express something vain in life. But the translators of Chinese Bible take use of inversion in phrase to manifest its special. E.g. Chinese people used to use *kong xu* (空虛) and *xiong di* (兄弟, bother), but Chinese Bible puts the phrases into *xu kong* (虛空, 63 occurrences in 55 verses) and *di xiong* (弟兄, 700 occurrences in 651 verses).

<sup>151</sup> In Chinese linguistic system the onomatopoeic word is usually combined by two parts. One part denotes the sound from which the whole word gets its pronunciation and other part the definition. The definition part is used to call radical part (部首 or 偏旁). Take *xu kong* for examples. *Xu* (虛), can be divided into two part, the upper 虍 for the sound and the lower 丘 (archaic form) the definition. *Kong* (空) has its upper part 穴 as definition and 工 the lower form connecting with its sound.

figurative word, is supposed to mean a great and vast mountain in archaic style.<sup>152</sup> But in the long process of linguistic evolution the word came to acquire the completely counter meaning.<sup>153</sup> *Xu* functions as *kong*, which literally means the "being empty or emptiness" in a container or "a hole".<sup>154</sup> Therefore *xu kong* as a synonymous phrase (two words together) or as individual words all are impressive of their corporate linguistic feature, namely a negative orientation to concrete thing. Accordingly it is reasonable that *xu kong* in Chinese should be associated with *hebel* in Hebrew. And *wu* is able to join as well the symposium of vanity from here.

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Ding Fu Bao, 3657. For *xu Shuo Wen* (說文) has this definition: "*Xu* is a great mountain. Gun Lun Qiu is called Gun Lun *Xu*." (虛, 大丘也, 崑崙丘謂之崑崙虛。)

<sup>153</sup> The process assumes the high mountain implied then is changed to the lower area (basin) circulated by mountains around. Therefore *xu* start to denote emptiness because of its hole-like characteristic in later use. So *Bei Feng* (北風) in *The Odes* (詩經, 2183 -481 B.C.E.) has the saying: "*qi xu qi xie*" (其虛其邪), in which *xu* has taken the meaning of *kong xu* (unreal or emptiness here).

<sup>154</sup> See Ding Fu Bao, 3285.

## CHAPTER X

### CONTEXTUAL AND TEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF *WU*

The use of *wu* in Chinese thought is both general and specific as mentioned above, upon which Wang Bi built his own interpreting system of *wu*. *Wu* was employed in general terminology for "there be not" and in special as the trademark of Daoism, the traditional school famous of *wu*. That is the reason that Wang Bi's philosophy is classified as Neo-Daoism by Chan<sup>155</sup>; however, Wang Bi used to be recognized as a Confucianism adherent.<sup>156</sup> The reasons for this apparent contradiction will be noted in the following sections. Wang Bi's style of *wu* will be introduced by following classification, and text and context will be presented by mean of juxtaposition so that his "Gui Wu Lun" (貴無論), literally "the theory of *wu*-emphasis" can be explored.

#### A. *WU* IN CONTEXT

This context will focus on Lao Zi's book, namely "*Dao De Jing*" (道德經), on

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<sup>155</sup> See Chan Wing-Tsit, *A source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, 314-335.

<sup>156</sup> Wang Bi wrote "The Question and Answer of Analects of Confucius"(論語釋疑), the other one of his books for the interpretation of Confucianism to follow the tradition in respecting Confucius since the Han Dynasty. Wang Bi said that: "The true sage understand *wu*, however *wu* is unable to describe. Therefore the sage is not willing to say about *wu*. Lao Zi is the adherent of *wu*, so he talked about what he didn't know enough." (見何邵王弼傳, 王弼曰:『聖人體無, 無又不可以訓, 故不說也。老氏是有者也, 故恒言其所不足。』) Here the sage means Confucius. According this comment Confucius seems better than Lao Zi in the understanding of *wu*; however, the fact is that he pretended to respect Confucianism publicly but adhered Daoism in private. See. 陶建國 (Tao Jian Guo), 607.



which Wang Bi followed and built his *wu*. Lao Zi<sup>157</sup> wrote the *Dao De Jing* and established the foundation for Daoism. As was the case with Qoheleth, Lao Zi could be both author implied and the book itself (*Dao De Jing*). According to Si Ma Qian (司馬遷), the author of *Shi Ji* (史記) and the most famous historiographer in the West Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-8 A.D.) and the Chinese history, Lao Zi was recognized as an older contemporary of Confucius. Lao Zi's time could not be identified correctly until the modern form and historical critic arose. Si Ma Qian gave a very authoritative and informative comment about Daoism:

The Daoist school urged men to unity of spirit, teaching that all activities should be in harmony with the unseen, with abundant liberality toward all things in nature. As to practice, they accept the orderly sequence of nature from the Ying-Yang school, gather the good points of Confucians and Mohists, and combine with these the important points of the (school of) Names and Law. In accordance with the changes of the seasons, they respond to the development of natural objects. Their achievements fit everywhere. Their ideas are simple and easily carried out. They perform but little, yet their achievements are numerous.<sup>158</sup>

Even though many problems about Lao Zi are still open, the historian in the closest age to Lao Zi provides us a neat overview for original Daoism, and the following points will be the summary from his book.

Regardless of some common use of *wu*, Lao Zi's *wu* occurs exactly 100 times in 81

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. Fung Yu-Lan (馮友蘭), *The History of Chinese Philosophy* (中國哲學史), Chinese version, 162-182; English translation version, 170-191. Fung said that: "The book known as the Lao-Tzu 老子, but popularly called the Tao Te Ching 道德經, is traditionally said to have been written by an older contemporary of Confucius, Lao Tan 老聃. To-day, however, it is generally believed that the Lao-tzu was composed after Confucius, that is, sometime during the Warring States Period." Warring States Period lasted from 403 B.C.E. to 222 B.C.E.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., English version, 170; Chinese version, 162. The paragraph of Chinese text is that: 『道家使人精神專一，動合無形，瞻足萬物。其為術也，因陰陽之大順，采儒墨之善，撮名法之要。與時推移，應物變化。立俗施事，無所不宜。指約而易操，事少而功多。』

chapters of *Dao De Jing*. Following is the original nuance of Lao Zi, from which we will get some clues as to how Wang Bi develops his thoughts.

### A.1. *WU* AS AN UNIVERSAL ORDER

According to its onomatopoeic and figurative feature *wu* is developed metaphysically other than its general use in Lao Zi's thought. Lao Zi says in his opening chapter that: (ch. 1)

道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名。無，名天地之始；有，名萬物之母。常無，欲以觀其妙；常有，欲以觀其微。此二者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，眾妙之門。

[*Dao* that can be described is not the eternal *dao*. Name that can be named is not the eternal name. *Wu* is the origin of heaven and earth, while *you* is the origin of the myriad things. Therefore, always in this constant *wu*, the mystery might be seen<sup>159</sup>, and in this constant *you*, the manifestations. It is mysterious that these two appear at the same time but are named differently. Mysterious and mysterious the phenomenon becomes and it ends out as the gate of all mystery.]

This opening chapter provides us an overview of Lao Zi. According to Lao Zi there exists an order in the whole universe, and the order appears in two forms, namely *wu* and *you*.<sup>160</sup> On this relationship Lao Zi expresses clearer:

天地萬物生於有，有生於無。(ch. 40)

[The heaven, the earth and all things are begotten by *you*, *you* is begotten by *wu*.]

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<sup>159</sup> *Dao De Jing* ch. 32: 『道常無名』 (Dao usually is beyond the terminology.) and ch. 41: 『道隱無名』 (Dao hides itself and its name is unknown.) The main purpose of these two chapters wants to express the mystery and intangibility of *dao*.

<sup>160</sup> *wu* could be translated into "non-being" here and *you* "being".

*Wu* takes place and the order becomes mysterious while *you* displays the appearance of the order.<sup>161</sup> *Wu* becomes a phenomenon existentially to demonstrate the non-being before everything comes into being. Lao Zi induces the principle of *wu-you* into a word, *dao* (道)<sup>162</sup>, with which all things in the universe may come. Therefore in the general use of *wu* he also implies its specific meaning by this sentence:

道常無爲 (*wu wei*) 而無不爲 (*wu bu wei*) ◦ (ch. 37)  
 [Dao does not seem to do something but everything in fact.]

*Wu wei* (do nothing) in contrast to *wu bu wei* (do everything) becomes one among the famous terms of Daoism, especially being employed in politics.

## A.2. WU AS AN ATTITUDE FOR LIFE

Based on the *wu* as an order of the universe, Lao Zi applies the principle in the human life. The basic idea of *wu* for life is ascetic and to emphasize the negative effect

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<sup>161</sup> In ch.42 of *Dao De Jing* there is another words for this idea: 『道生一，一生二，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以爲和。』 (Dao produces one, one two and three all things. All things with the change with *ying* and *yang* is harmony with *qi*.) This "one" was translated into *tai ji* (太極, The Ultimate) by Zhou Dun Yi (周敦頤), the Neo-Confucianist of the Northern Shong Dynasty (北宋, 960-1126 A.D.). The two usually are recognized as "*you* and *wu*"(being and non-being) or "*ying* and *yang*"(the negative and the positive). Based on the change of the three (one [Dao] or the Ultimate plus two [*you-wu*], the being and non-being, whole universe then comes out. The principle of *qi* (氣, literally means breath or vapor) was developed in a organized way by Zang Zhai (張載), the contemporary thinker of Zhou Dun Yi. On the principle of universe also see ch. 21, 25, 32, 34 and 莊子(*Zhuang Zi*) 天下篇 (*Tian Xia*) and 田子方篇 (*Tian Zi Fang*).

<sup>162</sup> There is not a compatible in English with *dao*. Dao 道, very similar to λογος (logos) in Greek, could be way, word, principle and so forth. Actually *Union Chinese Bible* uses Dao to translate Greek λογος in New Testament.

of the material.<sup>163</sup> *Wu* as the meaning of non-being is always used to encourage people to come to thing as they should be and to let no human desire control life. *Wu yu* (無欲), literally "no desire", which is similar to asceticism, is the other feature of Lao Zi's thought. Lao Zi indicates that:

不上賢，使民不爭；不貴難得之貨，使民不盜；不見可欲，使心不亂。聖人治：虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨，常使民無知(*wu zhi*)無欲(*wu yu*)，使知者不敢為，則無不治。(ch. 3)

[If you do not adulate the able, you will not stir up contentions among people. If you do not value rare goods, you will make people thefts. If people do not see desirables, they will not be alluded. Therefore, when the sage governs, he empties people's minds, fills their stomachs, weakens their ambitions and strengthens their bodies. The people are kept without cleverness and desire, and the intellectuals dare not to rebel, there should be no lack of manageability.]

As long as the earthly things end out the negative consequences, the best ways to survive for human beings are *wu zhi* (無智, no cleverness) and *wu yu* (無欲, no desire)<sup>164</sup>, which are similar to the asceticism in the West. At first glance at these sentences, it is quite

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. ch. 12. The anti-material inclination is proven by these words: "五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聾，五味令人口爽，馳騁畋獵令人心發狂，難得之貨令人行妨。是以聖人為腹不為目，故去彼取此。" [All kinds of wonderful colors blind our eyes. All kinds of the beautiful music deafen our ears. The many flavors of tongue indulge our taste. Racing and hunting madden our minds. Possessing rare treasures brings about the harmful behavior. Therefore the sage takes care of his basic need for his stomach but not for his eyes. He lets go of that and chooses this.]

<sup>164</sup> The postulation of 無智(*wu zhi*) and 無欲(*wu yu*) is also reconfirmed by ch. 19. In ch. 19 Lao Zi said that: 『絕聖棄智，民利百倍；絕民棄義，民復孝慈；絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。此三者，為文不足，故令有所屬：見素抱朴，少私寡欲。』 [Get rid of sage and abandon the wise, and the people will benefit hundredfold. Get rid of people's desires and abandon justice, and the people will become filial piety and compassionate again. Get rid of cleverness and abandon profit, and thieves and gangsters will not exist. The above three are merely hypocrites and not satisfied with what they have got; therefore, they always desire something else. Behave the original and keep the simple state. Lessen selfishness and decrease desire.] These views were treated as anti-Confucianism historically. For Lao Zi the main problem of Confucian is their intention to do too much. Too much standards, ordinances, and law Confucianist tried to established everything and ironically caused the opposite result in society. Lao Zi postulates that everything should return to its original(返朴歸真). In other words, he wants people to keep the state of *wu yu* (無欲).

obvious that these arrangements are political and serve for the aristocratic class. In the other words this self-denying model is also based on a deep insight for human life.

*Wu yu* is not only the encouragement for the average man but also for the sage himself. In ch. 57 Lao Zi indicates, as the third person that:

故聖人云：『我無爲(*wu wei*)，人自化；我好靜，人自正；我無事(*wu shi*)，人自富；我無欲(*wu yu*)，人自朴。』

[Therefore the sages say: I do nothing and the people cultivate themselves. I enjoy my serenity and the people correct themselves. I do not interfere and the people enrich themselves. I have no desires and the people recover their own original.]

In order to recover the original state a sage, a living model in society plays the role of the standard to guide people on the right way. The "sage", in ancient society except for some special figures like Confucius and Lao Zi, usually implies the emperor or the king. Therefore from the upper class to the lower class *wu wei* (doing nothing) and *wu yu* (no desire) were becoming the Chinese style of humility, the valuable virtue according to Chinese morality. The ancient political leaders would be respected as "good" or "great" if they could understand the order of the universe and humble themselves.

### A.3. *WU* AS AN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IDEAL

*Wu wei* (無爲), closely involved with the attitude for life, could be the most important feature in Lao Zi's principle of *wu*. *Wu wei* literally means "doing nothing" and furthermore, "keeping everything in its original". In the chaotic ages like Confucius' Spring-Autumn (722-481 B.C.E.) or Lao Zi's Warring States (403-222 B.C.E.),

all kinds of schools used their brains to the most in the hope that kings would employ them. That is the reason Confucius concentrated on his educational enterprise and became the greatest teacher after his rejection by kings because most of the kings in his age considered his postulation on *Ren Yi* (仁義) to be too ideal to use politically. Based on the same reason Lao Zi's ideas, with the nuance of anti-Confucianism<sup>165</sup>, couldn't earn so much approval in contemporary and upcoming political markets.

It is important to note that *wu*, similar with *hebel* in Qoheleth, is a positive sort of vanity. There is a very positive purpose hiding behind the postulation of *wu*. In ch. 2 of *Dao De Jing* (道德經) a good introduction for *wu wei* is that:

是以聖人處無爲(*wu wei*)之事，行不言之教，萬物作而不辭，生而不有，爲而不恃，成功不居。夫唯不居，是以不去。

[Therefore the sage abides in the condition of *wu wei* and carries out the wordless teaching, then the myriad things are made, yet not stopped. Therefore the sage produces without possessing, acts without expectations, and accomplishes without proclaiming his accomplishments. The more he does not abide in them, the more the more they will not leave him.]

In order to accompany the country and society with the order of the universe the sage (or king) should do nothing (*wu wei*, 無爲) to let everything run in its appropriate position.

