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# Conceptualizing the Interaction of Buddhism and Daoism in the Tang Dynasty: Inner Cultivation and Outer Authority in the *Daode Jing* Commentaries of Cheng Xuanying and Li Rong

Friederike Assandri

Center for Cultural Studies on Science and Technology in China (CCST), Technical University Berlin (TUB),  
Straße des 17. Juni 135, 10623 Berlin, Germany; friederike\_assandri@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** This paper takes the different interpretations of one and the same sentences in the *Daode jing* as “inner cultivation” or “worldly power” respectively, in the commentaries of two closely related early Tang Daoist authors, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 and Li Rong 李荣, as a starting point to approach the question of interaction of Buddhism and Daoism from a new angle. Instead of trying to pinpoint influences, origins, and derivatives, I propose to delineate philosophical discourses that cross the boundaries of the three teachings. Parallel excerpts from both commentaries show how Cheng reads the *Daode jing* as a guidebook for cultivation, and how Li Rong reads it as a guideline for governing. I argue that the differences could be read as the authors’ participation in different philosophical discourses, and I will show, for the case of Cheng Xuanying, how terminological overlap with contemporary Buddhist authors indicates that Buddhists and Daoists both participated in the discourse on inner cultivation with commentaries to their respective sacred scriptures.

**Keywords:** Chongxuan xue; Tang Daoism; Cheng Xuanying; Li Rong; Buddhism and Daoism; Laozi Daode jing; Three Teachings; Buddho–Daoism

## 1. Introduction

Decades ago, Erik Zürcher, in a trailblazing article, proposed three categories of influence of Buddhism on early Taoism (1980): (1) formal borrowing of Buddhist technical language; (2) conceptual borrowing of well-defined doctrinal concepts; and (3) “borrowed complexes: the absorption of a coherent cluster of ideas and/or practices, taken over from Buddhism as a complex” (Zürcher 1980, p. 87). Zürcher also mentioned a fourth category of “influence,”

“which is so elusive that at least at this stage of the investigation it is better not to speculate about it: the “pervasive influence” of Buddhist ideas and practices which may have contributed to the development of Taoism without, however, finding its expression in recognizably Buddhist terms. “ . . . ” In most cases the Buddhist and Taoist ideas supported and stimulated each other, so that for every subject both a Buddhist and a Taoist (or at least an endogenous Chinese) origin could be suggested. I shall not deal with such pervasive influence or convergence, which is at best hard to prove, . . . ”. (Zürcher 1980, p. 88)

This paper, in a study of a much smaller textual range than Zürcher’s, will address this “fourth category,” which Erik Zürcher chose not to speculate about, with an approach that instead of trying to pinpoint influences, origins, and borrowings, proposes to delineate philosophical discourses that transcend the boundaries of the three teachings Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. I will not

attempt a general explanation of “pervasive influences or convergence,”—that would indeed be “hard to prove at best”—but limit my focus on the context of early Tang dynasty commentaries to the *Daode jing*.

The approach will be exemplified with a focus on the topics of “inner cultivation” and “worldly power” as presented in two early Tang dynasty commentaries to the *Daode jing*, namely, the *Daode jing yishu* 道德經義疏 by Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 and the *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經注 by Li Rong 李榮. Pointing out the difference in interpretation of the two closely related Daoist thinkers, and the terminological overlaps of Cheng Xuanying’s commentary and contemporary Buddhist commentaries to Buddhist scriptures, the paper argues that the case of the “inner cultivation” and “outer authority” interpretation of one and the same sentence in the *Daode jing* by the two authors could be related to them participating in different philosophical discourses. Following this line of thought with further research on the commentarial language of the discursive field of “inner cultivation”,<sup>1</sup> we will show how this discourse crossed the boundaries of the three teachings, in particular, those between Buddhists and Daoists.

## 2. Context: Cheng Xuanying and Li Rong, Two Daoists in Early Tang Chang’an

The early Tang emperors, for a series of coincidences or a well-orchestrated ruse (Benn 1977, p. 29f), had come to accept a report of epiphanies of Laozi in the Yangjiao Mountains as a major omen for their successful rule. The deity was said to have claimed to be the ancestor of the ruling family of the Tang, and thus the Tang declared themselves descendants of Laozi (Benn 1977, p. 27; cf. *Tang huiyao* 唐會要<sup>2</sup>, 50, 1a). One of the consequences was that, in 625 CE, emperor Gaozong ranked Daoism first in court, before Buddhism and Confucianism;<sup>3</sup> emperor Taizong confirmed this ranking in 637 CE (Barrett 1996, p. 27).

Thus, Daoism, in particular in the capital Chang’an, gained much attention, both positive, in the form of generous imperial patronage (Barrett 1996, p. 27ff), and negative, as criticism by Buddhists and Confucian scholars eager to improve their own standing by lowering that of the Daoists. Notwithstanding acrimonious debates (Assandri 2015, pp. 24–31), Daoism remained first-ranking teaching for most of the Tang dynasty.

With the exalted position of the Daoist teachings at court, also the *Daode jing*, traditionally said to have been written by Laozi, received renewed attention. For Daoists, in 646, it became the basic Daoist ordination text, which the state recognized by offering land grants to those monks who had received it,<sup>4</sup> after the *Sanhuangwen* 三皇文, which had served in this function before, were censored (*Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng*, 集古今佛道論衡, T<sup>5</sup> 2104, 3, 386). But interest in the *Daode jing* went far beyond the circles of ordained Daoists. Commentaries to the *Daode jing* were written also by Confucian scholars like Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645), Wei Cheng 魏征 (580–643), Lu Deming 陸德明 (556–627?), and by the court astrologer and philo-Daoist Fu Yi 傅奕 (555–639).<sup>6</sup> These authors belonged to the intellectual

<sup>1</sup> The constraints of time and space do not allow us in this paper to present the parallel research for the “outer authority” interpretation, this shall be done in a future article.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Pu 王溥: *Tang Huiyao*, ed. Siku quanshu 欽定四庫全書, digital version available at Kanseki Repository. URL: <https://www.kanripo.org/ed/KR2m0002/WYG/050> (accessed on 18 January 2019).

<sup>3</sup> The author is aware that “Ruism” might be a better term; however, for the sake of a higher recognition value of “Confucianism” for the readers, we will use the term “Confucianism” to denote the thinkers and scholars that called themselves “rujia” 儒家.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably in the Daoist context, the text of the *Daode jing*, which was freely accessible in contrast to many other Daoist texts, was nevertheless transmitted in formal initiation rites, possibly related to the *taixuan* 太玄 section of the proto-canon, which consisted of commentaries and other texts related to the *Daode jing*. Cf. (Cheng 2006, pp. 305–7) for a description of the transmission of the *taixuan* texts.

<sup>5</sup> Primary sources from the Buddhist Canon or Taishō Tripitaka (T) are cited from Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經. Tōkyō: Taishō issai-kyō kankō kai, 1929–1934.

