

Article

Self-Transcending Images in the *Yijing*: Wang Bi's "Clarifying the Images" as a Religious Perspective and an Epistemological Inquiry

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Abstract

Most studies of Wang Bi's "*Mingxiang*" 明象 ("Clarifying the Images") treat its "grasping the meaning lies in forgetting the words" as a methodological rule for interpreting the *Yijing*, overlooking the deeper philosophical position behind it. We argue that this position shifts the inquiry from objective entities assumed by other Wei-Jin thinkers to the mind's own activity, offering an epistemological and religious perspective on how the *Yijing* conveys the sages' insight. On this basis, we reinterpret two key terms in Wang Bi's reading: *jin* 盡 should be understood not as "exhaust" but as "express properly", capturing the dialectical interplay of "loss" and "gain" in the presentation of meaning; *wang* 忘 should be understood in the sense of *Aufhebung* (sublation), which negates, preserves, and transcends images and words. Wang Bi's insight is that the "words-images-meaning" triad forms a living unity that emerges only within the concrete activity of the mind. Through imagination, images are not fixed signs but self-transcending movements toward meaning. A concrete reading of the *Mingyi* 明夷 hexagram illustrates this dynamic, and an analysis of the Chinese script (revealing the etymological link between *yan* 言 and *yin* 音 and the internality of *yi* 意) further supports the argument that meaning is inseparable from the mind's activity. The comparison with Augustine's distinction between *vox* and *verbum* then brings to light the universal religious significance of this hermeneutics framework: the "words-images-meaning" triad offers a model of how the transcendent becomes accessible through symbols, and a vision of scriptural reading as spiritual cultivation. "Clarifying the Images" thus advances not merely a hermeneutic method within the *Yijing* tradition, but opens an epistemological path that takes the mind's own activity as its starting point. This, we hold, is the universal philosophical and religious value of Wang Bi's text, and a contribution deserving attention in the study of how the *Yijing* informs the mind's grasp of meaning.

Keywords: *Yijing*; self-transcending; images; religious perspective; epistemology



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1. Introduction

Since the twentieth century, a noteworthy interpretive trend in Western *Yijing* scholarship has turned to the reader's inner experience as a key to understanding the text. In his foreword to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *Yijing*, C.G. Jung observed: "In the *I Ching* (*Yijing*), the only criterion of the validity of synchronicity is the observer's opinion that the text of the hexagram amounts to a true rendering of his psychic condition" (Jung 1967, p. xxv). The French sinologist Cyrille Javary similarly remarked that the *Yijing* "sets in motion in us a process by which we determine for ourselves the most fitting attitude toward the situation we face"; it "speaks neither truth nor the future, but simply triggers in

us a right perception, at the level of both heart and mind, for the Chinese viewpoint does not separate the two" (Javary 2009, p. 78). These interpretations all shift the ground of the *Yijing*'s validity from objective reference in the text to the reader's inner understanding and action.

This shift, however, is not unique to modern Western scholarship. If we return to the classical Chinese tradition of *Yijing* interpretation, we find that Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) had already developed a similar line of thought in his *Zhouyi Lüeli Mingxiang* 周易略例明象 ("Clarifying the Images", a chapter of his *General Remarks on the Zhouyi*¹). In this text, Wang Bi examines the relationship among the three key elements in his hermeneutic framework: *yan* 言 (words of the hexagram and line statements, abbreviated as "words" below), *xiang* 象 (hexagram and line images, abbreviated as "images" below), and *yi* 意 (meaning of hexagrams, abbreviated as "meaning" below).² These three terms originate from a passage in the *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended Phrases),³ where their relationship is set out as follows:

The Master said: "Writing does not exhaust⁴ words, and words do not exhaust meaning. If this is so, does this mean that the meaning of the sages cannot be discerned?" The Master said: "The sages established images in order to express their meaning exhaustively. They established the hexagrams in order to treat exhaustively the true innate tendency of things and their countertendencies to spuriousness. They attached phrases to the hexagrams in order to exhaust what they had to say. (zi yue: shu bu jin yan, yan bu jin yi. ran ze sheng ren zhi yi qi bu ke jian hu? zi yue: sheng ren li xiang yi jin yi, she gua yi jin qing wei, xi ci yan yi jin qi yan 子曰: 書不盡言, 言不盡意。然則聖人之意其不可見乎? 子曰: 聖人立象以盡意, 設卦以盡情偽, 繫辭焉以盡其言.) (Lynn 1994, p. 67; translation modified)

This passage, however, is far from straightforward. Wang Xiaoyi 王曉毅 (b. 1954) points out that it attracted little attention for centuries after its first appearance. It was only during the Wei-Jin period (220–420) that this passage was "rediscovered" (X. Wang 1996, pp. 211–12). Wang Bi 王弼, writing in the same period, produced its most important interpretation in his "Clarifying the Images".

Existing scholarship on Wang Bi's "Clarifying the Images" falls into three broad categories. First, some scholars approach it from the perspective of *Zhouyi* 周易 hermeneutics, discussing the connection and difference between Wang Bi's view of the relationship among words, images and meaning and the relevant statements in the *Yizhuan* 易傳 (Commentaries on the *Yijing*, "Ten Wings") (Li and Cheng 2016; Dong 2016). Second, from the perspective of the history of *Zhouyi* studies, others treat Wang Bi's *xuanxue yi* 玄學易 (Metaphysical Yi) criticism of the Han dynasty *xiangshu yi* 象數易 (Image-number Yi)⁵ and examine the theoretical significance of his method of interpreting the *Zhouyi* (Lynn 1994; Li 2018; Lin 2020; Liu 2022). Third, still others elevate Wang Bi's method of interpreting the *Zhouyi* to a general method of classical interpretation and explore its influence within the *yanyizhibian* 言意之辯 (words–meaning debate) of Wei-Jin metaphysics (Tang 2009; X. Wang 1996; B. Wang 1997; Wagner 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Cai 2013).

Although these approaches differ, they share a common tacit premise: they all locate the central argument of the "Clarifying the Images" chapter in the methodological slogan *deyi wangyan* 得意忘言 (grasping the meaning lies in forgetting the words⁶). We do not reject this reading, but we wish to press it further. From what philosophical position, we ask, does Wang Bi advance this claim? Our answer is that his interpretation of the *Xici* passage and his broader reflections in "Clarifying the Images" together constitute an early exploration, within the Chinese tradition, of the thinking activity of the "agent" and the operations of the mind. This is a stance of epistemological reflection, and it has not been fully recognized in the existing literature.

To address this gap, we proceed as follows. Section 2 reviews three other Wei-Jin views on the words–meaning relationship and shows that they all take words and meaning as objective entities, thus remaining at the ontological level. Section 3 examines Wang Bi’s first four sentences in “Clarifying the Images” and argues that he shifts the inquiry to the agent’s actual thinking; it then offers a critical reinterpretation of *jin* 盡. Section 4 examines his creative use of the *Zhuangzi* metaphor and provides a fresh reading of *wang* 忘. Section 5 then illustrates this triad through a concrete reading of the *Mingyi* hexagram and an analysis of the Chinese script. It draws a parallel with Augustine’s distinction between *vox* and *verbum* to bring out the universal religious significance of Wang Bi’s framework. The conclusion draws together the religious and epistemological implications of his approach.

Before proceeding, a brief note on our theoretical resources is in order. Our analysis builds on the textual scholarship of Richard Lynn and Rudolf Wagner, whose translations and critical studies of Wang Bi’s *Zhouyi* commentary provide the foundation for our inquiry. We also engage with Chinese scholars such as Tang Yongtong, Wang Xiaoyi and Wang Baoxuan, whose work situates Wang Bi within the broader intellectual context of the Wei-Jin period.