Because the sage would not like to abide in his accomplishment, everyone around him shares the accomplishment and enjoys doing his best in his position. The whole world will prosper in this *wu wei* system. Therefore Lao Zi affirms that: (ch. 37)

道常無爲 (*wu wei*) 而無不爲，侯王若能守，萬物將自化。

[Dao does not seem to do something but everything in fact. If the rulers are able

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (CD software, Version 1.0, London and New York: Routledge, 1998.) In "Daoist philosophy" entry there is some comments like this: "The classical Daoist philosophers in many ways have been construed as both a critique on and a complement to the more conservative, regulatory precepts of their Confucian rivals."

to obey it, everything will naturally be cultivated for good.]

In Lao Zi's opinion *wu wei* is the true virtue<sup>166</sup>; however people don't understand and accept it. The human response for *wu wei* is quite natural for him, so in ch. 43 he indicates that:

天下之至柔，馳騁天下之至堅。無有入於無間，是以無爲 (*wu wei*) 有益。不言之教，無爲 (*wu wei*)之益，天下希及之。

[The softest thing in the world will overcome the hardest. Non-being can enter where there is no space. Therefore I know the benefit of *wu wei* (doing nothing). The wordless teaching and the benefit of nothing doing are rarely reached in the world.]

This counter running model of thought in *Dao De Jing* is very popular<sup>167</sup> and he postulates that: 反者道之動，弱者道之用 [The converse is just the motion of the *dao* and the weakness is its function.]<sup>168</sup> The thinking model will be introduced more in the next section.

#### A.4. WU AS A RELATIVISM

Lao Zi is famous for his theory of relativism traditionally and it derives from his

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<sup>166</sup> *Dao De Jing* ch. 38 has these words that: "上德不德，是以有德。下德不失德，是以無德。上德無爲而無以爲，下德無爲而有以爲。" [The true virtue is reached by the intention not for the virtue, therefore the true virtue comes up. The superficial virtue never fails to be virtuous, but contrarily the true virtue will be lost. The true virtue means doing nothing, but anything will be completed at last. The superficial virtue tries to do anything, but ends up nothing.] Here 上德 could be true, or the highest virtue.

<sup>167</sup> Lao Zi does not think the world has observed the truth when it prefer the strong to the weak according their limited experience. He takes water as an example and says, "the best virtue is like water." (上善若水) (ch. 9) His point is that water is usually ignored because of its weakness. However water is the one which can enter into anything, go anywhere and break anything strong. The similar thought also see ch. 16, 26, 43, 76, 78.

<sup>168</sup> See *Dao De Jing* ch. 40.

observation of the revolution of Mother Nature. His *wu* is revealed to be more touching in this circumstance. How is *wu* known? If there is not a *you* as a contrast to *wu*, *wu* is impossible to understand. If there is not ugliness, shortness and lowness, there is certainly not beauty, length and height. Accordingly Lao Zi postulates that: (ch. 2)

天下皆知美之爲美，斯惡已；皆知善之爲善，斯不善已。故有無(*you* and *wu*)相生，難易相成，長短相較，高下相傾，聲音相和，前後相隨。  
[All in the world recognize the beauty is beautiful because of the ugliness. All recognize the good is good because of the evil. Therefore you (being) and *wu* (non-being) produce each other. The difficulty and the ease bring about each other. The long and the short delimit each other. The high and the low rest on each other. The sound and the voice harmonize each other. The front and the back follow each other.]

Therefore all human experience and the view for life derive from this contrast relationship which Lao Zi tries his best to understand. *Wu wei* (無爲) and *wu yu* (無欲) are also the product of this methodology.<sup>169</sup>

The objectified relativism built on the observation of universal order is different from the internalized and subjective mentality of Qoheleth in substantiality. According to Lao Zi, everything and everyone will meet its last stop-destruction but still will have a renewal and rebirth waiting. So the life style of Daoism, like Buddhism, is a cycle. *Wu* (non-being) is the cause of *you* (being), and *you* ends up *wu* at last. The two produce each other and depend upon each other. Moreover, the term of *you-wu*(有無) could be substituted by *yin-yan* (陰陽)<sup>170</sup> in the system of *dao*, so it becomes Lao Zi's

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<sup>169</sup> *Wu wei* (doing nothing) is in contrast to *you wei* (doing something) and *wu yu* (no desire) to *yu* (desire).

<sup>170</sup> Cf. ch. 42. Lao Zi said that: "道生一，一生二，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以爲和。" The translation and comment please consult the previous footnote.



style of relativism.<sup>171</sup> Following is a discussion of how Wang Bi builds his *wu* theory on the foundation of Lao Zi and how he relates his thought with Confucianism textually.

## B. *WU* IN TEXT

The contribution of Wang Bi's *wu* reflects his commentaries on *Lao Zi* and *Zhou Yi*, and his thought also highlights the uniqueness of *wu* in the history of *Lao Zi*'s commentaries<sup>172</sup> and Chinese thought. Wang Bi and He Yan, his contemporary colleague, create a new methodology in using Daoism to interpret Confucian *Jing* (經), their most authoritative classics, which is a fresh initiation in the history of Chinese philosophy. Dai Jun Ren(戴君仁), a modern Confucian scholar, considers Wang Bi and He Yan as the turning points of that age in thought and indicates:

What Wang Bi and He Yan had done are just the two commentaries of the two Jins (兩晉, namely 西晉和東晉); however, they cause a huge impact upon the change of thought. The change of the thought and conduct in intellects derives from Wang Bi and He Yan since Zheng Shi (正始), namely the Jin (晉) Dynasty. ... The popularity of Confucianism since Han Wu Di (漢武帝, an emperor of Han Dynasty) has been transferred upon Lao-Zhang (老莊) because of Wang He (王弼 and 何

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<sup>171</sup> The relativism is used for the interpretation of the rise of the universe according to Lao Zi's methodology.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Zhou Shao Xian (周紹賢) in his *Wei Jin Qing Tan Shu Lun* (魏晉清談述論) (台北 Taipei: 商務印書館 Commercial Publishing House, 民國五十五年版 1966) commented Wang Bi's contribution on Lao Zi, and said that: "Therefore, the former commentaries on Lao Tzi all are not to the point of Lao Zi, but only Wang Bi is so clever to understand the essence of *dao* (道體) and goes deep in its mystery. According to his systematic interpretation for the five thousands words (Lao Zi's content includes about five thousands of words.), the true meaning of Lao Zi is revealed abundantly. Indeed, Wang Bi is the lighting torch of Lao Zi." (是則以前注老子者, 皆未闡揚老子之義, 王弼獨具性靈, 了悟道體, 深入玄境, 對五千言作有體系之解說, 勝義始得顯揚, 洵可謂老學之慧炬也。), 67.

晏).<sup>173</sup>

## B.1. WU AS ONTOLOGY

Following is the introduction of Wang Bi's philosophical thought on *wu*, which will be revealed by his commentaries of *Zhou Yi* and *Lao Zi* and divided into four categories, ontology, a view for change, epistemology and methodology<sup>174</sup>.

Deviating from Confucianism and based on Daoism, Wang Bi's *wu* develops the theory of ontology as an attempt to also discover the order of the universe as Lao Zi did. Wang Bi's thought on *wu* comes from the principle of Lao Zi's "you is begotten by *wu*"<sup>175</sup>, which connotes the formation and the origin of the universe. *Dao* in the form of *wu* brings about every thing in the system. In his commentary Wang Bi interprets this principle with these words that: (*Lao Zi* ch. 40)

天下之物，皆以有爲生。有之所始，以無爲本。欲將全有，必反于無也。  
[Everything in the world is begotten by *you* and *you* motivated by *wu*. If everything intends to exist in *you* fully, it must end up *wu*.]<sup>176</sup>

And he has the some Daoistic style of interpretation in 复卦 24 (Fu Gua 24) of Zhou

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<sup>173</sup> Dai Jun Ren (戴君仁), "Wang Bi and He Yan's Jing Xue (王弼何晏的經學)" in *Con-Men Journal* (孔孟學報, 1970年5月), 29. The original Chinese text is: "而王弼何晏雖然只是注了周易和論語兩經，但在思想轉變上曾起極大的作用。正始以後，入了晉代，士大夫的思想和行爲有極大的改變，都是王何開其端，... 由漢武帝以後儒家獨尊的局面，轉變爲老莊盛行的局面，王何是其轉捩點。"

<sup>174</sup> The categorizing is according to 趙書廉(Zhao Shu Lian), *魏晉玄學探微 (The Exploration in Wei Jin Xuan Xue)*, 河南(He Nan): 人民出版社 (People Press), 1991.

<sup>175</sup> Lao Zi postulates that: "The heaven, the earth and the all things are begotten by *you*, *you* is begotten by *wu*." (ch. 40) and "Dao begot one, one two and three all things. All things with the change of *ying* and *yang* is harmony with *qi*." (ch. 42).

<sup>176</sup> See *Lao Zi Dao De Jin: Wang Bi Zhu* (老子道德經: 王弼注), 下篇(2nd section), 4.

Yi<sup>177</sup> that:

復者，反本之謂也，天地以本爲心者也。凡動息則靜，靜非對動者也。語息則默，默非對語者也。然則天地雖大，富有萬物，雷動風行，運化萬變。寂然至無(*wu*)，是其本也。<sup>178</sup>

[Fu means to return to the original and the original is the heart of the heaven and the earth. It returns to quietness after motion, but the quietness is not the true result of motion. It returns to silence after eloquence, but the silence is not the true result of eloquence. Therefore the heaven and the earth are big enough to have all things, motivating thunder and wind, and evolving with changes; nevertheless, the silent and ultimate *wu* is their original.]

According to these two paragraphs, Wang Bi indicates that everything in the world existing in visible form must return to its original non-being, namely *wu*, on which *you*, being, is based. Wang Bi's *wu*, similar with *hebel* but not equal to nothingness or non-existence literally, has become an order of cosmogony. This is the tradition of the original Daoism and the reason why the later generation would evaluate Daoism as a religion.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, the *wu* in Wang Bi obviously got better informed than in *Lao Zi* and the system of *wu* has been well-developed under the impact of Wang Bi. Sun Su Qi (孫述圻) proves this view that: "When the forming process of theoretic and thinking

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<sup>177</sup> The text of Fu Gua (復卦) is that: "反復其道，七日來復，天行也。利有攸往，剛長也。復其見天地之心乎。" (It evolves over and over according to the way of 7 days cycle, which is the evolving principle of the heaven. When it forwards with benefit, it looks solid and long. Therein the heart of the heaven and the earth is found.) *Zhou Yi* does not intend to mention *wu* but a kind of evolving order of the universe. However Wang Bi translates the paragraph the other way on purpose. Nevertheless, according to the tradition of *Zhou Yi*, it is obvious that *Zhou Yi*, like *Four Books* (四書), is accustomed of using the heaven (天, *tian*) or the life of heaven (天命, *tian ming*) to delineate the order of the universe

<sup>178</sup> See "周易上經噬嗑傳第三(*Zhou Yi Shang Jin: Shi Ge Zhuan 3*)", in *周易王韓注* (*Wang Han Commentary on Zhou Yi*), 5.

<sup>179</sup> *Wu* is deified and mixed with some god's name in the development of the thought by the later and religious Daoism. E. g., 無極玄天上帝 (The Mysterious God of Ultimate *Wu*), 清虛大帝 (The Great Emperor of Pure *Xu*). *Wu* could be transferred into *xu* without difficulty according above semantic and etymological study.

development is viewed in the history of ancient China, He Yan and Wang Bi's Gue Wu Lun (貴無論) goes deeper than Lao Zi's philosophy. It represent a new development and improvement in quality."<sup>180</sup>

The overview of introduction in *Lao Zi* ch. 1 unfolds the relationship between *dao* and *wu*, and Wang Bi uses this relationship to demonstrate his *wu* theory metaphysically. The text of Lao Zi is that, "道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名。無，名天地之始；有，名萬物之母。" (the English translation, cf. page 69) and Wang's interpretation is that,

凡有皆始於無(*wu*), 故未形無(*wu*)名之, 則為萬物之始。及其有形有名之時, 則長之, 育之, 亭之, 毒之。為其母也, 言道以無(*wu*)形無(*wu*)名始成萬物。以始以成, 而不知其所以, 元之又元也。

[All of *you* derive from *wu* that is formless and nameless, therefore *wu* becomes the origin of all things. When everything starts to have form and name, *wu* (or *dao*) grows, cultivates, up-lifts and nourishes it. As a mother-like position, *dao* creates all things in its formlessness and namelessness. Through the beginning to the completion it (*wu* or *dao*) is unknown so that it becomes mysterious extremely.]

Interestingly *wu* is interchangeable with *dao* in word and concept here. The similar expression is easy to find in other chapters and his other works.<sup>181</sup> *Wu* in Wang's philosophical system has become the absolute notion terminologically and metaphysically. Thereupon Li Zeng (李增) considers that Lao Zi's philosophy is a kind

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<sup>180</sup> Sun's comment in Chinese is that: "從中國古代思想史上理論思維的發展方面來看, 何晏、王弼的貴無論比<老子>哲學更為深入, 有著新的發展和提高。" See 孫述圻(Sun Su Qi), *六朝思想史(Idea History in Six Dynasties)*, 30-31.

<sup>181</sup> E.g. Wang Bi's interpretation for *Dao De Jing* ch. 8 is that: "道, 無。" (*dao*, namely *wu*), and the interpretation of ch. 41(大音希聲, 大象無形, 道隱無名: the loudest voice is inaudible, the biggest image is formless, and Dao is nameless) and ch. 14, 25, 32, 34, 51. And also see Wang's *Zhou Yi Zhu* (周易注), "繫辭上"(I Ji Ci), 道者, 無之稱也。無不通也, 無不由也, 況之謂道。寂然為體, 不可為象。" (Dao, the name of *wu*, can go anywhere and reach any place. It is named *dao*, embodies itself silently and the body is formless.), 7.

of conclusion without the clear deducted process<sup>182</sup> so that there were many commentaries on Lao Zi, nevertheless, "no interpretation of these commentaries are the same. ... Wang Bi's commentary on Lao Zi is accepted as the best one."<sup>183</sup> Obviously Li Zeng's comment focuses on Wang Bi's ontology.

Overemphasizing *wu* at the cost of *you*, Wang Bi seems to deviate from the original balance between *you* and *wu* in *Lao Zi*.<sup>184</sup> His *wu* theory brought about many impractical discussions among the upper class of intellectuals and officials and infused mysterious ethos into the entire society. Li Zeng in the conclusion of his article contributes the idea that:

因此老子之道是重視『有』，即使是王弼也說『老子是有者也。』不過弼注老卻側重於『道、無』之發揮，而忽略於『有』之顯明，忘記了『有之利』，這不免使老子的道更是玄之又玄，幾乎是懸空而不落實，而影響魏晉之玄學有點空泛不切實際。<sup>185</sup>

[Therefore Lao Zi's *dao* also emphasize 'you', with which Wang Bi agreed by the words that 'Lao Zi is the adherent of you.' However Wang's commentary overemphasizes *dao-wu* but ignores the position of *you* and its benefit, which causes Lao Zi's Dao more mysterious and impractical. Xuan Xue (玄學, occultism) in the Dynasties of Wei Jin became airy and impractical therein.]