<sup>6</sup> Lu Deming 陸德明: *Laozi yinyi* 老子音義. In *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985; Wei Zheng 魏征: *Laozi zhiyao* 老子治要. In *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要 (SBCK (四部丛刊初编) 443, available on ctext.org: <https://ctext.org/qunshu-zhiyao/zhs>; accessed 2 January 2019); Fu Yi 傅奕: *Daode jing guben pian* 道德古本篇 DZ 665; Yan

elite of their times, and they were active in the capital Chang'an, just like Cheng Xuanying and Li Rong. Even though we do not have complete biographies of Cheng Xuanying or Li Rong, we know that they interacted with the social and intellectual elite of Chang'an, from members of the imperial family to officials, scholars, and Buddhist clerics (Assandri 2009, pp. 38–46).

Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 had been invited in 631 by emperor Taizong to the capital. He came from Henan and had lived in Donghai 東海 in the coastal region in the northeast of Jiangsu.<sup>7</sup> From 631 to sometime between 650 and 656, he was actively involved in the affairs of Daoism in the capital. He participated in the prestigious, imperially sponsored project to translate the *Daode jing* into Sanskrit under the guidance of the Buddhist Master Xuanzang 玄奘 in 647 (Ji gujin Fo Dao lunheng T 2104, 3, 386bf; Pelliot 1912). Later, Cheng Xuanying must have fallen in disgrace; it is said that he was exiled to Yuzhou 郁州 during the Yonghui era (650–656).<sup>8</sup> He wrote most of his oeuvre after returning to Yuzhou: in addition to the explanatory commentary to the *Daode jing* with an introduction and preface (*Daode jing kaiti xujue yishu* 道德經開題序決義疏), he also wrote a subcommentary to the *Zhuangzi* commentary of Guo Xiang (*Nanhua zhenjing Zhuangzi zhushu* 南華真經 莊子註疏. DZ<sup>9</sup> 745), and a now lost commentary to the *Yi jing* (*Zhouyi liuyan qiongji tu* 周易流演窮寂圖, cf. Qiang 2006, p. 20). These three commentaries would put him nicely in the tradition of Dark Learning (*xuanxue* 玄學), but different from the *xuanxue* philosophers of the 3rd and 4th centuries, Cheng Xuanying was an ordained Daoist monk (cf. Cheng 2006, p. 178; Cheng 2011, p. 36); he also wrote a commentary to the Daoist *Lingbao wuliang duren shangpin miaojing* 靈寶無量度人妙經 (in *Yuanshi wuliang duren shangpin miaojing sizhu* 元始量渡人上品妙四注. DZ 87).

Li Rong, originally from Sichuan, was active in Chang'an in the second half of the 7th century; he had been invited to the capital by emperor Gaozong (r. 650–683) (Lu 1993, pp. 258–59). Between 658 and 663, he was invited several times to debate at court against Buddhists (Assandri 2015, pp. 58, 68, 87, 119). Li Rong was a well-known personality in Chang'an (Kohn 1991, pp. 199–200), contacts to members of the social and intellectual elite of Chang'an are documented.<sup>10</sup> Qing (1991, p. 190) assumes that Li Rong might have been a student or disciple of Cheng Xuanying, also because their philosophy seems closely related; however, the evidence for a disciple–master relation is slim (Meng 2001, p. 359). Apart from his commentary to the *Daode jing*, he wrote a commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, which is lost today, and to the Daoist scripture *Xisheng jing* 西升經 (in *Xisheng jing jizhu* 西升集注, DZ 726). He is further said to have authored a *Xiyu jing* 洗浴經, copying the Buddhist sūtra *Foshuo wenshi xiyu zhongseng jing* 佛說溫室洗浴僧經, T 701.<sup>11</sup> He was involved in an enterprise of editing Daoist texts, most probably with the aim of eliminating obvious terminological borrowings from Buddhism (*Fayuan zhulin*, 法苑珠林, T 2122, 55, 703a26f; cf. Assandri 2016, pp. 58–59).

Cheng Xuanying's and Li Rong's commentaries have been transmitted together in two compilations in the Daozang.<sup>12</sup> Even though the two commentaries are transmitted together as *zhu*

Shigu 顏師古: *Xuanyan xinji ming lao bu* 玄言新記明老部 ZD (Zhonghua Daozang. 中華道藏. Beijing: Huaxia 2004. Texts are cited following Pregadio 2009) 09/013.

<sup>7</sup> Donghai corresponds approximately to today's Lianyungan. *Xu Gaosengzhuàn* (T 2060, 17, 567a9) in the biography of Tiantai Zhiyi 天台智顛 (538–597) records that Tiantai Zhiyi sojourned there for a while.

<sup>8</sup> *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 59. The reasons for this exile are not specified. However, Yuzhou is right next to Donghai, where he had studied, so Yu (1998, p. 94) assumes he was rather sent back home. Zhang (2018, pp. 116–24) and Qiang (2006, p. 20) speculate that the banishment might have had something to do with his interpretation of the *Yijing*.

<sup>9</sup> Primary sources from the Daoist Canon or Daozang (DZ) are cited from *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏. Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu. 1923–1926. [Reprint Taipei: Yiwen, 1962.] The numbers follow the work numbers in (Schipper and Verellen 2004).

<sup>10</sup> The biography of the Doctor at the Imperial Academy (*taixueboshi* 太學博士) Luo Daocong 道琮 in ch. 196 of the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 relates that at the end of emperor Gaozong's reign, Luo Daocong frequently met and debated with the Assistant teacher Kang Guoan 康國安, the Daoist Li Rong, and others.

<sup>11</sup> See *Zhengzhenlun* 甄正論, T 2112, 569c; cf. (Cheng 1998, p. 295). The text is *Taishang lingbao xiyu shenxin jing* 太上靈寶洗浴身心經, Dunhuang manuscripts, S 3380, P 2402.

<sup>12</sup> *Daode zhenjing zhushu* 道德經注疏 DZ 710 (wrongly attributed to Gu Huan 顧歡 (~420/428–483/491), most probably dating to the 12th century, s. Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 649) and *Daode Zhenjing xuande zuanshu* 道德經玄德纂疏 DZ 711 (compiled by Qiang Siqu 強思齊 in the late 9th or early 10th century). Two 7th-century Dunhuang Manuscripts (P 2517 and S 5887) also contain a part of Cheng's commentary.

and *shu*, they do not relate to each other as commentary and subcommentary: Li Rong's interlineary commentary (*zhu*)<sup>13</sup> was written after Cheng Xuanying's expository commentary (*yishu*).<sup>14</sup> In terms of philosophical outlook, the two commentaries show much similarity, and they are both considered representative for Twofold Mystery (*chongxuan* 重玄) exegesis of the *Daode jing* (*Daode zhenjing guangshengyi* 道德真經廣聖義, DZ 725, 5, 12; cf. Meng 2001, pp. 360–61; Li 2005, pp. 308–10; Robinet 1977, pp. 110–15; Assandri 2009; et al.).

Twofold Mystery is a Daoist philosophy based on the *Daode jing*, but also found in other scriptures of the late Six dynasties and early Tang. One of its most conspicuous characteristics is the use of the *tetra lemma* logic, which had become known in China with the translations of the main texts of the Buddhist Madhyamika school (Assandri 2009). Both authors use the *tetra lemma* logic as well as the term “*chongxuan*” Twofold Mystery; and yet, a closer look reveals remarkable differences.