2. The Words–Meaning Debate Among Other Scholars in the Wei-Jin Period

This section surveys the main positions on the words–meaning relationship among other Wei-Jin thinkers and shows that, despite their apparent differences, they all share an ontological approach, treating words and meaning as objective entities. According to relevant historical materials, besides Wang Bi’s *deyi wangyan* 得意忘言 (grasping the meaning lies in forgetting the words), there were three other views: the view that *yan bujinyi* 言不盡意 (words cannot exhaust meaning), which emerged in the late Han and early Wei period; Xun Can’s 荀粲 (210–238) *weiyen jinyi* 微言盡意 (subtle words exhaust meaning); and Ouyang Jian’s 歐陽建 (ca. 269–300) *yan jinyi* 言盡意 (words exhaust meaning).

(1) “Words cannot exhaust meaning”. Many scholars (Tang 2009; X. Wang 1996; B. Wang 1997) have pointed out that the “words–meaning debate”, as a mode of scholarly inquiry, first arose in character evaluation activities during the late Han and early Wei period.⁷ In those activities, mismatches between *ming* 名 (name) and *shi* 實 (reality) occurred; that is, the title given to a person did not match that person’s true nature. As a result, a general awareness that “words cannot exhaust meaning” took shape at the time. For example, according to Ouyang Jian’s account in the *Yan jinyi lun* 言盡意論 (On Words Exhausting Meaning), when Jiang Ji 蔣濟 (188–249) discussed a person’s eyes, and when Zhong Hui 鍾會 (225–264) and Fu Gu 傅嘏 (209–255) discussed a person’s talent and nature, they all appealed to the idea that “words cannot exhaust meaning” as evidence. Thus, what the phrase conveyed was simply this: people formed this general awareness in response to the various phenomena of mismatch between name and reality. This view was not grounded in theoretical argumentation.

(2) Historical sources indicate that the first person to apply the idea that “words cannot exhaust meaning” to the interpretation of the classics was Xun Can. According to the records, when the Xun brothers debated, they all held the Confucian position; only Xun Can was inclined to speak about Dao. He quoted what Zigong 子貢 (520–456 BCE) said in the *Analects*, that “the Master’s words on nature and the Dao of *Tian* cannot be heard” (*fu zi zhi yan xing yu tian dao, bu ke de er wen ye* 夫子之言性與天道, 不可得而聞也.), as support. Although the words of the Six Classics have all been preserved, when it comes to the true meaning the sage wished to express, these words are merely dregs. Xun Can’s elder brother, Xun Yu 荀悞, disagreed with this claim. He then quoted the passage from the *Xici* we mentioned at the very beginning: “The sages established images in order to

express their meaning exhaustively and they attached phrases to the hexagrams in order to exhaust what they had to say.” This was to prove his point: how could one say that the sage’s “subtle words” cannot be heard or known? Xun Can replied as follows:

The hidden and subtle meaning of the pattern⁸ is not something that appears within the images. What the *Xici* calls establishing images to express the meaning exhaustively does not reach the content beyond meaning; attaching phrases to the hexagrams also does not express the content beyond the words. Therefore, the meaning beyond the images, that is, the sage’s true meaning, and the true words beyond the words of the hexagram and line statements, have not been expressed. (*Can da yue: gai li zhi wei zhe, fei wu xiang zhi suo ju ye, jin cheng li xiang yi jin yi, ci fei tong yu yi wai zhe ye, xi ci yan yi jin xiang, ci fei yan hu biao zhe ye, si ze xiang wai zhi yi, xi biao zhi yan, gu yun er bu chu yi* 繫辭曰：蓋理之微者，非物象之所舉也，今稱立象以盡意，此非通於意外者也，繫辭焉以盡象，此非言乎表者也，斯則象外之意，系表之言，固蘊而不出矣。)(Chen and Pei 1959, p. 319; my translation)

Wang Baoxuan 王葆玄 (1946–2023) thus argues that the words beyond the words of the hexagram and line statements that Xun Can speaks of are precisely the “subtle words”. Hence, Xun Can’s view can also be called *weiyang jinyi* 微言盡意 (subtle words exhaust meaning) (B. Wang 1997, pp. 93–97).

(3) The general social awareness that “words cannot exhaust meaning” and Xun Can’s notion of “subtle words” both appeared before Wang Bi’s time. In the Western Jin Period, after Wang Bi, Ouyang Jian’s 歐陽建 developed a third position: the theory that “words exhaust meaning”. He wrote an essay simply entitled *On Words Exhausting Meaning*. In this essay, he first observed that names do nothing in relation to things, and words have no effect in relation to patterns. If that was the case, why had people from ancient times to the present devoted themselves to fixing names and statuses, and why had sages and worthies been unable to set aside the use of language? His answer was as follows:

Patterns are grasped in the mind, but without words they cannot be conveyed clearly, and people cannot communicate with one another; things are out there, but without names they cannot be distinguished, and the ability to discern and recognize cannot manifest itself ... Therefore, to distinguish the substance of things, one must differentiate names; to express one’s thoughts, one must establish the right names. Names and words are not fixed; they change along with things and patterns. The relationship between names and words, on the one hand, and things and patterns, on the other hand, is like sound and echo, form and shadow: they cannot be separated. And since they cannot be separated, there is nothing that words cannot express. I therefore hold that words can exhaust meaning. (*li de yu xin, fei yan bu chang, wu ding yu bi, fei ming bu bian, yan bu chang zhi, ze wu yi xiang jie, ming bu bian wu, ze jian shi bu xian..... yu bian qi shi, ze shu qi ming, yu xuan qi zhi, ze li qi cheng, ming sui wu er qian, yan yin li er bian, ci you sheng fa xiang ying, xing cun ying fu, bu de xiang yu wei er yi. Gou qi bu er, ze yan wu bu jin yi. wu gu yi wei jin yi* 理得於心，非言不暢，物定於彼，非名不辨，言不暢志，則無以相接，名不辨物，則鑒識不顯..... 欲辨其實，則殊其名，欲宣其志，則立其稱，名遂物而遷，言因理而變，此猶聲發響應，形存影附，不得相與為二矣。苟其不二，則言無不盡矣。吾故以為盡矣。)(Ouyang 1965, p. 248; my translation)

Compared with “words cannot exhaust meaning”, which was merely a general social awareness, the views of Xun Can and Ouyang Jian are backed by supporting arguments and are richer in content. To summarize: Xun Can held that although the words of the

hexagrams cannot exhaust meaning, there exists another kind of words, “subtle words”, that can. In essence, his view involves a choice between two kinds of words. Ouyang Jian, by contrast, approached the question from the perspective of the social function of language. He held, in short, that because words are useful for expressing meaning, they can exhaust it. Logically, this is a non sequitur. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, the grounds Ouyang Jian offered, that “names and words change along with things and patterns”, actually support the opposite view, namely that words cannot exhaust meaning. Although Xun Can and Ouyang Jian reached different conclusions, a common ground is discernible in their arguments: both treated “words” and “meaning” as objective entities and, on that basis, made an essential judgement about their relationship. From this we may conclude that their thinking takes the “object” as its starting point, and their philosophical position is therefore a mode of ontological thinking.

3. Wang Bi’s Philosophical Position on the “Words–Meaning” Relationship

In this section, we turn to Wang Bi’s own position as articulated in the first four sentences of “Clarifying the Images”. By examining his deliberate choice of the word *xun* 尋 (ponder/search) and the inverse sequence of words–images–meaning, we argue that Wang Bi shifts the inquiry from objective entities to the concrete thinking activity of the agent. After presenting these sentences, we will offer a critical reinterpretation of the key term *jin* 盡.