This debate on *wu* and *you* can be observed easily on their application in life. Wang's *wu* in life and society will be demonstrated later. Before that, one more dimension needs to be noted, namely *wu* as the expression of "change".

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<sup>182</sup> See Li Zeng, "王弼之形上學(The Metaphysics of Wang Bi)" (哲學與文化第十一卷四期 Philosophy and Culture Vol.11, no. 4, 民國七十三年四月 Apr. 1984), 38.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> See the above discussion in *wu* "as a relativism" (*wu* in context).

<sup>185</sup> See Li Zeng "王弼之形上學(The Metaphysics of Wang Bi)", 43.

## B.2. WU AS A VIEW FOR CHANGE

Even though Wang Bi's philosophy focuses on *wu*, he did not ignore the changing phenomena brought by the interaction of *you-wu*. According to Wang Bi *wu* is the unchangeable and absolute entity that exists eternally, while on the contrary, *you* is always changeable and movable. So Wang Bi indicates that:

以虛(*xu*)靜(*jing*)觀其反復, 凡有(*you*)起於虛(*xu*), 動(*dong*)起於靜(*jing*), 故萬物雖並動作, 卒復歸於虛靜(*xu jing*), 是物之極篤也。

[Observing the *xu jing* on its changes, *you* derives from *xu* and *dong* from *jing* so that all things rise into *dong* and end up *xu jing*. This is the extreme phenomenon of all things.]<sup>186</sup>

*Xu jing* used as the interpretation of *wu* and, literally means quietness. In the syntax of this sentence *xu jing* acts as a contrast to *you* and *dong* (moving, changing). All things in the world are changeable and ephemeral, but the basic principle is that all will return to their original, namely *jing* or *wu*.

How does human life fit into this principle? Following Lao Zi's thought, Wang Bi said that:

歸根則靜, 故曰靜; 靜則復命, 故曰復命也; 復命則得性命之常(*chang*), 故曰常 (*chang*) 也。

[Returning to original then it comes to quietude, so it is called quietude. The quietude is to return to its fate, The returned fate cause the constant of fate. So it is called the constant.]<sup>187</sup>

Wang Bi's approval for Lao Zi's "understanding the constant" (知常) demonstrates that

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<sup>186</sup> See Wang Bi's *Lao Zi Zhu*, ch. 16(老子注, 十六章), 8.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

there exists a constant order in the whole universe. Human beings will prosper and be happy if they obey the order in life<sup>188</sup>. So "*chang*" (常) turns out to be an important view in *Lao Zi* and Wang Bi's thought<sup>189</sup>, and is connected with some other terms such as "*chang wu*" (常無, the constant *wu*, in ch. 32) and "*chang zu*" (常足, the constant satisfaction, in ch. 46). So *chang* is not only the key concept to see the change of *you-wu* but it is also relevant in living manner, politics and social relationship.

The view of the change on *wu* is commented as "Dong Jing Theory"(動靜觀) by Zhao Shu Lian (趙書廉)<sup>190</sup>, and according to Wang Bi's idea of "*jing* as the ruler of *zao*" (靜爲躁君)<sup>191</sup> Zhao indicates that the relationship of *you* and *wu* is actualized in this

Dong Jing Theory and postulates that:

王弼主張以靜制動，但並不否認現象世界的運動變化，甚至還承認矛盾是變化的原因。

[Wang Bi recognized *jing's* control on *dong* but did not deny the change in the phenomenal world. Moreover, he accepted even the contradiction as the cause of the change.]<sup>192</sup>

Wang Bi's *Zhou Yi Zhu* (周易注) backs this view. Wang Bi points out that: "凡不合而

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<sup>188</sup> That is the reason that Lao Zi is the proponent of "*wu wei*" (無爲) and "*wu yu*" (無欲), for *wu* is the constant order in the universe. If man lives in peace with this order, he would not get harmed but prosper in life.

<sup>189</sup> See Lao Zi and Wang Bi's interpretation in ch. 1, 4, 16, 37, 28, 32, 37, 46, 48, 51, 52, 59, 79.

<sup>190</sup> See 趙書廉(Zhao Shu Lian), *魏晉玄學探微 (The Exploration in Wei Jin Xuan Xue)*, 28-30.

<sup>191</sup> *Lao Zi Zhu*, ch. 26. Wang Bi indicates that: "不行者使行，不動者制動。... 靜必爲躁君。" (It makes run those that don't run and moves those that don't move. ... Therefore, *jing* must be the king of *zao*.) *Zao*(躁) is literally equal to *dong* (動).

<sup>192</sup> See 趙書廉(Zhao Shu Lian), 29.

后乃變生。變之所以生，生于不合者也。"(革卦, Ge Gua) (The change comes from the thing that contradicts. The reason the change happens is that it derives from contradiction.), "凡物窮則思變，困則謀通。"(困卦, Gen Gua) (Everything that comes to the extreme will try to change, and those that are blocked will try their best to go through.) and "凡物極則反，故畜極則通。"(大畜卦, Da Xu Gua) (Everything that comes to the extreme will contradict. Therefore to keep the extreme is to be successful.)<sup>193</sup> Following this thought, the change and contradiction of the universe does not derive from outside but inside, and the only cause that triggers change is *wu*.<sup>194</sup> It is *wu*, the entity of all phenomena that forms all the change in the universe and the human life in the immanent process. Basically the opinion of *wu* as a view of change is developed in Wang Bi's ontology. Following will be the study of his epistemology, connecting closely with its ontological presupposition.

### B.3. *WU* AS AN EPISTEMOLOGY

*Wu* becomes a special kind of epistemology under Wang Bi's impact when he approaches *wu* in a positive manner of human intelligence, which is opposed by Lao Zi. Lao Zi's view for human intelligence, to our surprise, is quite negative. He postulated

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<sup>193</sup> All of these Wang's quotation see in Zhao, 29, and 周易王韓注(*Zhou Yi: Wang- Han Commentary*).

<sup>194</sup> See *Lao Zi Zhu*, ch. 5. Wang Bi said that: "天地任自然，無爲無造," (The heaven and the earth let everything as it is, they do and create nothing.) and "無爲於萬物，而萬物各適其所用" (*Wu* is doing upon everything, then everything goes in accordance with its own function.)



that:

絕聖棄智，民利百倍；絕民棄義，民復孝慈；絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。此三者，爲文不足，故令有所屬：見素抱朴，少私寡欲。

[Denying the sage and the intelligent will benefit people abundantly, denying righteousness of people will make them filial and compassionate and denying cleverness and profit will make thefts and robbers unseen. These three are those who want to be good but not satisfied so that they deviate away. Returning to the natural is getting the original and being not selfish leads to no desire.]<sup>195</sup>

In order to reach his ideal utopia<sup>196</sup> Lao Zi denies all human intelligence and dignity according to his theory of *wu wei* (無爲) and *wu yu* (無欲). He wonders that human effort could bring about any happiness. Conversely the wiser and holier men are, the worse the society becomes.<sup>197</sup> Wang Bi does not follow Lao Zi this way. Wang Bi assimilates the human possibility to be good, so he indicates that, "神聖合道，交歸之也" (*Lao Zi Zhu*, ch. 60) (God and the sage do according to *dao*, for they interact to each other.) Therefore according to Wang Bi the sage should "have wisdom in his heart and food in his stomach", and "seemingly have wisdom but not actually." (心懷智而腹懷食，虛有智而實無知)<sup>198</sup> And the sage reaches the wisdom from his inner rather than the outside, meaning that the sage get his wisdom from his understanding of *dao* and *wu*.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Dao De Jing* ch. 19.

<sup>196</sup> Lao Zi's utopia world is shown in ch.80.

<sup>197</sup> Lao Zi considers of hypocrisy of human being so he said that, "慧智出，有大僞" (The wiser men become, the worse hypocrisy society will have.). See ch. 18.

<sup>198</sup> See 趙書廉(Zhao Shu Lian), 30. Zhao quotes the words from Wang Bi's "*The Q and A of Analects of Confucius*(論語釋疑)".

<sup>199</sup> See *Lao Zi Zhu*, ch. 2. "智慧自備，爲則僞也。"(Wisdom comes from the sage himself, and to chase for it brings about more hypocrisy.)

In the angle of epistemology Wang Bi's *wu* can be approached by his observation of the relationship among 象(form, the signifier of Gua), 意(meaning, the meaning of Gua), 言(word, the words used for interpreting signifier and meaning)<sup>200</sup> in *周易略例明象*(*Zhou Yi Lue Li, Ming Xiang*). Wang Bi said that,

言生於象，故可尋言以觀象，象生於意，故可尋象以觀意。意以象盡，象以言著，故言者所以明象，得象而忘言，象者所以存意，得意而忘象。

[Words derive from forms so that we might observe forms by words. Forms derive from meanings so that we might observe meanings by forms. The meaning depends fully on the form and the form is shown by the word. Therefore the word is used to show up the form, and the word will be forgotten after the form is got. And the form will be forgotten after the meaning is got.]

To sum up, Wang Bi give words, meanings and forms in *Zhou Yi* an epistemological interpretation, and in this way he makes these independent three correlated closely to one another. This Chinese style of hermeneutics can be understood by the correlation among signifier, meaning and referent. Words (signifier) are used to interpret forms (referent), and forms are used to reveal meanings (words → forms → meanings). This Wang Bi's style of deduction has enlarged and vivified *Zhou Yi* that originally was designed for divination and lifted *Zhou Yi* up to the philosophical dimension.<sup>201</sup> In the whole process of transformation, meanings is the last goal, so words and forms as the

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<sup>200</sup> *Zhou Yi* is the book of divination. It is composed of Gua forms(卦象), and their interpretation(卦辭, 爻辭). Gua forms with two basic signals, namely "–"(yin) and "–"(yan), and originally Eight Gua(八卦, 8 combinations of yin-yan), but are developed into Sixty-Four Gua(六十四卦) at last. Every Gua has its interpretation, namely Gua Ci(卦辭) or Yao Ci(爻辭).

<sup>201</sup> Fung Yu-Lan indicates that: "Originally the I (Zhou Yi) was written to be used with the divining plant, but later, even when not used for divination, the meanings of the explanations of its hexagrams and lives continued to be quoted when support for an argument was sought for." See Fung, 380 (English).

means to get meanings should be dropped away.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, the process also makes meanings to be an introspective and subjective result so that a kind of metaphysics emerges here. Of course, the ultimate of meaning is *dao*, namely *wu* in Wang Bi's mind.

Accordingly Wang Bi's epistemological interpretation is the reformation of the Yi Xue (易學)<sup>203</sup> in Han Dynasty(漢代). Most Confucian scholars in Han focused on the trivial and frivolous documentation in the Yi Xue, so that they were confined by syntactic and linguistic study at the cost of systematic and philosophical understanding of *Zhou Yi*. Wang Bi criticized the atmosphere with these words: "案文責卦, 有馬無乾" (Investigating Gua by the trivial documentation only can get a little horse at cost of whole heaven.) and "一失其原, 巧愈彌甚" (Deviating from the original, these people become subtler than before.)<sup>204</sup> Therefore according to Tang Yong Tong (湯用彤), Wang Bi's commentary on *Zhou Yi* is just intending to express his own opinion on "性道之學" (the Theory of Nature and Dao) so that he adapts the old interpretation for the new.<sup>205</sup> Wang Bi's reformation contributes a lot on renewal of Confucianism's *Zhou Yi*.

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<sup>202</sup> 周易略例-明象 (*Zhou Yi Lue Li, Ming Xiang*) has other two illustrations to interpret this theory. "猶蹄者所以在兔, 得兔而忘蹄, 筌者所以在魚, 得魚而忘筌也。(The hare-hunter setting a snap is to get a hare. He might forget his snap in case that a hare were caught. The fisherman sets his fish-basket for fish. He might forget his basket in case that fishes were caught.) 蹄(*ti*) is the special snap for hare-hunting and 筌(*quan*) is the fish-basket functioning like net when fishing.

<sup>203</sup> Yi Xue means the knowledge on *Zhou Yi* or the scholarship of *Zhou Yi*.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> See Tang Yong Tong, 魏晉玄學論稿 (*The Manuscript of Wei Jin Xuan Xue*), 93.

#### B.4. WU AS A METHODOLOGY

Basing on the ontology of *wu* and referring to the politic policy of former dynasties, the rulers of Wei used the principle of *wu* to determine their policy under the impact of Wang Bi.<sup>206</sup> Driven by the human desire and nature, people usually like 捨本逐末 (chasing after the last at cost of the basic)<sup>207</sup> so that many social problems happen. In order to correct the social deviance the methodology of 舉本統末 (*Ju Ben Tong Mou*)<sup>208</sup> or 崇本舉末 (*Chun Ben Ju Mou*, see *Lao Zi Zhu* ch. 38) issued tries to tackle the social problems and maintain a stable social system at that age. "*Ju Ben*" or "*Chun Ben*" means to use and adjust men themselves to the fundamental principle existing in the universe. "*Tong Mou*" or "*Ju Mou*" is to indicate that everything superficial or last in the human world needs to be well-organized by the basic principle. Wang Bi testifies in the commentary of ch. 38 that,

守母以存其子，崇本以舉其末，則形名俱有，而邪不生，大美配天，而華不作。故母不可遠，本不可失。

[As to keep the Mother is to keep the Son, so to respect the original leads to keep the last. If the form and the title are kept, the evil is quenched. The true beauty (of the sage) is as great as the heaven, but it might look like common. Therefore it should be reminded that Mother and the original need to keep.]

The methodology *Ju Ben Tong Mou* intends to resume the system of so-called "名

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<sup>206</sup> They postulated "舉本統末" or "崇本舉末" (The basic as a principle is used to rule over the last.) according to the concepts such as "以無爲本" (basing on *wu*) and "以無爲用(using in *wu*)".

<sup>207</sup> See Wang Bi's interpretation in ch. 52.

<sup>208</sup> See 論語集解 皇疏九 (*Commentary Collections of Confucius Analects, Hong Shu Jiu*).

教" (*Ming Jiao*).<sup>209</sup> There was a huge revolt called "黃巾之亂" (*The Revolt of Yellow Towel*)<sup>210</sup> and this domestic political riot happened meanwhile the exchange of Han and the Wei. The social system was greatly damaged by this dramatic catastrophe. Wang Bi considered that *Ming Jiao* comes from *zi ran* (自然), namely the nature of *dao* according to his terminology, so he said that:

朴(*pu*), 真(*zhin*)也。真散則百行出, 殊類生, 若器也。聖人因其分散, 故爲之立官長, 以善爲師, 不善爲資, 移風易俗, 使復歸於一也。  
[The natural is true. If the true deviates, all kinds of behaviors and differences will appear like different instruments. Because of these deviations, the sage sets up rulers for them in order that they may learn from good and keep alert from evil. After the social custom and wont is changed, the all things will return to the original one.]<sup>211</sup>

*Pu* (the natural) and *zhin* (the true) denoting *dao* or *wu* in Wang Bi's philosophical system, is developed into all kinds of virtues and materials, so the sage with the *wu*-understanding sets up the rulers according to their virtue and behavior to rule over those who are evil. And the ethos in society might be changed for good in the installation. The whole country and society might evolve without difficulty upon the strong and stable system under the influence of *zi ran* and *wu*.