### 3. Inner Cultivation and Outer Authority: Diverging Interpretations of the Sage

The sage (*sheng* 聖) is mentioned in 27 of the 81 chapters of the *Daode jing*; it might be considered a core conception; the interpretation of the term is closely tied to the tenor of the general interpretation of the *Daode jing*.

Cheng Xuanying reads the *Daode jing* as a guideline for inner cultivation; the sage in this framework becomes the model of cultivation, a superior accomplished being who has successfully put into practice the self-cultivation the *Daode jing* proposes. In Cheng Xuanying's interpretation, the sage takes on characteristics of the Mahayana Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, notably a distinct will to save the beings, in addition to being one with Dao or ultimate nonbeing. Much of Cheng's commentary discusses then the paradoxical issue of the sage being one with Dao, which implies perfect stillness and nonaction (*wuwei* 無為) on the one side, and wishing to save the beings, which requires necessarily some form of intentional action, on the other side. In addition, the commentary elaborates instructions for cultivation following the model of the sage.

Li Rong interprets the *Daode jing* as a guideline for government; consequently, in his reading, the sage is the emperor—to whom the commentary is dedicated and presented, as stated in the preface. Much of the commentary is dedicated to evaluating and praising government style, and offering advice on how to rule the people.

While the difference of “inner cultivation” and “outer government” might be reduced to a common theme of kingship, like the way of “inner sage and outer king” (*neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王之道) proposed in the last chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, we should note that here each commentator systematically focusses on one side, inner cultivation or outer rule, and while not implying that either excludes the other, the two commentators seem to have different visions of the role and actions of the sage—or, at least, they speak about it in a different way.

I will present excerpts<sup>15</sup> from both commentaries to short passages of chapters 2 and 3 of the *Daode jing* to underscore the different interpretations:

#### 3.1. *Daode jing*, Chapter 2, Section 2: The Governing of the Sage

**Laozi: Therefore the governing of the sage manages the affairs without acting and practices the teaching without speaking** 是以聖人治 處無為之事，行不言之教<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The interlineary *zhu* commentary had been in use since the Han dynasty, prominent examples are the Wang Bi commentary (Wagner 2003) and the Heshang gong commentary (Wang 1993).

<sup>14</sup> The *yishu* type commentary developed in the Six dynasties period, according to Mou (1984, p. 5), originally from lectures on texts. It was popular with Confucian scholars, Daoists, and Buddhists alike (Meng 2001, p. 353).

<sup>15</sup> A full analysis of the relevant chapters, or the whole *Daode jing*, would go well beyond the space of an article; therefore, I present only two representative excerpts; there are many more passages throughout both commentaries that show the same or similar interpretative choices of the two authors.

<sup>16</sup> The base text is taken here from the so-called 5000 word Version, reconstructed from Tang dynasty Dunhuang manuscripts in ZD 09/003. This text differs notably from the today much better known Wang Bi and Heshang gong editions of the *Daode*



### Cheng Xuanying's commentary reads:

第二顯聖智虛凝，忘功濟物 The second part shows that the wisdom of the sage is empty and concentrated, and that he forgets merit and makes [all] things equal.

[Laozi: 是以聖人治<sup>17</sup>] 是以，連上之辭也。聖人者，體道契真之人也。亦言聖者正也，能自正己，兼能正他。故名為聖。治，理也。即此聖人慈悲救物，轉無為之妙法，治有為之蒼生。所治近指上文。能治，屬在於下。仍前以發後，故云是以聖人治也。

“Therefore” is a term that constitutes the connection to the previous [sentence]. The sage is a man who embodies Dao and who is sworn (in agreement by a contract) to the True. It is also said that the sage is one who is correct, and by making himself correct he is also able to make others correct in the same way. This is why he is called sage. Regulate means “li” [to put in order/to polish and carve a gem]. This means that this sage, compassionately [wanting to] save the beings, passes on the wondrous teaching of non-action, and regulates the multitude of beings with desires. That which he regulates is pointed out close-by in the text above, how he can regulate belongs to what follows [in the text] below, relying on the former in order to develop the latter<sup>18</sup>, therefore he says “the sage regulates.”

[Laozi: 處無為之事] 言聖人寂而動，動而寂。寂而動，無為而能涉事。動而寂，處世不廢無為。斯乃無為即為，為即無為。豈有市朝山穀之殊，拱默當塗之隔耶？故言處無為之事也。

This explains that the sage is still and yet moves, moves and yet is still, still and yet moving, non-acting he can order all affairs; moving yet still, managing affairs he does not abandon non-action; thus then his non-acting is precisely acting, and his acting is precisely non-acting. So how could there be the difference between [a life in] market and court and [an eremitic life in] mountains and valleys; and [how could there be] a distinction between [a life of] making obeisance and keeping [a vow of] silence, and [a life of] a powerholder in a key position? Therefore he says “he manages with non-action.”

[Laozi: 行不言之教] 妙體真源，絕於言象。雖復虛寂，而施化無方。豈唯真不乖應，抑亦語不妨默。既而出處語默，其致一焉。端拱寂然，而言滿天下。豈曰杜口而稱不言哉。故《莊子》云：“言而足，則終日言而盡道；言而不足，則終日言而盡物。”

Wondrously embodying the true source, he is beyond words or images. Even though he is again empty and still, yet he bestows the transforming [truth] everywhere. How much more is the true not separate from the response,<sup>19</sup> or, in the same vein, speech might as well be silence. Subsequently, holding office or living in eremitic retirement, speaking or being silent, both are the same. Sitting straight and making obeisance in silence,<sup>20</sup> yet the words fill the world, how could this be called speechless, or not speaking? Therefore *Zhuangzi* (ch. 25.12) says: “If the words are adequate, then talking all day one could exhaustively [explain] the Dao. If the words are inadequate, then talking all day one can [merely] exhaustively [explain] the things.”

*jing* (both editions were popular in the Tang dynasty, cf. (Hung 1957, p. 81; Chan 1991; Wagner 2003, p. 63f)). Differences to the Wang Bi and Heshang gong readings are pointed out in the notes to the commentaries below.

<sup>17</sup> The received Wang Bi and Heshang gong versions both read 是以聖人處無為之事; while DZ 710, 1, 8b and DZ 711, 1, 18b and the 5000 word Version of the *Daode jing*, ZD 09/003, 28b read 是以聖人治無為之事 like Cheng Xuanying.

<sup>18</sup> In his introduction to chapter 2, Cheng Xuanying writes: “Getting into this chapter, we can divide its meaning into two parts: the first explains the clinging of the feelings of the common man, which turn [realities] upside down and thus produce misconceptions. The second demonstrates the empty stillness of the wisdom of the sage, forgetting merit he saves the beings.” (cf. Meng 2001, p. 378).