The sentences read as follows:

- (1) Images are what bring out meaning. Words are what explain images. (*fu xiang zhe, chu yi zhe ye. yan zhe, ming xiang zhe ye* 夫象者，出意者也。言者，明象者也.)
- (2) For fully exhausting meaning, nothing surpassed the images. For fully exhausting the images, nothing surpassed the words. (*jin yi mo ruo xiang, jin xiang mo ruo yan* 盡意莫若象，盡象莫若言.)
- (3) The words are generated by the images; thus one can ponder the words and so perceive what the images are. The images are generated by meaning; thus one can ponder the images and so perceive what meaning is. (*yan sheng yu xiang, gu ke xun yan yi guan xiang. xiang sheng yu yi, gu ke xun xiang yi guan yi* 言生於象，故可尋言以觀象。象生於意，故可尋象以觀意.)
- (4) The meaning is fully exhausted by the images, and the images are brought out by the words (Wagner 2003a, p. 80; translation modified). (*yi yi xiang jin, xiang yi yan zhu* 意以象盡，象以言著.)⁹

Let us first turn to sentence (1). This sentence can be taken as Wang Bi’s concise summary of what the *Xici* sought to convey.¹⁰ For instance, the *Xici, Part One* states: “The sage had the means to perceive the mysteries of the world and, drawing comparisons to them with analogous things, made images out of those things that seemed appropriate ... They appended phrases to the hexagram lines in order to judge the good and bad fortune involved. This is why these are called ‘the line phrases’”. (*sheng ren you yi jian tian xia zhi ze, er ni zhu qi xing rong, xiang qi wu yi, shi gu wei zhi xiang ... xi ci yan yi duan qi ji xiong, shi gu wei zhi yao* 聖人有以見天下之赜，而擬諸其形容，象其物宜，是故謂之象……繫辭焉以斷其吉凶，是故謂之爻.) (Lynn 1994, pp. 56–57). The *Xici, Part Two* states: “When the eight trigrams formed ranks, the [basic] images were present there within them. And so, when the sages doubled these, the lines were present there within them. When they let the *yang* and *yin* trigrams displace each other, change was present there within them. When they attached phrases to the lines and made them injunctions, the ways the lines move were present there within them.” (*ba gua cheng lie, xiang zai qi zhong yi. yin er chong zhi, yao zai qi zhong yi. gang rou xiang tui, bian zai qi zhong yi. xi ci yan er ming zhi, dong zai qi zhong yi* 八卦成列，

象在其中矣。因而重之，爻在其中矣。剛柔相推，變在其中矣。繫辭焉而命之，動載其中矣。) (Lynn 1994, p. 75). What the *Xici* describes can be summarized as follows: the meaning of the *Yijing* (namely, the mysteries of the world) is first represented through the images of the eight trigrams; only subsequently do the sixty-four hexagrams and the position of six lines emerge; thereafter, once the hexagram images and line positions are in place, the hexagram statements and line statements (words) are added to clarify good and bad fortune. This reveals a temporal sequence:

Meaning > Images > Words

That is to say, what is described here is a process in which the latter is rooted in the former. We may therefore say that sentence (1) captures the generative sequence in the *Xici*, and sentence (2) follows naturally as its conclusion. If we consider sentences (1) and (2) alone, it is difficult to discern any new thinking in Wang Bi's words. But when we read them together with sentences (3) and (4), a rather different picture emerges. In sentence (3), Wang Bi indicates that to perceive the images, one must ground oneself in the words; to perceive the meaning, one must ground oneself in the images. This forms an exact inverse of the sequence in sentence (1):

Words > Images > Meaning

Lin Anwu 林安梧 (b. 1957) also noted this point. He calls the process in sentence (1) *xia luoshi* 下落實 (downward actualization), that is, the unfolding of the metaphysical into words, the manifestation of Dao, and the process in sentence (3) *shang huixiang* 上回向 (upward returning), that is, the process of returning to the metaphysical (Lin 2020). Lin's understanding is reasonable. However, he did not ask in what "domain" such an inverse process takes place, and this is precisely the question we pursue in this paper.

We observe that in sentence (3), Wang Bi uses the word *xun* 尋 (ponder/search) twice. This word appears nowhere in the *Yizhuan*, or even in the *Yijing* itself. We take this as evidence that Wang Bi's choice of *xun* 尋 was deliberate. The same word appears in his *Laozi Zhilüe* 老子指略 (An Outline of the *Laozi*), where he writes: "It is only after careful searching that one fully realizes the meaning, and only after making inferences does one fully exhaust the pattern." (*xun er hou ji qi yi, tui er hou jin qi li* 尋而後既其義，推而後盡其理.) (Wagner 2003a, p. 92; translation modified). He also writes: "In observing on what [the ten thousand kinds of entities] are based, and in searching where to [they] return, words do not depart from the pattern, and the activities do not lose [sight] of the ruler." (*guan qi suo you, xun qi suo gui, yan bu yuan zong, shi bu shi zhu* 觀其所由，尋其所歸，言不遠宗，事不失主.) (Wagner 2003a, p. 99; translation modified). Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 (b. 1934) notes, in his annotation to the latter passage, that this statement draws on Chapter 70 of the *Laozi*: "My words are very easy to understand and very easy to put into practice ... my words have the pattern, my activities have the ruler." (*wu yan qi shen yi zhi, shen yi xing* *yan you zong, shi you jun* 吾言甚易知，甚易行..... 言有宗，事有君; translated by Wagner 2003a, p. 359; translation modified). The point, as Lou explains, is that neither words nor practice can depart from Dao (Lou 2009, p. 208). Thus, the objects to which Wang Bi directs the word *xun* 尋 are *yi* 義 (meaning), *li* 理 (pattern), and Dao itself.

We should also note that in these two sentences from the *Laozi Zhilüe*, the character *jin* 盡 (provisionally, exhaust) and *yan* 言 (words), the very same characters that appear in "Clarifying the Images", are also present. This further suggests that Wang Bi's use of *xun* 尋 in "Clarifying the Images" stems from the same mode of thinking. By employing *xun* 尋 twice in an active sense, Wang Bi brings his reflections on the relationship among words, images and meaning into the domain of the agent. In other words, his understanding of these three terms is situated within the real thinking activity of the agent, that is, the actual person who thinks. This, as we have suggested, is the "domain" in which the "upward returning" takes place.

In what follows, we further discuss the grounds for this conclusion by returning to the *Xici* passage quoted at the beginning of this paper. The conventional interpretation of this passage runs as follows: although words cannot exhaust meaning, meaning can still be expressed through images as a “medium”. The earliest extant commentary, by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (579–648), already states: “as for ‘the sages established images in order to express their meaning exhaustively’, although words cannot exhaust meaning, establishing the images can exhaust it ... as for ‘they attached phrases to the hexagrams in order to exhaust what they had to say’, although writing cannot exhaust words, attaching phrases to the hexagrams can exhaust them.” (*sheng ren li xiang yi jin yi zhe, sui yan bu jin yi, li xiang ke yi jin zhi ye..... xi ci yan yi jin qi yan zhe, sui shu bu jin yan, xi ci ke yi jin qi yan ye* 聖人立象以盡意者，雖言不盡意，立象可以盡之也..... 繫辭焉以盡其言者，雖書不盡言，繫辭可以盡其言也。) (Zheng and Kong 1999, p. 291; my translation). Although this commentary dates from a period later than Wang Bi’s time, we may infer that such a reading was already present in his time and even earlier. The exchange between Xun Can and his brother Xun Yu illustrates this point: Xun Yu represents precisely this understanding, and Xun Can’s objection is likewise based on it.