The other famous axiom in Wang Bi is called "崇本息末" (*Chong Ben Xi Mou*), which literally means "to respect the original in order to annihilate the last". Wang Bi

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<sup>209</sup> *Ming Jiao* is a social system. The different individual with a special virtue or family background will be given a special rank or official status. The feudalistic system has been built since Han and become very influential to sustain the whole society in Wei.

<sup>210</sup> The revolt burst out from rural area. The leader called Zhang Jiao (張角) leads thousands of mob to plunder and rob around. The members of this group wore yellow towels on their heads so that they also called Yellow Towel Robbers (黃巾賊).

<sup>211</sup> See *Lao Zi Zhu* ch. 28.

said that: (*Lao Zi Zhu* ch. 57)

夫以道治國，崇本以息末。

[The method of ruling the country with *dao* is to respect the basic in order to annihilate the last.]

崇本息末 in ch. 57 and ch. 58 focuses on the discussion of the topic: *wu wei* (無爲).

Lao Zi compares the two different methodologies for ruling. One is "以正治國" (ruling the country by justice) and it would result in more slyness, poverty, and plunderers<sup>212</sup>.

The other one is "無爲" (*wu wei*, doing nothing) and it could bring about justice, richness and naivete among people.<sup>213</sup> Here Lao Zi assumes that man's endeavor for good ends

up the opposite, because man can't understand the order of the universe. Wang Bi

informed the spirit of Lao Zi in this chapter. Highlighting the "the origianl" (本) and

"*dao*" in his commentary, *wu* is implied in these terms. Only *wu* can quench human desire for "the last" important thing (末) in human life.

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<sup>212</sup> Ch. 57. Lao Zi presents the reasons that, "天下多忌諱，而民彌貧；民多利器，國家滋昏；人多伎巧，奇物滋起；法令滋彰，盜賊多有。" (The more anxiety in the world, the poorer people would become; the more good instruments people have, the more disorder the country would get; the cleverer people are, the more treasures would appear; the more laws, the more plunderers.)

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. The reason Lao Zi provides is that, "故聖人云：我無爲而民自化，我好靜而民自正，我無事而民自富，我無欲而民自樸。" (Therefore Sage said that, "I do nothing so that people cultivate themselves; I love quietude so that people become just; I cause nothing that people get rich; I have no desire that people become naïve.")

## CHAPTER XI

### RHETORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF *WU*

This chapter will discuss Wang Bi's aesthetic skills and the literary characteristics based on his commentary on *Lao Zi*, which has been applauded as the best one among ancient *Lao Zi* commentaries. Our analysis will use these three perspectives: linguistic features, coherence and parallelism.

#### A. LINGUISTIC FEATURES

First of all, *Lao Zi* and Wang Bi's commentary will be compared to see how *wu* is used in these two works. The reason Wang Bi's commentary was highly-recommended by generations may be observed by the following statistics. *Wu* occurs in *Lao Zi* exactly 100 times while Wang Bi has used 289 times of *wu* to develop *Lao Zi*'s *wu* and his thought. Below are the charts of *wu* used in these two works:

Chart 1. *Wu* in *Lao Zi* (100 occurrences)<sup>214</sup>

chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>Wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>
1	2	14	3	37	4	49	1	69	4
2	2	19	1	38	5	50	4	70	1
3	3	20	3	39	7	52	1	72	2
7	1	24	1	40	1	57	4	75	1
8	1	27	6	41	3	58	1	78	1
10	4	28	2	43	4	59	2	79	2
11	4	32	1	46	1	63	4	80	2

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<sup>214</sup> Chart 1 and 2 are compiled and designed by the author of this thesis.

13	1	35	1	48	4	64	5		
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Chart 2. *Wu* in Wang Bi (289 occurrences)

chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>	chapter	<i>wu</i>
1	8	16	10	32	8	45	3	59	1
3	1	17	4	33	3	46	2	60	2
4	2	18	1	34	4	47	1	62	4
5	6	19	1	35	5	48	3	63	1
6	6	20	13	37	3	49	11	64	5
7	2	21	6	38	34	50	7	65	3
8	1	23	4	39	3	51	2	69	7
9	2	25	12	40	4	52	2	70	1
10	9	27	6	41	6	55	8	72	3
11	5	28	1	42	5	56	5	77	3
13	2	29	3	43	6	57	4	78	1
14	11	30	2	44	1	58	8	80	2

According to these two charts above, the following observations can be made:

- Wu* has just been used for 100 times, but 289 times in Wang Bi. The later is almost three times than the former. This amount of *wu* quoted and used illustrates a kind of *wu*-oriented inclination in Wang Bi's terminology.
- The occurrence of *wu* happens in 39 chapters of Lao Zi, about a half of all 81 chapters. However, Wang Bi uses *wu* in 60 chapters, namely three fourth of *Lao Zi*. In many chapters of *Lao Zi* there is no *wu* mentioned, but Wang Bi try to connect *wu* in these chapter (e.g., ch. 5, 6, 16, 17). Apparently it is Wang Bi's intention to build a *wu* system in his commentary.
- Usually the chapter in which both Lao Zi and Wang used *wu* for more times will be the crucial chapter to discuss on *wu*. (e.g., ch. 1, 14, 20, 27, 32, 38, 43, 64) And those chapters in which only Wang Bi mentions or Lao Zi just uses once while Wang Bi does more are always the brilliant parts of Wang Bi's *wu*. (e.g., ch. 4, 16, 25, 32, 41, 49, 55, 69)

Wang Bi presents the amazing rhetoric skills in his commentary with the terminological transformation of *wu*. For the description of nature of *dao*, he likes to use some words to connote *wu* such as "常" (*chang*, the constant, ch. 32, 37, 49, 50, 55), "柔" (*rou*, the soft, ch. 43), "真" (*zhen*, the true, ch. 65), "元" (*yuan*, the mysterious, ch. 1,



51)<sup>215</sup>, "虛"(xu, the empty, ch. 4, 16, 77)<sup>216</sup>, "靜" (jing, the quiet, ch. 16, 45, 61), "孔" (kong, the empty, ch. 21)<sup>217</sup>, "卑"(bei, the below, ch. 50), "奧"(ao, the mysterious, ch.62), "恍惚"(huang hu, the dim, ch. 21) and "寂寥"(ji liao, the lonely, ch. 25). For the order involved with *wu* he like to choose "道"(dao, the way, ch. 1, 23, 40, 41, 42, 46, 57, 59, 62, 77, 79), "自然"(zi ran, the naïve, ch. 25, 59, 60, 65, 77), "本"(ben, the basic, ch. 38, 52, 57, 58) and "母"(mu, the mother, ch. 38, 39, 52). According to these words employed, the atmosphere of *wu* is developed by Wang Bi, the rhetoric master. Of course, Wang Bi, the faithful adherent of Lao Zi's thought won't ignore Lao Zi's special phrases such as "無爲"(wu wei, doing nothing) and "無欲" (wu yu, having no desire). *Wu wei* and *wu yu* almost become the trademark of Daoism under the contribution of Wang Bi.

It is critical to pay attention to the contradictoriness with which Wang Bi's *wu* is infused, so that his language can be approached correctly. He indicates that:

凡此諸善，皆是道之所成也，在象則爲大象，而大象無形，在音則爲大音，而大音希聲。以之成而不見其形，故隱而無名也。

[It is *dao* that completes all these extremes. If it is the biggest in form, the biggest form should be formless. If it is the loudest in sound, it should be soundless. *dao* is completed when its form is unseen, so it is hidden and nameless.](ch. 41)

Everything seen and heard in the universe is indwelled and sustained by *dao*; however, *dao* enlarged to the most is unseen and inaudible. Accordingly the contradictoriness of

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. the former section, "Semantic and Etymological Understanding of *wu*". 元(yuan) equal to 氣(qi, breath) is used as 玄(xuan), namely the mysterious here.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> "孔"(kong) is equal to "空" (kong) in ancient Chinese character. Cf. "空" in ch. IX: Semantic and Etymological Understanding of *Wu*.

*dao* exist in between being(有) and non-being(無) in interpreting the system of Wang Bi.

That is the main reason that it is so difficult to understand *dao*. The contradictoriness of *dao* and its “original nuance” can be testified by Lao Zi himself this way:

爲學日益，爲道日損，損之又損，以至於無爲，無爲而無不爲。

[Learning makes more progress, but seeking *dao* makes more loss. If a man lose so much to get the situation of *wu wei*, he can complete anything because his *wu wei*.](ch. 48)

This attitude for human life is quite contradictory and against human logic. According human logic if a man want to be successful, what he should do is to learn and do more.

Lao Zi proposes just the opposite. Wang Bi caught the spirit of *Lao Zi* and interpreted in this chapter:

有爲則有所失，故無爲乃無所不爲也。

[Doing leads to lose so that those who do nothing (*wu wei*) will complete anything.] (*Lao Zi Zhu* ch. 48)

Wang Bi's interpretation touches the heart of Lao Zi. *Wu wei* is to return to the naivete of everything and to let everything fit into the order in the universe. This is Lao Zi's and Wang Bi's wisdom.

## B. COHERENCE

The coherence of Wang Bi's thought has always been discussed and evaluated by scholars. The reason is that his works include both the classics of Confucianism and Daoism. To which does the thought of *wu* belong Confucianism or Daoism? Lin Li Zhen (林麗真) indicates that Wang Bi intended to harmonize Confucianism and Daoism, but actually it is Lao Zi's thought that is superior to Confucius in his philosophical

system<sup>218</sup>. First of all, let us see how his thought of *wu* accords with Lao Zi.

### B.1. COHERENCE WITH LAO ZI

Lao Zi suggested a constant order, *dao*, in the whole universe, but what the order really is he did not mention clearly. Upon the transcendental order Wang Bi built his theory of *wu*. According to Wang Bi's interchangeable terminology, the nature of *dao* is always permeated in the atmosphere of *wu*, which is described as 虛 (*xu*, empty), 靜 (*jing*, quiet), 柔 (*rou*, soft), 元 (*yuan*, mysterious or breath), 真 (*zhen*, true), 卑 (*bei*, below), 恍惚 (*huang hu*, dim), and so on. All of these *wu*-oriented words make the whole picture of universal order mysterious and beyond human understanding. The Chinese vainest vanity has presented has developed a very close connection with ontology, which is initiated by Lao Zi and well-developed by Wang Bi. In Lin Li Zhen's approach "only *dao* in Lao Zi is the original but all the ethical theory in Confucianism is just the last. Without Lao Zi's ontology as the foundation, to stick always on Confucian Five Virtues is to pursue the last at cost of the original."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Lin Li Zhen said that, "There are two pillars, namely "the sage understanding *wu*" and "the sage is compassionate" in Wang Bi's thought. These two pillars, simply to say, are just discussing the essence and the function. He intends to treat the spirit of Lao Zi as the essence and the behavior of Confucianist as the function to harmonize the difference in between. ... He seemed to harmonize Confucianism and Daoism, but in fact, he had made Lao Zi's thought quite superior to the other." (王弼思想的支柱, 乃在『聖人體無』與『聖人有情』兩大端。這兩大端合起來, 就是一個體用問題。他想用老子的精神為體, 而以儒家的表現為用, 來融會儒道的不同。... 表面上是要調合儒道, 骨子裏已經是老子的思想取得了壓倒式的勝利。). See Lin Li Zhen, 1659.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 1676. The Chinese is: 唯有老子的道體才是本, 儒家所主張的一切處事接物之道都是末, 故若無老子的本體思想作中心, 而一味講求儒家的仁義禮智信, 那就是『舍本逐末』了。

Therefore the coherence of Wang Bi and Lao Zi is quite clear and understandable.

## B.2 COHERENCE WITH CONFUCIANISM

Wang Bi's coherence with Confucius has caused many controversies, and the pivotal problem is always concentrated on the interpretation of *Zhou Yi*, which is the one of *The Thirteen Jings* (十三經)<sup>220</sup>, the authoritative classics in Confucianism. Qian Mu (錢穆) indicates that:

王弼之學，細加研究，亦可說其是一儒家。他的易註，更是儒學大功臣，與何晏論語集解同列十三經註疏，而影響功蹟，更爲遠大。

[Wang Bi could be a Confucianist in a careful understanding. His commentary of *Zhou Yi* contributes a lot in Confucianism and is included in the authoritative commentaries of *The Thirteen Jins* with He Yan's commentary on *Confucius' Analects*. The influence of his merit for coming generations is greater.]<sup>221</sup>

However, according to Mou Zhong San (牟宗三)<sup>222</sup> Wang Bi's interpretation on *Zhou Yi* is a attempt to abolish the divination inclination and word study in Han Dynasty; notwithstanding, he did not touch the heart of Confucius's thought. What he had done is

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<sup>220</sup> The Thirteen Jings" are 易經(周易, *Yi Jin* or *Zhou Yi*), 詩經(*Shi Jin*, *The Odes*), 尚書(*Shang Shu*), 禮記(*Li Ji*), 周禮(*Zhou Li*), 儀禮(*Yi Li*), 左傳(*Zuo Zhuan*), 公羊傳(*Gong Yang Zhuan*), 穀梁傳(*Gu Liang Zhuan*), 論語(*Lun Yu*, *The Analects of Confucius*), 爾雅(*Er Ya*), 孝經(*Xiao Jin*), 孟子(*Mong Zi*). The thirteen books are classics and main doctrine in Confucianism. The main thought of Confucianism can be found in these books.

<sup>221</sup> Qian Mu, *The Historical Series of Chinese Academic Thought* (中國學術思想史論叢) (Taipei: Dong Da Press Inc., 1977), 71.

<sup>222</sup> Mou indicates that, "王(Wang Bi)·韓易學，要在廢象數。至於易理，則未能握住孔門義理之管鑰，而是以道家之有無玄義而解經也。" (The theory of Wang-Han is to abolish the interpretation of form and number. But their theory could not touch crucial points of Confucianism, but interpret *jin* by Daoist's *you-wu*.", see Mou Zhong San, "王弼之玄理之易學"(The Mysterious Theory in Wang Bi's Yi) in "魏晉玄學" (*Wei Jin Xuan Zue*) (Taichung: Dong Hai Univ. Press, 1962), 51.

the reinterpretation on the Confucian *Jing* (經) by Lao Zi's *you-wu*.