<sup>19</sup> Compare (Assandri 2009, pp. 183–88): true and response refer to aspects of the conception of the sage: “true” as an all-encompassing cosmic deity, comparable to the Buddha in his manifestation as *dharmakaya*, or Laozi as Dao, while “response” refers to a more worldly manifestation of the sage, comparable to the Buddha as a historical being—or Laozi as archivar of the Zhou.

<sup>20</sup> *Duangong* 端拱 refers to the way ancient kings ruled with non-action.

### Li Rong comments the same lines as follows:

緬觀萬古或澆或淳 遐覽百王時步時驟 未有紀尊號於金簡 昭聖於玉篇 皇上應千年之運隆七百之基 不用干戈 樂推無厭 是以宗聖遠彰於未兆 先定於無形 故言是以聖人治處無之事也

Looking from afar and observing ancient times, some were decadent, some were pure. Looking from afar at the hundred kings, at times they walked [slowly] at times they galloped. [However,] there weren't those who recorded their Honored Title on Golden Tablets,<sup>21</sup> or those who understood the registers of the sage on the jade tablets.<sup>22</sup> His majesty responds to the needs of 1000 years, prospering achievements for more than 700 years. He does not use weapons, [therefore the world] delights in praising him and doesn't get tired [of him].<sup>23</sup> For this reason the ancestral sage<sup>24</sup> far away manifested himself in the not yet visible (of the past), and took shape first in the [time of] formlessness. Therefore [Laozi] says: "Thus the governing of the sage rests in the affairs of non-action."

猛士上將 承威以定四方 宰輔阿衡論道而清百揆 化不以言 故云行不言之教也。

Brave warrior, superior general, he carries on the majestic power in order to secure the four directions. Ministers and imperial advisors discuss the Dao and make the affairs of government clear. He transforms without words. Therefore [Laozi] says: "he practices the teaching without words."

Both commentators speak about the sage, yet they describe him in different terms in their interpretations. Cheng Xuanying describes the sage, whom he identifies with Laozi, as a bodhisattva-like spiritual being, at one with the ultimate source of all that is, and striving to save all the beings. His cultivation and state of mind is described in detail—presumably because he also serves as a model for the adepts.

Li Rong instead describes clearly the emperor of the Tang, comparing him first to previous emperors and attributing the appearance or epiphany of the "ancestor" Laozi to the emperor's virtue.

### 3.2. *Daode jing*, Chapter 3, Section 2: *When the Sage Rules He Makes His Mind Empty and His Belly Full*

**Laozi: When the sage rules, he makes his mind empty and his belly full, he weakens his will and strengthens his bones. Always causing the people to be without knowledge and without desires, and making sure that those who know do not dare not to act (Cheng)/those who know do not dare to act (Li),<sup>25</sup> thus nothing is not regulated. 聖人治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨。常使民無知無欲。使知者不敢不為 (Cheng)/不敢為 (Li) ，則無不治。**

#### Cheng Xuanying writes:

第二，独显圣人，虚怀利物。

Second, he solely shows how the sage is open-minded and benefits the beings.

[Laozi: 聖人治，虛其心] 聖人治，同前釋。既外無可欲之境，內無能欲之心，心境兩忘，故即心無心也。前既境幻，後又心虛也。

<sup>21</sup> Golden Tablets refers to Daoist writings as well as to imperial edicts.

<sup>22</sup> *Yupian*, Jade tablets, or jade registers, refers to Daoist sacred scriptures of the nine heavens.

<sup>23</sup> This refers to *Daode jing* 66: 是以天下樂推而不厭.

<sup>24</sup> The Tang considered Laozi their ancestor and had named the Laozi temple Zongsheng guan 宗聖觀. Compare *Da Tang Zongsheng guan ji* 大唐宗聖觀記 by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641) (*Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 j.146).

<sup>25</sup> Cheng Xuanying reads the base text of this sentence following the 5000 word version of the *Daode jing* (ZD 09/003) as "不敢不為" (Meng 2001, p. 383), while Li Rong relies on the Heshang gong and Wang Bi base text of the *Daode jing* and reads 不敢為 (Meng 2001, p. 570).

“When the sage regulates [the beings], this is what I have explained before. Since outside there are no objects<sup>26</sup> that are desirable, inside there is also no mind that can desire, mind and objects are both forgotten, therefore this mind is no mind, since in the former [proposition] the external realm of objects is illusory, also in the later [proposition] the mind is empty.

[Laozi: 實其腹] 雖復即心無心，而實有靈照，乃言妙體虛寂，而赴感無差。德充於內，故言實其腹也。

Even though this mind is no mind, yet in reality there is the shining of the spirit, therefore [I] say: wondrously he embodies emptiness and stillness, yet he responds [to the stimuli or needs of the beings] without fail, the virtue is complete inside, therefore he says “reality” is in his belly.

[Laozi: 弱其志] 既內懷實智，而外弘接物，處俗同塵，柔弱退己也。

Since inside he cherishes the true wisdom, but outside he interacts much with the external things, dwelling with the common people and being like the worldly dust, he is supple and weak and takes himself back.

[Laozi: 強其骨] 骨，譬內也。言聖人雖復外示和光，而內恒儉泊。欲明動不傷寂，應不離真，故言強其骨也。

“Bones” is a metaphor for the interior. [Laozi] says that the sage, even if outside he shows [merely] dimmed brilliance, inside he is forever tranquil and unassuming. [With this] he wants to explain that [the sage’s] movement does not harm his tranquility, [his] responding does not leave the [state of] truth, therefore he says “he strengthens his bones.”

#### Li Rong instead interprets:

[Laozi: 是以聖人治] 皇上積德積仁盡善盡美老君欲重揚聖德故再言之也

The reigning emperor accumulates virtue and benevolence, exceedingly good, exceedingly beautiful.<sup>27</sup> Lord Lao wants to praise again the virtue of the sage, therefore he repeats it.

[Laozi: 虛其心] 除嗜欲是非遺萬慮存一

He eliminates all indulgence in carnal desire and abolishes [clinging to concepts of] right and wrong; he banishes the ten thousand deliberations and guards the true one.

[Laozi: 實其腹] 道實於懷 德充於

Dao fills his bosom and virtue fills his interior.

[Laozi: 弱其志] 心志柔弱順道無

He makes his will weak and follows Dao without [ever] going against it.

[Laozi: 強其骨] 唯道集虛心懷至道在物無害者得成仙骨自

Only Dao gathers in emptiness,<sup>28</sup> for him whose mind embraces the highest Dao there is no harm in the external things; he achieves to make his immortal’s bones<sup>29</sup> become strong by himself.

<sup>26</sup> *Jing*境 refers here, following an originally Buddhist interpretation of the term, to the external sphere that the inner sense organs and the mind get into contact with. According to the theory of the rise of consciousness through the “five *skandhas*” (five aggregates), a concept that appears also in the Daoist *Benji jing* 本際經 (Assandri 2013), internal sense organs and the mind get into contact with external spheres or objects of cognition (*jing*), both considered as “form” (*rupa*). This then produces “sensation” (*vedana*), “perception” (*samjna*), “mental formation and volition” (*samskara*) and “consciousness” (*vijnana*). Note that the order of the last four *skandhas* can vary in different Buddhist explanations (cf. Assandri 2013, pp. 56–57).