If we suppose that words, images, and meaning are all treated as objective entities, and that the word *jin* 盡 is understood as meaning “exhaust”, “express/convey fully”, or “to be fully equivalent to”, then the logical weakness of this understanding becomes clear. To simplify: the first sentence from the *Xici* would then say that meaning is not equal to words, while the second sentence would become meaning equals images, and images equal words. This is a contradiction. Chao Yuezhi 晁說之 (1059–1129) of the Northern Song dynasty already raised a criticism along these lines. He said: “The sages held that words cannot exhaust meaning, and therefore established the images to exhaust meaning. If meaning could be exhausted in the images, then it would also be exhausted in the words. But since meaning is not exhausted by words, it follows that it cannot be exhausted by images either.” (*sheng ren wei yan bu jin yi, gu li xiang yi jin yi. shi yi jin yu xiang, ze yi jin yu yan, er yi fei yan zhi suo jin, ze yi fei xiang zhi ke jin* 聖人謂言不盡意，故立象以盡意。使意盡於象，則亦盡於言，而意非言之所盡，則亦非象之可盡。) (Chao 1987; my translation). Given Wang Bi’s philosophical acumen and the fact that the Xun brothers had engaged in this debate, it is unlikely that he was unaware of this contradiction.

Understanding the Sage’s words in terms of “equivalence” leads to the contradiction above. Yet, as canonical texts, the Sage’s words cannot be questioned. The question, then, is this: how can both the claim that words exhaust meaning and the claim that they do not be rendered coherent? Wang Bi’s answer lies in the thinking activity of the agent, that is, the process by which a person grasps meaning through words and images. Only within the actual process of human thinking can the equivalence model (the judgement model that results from treating words and meaning as objects) be dissolved. In this domain, words and images are not objective entities. Rather, words inherently contain images and meaning; images inherently contain words and meaning; and meaning can present itself only through images and words.

Therefore, when Wang Bi says that “the meaning is fully exhausted by the images, and the images are brought out by the words”, he does not mean that the images fully express the meaning. In the process of expressing meaning through images, meaning is transformed from its unfathomable subtlety and formlessness into fixed hexagram images (determinate pictures). In this process, meaning acquires objectivity but loses its mystery. Likewise, when words describe the images, the abstract hexagram image is further rendered into particular representations. For example, the *Qian* 乾 hexagram (☰) is an image that could manifest many possibilities, but once the hexagram and line statements are produced, this image becomes concrete. Thus, while words make the images more de-

terminate, they also deprive them of the possibility of turning into other representations. In other words, words are representations of images; they serve to describe images and convey meaning. Hence, they are not meant to pin images down to any particular objects.

It is on the basis of this understanding of the words–images relationship that Wang Bi, in the latter part of the “Clarifying the Images”, criticizes the interpretive methods of Han dynasty *Yijing* scholarship. He states: “This is why anything that corresponds analogously to a meaning can serve as its image, and any concept that fits with a meaning can serve as corroboration of its nature. If the concept involved really has to do with dynamism, why must it only be presented in terms of the horse? And if the analogy used really has to do with compliance, why must it only be presented in terms of the cow? ... Yet there are some who have convicted *Qian* of horsiness. They made a legal case out of its texts and brought this accusation against its hexagram, and, in doing so, they may come up with a horse, but *Qian* itself got lost in the process! And then this spurious doctrine spread everywhere, even to the extent that one cannot keep account of it!” (*shi gu chu lei ke wei qi xiang, he yi ke wei qi zheng, yi gou zai jian, he bi ma hu? lei gou zai shun, he bi niu hu?..... er huo zhe ding ma wei qian, an wen ze gua, you ma wu qian, ze wei shuo zi man, nan ke ji yi* 是故觸類可為其象, 合義可為其徵, 義苟在健, 何必馬乎? 類苟在順, 何必牛乎?..... 而或者定馬為乾, 案文責卦, 有馬無乾, 則偽說滋漫, 難可紀矣.) (Lynn 1994, p. 32; translation modified).

We must then ask: how can the process of understanding images through words and meaning through images actually be carried out? As far as human mental faculties are concerned, this can take place only through the work of the imagination. Once we have thought this far, we are led to reflect further on what sentence (1) expresses. As we noted earlier, we understood it as a natural process of “generation”, that is, thinking at the ontological dimension. But at the same time, it is also a cognitive process, one in which the imagination is at work. The pattern inherent in meaning (the mysteries of the world) is generated into images through the imagination, and the content of the images is likewise formulated into hexagram and line statements through the imagination. Therefore, when we compare sentence (1) and (3), the movement from words to images and then to meaning in sentence (3) is by no means simply the reverse of sentence (1); it is not merely an “upward returning”. In terms of human understanding, the meaning generated anew through sentence (3) has undergone a certain “loss” and “gain” relative to the original meaning (for clarity, we posit this “original meaning” as a logical priority, not a temporal one). That is to say, what Wang Bi aims to express is a “logical chain” constituted by different contents within the activity of human thinking, a chain that is continually generated through the imagination. The real presentation of meaning is carried by this “logical chain”; it is a “living” meaning.

We may therefore infer that, in Wang Bi’s view, any abstract discussion of the “words–meaning” relationship that leaves out the concrete contents of thinking activity (whether one arrives at “words exhaust meaning” or “words cannot exhaust meaning”) is neither simply right nor simply wrong. For neither view captures the actual process of human thinking. As for the “words–meaning” relationship as it occurs within human thinking, it is a dialectical unity of exhausting and not exhausting.

In “Clarifying the Images”, Wang Bi conveys this point through two sentence patterns: *jin.....mo ruo.....* 盡.....莫若..... (for fully exhausting ... nothing surpasses ..., sentence [2]) and *.....yi.....jin以.....盡* (... is fully exhausted by ..., sentence [4]).¹¹ Sentence (2) uses a contrastive structure, while sentence (4) uses an affirmative one. Let us suppose, for a moment, that the word *jin* 盡 means “exhaust” or “express/convey fully”. If that were the case, sentences (2) and (4) would express the same idea. But if so, why would Wang Bi have used such a markedly contrastive structure to formulate sentence (2)? The most plausible explanation is that he deliberately combined the affirmative (sentence [4]) with

the contrastive one (sentence [2]), not only to show that images and words are the utmost means of expressing meaning, but also to describe the working of the “logical chain” in thinking. As noted above, what we mean by “logical chain” here goes beyond the “inverse structure” discussed earlier; it points to an unending process of becoming.

Based on the discussion above, we would like to point out here that to understand and translate the character *jin* 盡 simply as “exhaust” does not capture the full weight of meaning that this character carries in Wang Bi’s usage as a philosopher.¹² If we use the word “express” to describe the relationship among words, images, and meaning, then *jin* 盡 does not mean “express fully”. Rather, “express properly” is more fitting, since “proper” and its Latin root *proprius* convey the sense of “one’s own” or “special”. That is to say, in sentence (2), the images are precisely the mode in which meaning necessarily presents itself, and the words are precisely the mode in which the images necessarily present themselves. It is this very relationship that the word *jin* 盡 expresses. What *jin* 盡 implies is the interplay between two forces, “loss” and “gain”, and it is a dialectical unity of the two. Since we have established that words, images and meaning are not objective entities within actual thinking activity, we may say that these three exist as an integral unity. To bring out this point more clearly, in what follows we will use the expression “words–images–meaning”. The reason is that the next part of “Clarifying the Images” unfolds from Wang Bi’s thinking on the basis of this very philosophical position. Therefore, in the next section, we will draw on the content of “Clarifying the Images” to explain the philosophical value of Wang Bi’s approach, and in doing so we will give particular attention to the word *wang* 忘 (provisionally, forget) that Wang Bi employs.