Following is a good illustration to see the relationship between Wang Bi and *Zhou Yi*

*Yi*. In *Qian Gua Tuan Zhuan* (乾卦彖傳) of *Zhou Yi*, there is a cosmological description to tell how the universe comes into being. *Zhou Yi* said that,

大哉乾元，萬物資始。乃統天。雲天雨施，品物流形。大明終始，六位時成。時乘六龍以御天。乾道變化，各正性命。保合太和，乃利貞。  
[Oh, how great is Qian as the original, from which all things derive. It rules over the heaven, and it not only makes the heaven cloudy and rainy but also gives form for everything it has checked. From the beginning to the end it is the brightest, and formed six dimensions in their time when it rules the heaven on six dragons. After Qian transforms, everything will keep its fate as it should. If every one could keep his fate and harmony with this extreme peace, the benefit of the firm will come upon him.]

Wang Bi interprets the words this way:

大明乎終始之道，故六位不失其時而成。升降無常，隨時而用。... 乘變而御大器，靜專動直，不失太和，豈非正性命之情者耶？  
[The *dao* of the beginning and the end is the brightest, so the six dimensions come to being in time. It rises and descends without a constant rule and it functions at any time. ... Is it not the controller of the fate and compassion, namely that can take control of the change and rule over everything, hold the rhythm of *dong jing* without losing the extreme peace?]

The pivotal point is the use of the subject. For *Zhou Yi* there is "各" (*ge*, every or everyone) in the phrase "各正性命" (everyone keeps his own fate), which emphasizes the accommodation of everyone with the change of the universe. However Wang Bi takes off "各" (*ge*) the word and the meaning from the interpretation and focus on universal order itself. Of course, the order in his mind is *dao* and *wu*. Therefore Mou Zhong San disagrees with the interpretation and postulates that, "its (*Zhou Yi*'s) creation is not

the sort of change of *wu* and *kong* but the real virtue incarnated and prevailing."<sup>223</sup>

Obviously Wang Bi's exegesis is to develop his idea of *wu* but not original style of *Zhou Yi*.<sup>224</sup>

#### D. PARALLELISM

As an aesthetic master Wang Bi employed a lot of parallelism in his works. It should be noted that the parallelism is a traditional art in Chinese classics and especially in Wei Dynasty and Wang Bi's rhetorical skill can reflect this literary phenomenon in this point. In Lao Zi and *Zhou Yi*<sup>225</sup> parallelism is everywhere, let alone in the commentaries of

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 55. Mou's original words in Chinese is that: "其創造非是空無之變, 乃是實德成物之流行。"

<sup>224</sup> In Confucianism's tradition Confucian *The Ten Wings* (十翼, Confucian interpretation of *Zhou Yi*) and *The Mean* (中庸) discussing usually ontological *tian* (天, the heaven) and metaphysical-pragmatic *dao* (not the style of Lao Zi). E.g., *The Mean* says that, "天命之謂性"(*Tian ming* is called the nature) and "率性之謂道"(the nature accommodating with *tian ming* is called *dao*). *Tian ming* in Confucianism seems like the ontological *dao* in Daoism, but it must be pragmatic in human life and human relationship according the Confucianism's tradition. Therefore harmonizing the nature with this universal order is the actualization of *tian dao* (Confucian style).

<sup>225</sup> In *Dao De Jing* ch.1 there is the beginning words like that, "道可道, 非常道; 名可名, 非常名。無, 名天地之始; 有名萬物之母。" The whole book starts with the excellent structure of parallelism that, "道可道, 非常道", the six characters (3+3) is in parallelism with the other six(3+3), "名可名, 非常名", and "無, 名天地之始" (1+5) with "有, 名萬物之母"(1+5). Furthermore, the bigger parallelism (6+6 and 6+6) is formed by the mode of [3+3]+[3+3] and [1+5]+[1+5]. *Zhou Yi* is also full of parallelism like the beginning of book, "乾, 元亨利貞。" in 乾傳. "乾"(*qian*) means "the heaven" and the author of *Zhou Yi* uses two of the short parallel terms to describe Qian Gua(乾卦). "元亨" (1+1) is in parallelism with "利貞" (1+1). "元", the beginning, as a form of noun is in contrast with the other noun, "利", good fortune or benefit, while "亨", smooth or prevailing, as a form of adjective is in contrast with other adjective. "貞" meaning strong or stable. So whole sentence will be like that: "if the way of the heaven, namely the beginning is prevailing, then everything in the world will benefit therein." According the parallelism, "元亨", the former terms is the cause and "利貞" is the consequence. What an art the Chinese classics present here. Only a few of words used is able to convey a lot of and even deep meaning.

Wang Bi who is the master of parallelism. The skill of Chinese parallelism like Hebrew poetry can be used to emphasize the special idea repeatedly or conversely. Take for example the interpretation of *Lao Zi Zhu* ch. 1, Wang Bi said that:

萬物，始於微而後成，始於無(wu)而後生  
[Everything, starts from the tiny, and then is completed; starts from the non-being, and then is begotten.]

Basically this sentence is a combination of synonymous parallelisms. The structure is (3+1+2) plus (3+1+2), namely the first colon of words, 始於微(3) + 而(1) + 後成(2), and the second colon of words, 始於無(3) + 而(1) + 後生(2). In the synonymous structure the former sentence is employed to strengthen the later in the way of crescendo, then at last the intended meaning is carried out in the later sentence. 微 (*wei*, the tiny, almost to nothing) is very similar to 無 (*wu*, non-being), and the last word of the former sentence, 成 (*cheng*, to be completed) is in correspondence with the other last word, 生 (*sheng*, to be begotten). Therefore the entire process of cosmogony that everything derives from non-being is revealed in this beautiful pair of parallelism.

Like a deliberate sculptor Wang has employed the parallelism skill to chisel out his master piece little by little. Following are the more parallelisms relevant with *wu*:  
(translation, style and form will be listed in the chart following)

無爲無造 (無爲+無造) (ch. 5)  
無狀, 無象, 無聲, 無響, (無狀+無象+無聲+無響) 故能  
不塞其原, 則物自生, 何功之有? (不塞其原+則物自生→何功之有)  
不禁其性, 則物自濟, 何爲之恃? (不禁其性+則物自濟→何爲之恃)(ch. 10)  
無所不通, 無所不往 (無所不通→無所不往) (ch. 14)  
爲學者日益, 爲道者日損。(爲學者+日益→爲道者+日損)(ch. 20)  
智者可以能臣也, 勇者可以武使也。(智者+可以+能臣也↔勇者+可以+武使)

也)(ch. 32)

本在無爲，母在無名。(本+在+無爲←→母+在+無名)(ch. 38)

無而弗持則生有焉，微而不散則生大焉。(無+而+弗持+則+生有焉←→微+而+不散+則+生大焉)(ch. 64)

Ch.	Translation	Style	Form
5	Doing nothing and creating nothing.	Synonymous	2+2
10	What merit does it have, for it just chokes not the original and lets everything live by itself? What success does it depend upon, for it just confines not the nature and everything help itself?	Synthetic & Progressive	4, 1+3, 4 4, 1+3, 4
14	Formless, shapeless, soundless, voiceless, so it can enter in any place and go anywhere.	Synonymous & Synthetic	2+2+2+2 (2)4+4
20	Learning makes more progress, but seeking <i>dao</i> makes more loss.	Synthetic & Antithetic	3+2 3+2
32	The wise could be made an able official and the brave an able officer.	Synonymous	2+2+3 2+2+3
38	The original consists in doing nothing, and the Mother her namelessness.	Synonymous	1+1+2 1+1+2
64	Keeping <i>wu</i> without hindering it produces <i>you</i> , while keeping the tiny without disappearing produces the great.	Synonymous	1+1+2+1+3 1+1+2+1+3

No surprise that Wang Bi's philosophical style of *wu* is introduced in the atmosphere of parallelism. First of all, a Chinese character is an independent unit regardless of its simple or complicated form, so many words could be arranged very neat in order. Secondly, following the tradition of the Han Fu (漢賦), a special poetry form in Han Dynasty, whole Six Dynasties<sup>226</sup> was permeated with a poetic style of literary expression and gained the excellent achievement in literature.

<sup>226</sup> Six Dynasties, the special term for Wei, Western Jin, Eastern Jin and South-Noth Dynasties is the favorite expression to describe the history from 220 A.D. to 589 A.D. by historiographers.



## CHAPTER XII

### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF *WU*

Actually Wang Bi's *wu* is a reflection to the spirit of that age and an echo to the social and political problems, which is inherited from the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty. In this connection, several questions arise that must be dealt with. How does Wang Bi as a young genius (died just at being 24 year old) in thought and come to the thought of *wu*? Why is Lao Zi's philosophy so attractive to motivate him to write the commentary for the book and even write the commentary of *Zhou Yi* under the cloak of it? What does this style of *wu* intend to convey?

Apparently the concept of Wang Bi's *wu* is a abstract philosophy rather than a retrospection of human life. Nevertheless, through the philosophy we find much sorrowful cry heard and confined minds released. Let us recall some historical background. In culture, living standard, economic achievement and scholarship, the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 A.D.), the strongest empire in the East at that time, was almost compatible with Roman Empire in the West. All of the officials were well-educated intellectuals and kept their absolute loyalty to the rulers of Han. However the loyalty had been threatened and challenged because of the political disorder<sup>227</sup> caused by

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<sup>227</sup> In the end of the Eastern Han the royal relatives and eunuchs took control of power in a despotic way. Dou Xian(竇憲), The Great General in the age of He Di (何帝, Emperor He); Empress Deng (鄧后) and Deng Zhi (鄧騭), her brother in the age of Emperors Liu Long (劉隆, the emperor as 100 days year old) and Liu Hu (劉祜, enthroned at the age of 10 years); Empress Yan (閔后) and Yan Xian (閔顯), her brother in the age of Emperor Liu Yi(劉懿), and Eunuch Sun Cheng (孫程) in the age of Emperor Liu Bao (劉保) are the dictators at their ages.

emperors' families and their eunuchs in the end of Eastern Han. The entire empire did not come to bankruptcy until Emperor Huan and Ling (桓帝與靈帝) were dethroned by General Dong Zhou (董卓將軍) in the end of Han. Afterward Chinese history moved on to the Three Kingdoms Period (三國時代) when the whole China was separated into three parts by incessant wars and battles.

The concept of *wu* initiated by Lao Zi became intriguing to correspond to the mind of the intellectuals at that troubled time. Luo Zong Qiang indicates that:

兩漢士人，是在儒家正統思想的哺育之下成長起來的，君臣之義是他們立身的基本準則。外戚與宦官，向為士人所不齒。他們竊取朝政，凌逼主上，淆亂君臣之義，常常使真心實意維護大一統政權的士人痛心疾首。

[The intellectuals in Two Hans [two dynasties of Han] used to grow up under the cover of the orthodox thought of Confucianism, so the ethics between the ruler and the official is the standard manner for them to observe. They used to abhor the rebellious group of royal families and eunuchs because they usurped the power, threatened the emperors and turned upside side down the proper ethics and distressed always those who tried to sustain the unity of the country.]<sup>228</sup>

Disappointed in politics and helpless of orthodox thought, the intellectuals were turning to other sources for consolation. It is not surprising that an intellectual as clever as Wang Bi could replace their enthusiasm for Confucianism with the Three Xuan (三玄, Three Mysterious, *Lao Zi + Zhang Zi + Zhou Yi*), the most popular thoughts in the Wei Dynasty. *Wu*, the Chinese style of vanity, had become the right outlet of their discontent and disappointment.

The corruption of the country, and the disorder and the injustice in society had worn out their loyalty to the highest authority vertically, so their attention started to

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<sup>228</sup> See 羅宗強(Luo), *玄學與魏晉人士心態(Xuan Xue and the Intellectuals' Manner in Wei Jin)*, 10.

develop horizontally. Among the intellectuals the some special manners in life, namely the evaluation for intellectual figures (personal character, eloquence, individuality, talent and so on) was coming into fashion. The new movement is called "清談" or "清議" (the Pure Talk or the Pure Evaluation). Those who kept their integrity and justice even at cost of their lives would be evaluated highly among the intellectuals at that evil time.<sup>229</sup> However the movement of the carefree "talk" movement changed in quality later. Now that the intellectuals liberated from the Confucianism, the orthodoxy of hundreds years started to take heed of many other thoughts than Confucianism and the criticism of the rulers. *Wu* supported and interpreted by Wang Bi provided a broad way in terminology and methodology in this atmosphere and attracted the attention of most intellectuals on Three Xuans.

The manner for the individual evaluation also came to a huge change in 180 degrees under the impact of *wu*-oriented thought. The taste and life style of the intellectuals changed greatly after the orthodox thought (Confucianism) and ruling threat declined gradually. Instead of "the character of integrity" they liked to relax in sightseeing "山水" (mountains and waters, namely the beautiful scenes) and to indulge themselves as Epicureans<sup>230</sup>. The concept of *wu* played the role of enlightenment for them when the human life was felt meaningless and out of control. Luo Zong Qiang

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<sup>229</sup> In the age of Emperor of Huan and Ling(桓帝 and 靈帝) the ruling authority triggers a serious punishment among the intellectuals who used to criticize rulers. Some were killed and many were imprisoned or discharged. The event is called "黨錮之禍"(The Event of Party Imprison) historically.

<sup>230</sup> In Wang Bi's contemporaries the famous case of the indulgence of the intellectuals is "竹林七賢"(The Seven Sages of Bamboos) that is the combination of the seven famous intellectuals. They were alcoholic, nude and freewheeling in sex and behaving haphazardly in that conservative society.

suggests that,

士人的縱樂，其中卻還包含有對於人生的深切的眷戀和對於人性的體認。禮的束縛解除了，自我得到了很大程度的認可，感情也在放縱中得到豐富的發展。

[The indulgence of the intellectuals also implies their deep passion for life and realization for human nature. The bondage of Li (Confucianism's rule) was broken up, so the self was more acceptable than before and human feeling was developed abundantly in this kind of indulgence.]<sup>231</sup>

If Luo Zong Qiang's observation is correct, the indulgence rightly revealed the passive defiance of the intellectuals against authority when time is evil. The concept of *wu* is the best one they could take good use. The influence of *wu* existed not only in the life manner but also in the theological field, which will be introduced following.

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<sup>231</sup> 羅宗強(Luo Zong Qiang), *玄學與魏晉人士心態(Xuan Xue and the Intellectuals' Manner in Wei Jin)*, 48.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF *WU*

#### A. *WU* APPROACHED PHILOSOPHICALLY

The importance of *wu* as a topic in Chinese philosophical history cannot be overemphasized. The *wu*, created by Lao Zi and well developed by Wang Bi has made a fresh Chinese philosophy possible while Confucian's practicalism had choked Chinese mind for thousands of years.<sup>232</sup> In other words, the thought developed horizontally (in Confucianism) in Chinese mind is motivated to go upward vertically under the impact of the idealistic concept (Daoism).<sup>233</sup> Therefore the universal order that depends closely upon the earthly order, namely the human relationships in Confucian thought, has been transformed into an apathetic, philosophical, and transcendental *dao* or *wu* in an immanent process.

The contribution of Wang Bi is not the initiation of *wu* or the establishment of a new school but the re-organization and clarification of *wu* on the basis of Daoism and to bring the promotion upon Confucianism in seeking the ontological order

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<sup>232</sup> Quite a few Chinese scholars don't think that China had the so-called "philosophy" of the West because Chinese thought focuses on ethics and pragmatic methodology under the strong impact of traditional Confucianism. The Western style of philosophy seems not appropriate to define "Chinese thought". Under the prevalence of Confucianism Daoism usually could not be so acceptable politically and in society.