<sup>27</sup> This is a reference to *Lunyu* 论语, 3·八佾: 子謂韶, 「盡美矣, 又盡善也。」

<sup>28</sup> This is a reference to a sentence in *Zhuangzi* 4: 唯道集虛。虛者, 心齋也。

<sup>29</sup> “Immortal’s bones” in Daoist lore are a characteristic of a human destined to become immortal.

[Laozi: 常使民無知無欲, 使知者不敢為, 為無為, 則無不治矣] 上扇無為之風下行淳樸之化下從於上上下下皆安則無不化之也。

If those above start the wind of nonaction, those below will practice the transformation to simplicity. The ones below follow the ones above, and those above and below are both peaceful, then there is nothing that is not transformed.

Again the different interpretations of the two commentaries are evident: Cheng Xuanying reads the passage as an instruction for self-cultivation focused on inner cultivation in order to overcome discriminating thinking and desires. The sage, like in chapter two, is the one who practices this self-cultivation successfully. He is an accomplished model who embodies Dao. Cheng's terminology points to his adoption of Buddhist theories of mind and consciousness. Li Rong's short commentary, just like ch. 2 cited before, clearly reads the sentence in the context of a guideline to govern, and the sage as referring to the emperor. The emperor should follow the guidelines of Dao, practicing cultivation as well—but he is an ideal of worldly power practicing spiritual cultivation, while in Cheng Xuanying's reading the sage is an ideal of spiritual cultivation.

#### 4. Discussion

The interpretative openness of the Laozi is known—yet, the fact that even in a “sectarian” Daoist environment, and among two closely related authors, the interpretation could be so different is noteworthy. Of course, both themes, inner cultivation and outer authority, are traditionally associated with the concept of the sage. What is noteworthy in our context, however, is the consistency with which one author describes motives related to inner cultivation, and the other motives related to outer authority.

Considering that both commentaries agree in the general tenor of Twofold Mystery interpretation, we might exclude the explanation that the divergent interpretations could be depending on different schools of thought. Other explanations could be personal idiosyncrasies of the authors, or else major changes in Daoism, which then would necessitate new readings of the old texts. However, keeping in mind that the two authors shared a common philosophical outlook, that they were both active in Chang'an less than a decade apart, and that Daoism in the capital did not experience major upheavals during this time, these arguments are rather weak.

A more plausible consideration asks for intended audience and topic of discussion.

The importance of intended audience for Daoist texts in general is well known; it is recognized for example in the distinction between texts for “internal circulation” and texts for “general circulation” which structures the presentation of texts in the *Companion to the Daozang* by Schipper and Verellen (2004, p. xvii). In this framework, “internal circulation” refers to texts which are exclusively for Daoists, or a specific subset of Daoists, while the texts for “general circulation” were open to all.<sup>30</sup>

Li Rong addresses in his preface the emperor of the Tang as foremost representative of worldly power. Cheng Xuanying does not offer explicit information with regard to his intended audience, the content of his commentary suggests that he addressed fellow Daoists with an interest in inner cultivation. However, since neither the *Daode jing* nor Cheng Xuanying's commentary are to be considered esoteric (cf. Assandri 2005, p. 434), a distinction between texts intended for “internal” vs. “general” circulation cannot explain the divergence of interpretation of the commentaries. Even if we assume that Cheng Xuanying's commentary addressed fellow Daoists, it was not exclusively for them.

Cheng Xuanying's commentary focusses on the topic of “inner cultivation,” but is not intended for “internal circulation,” Li Rong's commentary centers on the topic of “worldly (“outer”) authority.” We can relate these different topics to different intended audiences, and argue that the respective topics had special relevance for the intended audience.

<sup>30</sup> This distinction is important, because much of the early medieval Daoist scriptural lore was esoteric and accessible only to initiated Daoists (Bumbacher 1995; Assandri 2016).



Or else, we can argue that the two commentaries partook in two different philosophical discourses, which formed in different environments. The last section of this paper will discuss some implications of this last argument.

#### 4.1. Language, Influence or Shared Discourses

If we accept that Cheng Xuanying and Li Rong used a different language and terminology in their interpretation of the sage in the *Daode jing* based on interest in different topics<sup>31</sup> and different intended audiences, we might further ask if these topics were discussed in a wider audience, and who this audience was. And lastly, we should ask ourselves if addressing a specific topic and a specific audience did also entail a specific or particular language, and could thus be described as a specific discourse. To answer the latter questions, we need to move away from close reading techniques and employ data mining tools, which allow us, similar to zooming out on a larger scale on a map,<sup>32</sup> to locate shared discourses in the textual materials.

Li Rong, who takes the concept of sage as a reference to the current emperor and addressed the emperor directly in his preface to his commentary (Meng 2001, p. 562), employs conventional language of praise of authorities, references to the kings of ancient times, and allusions to the ancient classics. Results of data mining for key terms used in his commentary cannot be presented in the space of this paper; however, even a cursory search for terms in the Kanseki Repository<sup>33</sup> shows terminological overlaps mainly with historiographical literature and the classical philosophers. His base text of the *Daode jing* is largely that of the Wang Bi and Heshang gong editions, which were both current and popular in the early Tang dynasty; Wang Bi was even included among the twenty-one “sages and teachers of antiquity” venerated in the imperial university (*Jiu Tangshu* 189.595a).

Cheng Xuanying uses the 5000 word edition of the *Daode jing* as a base text.<sup>34</sup> Language, terminology, and expressions of his commentary seem idiosyncratic when compared with the Wang Bi and Heshang gong interpretations of the *Daode jing*, and with Li Rong’s commentary.

Conceptually, there seems to be Buddhist influence, however, this “influence” is hard to pinpoint on the level of language. His language is per se not specifically “Buddhist,” in a sense of transliterations from Sanskrit or Buddhist technical terminologies, nor are there any of the somewhat obvious “plagiarisms,” copies from Buddhist scriptures, which Buddhists admonished at times (Assandri 2015, p. 92, 2016).

Data mining allows us to search for the seemingly “idiosyncratic” language we find in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary in comprehensive collections of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian texts.

Searching for some of the key terms in the Kanseki Repository database, we find that Cheng Xuanying’s language looks much less idiosyncratic when compared to contemporary commentaries to Buddhist sutras: Throughout the commentary, Cheng employs terminologies and expressions, which are not per se specifically Buddhist, nor do they per se express specific Buddhist concepts. However, they show a large overlap with commentaries of several Buddhist authors, in particular Jizang 吉藏

<sup>31</sup> Topics refers here not to the sage, but to, e.g., inner cultivation, or movement and stillness, or good government, etc.