4. The “Trap and Snare” Metaphor in “Clarifying the Images” and the Philosophical Meaning of *Wang* 忘

Now that we have brought out Wang Bi’s philosophical position in the first four sentences (he situates the understanding of the “words–images–meaning” relationship within the real thinking activity of the agent), let us now turn to the next passage in “Clarifying the Images”. In this section, we examine Wang Bi’s creative appropriation of the *Zhuangzi*’s metaphor, preparing the ground for a fresh understanding of what *wang* 忘 means in his thought.

Sentence (5) reads:

- (5) Thus, since the words are that by which the images are explained, once the images have been grasped, the words are forgotten; and since the images are that by which the meaning is arrested, once the meaning has been grasped, the images are forgotten. (*gu yan zhe suo yi ming xiang, de xiang er wang yan. xiang zhe suo yi cun yi, de yi er wang xiang* 故言者所以明象, 得象而忘言. 象者所以存意, 得意而忘象.) (Wagner 2003a, pp. 80–81; translation modified).

It is from this sentence that the word *wang* 忘 (provisionally, forget) first appears. As argued above, within the real thinking activity of the agent, “words–images–meaning” exist as an integral unity. From this perspective, the three are interdependent; none can exist alone. For example, when we see the hexagram image “☰”, the recognition that “this is the *Qian* 乾 hexagram” immediately arises in our mind. “*Qian* hexagram”, as the name of “☰”, belongs to the words, while the connotations we think of at the same time, such as “strength” and “firmness”, belong to its meaning. In other words, the images we grasp in thinking cannot be entirely separated from words and meaning. In real thinking activity, the three cannot be separated.

We therefore need to undertake a more reflective understanding and translation of the word *wang* 忘 that appears here: rendering it simply as “forget” according to its literal

meaning is not adequate. In our view, to understand what Wang Bi means by it, we must fully take into account the content of sentences (6) through (10) that follow. Wang Bi's discussion of *wang* 忘 begins with a metaphor:

- (6) This compares to the snare's being that by which a rabbit is arrested, but once the rabbit has been grasped, the snare is forgotten; to the fish trap's being that by which a fish is arrested, but once the fish has been grasped, the trap is forgotten. (*you ti zhe suo yi zai tu, de tu er wang ti. quan zhe suo yi zai yu, de yu er wang quan ye* 猶蹄者所以在兔, 得兔而忘蹄。筌者所以在魚, 得魚而忘筌也。) (Wagner 2003a, p. 81; translation modified).

Wang Bi's metaphor here is taken from the "External Things" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The original passage reads: A fish trap is there for the fish. When you get the fish, you forget the trap. A snare is there for the rabbits. When you get the rabbit, you forget the snare. Words are there for the meaning. When you get the meaning, you forget the words. (*quan zhe suo yi zai yu, de yu er wang quan. ti zhe suo yi zai tu, de tu er wang ti. yan zhe suo yi zai yi, de yi er wang yan* 筌者所以在魚, 得魚而忘筌。蹄者所以在兔, 得兔而忘蹄。言者所以在意, 得意而忘言。) (Ziporyn 2020, p. 224; translation modified). In the *Zhuangzi*, this passage treats the relationship between the trap and the fish (and the snare and the rabbit) as one of means to end. Accordingly, the relationship between words and meaning is also understood in terms of means and ends. Words, then, are placed in a position comparable to the trap or the snare; they serve as a means, a tool, so that once the meaning is grasped, the words may be forgotten. That is why, after this passage, Zhuangzi sighs: Where can I find a man who has forgotten words, that I might speak with him [about true meaning]? (*wu an de fu wang yan zhi ren er yu zhi yan zai?* 吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉?) (Ziporyn 2020, p. 224; translation modified). What this shows is that in the *Zhuangzi*, the "words–meaning" relationship is framed in a methodological mode, one that belongs to the same dimension of thinking as Xun Can's "subtle words exhaust meaning". Wang Bi, however, employs it in an entirely different way.

First of all, we should note that although Wang Bi's writings and classical commentaries contain many passages related to the *Zhuangzi*,¹³ his usage of them often departs from their original meaning, a point that must be kept clearly in mind. Consider, for example, Wang Bi's commentary on the expression *chugou* 芻狗 (provisionally, straw dogs) in Chapter 5 of the *Laozi*: "Heaven and Earth are not kindly. For them, the ten thousand kinds of entities are like *chugou* 芻狗". (*tian di bu ren, yi wan wu wei chu gou* 天地不仁, 以萬物為芻狗。) (Wagner 2003b, pp. 134–35; translation modified). Wang Bi explains: "Heaven and Earth do not produce grass for the benefit of cattle, but the cattle [still] eat grass. They do not produce dogs for the benefit of men, but men [still] eat dogs." (*tian di bu wei shou sheng chu, er shou shi chu. bu wei ren sheng gou, er ren shi gou* 天地不為獸生芻, 而獸食芻。不為人生狗, 而人食狗。) (Wagner 2003b, p. 135; translation modified). Besides the *Laozi*, the expression *chugou* 芻狗 also appears in "The Spinning of the Heavens" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The story Zhuangzi tells is this: When Confucius traveled west to the state of Wei 衛, his most famous disciple Yan Yuan 顏淵 (521–481 BCE) asked the Maestro Jin 太師金 for his opinion on the Dao that Confucius insisted on conducting himself. Maestro Jin replied that Confucius' Dao was unworkable. When Yan Yuan pressed him for the reason, Maestro Jin used *chugou* 芻狗 as an example. He said: "Before a straw dog is set out for the ceremony, it is kept in a bamboo box and wrapped in embroidered cloths, and the representative of the dead and the priest engage in self-mortifying fasts to prepare themselves to receive it. After the ceremony is over, however, people trample over its head and back; then the custodian collects the remains for incineration, and that's the end of it. If someone were to gather it back into its bamboo box and again wrap it in its embroidered cloths, taking it home with him and setting it above him as he lived out his days and

sleeping beneath it at night, he would not only be disturbed by restless dreams, but would certainly be again and again terrorized by blinding nightmares.” (*fu chu gou zhi wei chen ye, cheng yi qie yan, jin yi wen xiu, shi zhu zhai jie yi jiang zhi. ji qi yi chen ye, xing zhe jian qi shou ji, su zhe qu er cuan zhi er yi. jiang fu qu er cheng yi qie yan, jin yi wen xiu, you ju qin wo qi xia, bi bu de meng, bi qie shuo mi yan* 夫芻狗之未陳也，盛以篋衍，巾以文繡，屍祝齊戒以將之。及其已陳也，行者踐其首脊，蘇者取而爨之而已。將復取而盛以篋衍，巾以文繡，游居寢臥其下，彼不得夢，必且數昧焉。) (Ziporyn 2020, p. 121; translation modified). Confucius’ conduct, then, was like holding onto the “straw dog” once used by the former kings. According to the common understanding of the Laozi–Zhuangzi lineage, their usage of *chugou* 芻狗 could hardly have been different. It is unlikely that Wang Bi was unaware of how this expression was used in the *Zhuangzi*. Yet he still insisted on interpreting it in terms of *chu* 芻 (grass) and *gou* 狗 (dogs). The only conclusion is that he knew the original meaning in the *Zhuangzi* perfectly well but chose not to follow it, or rather, he gave the original meaning a new interpretation.¹⁴