<sup>233</sup> In *History of Chinese Philosophy* (中國哲學史) (北京大學哲學系編 Philosophy Dep. of Bei Jing Unive. ed., 北京[Bei Jing]: 中華書局[China Press], 1980) Wang Bi's thought is put as "idealistic ontology". See 252-263.

philosophically.<sup>234</sup> Although Wang Bi's interpretation on *Zhou Yi* is not widely acceptable to traditional Confucians, doubtlessly his try is still creative and fresh regardless of his inappropriate explanation on the text of *Zhou Yi*.

## B. *WU* APPROACHED RELIGIOUSLY

Wang Bi's *wu* with its ontological nuance is quite easy to develop theologically and its influence usually concentrates on the religious Daoism and the Chinese Buddhism. First of all, the religious Daoism will be tackled because of its close relationship with the philosophical Daoism. Secondly, the discussion of the sinologized Buddhism will follow.

Even though there exist quite a differences between Wang Bi's philosophical thought and the religious Daoism, they still have a close connection with each other because of their common source, *Dao De Jing*(*道德經*). The initiators<sup>235</sup> and followers of religious Daoism took use of *Dao De Jing* to build their doctrine by the commentary of

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<sup>234</sup> After Wang Bi Confucianist in all generations is pushed to face the true philosophical issue. Neo-Confucianism in the Song and the Ming Dynasties (宋明理學) became a kind of philosophical Confucianism to some extent. The philosophical terms like "太極"(*tai ji*, the Ultimate), "性"(*xing*, the Nature), "理"(*li*, the Reason), "氣"(*qi*, the Breath), "體"(*ti*, the Essence) are very common in that age.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. 湯一介(Tang Yi Jie), "道教的產生(The Initiation of Religious Daoism)" in *魏晉南北朝時期的道教(Religious Daoism in Wei Jin and South-North Dynasties)*(台北[Taipei]: 東大圖書公司[Dong Da Books Inc], 民國七十七年 [1988]), 77-94. Tan Yi Jie indicates that the initiation of the religious Daoism happened in the end of East Han Dynasty. Before the religion was called "Daoism" Zhang Dao Lin (張道陵) had initiated "Wu Dou Mi Dao(五斗米道)" in the age of Emperor Shun (順帝) (126 A.D.-132A.D.) and Zhang Jiao(張角) initiated "Tai Ping Dao (太平道)" in the age of Emperor Ling (靈帝)(168-172A.D.). Furthermore, "Shen Xian School(神仙家)" should be the earlier initiator, prevailing in the area of Yan and Qi (齊燕地區) in Warring States Period (403-222 B.C.E).

their own<sup>236</sup>. Tang Yi Jie postulates that:

漢末道教建立，為給自己的教派找尋理論上的根據，很自然就找到這部『玄之又玄』有『長生久視』思想的<老子>。

[In order to seek the basis of their doctrine for their religion, the religious Daoism finally found *Lao Zi*, the book with the "mysterious and mysterious" and ageless thought.]<sup>237</sup>

According to Tang's observation the fact is clearer that original Daoism thought is unrelated to the later religious Daoism. The main reasons the religious adherents of Daoism chose *Dao De Jing* as their ultimate Scripture are that Lao Zi, the man had been deified in Han<sup>238</sup>, on the one hand, and the concept of *wu* contributed by Wang Bi had opened a vertical and theological window for their mind, on the other hand.

After the concept of *wu* was highlighted in Wei, the concept brought a lot of impact upon the budding Buddhism in China on account of some similarity existing in between.<sup>239</sup> Buddhists employed certain terms and loaned the concept of *wu* from Daoism in the translation of Buddhist Scriptures (from Sanskrit) and for the purpose of the propagation as Cardinal Lu Guang, the late Chinese Catholic scholar in Taiwan,

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<sup>236</sup> Among Wang Bi's contemporaries there are the two more commentaries, *老子河上公注(Lao Zi: He Sheng Gong Commentary)* and *老子想爾注(Lao Zi: Xiang Er Commentary)*, based on the conception of the religious Daoism.

<sup>237</sup> 湯一介(Tang Yi Jie), *魏晉南北朝時期的道教(Religious Daoism in Wei Jin and South-North Dynasties)*, 95.

<sup>238</sup> So the religious Daoism in Eastern Han was called "黃老道" (Huang Lao Dao). Lao means Lao Zi in an abbreviated way. In the beginning of the East Han Dynasty Lao Zi had been worshipped as an idol.

<sup>239</sup> Buddhism was brought into China at the age of Emperor Ming in the East Han Dynasty (東漢明帝).

indicated in his Series Books.<sup>240</sup> *On Enlightenment*(弘明集), the Buddhist's work in

Eastern Jin Dynasty following the ethos has these words:

夫佛也者，體道者也。道也者，導物者也。應感順通，無爲而無不爲者也。無爲故虛寂自然，無不爲故神化萬物。

[Buddha is the one who understands *dao*. *Dao* is to guide things. If *dao* can be connected without any interruption, *wu wei* (doing nothing) will lead to finishing everything. *Wu wei* looks like the quietude and the naïve, then this "finishing " deifies everything.]

The fact that *dao* and *wu* are so easy to employ is based on their similarity with Buddhist's *nirvana* (空 in Chinese) asceticism. In this atmosphere the Buddhist scripture, "*Scripture Nirvana*"(般若經) that discusses on nothingness (空) was translated into a couple of different versions and was prevailing in society. Moreover, Zhi Dao Lin (支道林), a Buddhist monk used to be reputed as great as Wang Bi in the thought of *wu*.<sup>241</sup> What Wang Bi's *wu* provides in metaphysics facilitated the indigenalization of Buddhism and touched the Buddhist's heart at that time.

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<sup>240</sup> Cf. Luo Guang (羅光), *The History of Chinese Philosophy: Buddhism in Wei Jin Sui Tang* (中國哲學思想史: 魏晉隋唐佛學篇) in *The Luo Guang Series*(羅光全書) vol.8, 37-55. According to Luo Guang Buddhism came to China in Eastern Han (東漢明帝, in the age of Emperor Ming) and was considered as a kind divination (方術) initially, then it adopted gradually Daoist's thought later. In Wei Jin not only Buddhism became prevailing but also the enterprise of scripture translation came to a culmination.

<sup>241</sup> See Tang Yong Dong (湯用彤), *The Buddhism History in Han Wei and Two Jins* (漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史), 177. Tang quotes the reputation about Zhi Dao Lin Monk (支道林和尚) from *Biographies of Buddhist Monks*(高僧傳) and *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* (世說新語) that, "造微之功，不減輔嗣" (The contribution of Zhi Dao Lin is not less important than Wang Bi in thought of *wu*.)



## CHAPTER XIV

### CONCLUSION OF PART TWO

*Wu*, the Chinese style of vanity, defined as "nothing" or "non-being" has been developed and applied abundantly through Dynasties. Unlike the retrospection of Qoheleth's *hebel* Wang Bi's *wu* develops a metaphysical ontology and thought system under the subjective judgment. This subjective vanity comes from the observation of the universal order and the philosophical deduction. Experiencing hundreds years of interruption in Han Dynasty, the concept of *wu* in *Lao Zi* finally was re-excavated and highlighted by Wang Bi, the young thinker. Its influence has been permeated in all the philosophy, the religion, the politics and the general life of Chinese.

In the first section of this part (ch. IX) *wu* is understood semantically and etymologically. *Wu* and *xu kong*, the three onomatopoeic and the similar characters are scrutinized carefully by the help of the most authoritative dictionaries in the classics and the modern scholarship. Through the investigation the syntax and use custom in ancient China is approached as well, and the similarity between Hebrew and Chinese is observed.

In the second section (ch. X) the original thought of Lao Zi is presented in an organized way in order to reveal the context that Wang Bi had followed. Lao Zi's thought on *wu* is divided into four parts, namely as a universal order, an attitude of life, a political and social ideal, and a relativism. Wang Bi's *wu* is compared with Lao Zi's thought and presented by four points: *wu* as ontology, a view for change, epistemology and a methodology. In this structure not only philosophical Daoism is evaluated but

also Confucianism is scrutinized.

In the third section(ch. XI) the rhetorical understanding of *wu* brings us into the aesthetic world of Wang Bi. Depending upon the help of several statistical charts the Wang Bi's literary style is revealed by means of the analysis. The analysis also benefits us with a little of comprehension of the Six Dynasties' literary environment.

The fourth section (ch. XII) brings about the background that Wang Bi's *wu* comes from and the fifth section (ch. XIII) is to make clear the relationship between philosophical and religious Daoism. And how the young Buddhism survives under the cloak of Daoism at time is also introduced on the concept of *wu*.

Wang Bi's philosophical thought on *wu* has been approached in different dimensions above in order to introduce the Chinese conception of vanity in human life. The oriental style is very different from the western and Biblical one. The study of more difference, similarity, and evaluation will follow in the next part.

PART THREE  
COMPARISON AND EVALUATION

Through the effort of study in the first and second part the original sense of vanity has been touched as much as possible exegetically. This section will attempt a cross-cultural comparison and evaluation. Similarities and differences of the notions of vanity existing in between Chinese and Hebrew will be demonstrated and the question of how human beings deal with this unavoidable experience in life will be addressed.

In addition to the theological evaluation and the practical solution will be suggested in this part, the missiological methodology will be discussed in this regard as well. In other words, according to the original aim of this thesis, all the efforts involved will build a bridge across the obstacles between Biblical background and Chinese culture so that both sides may understand each other more with regard to the same concern. The understanding of vanity in life is just an attempt for that. The more the understanding of different cultures with regard to the specific concern is gained, the more the marvelous similarity and individual uniqueness in cultures will show up. And then effective missiological outreach will be possible.

Qoheleth's *hebel* and Wang Bi's *wu* help us very much in this regard. Even though these two thinkers on both sides of Asia never met, their common concern for the topic of vanity in life reflects the social problems, religious mind, history, theology and philosophy of their age, and makes possible a cultural dialogue between the Hebrew and Chinese. Much attention is paid in Ancient Near East study on Old Testament

scholarship during these two centuries. Certainly Ancient Near East study is the one choice to study the Old Testament, the product of their Hebrew neighbor, because it sheds light on issues of language, living customs, religion, international relationships and thought. Nevertheless, the Christian worldview should not be imprisoned by ANE study but broadened to see the wider global context. Through an encounter with Chinese culture, which has been most influential in the East Asia for thousands of years, Christianity should know how to dialogue with it in a dynamic way (to understand and to be understood). It is with this goal in mind that Qoheleth's *hebel* and Wang Bi's *wu* are compared in order to identify their similarities and their unique emphasis.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN QOHELETH'S *HEBEL* AND WANG BI'S *WU*

Without any communication or dialogue beforehand, Qoheleth and Wang Bi unfold an amazing and common regard for the concept of vanity in the western and the eastern Asia. After a careful survey of the concept of vanity in their different backgrounds, there really exist between the two the multifaceted similarities rather than colossal differences assumed before. In fact, it is similarities and a curiosity about the notion of human vanity that move this thesis forward. Following will be their similarity from linguistic, social, religious and pragmatic dimensions.

#### A. ETYMOLOGICAL AND SEMANTIC SIMILARITY

*Hebel* and *wu* come from similar onomatopoeic word systems with the gasified consonants and forms. Of course, the linguistic phenomenon is meant to express something ephemeral, worthless and useless on the basis of the nature of breath (*hebel*) or the other similar thing (*wu*). The analogical relationship between the descriptor and the described derives from the homology they have. The ridiculous or unbearable experience of human life and the negative retrospection on life lead to a similar literal expression, namely the corresponding aesthetic concept like *hebel* or *wu*, which bear the homologous nature (ephemeral, worthless, negative and so on).

What is interesting is that both *hebel* and *wu* have experienced a process of

transformation in their etymological history. The Hebrew in Qoheleth, according to some scholars<sup>242</sup> is a kind of post-Hebraic style influenced by other ANE languages. No wonder that some similar forms of *hebel* could be found in ANE environments. *Wu* has a transforming process of its own. *Wu* connoted or annotated by some other characters ends up the meaning running counter to its original (無, 𣎵 → 无, 亡, 虛, 空). Even though the language has been changing always in view of *hebel* and *wu*, the souls of vanity that employ these words are unchangeable.

## B. FIGURATIVE CHARACTERISTIC AND ITS PERISCOPE

As the literary geniuses, both Qoheleth and Wang Bi love the pictorial or figurative aspects of language. The previous word study shows this fact vividly. In the picture of breath (or vapor) *hebel* brings about the ocular effect of something gone or disappearing. *wu* (無) comes from *wu* (无) which means the heaven declining (天→无) and *wu* (𣎵) which means originally the trees. *Wu* exhibits a stronger feeling according to its visual reality.

Certainly Qoheleth and Wang Bi would not be satisfied with only the use of *hebel* and *wu*. In order to display the special nuance of *hebel* and *wu*, they employ other more figurative terms like חלק (portion), רוח (wind), כעס (vexation), and עמל (trouble) in Qoheleth, and 本 (the original or basic), 末 (the last or the trivial), 母 (the mother), 君 (the king), 長之 (to grow it up), 育之 (to cultivate it), "亭之 (to up-lift it), 毒之 (to

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<sup>242</sup> E.g., Choon-Leong Seow.

nourish it) in Wang Bi. Accordingly the figurativeness-oriented terminology, to be sure, is a common phenomenon in both Hebrew and Chinese.

### C. IDIOMATIC TERMS OR PHRASES

Qoheleth and Wang Bi have similar literary tastes in using form of phrase. In Qoheleth the famous idiomatic phrases are: *חַזַּק שֶׁמֶשׁ* (under the sun) in 1:3, 5, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:3, 7, 15; 5:12; 6:1, 12; 7:11; 8:9, 15; 9:6, 9, 13; 10:5; *רַעַת רוּחַ* (chasing after the wind) in 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9 and *רוּחַ רַעֲיוֹן* (chasing after the wind) in 1:17; 2:22; 4:16; *רַעַת רַבָּה* (great evil) in 2:21; *עֵיץ רַע* (evil business) in 4:8; and *חֲלֵי רַע* (evil disease) in 6:2. Wang Bi also has his favorite phrases and terms like *無爲* (*wu wei*) in *老子注* (*Lao Zi Zhu*) ch. 1, 5, 7, 10, 17, 23, 37, 38, 63; *無欲* (*wu yu*) in ch.20, 27, 34, 37, 55, 57, 65, *自然* (*zi ran*) in 2, 5, 12, 23, 25, 27, 29, 37, 56, 60, 64, 65, 77; and *常* (*chang*) in 16, 32, 52, 55. The use of idiomatic phrases or terms is helpful to raise attention and highlight crucial points. Surveying the syntax of their works, their main theories on vanity always happen around these special terms and phrases. What an interesting and amazing similarity!