<sup>32</sup> The two methodical approaches (hermeneutics and discourse analysis) proposed here seem at first sight contradictory: hermeneutics imply that the author uses language with the intent of expressing a specific thing. Discourse theory implies that “a thing” is constructed by many referring to it in a specific language which works with certain regularities or rules, and in its radical interpretation attention to the author is not needed. A less radical way of looking at these two methodologies, however, is to see them as a difference in scale rather than something radically contradictory (van de Ven 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Kanseki Repository: <https://www.kanripo.org/>. The database combines the *Siku quanshu*, the Buddhist canon and later additions, and the Daoist canon with later collections. It is at this moment, to my knowledge, the largest and easiest-to-use online repository which allows such large scale, cross-tradition searches. However, the field of digital humanities in the China Studies is developing fast; another tool, which will offer many more functions, and in particular also the possibility to visualize results and map them geographically, is the prototype developed by Michael Stanley-Baker, see (Stanley-Baker 2018; Stanley-Baker and Ho 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Cheng Xuanying’s base text of the 5000 words version (reconstructed in ZD 09/003) also corresponds to the extant (Chapters 3–37) version of the base text of the *Xiang’er* commentary (in Rao 1956). However, his commentarial language does not draw on the *Xiang’er* commentary.

(549–623) and Tiantai Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) and their disciples.<sup>35</sup> Li Rong’s commentary instead has hardly any of this specific terminology so prominent in Cheng’s commentary.

#### 4.2. Stillness and Motion 寂而動

An illustrative example is the expression 寂而動, which Cheng elaborates to show that, for the sage, movement and stillness are the same, as seen above in his commentary to chapter 2. The sage is still while moving and he moves while being still. This is an essential quality that allows the sage to embody Dao and save beings at the same time.

A search for the word combination 寂而動 in the Kanseki Repository gives 22 occurrences in Daoist sources, 21 in Buddhist sources,<sup>36</sup> and only 1 occurrence in a secular text. The Kanseki Repository contains texts from the Han to the Qing dynasties’ time; however, occurrences of 寂而動 in Daoist texts are all in texts from the early Tang dynasty; with only two exceptions,<sup>37</sup> they are from the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* commentaries of Cheng Xuanying.

The 21 occurrences in Buddhist collections show a more complex pattern of distribution: Two are earlier, from a Jin dynasty commentary to the *Zhaolun* 肇論 (T 1858); twelve occurrences are in texts from the Sui and Tang dynasties. Seven occurrences are in later texts.

Manually eliminating double references, we can document the occurrence of the word combination 寂而動 and 動而寂 in the following Buddhist texts:

1. The earliest occurrence is in a 5th century commentary to the *Zhaolun*, an influential collection of essays by the Buddhist monk Sengzhao 僧肇 (374/384–414).

Sengzhao had been a disciple of Kumarajiva and his essays are considered the first exposition of Madhyamika teachings in China and, as such, were hugely influential (Dippmann n.d.). While Sengzhao himself does not use the exact expression 寂而動 and 動而寂, it seems to be he who brought up the question of the dialectic relation of motion and stillness in the context of the sage and his nonaction (*wuwei*). One of Sengzhao’s essays, the Nieban wuming lun 涅槃無名論,<sup>38</sup> discusses the question of motion and stillness:

“無名曰：經稱「聖人無為而無所不為。」無為，故雖動而常寂；無所不為，故雖寂而常動。雖寂而常動，故物莫能一；雖動而常寂，故物莫能二。物莫能二，故逾動逾寂；物莫能一，故逾寂逾動。所以為即無為、無為即為，動寂雖殊而莫之可異也。(Sengzhao, *Zhaolun*, Nieban wuming lun, T 1858, 1, 160c). “The One who does not Conceptualize says: The sutra states: “The holy sage does not act with premeditation and yet there is nothing which is not acted upon.”<sup>39</sup> In his non-action, though moving he is always quiescent; in the case of everything being acted upon, though quiescent there is nevertheless always motion. Because he exhibits quiescence while constantly moving, things cannot be [understood as] one; because he exhibits motion while constantly at rest, things cannot be [understood as] two. Things not being two, the more he moves the more quiescence he exhibits also; things not being one, the more he remains at rest the more motion he exhibits also. Therefore, his action and non-action are identical and his non-action and action are identical.”

(Dippmann 1997, pp. 642–43.)

<sup>35</sup> Jizang and Tiantai Zhiyi had gained patronage of the Sui and early Tang emperors, both were prolific writers; their works might very well have been available to Cheng Xuanying.

<sup>36</sup> Included in the numbers are some double references, which need to be eliminated manually in a second step. Thus, the numbers obtained by data mining the Kanseki Repository offer only a rough orientation—in particular, they serve to outline clusters of occurrences of terms in the texts of the three teachings, and synchronic and diachronic distribution of these terms.

<sup>37</sup> The two additional occurrences are in the introduction of the *Daojiao yishu* 道教義樞 (DZ 1129, written around 700 in Chang’an) and in another Tang dynasty Daoist scripture *Taishang shier shangpin feitian falun qinjie miaojing* 太上十二上品飛天法輪勸戒妙經 DZ 182.

<sup>38</sup> In *Zhaolun* T 1858, 1, 160c.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. (Dippmann 1997, p. 642): Note 519: “PPSM 113a. 12. While Seng-chao quotes from the Perfection of Wisdom, he rephrases it in such a way that it is almost identical with the opening lines of chapter thirty-seven in the Tao Te Ching . . . ”

Huida 惠達<sup>40</sup> commenting on this passage in the 5th century is the first to use the exact wording 動而寂/寂而動; he adds new explicit themes, namely the question of the generation of karma and merit:

經稱聖人無為而無不為者。大乘觀空但見諸法唯空唯無。故曰無為也。無為觀行不證因果。不捨生死。被萬物功德曰藏。故無所不為也。無為故雖動而寂。無所不為故雖寂而動<sup>41</sup>者。動靜相即。...

When the sutra assesses that the sage does not act and yet nothing remains undone<sup>42</sup>, it is because the great vehicle observes emptiness, it only sees the external dharmas as empty and non-existent, therefore the text says “not acting.” With a view and practice of not acting one does not realize karmic retribution (cause and effect) and does not abandon birth and death.<sup>43</sup> Carrying the merit of the ten thousand beings<sup>44</sup> is called “hidden treasure store,” therefore there is nothing that is not done. Not acting, therefore even in motion one is still. Nothing remains undone, therefore even in stillness, there is motion. Motion and Stillness become one ...

We can see here that the theme of the relation of motion and stillness and their paradoxical unity is associated with the sage, and with the sentence 無為而無不為 from *Daode jing* ch. 37, just like in Sengzhao’s essay, but the discussion is enriched with an explicit reference to the question of generation of karma and the generation of merit, and an implicit reference to the bodhisattva as the one who does not abandon life and death [to enter Nirvana, but instead stays in the world to save the beings].

2. Tiantai Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) uses the expression in a rather technical description of the process of “Meditating on the Objects pertinent to the senses, while responding to the arising objects”<sup>45</sup> in his *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (T 1911, 7, 101a):

“雖動而寂寂不妨動。雖寂而動動不妨寂。雖見不見不見而見。乃稱明見來入門也”。 Even though moving yet still, stillness does not impede motion. Even though still, yet moving. Motion does not impede stillness. Even though seeing yet not seeing, even though not seeing yet seeing, this then is called the entering gate of clear vision.<sup>46</sup>

3. Guanding 灌頂 (561–632)<sup>47</sup> uses the terms twice<sup>48</sup> as an additional illustration for the sentence “雖有去來而常住無變”, “even though he comes and goes he is [at the same time] eternally staying and not changing.”