Another clear example appears in Wang Bi’s commentary on the *shangjiu* 上九 (top Yang) of the *Kui* 睽 (Contrariety) hexagram. There Wang Bi writes: “When Contrariety is brought to its most extreme, it means that things will then tend to unity, and when differences are at their most extreme, it means that things will then tend to harmony. Things might be oversize, deviant, deceptive, or strange, but Dao will bring them into oneness” (*zhi kui jiang he, zhi shu jiang tong, hui gui jue guai, dao jiang wei yi* 至睽將合，至殊將通，恢詭譎怪，道將為一。) (Lynn 1994, p. 372; translation modified). What Wang Bi is saying here is that things, when pushed to the extreme of contrariness and differences, will return to oneness. This is a developmental perspective. The phrase “things might be oversize, deviant, deceptive, or strange, but Dao will bring them into oneness” is taken from the “Equalizing Assessments of Things” chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The original passage reads: “Each thing necessarily has someplace from which it can be affirmed as thus and so, and someplace from which it can be affirmed as acceptable. So no thing is not right, no thing is not acceptable. For whatever we may define as a beam as opposed to a pillar, as a leper as opposed to the great beauty Xishi, or whatever might be from some perspective oversize, deviant, deceptive, or strange, there is Dao that opens them into one another, connecting them to form a oneness.” (*wu gu you suo ran, wu gu you suo ke. wu wu bu ran, wu wu bu ke. gu wei shi ju ting yu ying, li yu xi shi, hui gui jue guai, dao tong wei yi* 物固有所然，物固有所可。無物不然，無物不可。故為是舉莛與楹，厲與西施，恢詭譎怪，道通為一。) (Ziporyn 2020, p. 15; translation modified). Taken on its own, this passage emphasizes that, from the perspective of Dao, all things interpenetrate and form a oneness. What is absent here, however, is any dimension of development. In Wang Bi’s reading, by contrast, the emphasis falls precisely on “process”. This again gives us grounds to conclude that Wang Bi understood the original meaning of the *Zhuangzi* text, yet deliberately adapted it to his own philosophical purpose. This is clear from his replacement of the *Zhuangzi*’s original word *tong* 通 (connecting) with *jiang* 將 (will), which brings out the processual character of the content.

We therefore stress that, in interpreting Wang Bi’s use of the *Zhuangzi*, one must bear in mind that he may not have followed the “original meaning” of the text. As the next part of “Clarifying the Images” shows, this is indeed the case. Sentences (7) through (11) read:

- (7) If so, then the words are the snare of the images; the images are the trap of the meaning. (*ran ze, yan zhe, xiang zhi ti ye. xiang zhe, yan zhi quan ye* 然則，言者，象之蹄也。象者，意之筌也.)
- (8) Therefore, someone clinging to the words will not be the one who grasps the images; someone clinging to the images will not be the one who grasps the meaning. (*shi gu, cun yan zhe, fei de xiang zhe ye. cun xiang zhe, fei de yi zhe ye* 是故，存言者，非得象者也。存象者，非得意者也.)

- (9) The images are generated by the meaning, but, by clinging to the images, what one clings to is not indeed the images; the words are generated by the images, but, by clinging to the words, what one clings to is not indeed the words. (*xiang sheng yu yi er cun xiang yan, ze suo cun zhe nai fei qi xiang ye. yan sheng yu xiang er cun yan yan, ze suo cun zhe nai fei qi yan ye* 象生於意而存象焉, 則所存者乃非其象也。言生於象而存言焉, 則所存者乃非其言也。)
- (10) If so, then someone who forgets about the images is the one who grasps the meaning; someone who forgets about the words is the one who grasps the images. (*ran ze, wang xiang zhe, nai de yi zhe ye. wang yan zhe, nai de xiang zhe ye* 然則, 忘象者, 乃得意者也。忘言者, 乃得象者也。)
- (11) Grasping the meaning lies in forgetting the images; grasping the images lies in forgetting the words. (*de yi zai wang xiang, de xiang zai wang yan* 得意在忘象, 得象在忘言。) (Wagner 2003a, pp. 81–82; translation modified).

In this passage, Wang Bi uses two sentences that begin with *ranze* 然則 (if so, then ...) and one that begins with *gu* 故 (therefore) to unfold his understanding of *wang* 忘. We might well imagine that if what Wang Bi meant by *wang* 忘 were simply the *Zhuangzi* sense, he could have moved directly from sentence (6) to sentence (11), that is, “grasping the meaning lies in forgetting the images; grasping the images lie in forgetting the words”, and this would have been perfectly in line with the *Zhuangzi* text. Clearly, Wang Bi knew the *Zhuangzi* text well, yet he did not follow its meaning.

In sentence (7), Wang Bi first appears to “accept” the metaphor of the snare and the trap as employed in the *Zhuangzi*. According to this metaphor, words serve as the means for grasping images, while images serve as the means for grasping meaning. Correspondingly, images are the end for words, and meaning is the end for images. Here, images function as both an end and a means. As discussed earlier, to think in this way is to treat words, images, and meaning as mere objects. But the two sentences that follow show that, in Wang Bi’s thinking, the relationship between words and images, and that between images and meaning, is by no means simply one of ends and means. Sentence (8) seems to affirm that words and images, each serving as a means, should be forgotten once the images and the meaning are grasped. Sentence (9), however, immediately negates this possible reading. If one understands words from an objectified perspective, then what one clings to is indeed not the images, yet what is clung to ought at least to be the words themselves. But Wang Bi points out that “what one clings to is not indeed the words”. Why? Because the previous sentence has already made it clear that “the words are generated by the images”. The genesis between words and images cannot be grasped by separating them from each other, and the same is true of the genesis between images and meaning, and indeed of the relationship among the three as a unity. Wang Bi therefore operates here in his own distinct mode of expression and understanding, one we may neutrally describe as a “creative adaptation” of the *Zhuangzi*’s metaphor. That is to say, in Wang Bi’s understanding, “words–images–meaning” form an integral unity. None of the three can properly be said to exist outside their mutual determination: words are what they are by virtue of images; images are what they are by virtue of meaning; and, further, words are determined by both images and meaning, just as meaning is determined by both images and words. Each moment within this triad is thus a concrete instance of threefold mutual determination, and this internally connected unity can present itself only within the agent’s actual thinking activity.

Once we have understood this inner connection of mutual determination among words, images and meaning, we must point out the philosophical significance of Wang Bi’s distinctive “creative adaptation”. For Wang Bi, *wang* 忘 does not merely carry the negative sense of “forgetting”; it also has a positive meaning, namely, “sublating”. That is to say, to forget the images is at the same time not to cling to them, and thus it also involves

a transcendence of the images. The living preservation, or presence, of the images lies precisely in this dialectical unity with words and meaning. Hence, when we interpret and translate “Clarifying the Images”, rendering *wang* 忘 as “forgetting” does not fully convey the meaning of the character as Wang Bi uses it. The character *wang* 忘 means, at once, a negation, a preservation of what was originally there, and a transcendence of it. It is a threefold unity of discarding, preserving, and transcending. If we must borrow a term from Western philosophy to render this meaning, we consider that the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* (sublation) comes closest to *wang* 忘.