### D. CHERISHING MANNER FOR LIFE

From a positive standpoint both Qoheleth and Wang Bi have the same cherishing manner on human life. Obviously this manner does not contradict the whole theory on

vanity but rather reveals the human striving against vanity. Qoheleth indicates that there is "nothing better for a man than that to eat and drink" (Ecc. 2:24), "nothing better than to rejoice" (2:14), "eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart" (9:7) and "live joyfully with the wife" (9:9). All these responses are stirred by the concept of *hebel* to express the human effort against the threat of *hebel*. As for Wang Bi, he postulates 無爲 (*wu wei*, doing nothing) and 無欲 (*wu yu*, desire nothing) in order that the whole life could reach a higher level in a reverse way and in accordance with the universal order. And "舉本統末" (Ju Ben Tong Mou) and "崇本舉末" (Chun Ben Ju Mou) which discuss the relationship of the priority constitute the methodology that promotes human life and society. All of these endeavors, simply to say, are the positive attempt in human life to war against vanity.

#### E. DISTRUST TO HUMAN NATURE

The positive manner in human life does not mean their approval for human nature. Basically these two thinkers in their individual traditions keep their common distrust to human nature when their thought on *hebel* or *wu* is established. For Qoheleth's *hebel* is caused by God, on the one hand, but also brought about by man himself; on the other hand. The autobiographical description in chapter two of the Book of Qoheleth tells the story of the king with richness and prosperity who at last experienced a unexpected vanity. Qoheleth said that: "I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what



was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives." (Ecc. 2:3)

However, all of these will come to *hebel* once he has died (Ecc. 2:16, 17). In other words, the sense of vanity derives from the discontent of the human nature.

For Wang Bi "無欲" (*wu yu*, to desire nothing) is the best way to control the human nature. *Lao Zi* ch. 12 has a very vivid picture of the corrupted nature.<sup>243</sup> Wang Bi glosses the chapter with this: "

夫耳目口心皆順其性也，不以順性命，反以傷自然。"

[The ear, eyes, mouth (stomach) and heart (Lao Zi mentions in this chapter) are made for the obedience to man's nature. They will be harmful for the naïve once they are not used according to *xing ming* (the universal order).]

The sensuous functions are the servants of human nature. And they will bring about harm once they are abused by human nature. All in all, Qoheleth and Wang have a common distrust to human nature.

## F. SOCIAL SIMILARITY

According to the textual and historical evidences, Qoheleth and Wang Bi did not live in a peaceful environment. Jealousy (Ecc. 4:2), injustice (Ecc. 7:15; 8:14), curses (Ecc. 8:21), adultery (Ecc. 7:26), ridiculous arrangement (Ecc. 10:6, 7) in Qoheleth's day and war, rebellion, treachery, killing and imprisonment in Wang Bi's became the serious

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<sup>243</sup> "五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聾，五味令人口爽，馳騁畋獵令人心發狂，難得之貨令人行妨。是以聖人爲腹不爲目，故去彼取此。" (All kinds of the wonderful colors blind our eyes. All kinds of the beautiful music deafen our ears. The many flavors of tongue confuse our taste. Racing and hunting madden our minds. Possessing rare treasures brings about harmful behavior. Therefore the sage regard his basic, and not his eyes. He lets go of that and chooses this. )

challenges for them. Their souls could not rest beside the water as described in Psalm 23 because there were temptations and unrest anywhere around them.

Did the similar and unstable situations motivate them to write the article on vanity? Yes, it is possible. When the time is evil and human life lacks security, the heart will feel worthless and helpless. Wang Bi's and Qoheleth's postulations have manifested the point.

### G. MYSTERIOUS ORIENTATION AND NUANCE

There is a strongly mysterious orientation in the thoughts of both thinkers. The God in Qoheleth is the hidden God. The entire book of Qoheleth is permeated with the nuance that God takes control in everything and what He has done is beyond human knowledge. Similarly Wang Bi mentions quite a few of words like "玄" (*xuan*), "奥" (*ao*) and "元" (*yuan*) which all mean "mysterious". And Wang Bi also likes to use "恍惚" (*huang hu*, the dim) and "寂寥" (*ji liao*, the lonely) to promote his mysterious ontology.

The mysterious nuance comes from these two basic onomatopoeic words, *hebel* and *wu* that convey a sense of "out of control" and "beyond man", and these senses of vanity transform the anthropological and philosophical thought into theological and religious use transcendently. Hence the impact on religion and from religion is pervasive. That is the reason that philosophical Daoism would at last become the religious Daoism. Abundantly discussing on the divine Being metaphysically in *Dao*

*De Jing* (道德經), Daoism had provided a model for all Chinese folk religions.

Thousands of famous figures in Chinese history are deified into gods in the process. It is understandable that the Book of Qoheleth was added the editorial reminding of divine judgment and obedience of God's commandment (Ecc. 12:13, 14) in order to control the rambunctious vanity.

#### H. CRITICISM OF ALIENATION

Both Qoheleth's and Wang Bi's thought underwent serious criticism from the orthodoxy of their times because of their alienation from the tradition. For Qoheleth the orthodoxy is obviously the salvation history of Israel in the Old Testament, and Qoheleth rarely mentions God's salvation and God's Word. The hardship present during the process of canonization exposes the difficulty of this reality. However, as mentioned earlier in the first part, the criticism of alienation or even heresy is not proper for Qoheleth, because other authors of the Old Testament still like to use "*hebel*" and its concept. Furthermore the whole Old Testament content is quite with the mysterious nuance present in Qoheleth's writing. Modern scholars have had more open minds to scrutinize and set much value upon the book, as shown in the first part of this thesis.

Wang Bi's situation is remarkably similar to that of Qoheleth. As a pioneer of the new thought, Wang Bi also encountered with the serious critique from Confucianism, the thousand years of orthodoxy in Chinese scholarship. The critique focused on his commentary of *Zhou Yi* in a Daoist's style. His theory on *wu* was welcomed by

contemporary intellectuals and generations to come, but not so acceptable by the royal court. The rulers and orthodox authorities preferring pragmatic methodology to Wang Bi's style of metaphysics persecuted "the heresy" in their sight. Accordingly the famous adherents of Wang Bi's *wu* usually were the ones who had were criticized and perscuted as well<sup>244</sup> in the later generations since Wang Bi. Although the attacks and critiques were serious, fortunately Qoheleth and Wang Bi have survived so far.

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<sup>244</sup> E.g., 竹林七賢, The Seven Sages of Bamboos. They indulged themselves under the impact of Wang Bi's theory.

CHAPTER XVI  
THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS OF QOHELETH'S *HEBEL*  
AND WANG'S *WU*

The many points of similarity between Qoheleth's *hebel* and Wang Bi's *wu* will not hide their individual characteristics. After all, *hebel* and *wu* come from two different language systems and backgrounds and should have special nuances that reflect their cultures. Many common features of Wang Bi's *wu* and Qoheleth's *hebel* have been introduced in the former chapters, so in this chapter the focus will be on their specific features. Following are their individual characteristics from the angles of 1) authorship known and unknown, 2) linguistic limitation, 3) motive, and 4) canonization process.

A. AUTHORSHIP KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

In order to understand these two different styles of vanity, knowledge of the authors is quite important. It is very easy to know much about Wang Bi biographically because the great movement of historiography in China began with the Han Dynasty and the much biographical data can be found among the mountain-like volumes of chronicles<sup>245</sup>. These data about Wang Bi gives us a basic understanding of his works.

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<sup>245</sup> The historiography started from Si Ma Jian (司馬遷), the author of Shi Ji (史記). Then the historiographers of every dynasty kept on writing chronicles of their own dynasties since the Han Dynasty. There were twenty-five sets of chronicles done before the Republic of China was established. The twenty-five chronicles called "二十五史" historically are the most authoritative historical source in all of Chinese history.

However, the Book of Qoheleth was written by an unknown Jewish author in an anonymous or pseudonymous way. Any historical and biographical data is no more than assumption. What we have known with certainty about Qoheleth is limited to his work. The content of mysterious nuance combined with its author's inaccessibility makes Qoheleth's thought more mysterious and controversial.

No matter whether or not Qoheleth was written by King Solomon at his old age or an unknown Jewish author in the fifth-third century B.C.E., it won't lose the charm to compare his *hebel* to the *wu* of Wang Bi, the young scholar (who died at age 24). The thought of vanity conveyed by the young is theoretical, but the vanity of the old king (or the old man) is retrospective after he had seen a lot of life. Hence Hebrew thought in the Old Testament is quite pragmatic and life-oriented, and not easily made metaphysical or ontological. The young scholar Wang Bi stood on the shoulder of former thinkers to develop his transcendental philosophy away from the pragmatic Chinese tradition, seemingly apathy for the general life. Perhaps it is not because his metaphysics is inapplicable in practical life but he did not get enough time to vindicate his theory before he died. Thus manifest becomes the reason that his thought and the thought of Daoism always stood under the orthodoxy, Confucianism through dynasties.

## B. LINGUISTIC LIMITATION

*Hebel*, the Hebrew word in Qoheleth is conspicuous for its western Asian phonetic way that includes a complicated system of tense, gender, conjugation, number and so on.

However, *wu* comes from a very different eastern Asian linguistic system, which does not provide any change of the word itself, but combines a group of words in different and idiomatic ways to convey exact meaning. Even though Hebrew and Chinese both read from right to left, the two language systems have the different limitations individually. To sum up, before we see the difference between Wang Bi's and Qoheleth's concepts of vanity cause, we must pay the first attention to the linguistic and grammatical differences.

Take synonymous parallelism for example. Below are the two synonymous parallelism used by Wang Bi and Qoheleth:

本在無爲, 母在無名。(Lao Zi Zhu ch. 38)  
 [The Original consists in doing nothing; and the Mother namelessness.]<sup>246</sup>

מְעֻת לֹא יִכָּל לְתַקֵּן  
 וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא יִכָּל לְהַמְנוֹת: (Ecc. 1:15)

(What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.)

Both these two parallelisms are used for a specific goal individually in a similar "synonymous type". Even though both of them take the similar "thought rhythm", that the second line is repeated in the first line, the individual characteristics and difference in these two sentences still can be observed obviously. Accordingly Chinese cannot include tense and person in one word, but Hebrew also cannot do the word pair as Chinese characters do. We need pay attention to these intrinsic linguistic differences and limitation when we compare Wang Bi's *wu* and Qoheleth's *hebel*.

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<sup>246</sup> The structure of this parallelism is [1+1+2] + [1+1+2]. The whole parallelism indicates that the order in universe is based on *wu*, which is revealed by *wu wei* (doing nothing) and *wu ming* (nameless or beyond words).

### C. MOTIVATION

The motivation of Qoheleth is quite different from the one of Wang Bi. Qoheleth exclaims "vanity of vanities, everything is vanity" (Ecc. 12:8) except for the editorial epilogue. The anthropological conclusion that emphasizes vanity echoes the other vanity phrases in the prologue (Ecc. 1:2) and expresses the feeling that man's life is nothing but *hebel*. Wang Bi wrote some words on *Lao Zi Zhu* as a superscription:

道德經不析乎道而上下之，猶近於古歟，其文字則多誤謬，殆有不可讀者，令人惜之。<sup>247</sup>

[What *Dao De Jing* is tackling is not *dao de* (morality in Chinese) but the principle of the upper and the below, which is close to ancient classics. However the characters in it contain a lot of errors and even many words are unidentified. What a pity!]

The principle of the upper and the below is the principle of heaven and earth, namely ontological *dao*. The motive of Lao Zi is doubtlessly philosophical. The *wu*-oriented interpretation of Wang Bi is renowned by his touching Lao Zi's marrow<sup>248</sup> and the philosophical nuance is no less than Lao Zi.

Qoheleth's thought, namely the theological anthropology is still quite different from the philosophical thought in Wang Bi. This is because Wang Bi uses *wu* as a basis on which to view human life and concludes that life in accordance with the principle of *wu* will go well. It does not correspond to the exclamation at the end of Qoheleth. Therefore, the two similar concepts of vanity come to very different conclusions based on

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<sup>247</sup> See *Lao Zi Zhu* (the quotation of 熊克謹 Xiong Ke Jin), 25.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. "王弼老子道德經二卷，真得老子之學歟!" (Lao Zi's commentary of Wang Bi touches the Lao Zi's marrow.)



different motivations.

#### D. CANONIZATION PROCESS

In the process of canonization Qoheleth and Wang Bi experienced different consequence. The Book of Qoheleth has been accepted in canons by Judaism and Christianity for a long time while Wang Bi's commentary was not so acceptable by religious Daoism and was rejected by Confucianism<sup>249</sup> despite its huge contribution to philosophical Daoism. The contradictory consequences of these two thinkers might result from the later editorial efforts (in the case of Qoheleth). In the conservative academic and religious environments of both Palestine and China, the concept of vanity seems to be a hot pot for everyone confesses its existence but doesn't want to touch it. Therefore Qoheleth's canonization had to experience a kind of editorial process to "upgrade" its connection with King Solomon, God's judgment and the fear of God. Wang Bi was not so lucky to encounter such treatment in Chinese history until later generations. Following will be the introduction how a man conquers the unavoidable vanity, which is also the mission beyond vanity.

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<sup>249</sup> The most authoritative commentaries in religious is *老子河上公注* (*Lao Zi: He Sheng Gong Commentary*) and *老子想爾注* (*Lao Zi: Xiang Er Commentary*), though Wang Bi's commentary is considered as the best one of Lao Zi. And Wang Bi's commentary on *Zhou Yi* has been doubted to be "Confucianism's work" for hundreds of years. In ancient Chinese scholarship the authoritative commentary will play the role of the spokesman once the *Jin* (經) is established (like the Bible in Christianity).

## CHAPTER XVII

### BEYOND VANITY

The sense of vanity seems common for all in the world regardless of race, skin, language or culture. "Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity", the helpless cry is unceasingly resonant throughout human history. So long as there is loneliness, distress, absurdity, conflict, hopelessness and disappointment in human life, there is vanity. Qoheleth describes the vanity as a negative aspect of human life, but Wang Bi treats it the other way. For Wang Bi vanity is a kind of universal phenomena or order. Even so, where does the sense of vanity come from? How does a man conquer vanity? How does vanity play its part in creation?

The concept of vanity comes before the name Abel in Genesis. The earliest delineation of vanity is found in Gen. 1:2 which states: "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Here the two Hebrew words, "תהו (formlessness, without form)" and "בהו (emptiness, void)" are very similar to הבל (*hebel*). What is interesting is that the letter "ה (*he*)" is found in these words and the *he* should be relevant with its breath sound according to onomatopoeic phenomena.

Was there any vanity before God created the whole world or was there any other previous world destroyed into vanity before God created a new one? Genesis does not try to answer the question and any answer regarding it is just an assumption, either scientifically or philosophically. The real vanity that a man could feel starts from Gen.

3. In Gen. 3 sin came to the world and made a huge cleft between the Creator and His creature.<sup>250</sup> Hence man lost his hope for life and sank into unconquerable vanity.