<sup>40</sup> *Zhaolun shu* (T 1859, 1, 59b).

<sup>41</sup> The text of the *Zhaolun* refers to movement and stillness, yet not with the specific wording of Cheng Xuanying op cit. Huida, in his commentary, instead uses the wording that we find in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary. Huida continues to elaborate the relation of stillness and movement also in the following paragraph, again with the expressions 動而寂 and 寂而動, which Cheng Xuanying also employed.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. note 39 above.

<sup>43</sup> i.e., he does not leave the world to enter Nirvana, but instead remains in order to save the beings.

<sup>44</sup> This theme (merit) is also prominent in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary to the *Daode jing*. See, e.g., the remainder of chapter 2, not translated above for lack of space. Cheng writes, for example ... 夫圣人虚怀, 逗机利物, 自他平等, 物我兼忘, 虽有大功, 终不恃赖, 忘其功也。” This refers to the sage being open-minded, when occasions come up, he benefits the beings, self and other are equal [to him], he forgets both, his person and the things [outside of himself], even though he may have great merit, he never becomes dependent on it, and forgets his merit” (Meng 2001, p. 381) ... 覆载万物, 功格天地, 照烛苍生, 光逾日月, 而推功于物, 不处其德也 “Covering and carrying the ten thousand things, his merit is of a par with heaven and earth, shining on the multitude of beings, its radiance exceeds [that of the] sun and the moon, yet he leaves the [claim of] merit to the things, and does not dwell in his virtue ... ” (Meng 2001, p. 381).

<sup>45</sup> The section presents a very complex elaboration based on the theory of the five *skandhas*.

<sup>46</sup> This is the “entering gate” for becoming a disciple of clear vision (one of the four “gates” postulated by the Tiantai school, see *Sijiaoqi* 四教儀, T 1931, 780b26).

<sup>47</sup> Also known as Chang-an [章安] (561–632). He was the successor of Tiantai Zhiyi; he recorded and edited many of Tiantai Zhiyi’s works, including *Miaofa lianhua xuanyi* 妙法蓮華經玄義 T 1716, *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju* 妙法蓮華經文句, T 1718, and *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, T 1911.

<sup>48</sup> *Daban nieban jingshu* 大般涅槃經疏, T 1767, 11, 107b and *Banjing huishu* 槃經會疏 X 659A, 8, 454c.

4. Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), an older contemporary of Cheng Xuanying, employs the word combination in two of his commentaries<sup>49</sup> and in two explanatory essays.<sup>50</sup>

His Commentary on the Śrīmālādevī-sūtra *Shengman baoku* 勝鬘寶窟 T 1744, 1,12c shall serve as a representative example:

就理釋者。法身無為。而無所不為。即寂而動。故云空中現。

If we explain it according to the principle, then because the *dharmakaya* does not act (*wuwei*) and yet nothing remains undone, this is stillness yet motion, and therefore [the text] says it manifests in emptiness.

1, 15a03.10: 又一義者。如肇公云。本雖殊。不思議一。故一義也。

又一義者。即寂而動。故即是應。即動而寂。故應即是。故肇師云。

Furthermore, the one meaning is like what [Seng]zhao said: Even though root and traces are different, the unfathomability is one, therefore it says one meaning.

Furthermore, it is still yet moving, therefore the true is just the response. It is moving yet still, therefore the response is the true. Therefore teacher [Seng]zhao said: . . .

We can note the explicit reference to Sengzhao (cited above), as well as the elaboration of the dialectic relation and complete interpenetration of the concepts of motion and stillness. They are furthermore aligned with the dialectical relation between root and traces and truth and response—two terms related to the interpretation of the *dharmakaya*, the *fashen* (cf. (Assandri 2009, pp. 183–88) for a discussion of the dialectics of these terms in Cheng Xuanying’s commentary.)

Also in the next example, Jizang’s *Weimojing yishu* 維摩經義疏 (T 1781, 3, 396c26–29), we can see the association of the mind of the accomplished being (here designated *zhiren*) and the unity of motion and stillness, which allows responding to the needs of the beings and stillness of mind:

至人無心於彼此。而能應一切。上辨不於三界現身。今明現諸威儀者。夫以無現。則能無不現。故前即動而寂。此即寂而動。不捨道法而現凡夫事是為宴坐。

The accomplished being has no mind fixated on this or that, and yet he can respond to all. Before [the text] discussed that he does not manifest his body in the three worlds [of desire, form and formlessness], and when it now explains that he manifests all these dignified compartments, this is with nothing manifest and yet he is able to make everything manifest. Therefore, before [the text referred to] moving yet still, and now here it is still yet moving. Not giving up the dharma of the way (or teaching of the way) and yet manifesting the affairs of a common man; that is sitting in meditation.

5. Junzheng 均正 (also called Huijun 慧均), who had studied together with Jizang under Falang 法朗<sup>51</sup>, uses the terms in his *Dasheng silun xuanyi* 大乘四論玄義 (X 0784, 2, 566b), in a discussion of the seventh stage of bodhisattva-hood (out of altogether ten stages), and he refers to Kumarajiva and Sengzhao: 正以什公肇公等。多七地自動而寂故。 “It is truly because Kumarajiva and Sengzhao oftentimes [described] the seventh stage as out of oneself moving yet still.”

6. Then there are several later occurrences: Chengguan 澄觀 (737–839), who lived about a century after Cheng Xuanying and Li Rong, employs the word combination several times; there are few even later occurrences, among them a reference in Yongming Yanshou’s 10th century *Zongjing Lu*, 宗鏡錄 which cites *Zhaolun* as well (T 2016, 22, 535c).

<sup>49</sup> In the *Commentary on the Śrīmālādevī-sūtra Shengman baoku* 勝鬘寶窟, T 1744, 1, 15a and in the *Expository Commentary to the Vimalakirti sutra Weimojing yishu* 維摩經義疏 T 1781, 3, 936c.

<sup>50</sup> In *Jingming xuanlun* 淨名玄論 T 1780, 5, 890a and *Dasheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論, T 1853, 4, 61c.

<sup>51</sup> 法朗 Falang (507–581), an early proponent of the *sanlun* 三論 (Madhyamika) teachings, was active since 558 in the capital of the Chen state.

For the early Tang dynasty, the life times of Cheng Xuanying and Li Rong, we might conclude here that the topic of motion and stillness of the sage, expressed in the succinct wording 動而寂/寂而動, which Cheng Xuanying discusses in his commentary, was addressed in similar terms in contemporary commentaries to Buddhist scriptures; Jizang's use of the phrase in his commentaries to the Vimalakirti sutra and to the Śrīmālādevī-sūtra show this conceptual overlap very clearly.