With this philosophical understanding of *wang* 忘, we can finally see the true intention behind Wang Bi’s appropriation of a passage from the *Zhuangzi* in his commentary on the *Laozi*. In Chapter 18, he writes: “When fish forget each other in the Dao of the rivers and lakes, then the virtue of moistening each other with spittle occurs.” (Provisionally translating *wang* 忘 as “forget”; *yu xiang wang yu jiang hu zhi dao, ze xiang ru zhi de sheng ye* 魚相忘於江湖之道, 則相濡之德生也.) (Lynn 1999, p. 81; translation modified). This passage is taken from “The Great Source as Teacher” chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where the corresponding passage in the original reads: “When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster on the shore, blowing on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we’d be better off forgetting them both, letting their courses melt away in their transformation.” (*quan he, yu xiang yu chu yu lu, xiang xu yi shi, xiang ru yi mo, bur u xiang wang yu jiang hu. yu qi yu yao er fei jie, bu ru liang wang er hua qi dao* 泉涸, 魚相與處於陸, 相呴以濕, 相濡以沫, 不如相忘於江湖。與其譽堯而非桀也, 不如兩忘而化其道.) (Ziporyn 2020, p. 56).

To date, all studies have taken Wang Bi’s character *wang* 忘 simply as “forget”, thereby treating his statement as nonsensical and even emending the text. These emendations include: a. “Fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes, but when this Dao of forgetting each other is lost, the virtue of moistening each other occurs.” (Tao Hongqing 陶鴻慶; *yu xiang wang yu jiang hu, xiang wang zhi dao shi, ze xiang ru zhi de sheng ye* 魚相忘於江湖, 相忘之道失, 則相濡之德生也.). Although Wagner agrees with Tao’s interpretation, he finds Tao’s emendation uneconomical, since inserting the character *shi* 失 (lost) after “Dao” can express the same meaning. Thus, he proposes the following reading: “[Only] when the Dao of the ‘fish to forget about each other in the rivers and lakes’ is lost, is [their] [particular] capacity of ‘moisturizing each other’ [with their mouths while lying on the dry shore] born [of which the *Zhuangzi* speaks].” (*yu xiang wang yu jiang hu zhi dao shi, ze xiang ru zhi de sheng ye* 魚相忘於江湖之道失, 則相濡之德生也.) (Wagner 2003a, p. 177). b. “While the Dao of the fish forgetting each other in the rivers and lakes endures, no one knows where the virtue of wetting each other can be found.” (Lou Yulie; *yu xiang wang yu jiang hu zhi dao, ze xiang ru zhi de bu zhi qi suo sheng ye* 魚相忘於江湖之道, 則相濡之德不知其所生也.). c. “It is when fish do not forget each other in the rivers and lakes that the virtue of moistening each other occurs.” (Momoi Hakuroku; *yu bu xiang wang yu jiang hu zhi dao, ze xiang ru zhi de sheng ye* 魚不相忘於江湖之道, 則相濡之德生也.). d. “It is when fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes that the virtuous act of moistening each other vanishes.” (Tōjō Ichidō; *yu xiang wang yu jiang hu zhi dao, ze xiang ru zhi de shi ye* 魚相忘於江湖之道, 則相濡之德失也.). e. “It is when fish forget the Dao of rivers and lakes that the virtuous act of moistening each other occurs.” (This is Lynn’s translation; rendered back into Chinese, it would be: *yu wang yu jiang hu zhi dao, ze xiang ru zhi de sheng ye* 魚忘於江湖之道, 則相濡之德生也.) (For the translations of Tao, Lou, Hakuroku, and Ichidō, see Lynn 1999, pp. 81–82).

We argue, however, that his words require no emendation. Their meaning is as follows: only by forgetting each other can fish truly transcend the [named] relations between them, thereby grasping the ultimate ground of the virtue of moistening each other with

spittle, namely, the [nameless] Dao of the rivers and lakes. Thus, once the Dao of the rivers and lakes is grasped, the virtue of moistening each other with spittle occurs spontaneously, without knowing why. This is entirely consistent with what Wang Bi says earlier in the same commentary: “The most praiseworthy of names are generated by the greatest censure, for what we know as praise and censure come from the same gate ... When the six relations exist in harmony and the state maintains good order all by itself, no one knows where the obedient and the kind and loyal ministers are to be found.” (*shen mei zhi ming, sheng yu da wu, suo wei mei wu tong men*..... *ruo liu qin zi he, guo jia zi zhi, ze xiao ci zhong chen bu zhi qi suo zai yi* 甚美之名, 生於大惡, 所謂美惡同門.....若六親自和, 國家自治, 則孝慈忠臣不知其所在矣.) (Lynn 1999, p. 81). Therefore, here Wang Bi deliberately uses the single character *wang* 忘 to express the rich dialectical meaning of both discarding and transcending the “mutual moistening” in order to grasp the Dao.

In light of the above analysis, and applying our critical understanding of *jin* 盡 and *wang* 忘, we may now translate sentence (12) of “Clarifying the Images”:

- (12) Therefore, the images are established in order to properly express the meaning, yet the images may then be sublated; the trigrams are doubled in order to properly express the true innate tendency of things, yet these figures may then be sublated. (*gu li xiang yi jin yi, er xiang ke wang ye. chong hua yi jin qing, er hua ke wang ye* 故立象以盡意, 而象可忘也。重畫以盡情, 而畫可忘也。).

This sentence corresponds exactly to the passage in the *Xici*. In Wang Bi’s understanding, then, it is within the activity of thinking, within the dialectical interplay of “loss” and “gain” in the images, that the sage sublates the images in order to attain an understanding of meaning. It is precisely here that the full richness of the word *wang* 忘 lies.

5. The Universal Religious Significance of the “Clarifying the Images”

To further demonstrate how this understanding operates in the concrete reading of the *Zhouyi*, we may take the *Mingyi* 明夷 (“䷣”, Suppression of the Light) as an example. After illustrating how the “words–images–meaning” triad works in the interpretation of this hexagram, we will turn to an analysis of the Chinese script that reveals the internal connection between *yan* 言 and *yi* 意 through *yin* 音. This will then be brought into dialogue with Augustine’s distinction between *vox* and *verbum*, which will in turn open up a broader reflection on the universal religious significance of Wang Bi’s “Clarifying the Images”.

The *Mingyi* 明夷 hexagram is composed of the upper trigram *Kun* 坤 (“䷁”, Earth) and lower trigram *Li* 離 (“䷄”, Fire), so its image is “brightness entering the earth”. The hexagram judgement reads: “Suppression of the Light is such that it is fitting to practice constancy in the face of adversity.” (*ming yi, li jian zhen* 明夷, 利艱貞) (Lynn 1994, p. 357). The first *Yang* line statement reads: “Suppression of the Light¹⁵ takes flight, keeping its wings folded. The noble man on the move does not eat for three days. Whenever he sets off to a place, the host there has something to say about it.” (*ming yi yu fei, chui qi yi. jun zi yu xing, san ri bu shi. you you wang, zhu ren you yan* 明夷於飛, 垂其翼。君子於行, 三日不食。有攸往, 主人有言.) (Lynn 1994, p. 358; translation modified).

First, the reader encounters the words, that is, the text of the hexagram judgement and line statements. The phrase “Suppression of the Light takes flight, keeping its wings folded” presents an image of a bird flying with folding wings. In Wang Bi’s view, however, this “image” functions not as a simple pictorial reproduction but as a metaphor or analogy. The bird of Suppression of the Light, folding its wings in flight, evokes a noble man who, in times of disorder, must conceal his brilliance and hold back his sharpness. Through “pondering the words to perceive the image”, the reader grasps this metaphorical picture from the text.

Next, the reader proceeds to “ponder the image to perceive the meaning”. The image of the folding-winged bird points not to zoological knowledge, but to the meaning of human affairs: in the dark political environment (the hexagram image of *Mingyi* being “brightness entering the earth”), the noble man should hold fast to the right path, knowing the difficulty yet practicing constancy, just as the hexagram judgement says: “It is fitting to practice constancy in the face of adversity.” This is the profound insight that the sage intended to convey.