The huge cleft of vanity only God is able to make up. No matter what kind of vanity in Hebrew or in Chinese, the delineation of vanity is inseparably tied to the sinful nature in human being.<sup>251</sup> According to the Apostle John, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn. 3:16). Jesus Christ was sent as a true Savior to save those who sink into the vanity of sin.<sup>252</sup> He is the only hope prophesied<sup>253</sup> after sin has happened. Jesus Christ in the biggest "vanity" man ever has, namely his humility descended from the heaven to save sinners, demonstrating the Creator's unconditioned love for sinners from the beginning.

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<sup>250</sup> God sees what He has created is טוב (good). טוב, the Hebrew word is used over and over in Gen 1 and 2 to describe God is very pleased with His creatures and the works (see Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:9, 12, 17, 18). However, רע (evil) emerges from Gen. 3:5, 6. Then man starts to sink in sin and is separated from God after they sinned against Him.

<sup>251</sup> See *hebel* in Qoheleth. His *hebel* is caused by many absurd and meaningless things brought by sinful men. What he really does not know is why the thing would come out that way. *Wu wei* (無爲) and *wu yu* (無欲) Wang Bi proposes is just the suggestion against the human sinful nature (pride, evil, desire).

<sup>252</sup> ἠγάπησεν, the Greek word simply means "to love" but also "long for", "desire" and "place first in one's affection" according Bible Work 3.5. The Greek word helps to exhibit God's unconditioned and fervent love for those who are lost in sin as its noun form usually is interpreted (agape, Holy Love).

<sup>253</sup> In Gen. 3:15 the prophecy is: "And I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SOME SUGGESTIONS ON MISSION FOR CHINESE

Through the observation of vanity, some missiological conception could benefit from the study. To fulfill the original goal of this thesis it is necessary to study the mission and ministry in China and give some available suggestions. At that age has been an anti-Christianity complex in many Chinese minds because of the misunderstandings since the end of the Qing Dynasty (清朝), the last dynasty in Chinese history. Therefore some serious conflicts arose between the countries that Chinese viewed as Christian (England, America, Germany...) and China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the years of Guang Shu Emperor (光緒皇帝), the most serious conflict was "義和團事件" (in Western terms, the Boxer Rebellion), in which many Western missionaries and Chinese Christians were killed. The event resulted in the vehement diplomatic protestation and the invasion of the eight unified western countries.<sup>254</sup> Of course, more Chinese were slaughtered; many houses, traditional building, property of innocent Chinese were destroyed, and many treasures were robbed in this war. Many Chinese are still ashamed that the treasured articles are exhibited in some famous Western museums.

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<sup>254</sup> The event is also called "The Unified Military Action of Eight Countries"(八國聯軍). All of the eight countries, England, French, Japan, Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy and America, are western Christian countries except for Japan. In 1900 A.D., namely 26<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Guang Shu the event happened and these foreign countries invaded and occupied the capital of China, Pei Jing (北京) and China signed a "Shin Chou Treaty" (辛丑和約) with all these countries at cost of trillions of dollars and other important authorities.

The negative impression of Christianity has been equal to invasion, imperialism, opium, and military violence in the minds of many Chinese. However, these impressions misunderstand the true Christianity and Christian faith. One goal of the thesis is an attempt to drive these two groups to communicate each other on a specific topic. Hopefully much misunderstanding can be solved and each group can learn to appreciate each other with God's love and His forgiveness. Continuing next is the observation of the translation of Chinese Bible focusing on the topic of vanity and some of the pragmatic suggestions for the mission and the ministry in China.

#### A. TRANSLATION

On the topic of vanity there seems to be an entry for the understanding and communication between Biblical and Chinese cultures. As it is mentioned in the second part, most versions of the Chinese Bible put the Hebrew word  $\text{הָבֵל}$  and the Greek word  $\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\iota\acute{o}\tau\eta\varsigma$  as "虚空" (*xu kong*) in the Old Testament and the New Testament. *Xu* and *kong* are interchangeable with *wu* in meaning according to the characteristic of Chinese characters. The terminological effort of *xu kong* is the good contextualization of Hebrew *hebel*; however, *xu* (虛), one of the favorite words in Daoism and *kong* (空) in Buddhism need to define well for fear of confusion once they are employed.

*Xu kong*, the standard Chinese translation for *hebel* does convey the concept of worthlessness or uselessness but is not successful in the sense of ephemerality and absurdity to some extent. This is because the Hebrew word *hebel* is quite obscure and

can be broadly applied. The word is not properly limited to one definition alone. Considering the accuracy of the original text and easy understanding for Chinese people, the phonetic way or the other translation like *xu miu* (虛謬) or *kong miu* (空謬)<sup>255</sup> probably is better. It is not necessary to reject loan words from some other religions like Buddhism or Daoism in China.<sup>256</sup> Even though the *Chinese Union Bible*, the most popular one in Chinese churches has established its “tradition” for decades somehow. Many translation problems are still open and all kinds of translated versions of Bible should be checked over and over in the original text.

## B. APPROACHES

Below are some pragmatic suggestions to promote Christian outreach among Chinese do a more effective job, and to help Chinese people perceive Hebraic culture and the Biblical message in a proper manner.

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<sup>255</sup> The phonetic way is to transfer *hebel* into "何弗" (he + bel) according its spelling. *Xu miu* or *kong miu* is meant by a combined meaning of "ephemerality and absurdity". (虛 *xu* or 空 *kong* is equal to emptiness, meaninglessness, or ephemerality; 謬 *miu* is equal to 荒謬 (*huang miu*), namely absurdity.

<sup>256</sup> In the Chinese church some serious controversies developed regarding the translation such as the name of God. Some Chinese Christians like "上帝" (Shang Di), literally meaning the Supreme Emperor as God's name, while the other prefer "神" (Shen), literally equal to "God" in English. Both of the two Chinese terms could find their sources from classics but are used by other religions as well. It is not necessary to reject the other in order to use the favorite of his own.

## B.1. APPRECIATION (A)

The attitude of appreciation is the start of dialogue. No people or language is superior to others in the world, for all are created by the same Creator. So much differences exists among cultures. Notwithstanding, more or less similarity exists as well for they come from the same source. The concept of vanity is a good sample to discuss. Comparing *hebel* and *wu*, the similarity and uniqueness in between show not only the different thinking mode on the similar field but also two cultures cultivated in the two different environments. The appreciation of these disparities and similarities will smooth the mission task in China.

## B.2. BACKBREAKING (B)

"No pain, no gain", the English idiom can apply to missionary very well. To understand a new culture is never easy, let alone the huge differences that exist between the Western and the Oriental cultures and languages. Nevertheless, difficult does not mean impossible. The only way to understand the other culture is to think, speak, and live in that culture. Our study of "vanity" illustrates this. Wang Bi's *wu* is quite similar to Qoheleth's *hebel* in a multifaceted way, but the similarity can not be evaluated as "the same". Dialogue is possible only after the backbreaking exegetical effort has been done.

### B.3. COMMUNICATION (C)

How do we know Wang Bi's *wu* is relevant to Qoheleth's *hebel*? Before these two thoughts come to dialogue, a common concern should be established and evaluated. A dynamic and constructive communication comes out After *wu* and *hebel* meet together on the concept of vanity. The priority of communication requires a common concern, namely the intersection of thoughts in different cultures. The more relevant the common concern is to both sides, the more successful the communication will be. Is there any more common concern between Christian thought and the traditional Chinese thinking existing besides vanity? Life and death, existence of God, ethics, family, justice and injustice, and filial piety are all common concerns. What has been done with the comparison of vanity is just a start.

### B.4. DELIBERATION (D)

Influenced more and more by many kinds of religions in Chinese society, Chinese mission and ministry have become more difficult than before. To make a good policy and priority under a good deliberation will make easy the work and save the sources (time, manpower, and money). Of course, different people need to be dealt with differently, and the effective job for one people is not necessarily effective for the other. The evangelism is still the priority for the most current Chinese Christian circle but the professional scholars, namely the ones who are proficient in Chinese culture and Bible,



should not hesitate to cultivate. If Christianity does not have enough scholars to build the foundation of theology for Chinese, there will not be a reliable dialogue with unbelieving Chinese to persuade them. Take the concept of vanity as an example. If the similarity between Biblical and Chinese is not discussed thoroughly, Chinese Christians will consider what they receive is a kind of Western religion but not of their own. They will feel comfortable once they discover that the truth in the Bible is for all people, not just for Western people, and find there exist quite similarity in between them.

The four suggestions given above are some possible ways to avoid misunderstanding and improve mission outreach in China. The pragmatic methodology are not the axioms unchangeable, and they are just the result of the comparison of Wang Bi's *wu* and Qoheleth's *hebel*.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CONCLUSION OF PART THREE

The goal of chapter XV is to compare and evaluate Wang Bi's *wu* and Qoheleth's *hebel*. The issues provided are etymological and semantic similarity, figurative and characteristic and its periscope, idiomatic terms or phrases, cherishing manner for life, distrust to human nature, social similarity, mysterious orientation and nuance, and criticism of alienation, the eight points totally. The similarity comparison is based on the study of the former two parts and is clearer in this parallel way.

Chapter XVI following attempts to unfold the uniqueness of Qoheleth's *hebel* and Wang Bi's *wu*. In the words, the points of uniqueness are the obvious difference in between them. In their different characteristics there are four aspects: the authorship known and unknown, the character phonetic and combined, the conclusion and the motive, and the canonization process. Through the analysis of characteristics the concept of vanity is revealed more touching from these two cultural backgrounds.

One aim of the thesis is located in chapter XVII. The concept of vanity is introduced not only to find the similarity and difference between them but also to help understand how to conquer vanity. In this chapter the derivation of vanity is understood in the perspective of creation. The true vanity of human being results from sin. The vindication of the Old Testament and New Testament is briefly given in the chapter to demonstrate that Jesus Christ with the sample of extreme vanity in his humility, has made up the cleft and vanity of sin to give those who believe in him eternal life.

The last chapter (ch. XVIII) in this part wants to provide some suggestions for the mission work of Chinese. First of all, the historical misunderstandings between China and Christian countries are mentioned briefly. And the goal of the chapter is to seek the possible ways to make the two to understand each other more and to make Christian mission in the Chinese circle more effective. The study includes the two parts. The first introduces the recommendations for Chinese Bible in translating vanity. The second gives the four available manners in this regard, namely appreciation, backbreaking, communication and deliberation in the alphabetic way of ABCD. Of course, the discussion of vanity plays still the important role as an example in these four dimensions to make the issues clearer.

To sum up, this part gives not just the comparison and evaluation on Wang Bi's *wu* and Qoheleth's *hebel* but also the some practical methodologies on mission work in China. If the former two parts fulfill the exegetical job to some extent, what this part has done is a kind of cross-cultural work. The exegetical and cross-cultural study combined in this part fulfill properly the basic intention of this thesis.

## CONCLUSION

The sense of vanity in human life is common for all without the difference of race, rank, language and culture. Man is destined to be challenged by the threat of vanity all his life. With the help of two contributors, Qoheleth and Wang Bi, we get an overview of the concept of vanity and a brief understanding of this concept through the text and context of Hebrew and Chinese.

Qoheleth the spokesman of vanity in the Old Testament presents the multifaceted nuance of vanity by his *hebel* in accordance with the Old Testament tradition, especially the sapient tradition. The book is not so grotesque to the Old Testament, but with its kindred brother, the Book of Job, it develops more mysterious orientation than other books. The mysterious nuance of *hebel* can not be shown by the translation of "meaningless" in the NIV Bible and the literal translation of "vanity " of many other versions according to its original, breath or vapor. Analyzed by the Hebrew text and the aesthetic skill of Qoheleth, his *hebel* reflects his feeling on human wisdom, existence, and the absurd fate. What is special and important is that *hebel* strongly mirrors Qoheleth's negative mentality to human life, because he encounters God with something he never knew. Many things turned upside down do not make sense for him. If there is an order in the universe, it should be in God's hand and beyond human knowledge. His *hebel* comes out from this situation.

As for Wang Bi, the Chinese young scholar and the pioneer of a new age after a conservative and strong empire, and he built a new track for all the contemporary

intellectuals and the generations to come. Of course, he is not the initiator of *wu*, the Chinese vanity, but the most important theory of *wu* was set up by him from then on. Following Lao Zi, he found that *wu* is the principle of the universal order and that according to this order, everything evolves on its orbit. His metaphysical theory of *wu* is related to a strong ontological and political motive. Contrary to the Qoheleth's mode of thinking (from the horizontal dimension to the vertical one), Wang Bi's *wu* goes from vertical to horizontal. According to his *wu*, *wu wei* (無爲) and *wu yu* (無欲) become the characteristics of his thought and *wu* is also used as a kind of relative epistemology. However, Wang Bi's *wu* is a philosophical product, so it is developed in an organized way and does not infuse some mental flavor.

Did Wang Bi find out the universal order that is intangible for Qoheleth? The question has no answer and is not the point. The truth is that in different ways, Qoheleth and Wang Bi express their common concern, namely "vanity in human life". Through the comparison and evaluation the disparity between Hebrew and Chinese, the anthropological and the metaphysical, and the theological and the philosophical appears.

The aim of this thesis intended not to solve the problem of vanity in human being, but to build a bridge to cross the Biblical thought to the Chinese mind. It also tries to introduce the Chinese mind that can be observed from Wang Bi's *wu* to those who are unaware of it. The other goal is that mission outreach among the Chinese of the world could have more effective dialogue and that misunderstanding of each other could be lessened.

Of course vanity study is just the one among many valuable topics. The ethical

concerns like family relationship<sup>257</sup>, moral judgment and inclination<sup>258</sup> and societal moral movement<sup>259</sup> all are good to do the similar comparison. *Tian* (天, the heaven), the immanent and transcendental conception in Chinese culture also provides a cross-cultural point to evaluate its difference from God in the Christian Bible. The difference /similarity between Torah in the Old Testament and the ancient Chinese laws, and the sapient tradition of the Bible and the wisdom literature in ancient China all deserve deeper and multifaceted studies. The study of the conception on vanity is just an attempt and beginning in these fields.

According to the effort of this thesis what Qoheleth and Wang Bi have done is nothing else than to excavate the vanity in human heart, which is the common cry in ancient and modern age, and in Western and Oriental world. Doubtlessly it is indicated that the fact of vanity is caused by the bankruptcy of a vertical relationship with God and the only way the cleft of vanity could be made up is in the salvation of Jesus Christ. If the effort committed upon this study has produced any positive reactions regarding these goals, it would not come to "vanity".

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<sup>257</sup> The patriarchal family in the Old Testament is very like the ancient Chinese one. The way or the attitude people used to deal with the general affair in life are valuable to study more. Take filial piety as an example. Isaac's filial piety to Abraham that makes him submissive to be sacrificed (Gen. 22:1-19) is very friendly for Chinese, because Chinese are taught traditionally to obey their parents in a absolute submission.

<sup>258</sup> Confucianism and Proverbs are the good pair to do the comparison.

<sup>259</sup> In the Old Testament there was a moral reformed movement in Ezra's age (see the Book of Ezra). The similar movement also happened in ancient China (in the East Han Dynasty, the Song Dynasty and so on).

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