Space does not allow us to elaborate the many further examples, terms, and expressions in the text,<sup>52</sup> which point to the same phenomenon: the Daoist Cheng Xuanying and the Buddhists Jizang (549–623), Tiantai Zhiyi (538–597), his disciple Guanding (561–632), also Jingjing Huiyuan 淨影慧遠 (523–592), and (to a lesser extent) the Confucian author Yan Shigu 顏師古, who were all active in Chang'an, all wrote much on the topic of inner cultivation, oftentimes in commentaries, using terms and expressions that were shared among them, but not used by others like, e.g., Li Rong. The example cited above, *jing er dong*, *dong er jing*, is only one representative example.

The fact that Li Rong, fellow Daoist active in Chang'an, does not use the expression *ji er dong* 寂而動 at all, is noteworthy, because if we want to accept the conceptualization of the two Daoist commentaries by Li Rong and Cheng Xuanying as participating in different discourses and therefore using different language and concepts in the interpretation of the *Daode jing*, we have in this case to recognize that the "fault lines" which we usually draw along and around "traditions" or "religions," like "the Daoists," or even "the commentaries to the *Daode jing*" in this case, cannot be drawn in this usual matter—the two Daoist commentaries participate seemingly in different discursive fields. Instead, the Daoist Cheng Xuanying's commentary to the *Daode jing* and the Buddhist Jizang's commentaries to the *Vimalakirti sutra* or the *Śrīmālādevī-sūtra* show much overlap in terms of language and expressions—suggesting in the case of the example cited a shared language in a discursive field on the subject of "inner cultivation," which crossed the sectarian boundaries of the three teachings. We have here possibly a specific discussion (or a philosophical discourse), which was expressed by roughly contemporary thinkers, Daoists and Buddhists, in similar language, in commentaries to their respective sacred scriptures.

## 5. Conclusions

How should we reckon for the fact that the "inner" cultivation interpretation uses concepts as well as terminologies that seem connected to Buddhism, but yet do not fit in any of the conventional "influence" or "borrow" patterns such as, e.g., those of Erik Zürcher cited above? And how can we conceptualize and describe this?

I propose to return to Zürcher's fourth category as cited above in the introduction, the category of "pervasive influence," about which Zürcher said: "In most cases the Buddhist and Taoist ideas supported and stimulated each other, so that for every subject both a Buddhist and a Taoist (or at least an endogenous Chinese) origin could be suggested. I shall not deal with such pervasive influence or convergence, which is at best hard to prove, . . ." (Zürcher 1980, p. 88).

While Zürcher did not want to address this fourth category of "pervasive influence," we might speculate on it with regard to our commentaries.

<sup>52</sup> Other examples from the short passages cited in the previous chapter are "聖者正也" in chapter 2, with occurrences in our Daoist commentary and in 63 Buddhist texts. Another important example is the particular use of *jing* 境: in Buddhism the term is related to a conception of wisdom (*zhi* 智) or mind (*xin* 心) as the external sphere or object (*jing* 境) wisdom or the mind relates to. Cheng Xuanying uses the term *jing* in the sense of object of recognition for wisdom 120 times in his commentary; Li Rong uses the term *jing* only 9 times, and in the sense of "region" rather than in the specific sense of "object of wisdom." A search in the Kanseki database shows 676 occurrences in texts from the Sui dynasty alone, the first several hundred are in texts written by Tiantai Zhiyi and Jizang. Yet another term, *li* 理, is of major importance in Cheng Xuanying's commentary; it appears 122 times, even though the original text of the Laozi has not a single occurrence of the term *li* at all. And again it appears frequently also in Buddhist commentarial literature. Another example would be the terms denoting men of superior, medium, and inferior capacities, *ligen* 利根, *zhonggen* 中根 and *xiaji* 下機, which Cheng introduces in chapter 17. An exhaustive analysis of the shared language of Cheng Xuanying and Sui and early Tang Buddhist authors cannot be undertaken in the frame of an article and shall be left for a dedicated study.



Firstly however, we should note that the term “influence” seems ill-suited to describe the phenomenon at hand. Zürcher worked within a paradigmatic understanding of “origins” of ideas, or “pure” teachings or religions that “get influenced.” For a critique of this way of understanding the interaction of Buddhism and Daoism see Bokenkamp (2004) and Campany (2003).

The idea of “convergence” (Zürcher op. cit) instead seems to be a point to elaborate on. If we assume a common topic of interest, in our case “inner cultivation,” then we might postulate that Daoists, Buddhists, and at times also Confucian scholars, participated in discussing this topic of interest, speaking about it and writing about it. In doing so, they drew on their respective classical or sacred scriptures—using the scriptures to illuminate aspects of the topic under discussion and at the same time explicating the relevance of their authoritative sacred or classic scriptures for the topics under discussion.

If we describe this phenomenon of “convergence” (or “pervasive—that is hard to define—influence”) as philosophical discourses (on specific topics), then in our case “inner cultivation” becomes the object of discourse and the writing of various commentaries becomes a discursive practice. In this framework, we can renounce searching for origins and influences—which is “at best hard to prove” (Zürcher 1980, p. 88)—and instead describe the phenomenon as a philosophical discourse that transcends the boundaries of the three teachings. “A pervasive influence or convergence” as Zürcher op. cit. calls it—thinkers discussing a topic of common interest together, each looking to his own resources in the classical or sacred literature to illuminate the subject of common interest and show at the same time the relevance of the respective sacred scriptures or classics for the burning questions of their times.

And this again might have implications for how we should think about Tang dynasty, or early medieval, intellectual life, philosophy, and the interaction of the three teachings.

Of course, with the introduction of Buddhism, a large field of apologetics and polemics had opened, representatives of Buddhism and Daoism and Confucian teachings competed against each other, fighting to prove the superiority of their respective teachings. These kind of fights were rampant in the Tang dynasty; the traces they have left range from polemic essays, apologetic compilations, and debates, to records of denunciations and slander (one sad case in point here is Falin法琳 (572–640), who died on his way to exile after having been denounced by a Daoist for slander of the imperial ancestor Laozi<sup>53</sup>).

Yet—instead of considering these polemic encounters as symptomatic for ALL interaction, we could think of different fields of discourse, and thus conceive the polemic field—in Buddhism it is called “*hufa* 護法” (protecting the Dharma), not as the all-subsuming state of affairs, but one field of discourse among others. Cheng Xuanying’s commentary cited above, in such a framework, would then be part of a field of discourse on the sage and on self-cultivation, while Li Rong’s commentary would be participant in a discourse on governing. Representatives of all teachings with an interest in the object of discourse might be engaged, using shared expressions, terminologies, methodologies, and conceptual tools, drawing also on the respected authoritative texts of their respective traditions.

Admittedly, we are imagining this for the distant past, and documenting such a thing for early medieval China is challenging, if possible at all. However, we can ask ourselves if such an image is more or less convincing than the cherished one of a Daoist, Buddhist, or Confucian philosopher digging deep into the past of his own tradition, trying to wrest answers from omniscient ancient texts for an ever-changing present.

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<sup>53</sup> See *Tang hufa shamen Falin biezhuan* 唐護法沙門法林別傳, T 2051, chapters 2 and 3.

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