What is worth noting is that, in this process of thinking, the image is not a fixed sign, but rather a dynamic, self-transcending medium whose self-transcendence consists precisely in its orientation toward meaning. The reader begins with the image of the bird, but does not stop there. Instead, this image, as a metaphorical medium, guides the reader from the concrete image to the apprehension of abstract meaning. Once the meaning is grasped, he no longer clings to the image or its specific description of “folding wings”. This is precisely what Wang Bi means by “grasping the meaning lies in sublating the images” and “grasping the images lies in sublating the words”. As we have argued above, *wang* 忘 here is not a simple erasure of words and images, but rather a spiritual sublation (*Aufhebung*). After meaning has been internalized, words and images are transcended, yet the meaning they carry remains alive in the reader’s apprehension. Thus, Wang Bi’s thought of “words–images–meaning” moves from an abstract philosophical proposition to a perceptible reading experience. Every genuine act of understanding is an inner movement from words to images, from images to meaning, and finally, in the apprehension of meaning, a transcending of both words and images.

This reading experience is by no means an isolated case. The dynamic of moving from concrete signs to inner significance is not merely a hermeneutic strategy; it corresponds to a deeper logic inherent in the Chinese script itself. A closer look at the semantic structure of the Chinese script reveals the same insight. The characters *yan* 言 (words) and *yin* 音 (sound) share the same etymological root. The *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining and Analyzing Characters) defines *yin* 音 as “derived from *yan* 言 with ‘one’ contained in it” (*cong yan han yi* 從言含一), and defines *yi* 意 (meaning) as composed of *yin* 音 and *xin* 心 (heart/mind): “to perceive the words with the heart/mind and thereby understand the meaning; composed of heart/mind and sound” (*cong xin cha yan er zhi qi yi ye, cong xin cong yin* 從心察言而知意也, 從心從音). This suggests that words are never merely external utterances, but are always connected to an inner “sound”, the silent voice of the mind. On this basis, *yi* 意 may be properly understood as the whole of significances to which this inner voice points. Seen in this light, the reading experience of the *Mingyi* hexagram finds its parallel in the very structure of the Chinese script itself, where the apprehension of meaning is always inseparable from the activity of the mind.

Furthermore, the connection between *yan* 言 and *yi* 意, as revealed through *yin* 音, bears a striking resemblance to Augustine’s discussion of the relationship between *vox* (sound) and *verbum* (word).¹⁶ He writes: “Hence, the word which sounds without is a sign of the word that shines within, to which the name ‘word’ more properly belongs. For that which is produced by the mouth of the flesh is the sound of the word, and is itself also called ‘word’, because that inner word assumed it in order that it might appear outwardly” (Augustine 2002, p. 187). Here Augustine emphasizes that the *verbum* belongs to the interior; it is in the mind, but it must nevertheless be conveyed through the vibration and propagation of outward *vox* in order to reach the ears of others and make one’s meaning known to them. (Hence, in what follows, I translate Augustine’s *verbum* as “inner word” to distinguish it from Wang Bi’s *yan* 言, which is also rendered as “word” in English.) Augustine deploys this analogy from human speech, that is, from the created order, in order to illuminate the Trinitarian character of God. In his view, the Son is called the *Logos* (Word)

precisely because he is “spoken forth”, and that which is spoken forth is the Incarnation of the Word. “For just as our (inner) word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it may be manifested to the senses of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of men. For by assuming it, not by being consumed in it, this word of ours becomes a sound, and that Word became flesh.” (Augustine 2002, p. 187). Thus, we may say that the Son, taking the form of a servant, entered history and time, manifesting himself before creatures such as human beings, in order to guide them back to the Kingdom of Heaven (Zhou 2005, p. 15; my translation).

This comparison with Augustine opens a way to reflect on the more universal religious significance of Wang Bi’s “Clarifying the Images”. First, as we have shown above, within the unity of mental activity formed by the triad of “words–images–meaning”, *yi* 意 is not merely “the meaning of the hexagrams”, but also “the sound of the mind”. The *Yijing*, as a sacred text of ancient China, conveys its ultimate truth through two interrelated symbolic media: *xiang* 象 and *yan* 言. Both *xiang* 象 and *yan* 言 are concrete objects perceptible to the human senses, and it is only through their guidance that one can arrive at an understanding of *yi* 意. Thus, *yi* 意 is communicated to human beings through *xiang* 象 and *yan* 言, so that it does not remain an empty abstraction. This is comparable to what Augustine emphasizes: that the Son, in the “form of a servant”, entered history and time, manifesting himself before creatures such as human beings. Strictly speaking, then, the conventional translation of *yi* 意 as “meaning” is far too broad a concept to convey the depth of its meaning. Just as Augustine speaks of the intrinsic relation between *verbum* and *vox* (and between the Father and the Son), there is likewise a unity of the same “sound”, both within (the sound in the mind) and without (the sound as word), at work in the relation between *yan* 言 and *yi* 意.

Likewise, *xiang* 象 does not refer to a fixed image. The *Yizhuan* itself writes: “This is why the *Changes* as such consist of images. The term *image* means ‘the making of semblances’” (*shi gu, yi zhe, xiang ye. Xiang ye zhe, xiang ye* 是故，易者，象也。象也者，像也) (Lynn 1994, p. 80), “What one sees is called the *images*” (*xian, nai wei zhi xiang* 見，乃謂之象) (Lynn 1994, p. 65), “Heaven hung images in the sky and revealed good fortune and bad, and the sages regarded these as meaningful signs” (*tian chui xiang, xian ji xiong, sheng ren xiang zhi* 天垂象，見吉凶，聖人象之) (Lynn 1994, p. 66). From the history of the *Yijing*’s hexagram development, scholars generally agree that the eight trigrams preceded the sixty-four hexagrams. The names of the eight trigrams correspond to eight natural objects (Heaven, Earth, Mountains, Lakes/Marsh, Water, Fire, Thunder and Wind), but when they are combined into the sixty-four hexagrams, their meanings clearly undergo transformation. Take the *Mingyi* 明夷 hexagram we discussed above: its upper and lower trigrams correspond to Earth and Fire respectively, but when combined they signify “Suppression of the Light”. Although this takes its image from the figure of “fire in the earth”, its signification extends far beyond this original imagery, and the line statements (*yan* 言) attached to the hexagram further deepen this symbolic meaning.

This points to a universal question in religious studies, especially in the philosophy of religion: how does the transcendent manifest itself to human beings? In religious experience, the transcendent sacred cannot be perceived directly; it must present itself through some mediation, such as symbol, ritual, scripture, or myth. Augustine’s doctrine of the Incarnation is Christianity’s answer to this question. Wang Bi’s “words–images–meaning” structure can be read in parallel: in “Clarifying the Images”, *yi* 意 as sacred, transcendent wisdom cannot be opened directly to human beings; it must pass through *xiang* 象 (which, in this context, may be understood as sacred symbols) and *yan* 言 (scriptural text, as above) in order to enter the domain of human cognition. The structure of “Clarifying the Images”,

that is, how words, images, and meaning are unified in the activity of the mind, thus itself constitutes a model of religious epistemology.

Second, this religious–epistemological process is necessarily carried out through the reading of a sacred text. In our analysis above, we have offered a fresh interpretation of the key term *wang* 忘 in Wang Bi’s account. To summarize, *wang* 忘 is not a simple discarding, but a sublation (*Aufhebung*): it transcends words and images after grasping the meaning, while preserving their value. This does not mean, however, that we reject the more common understanding of *wang* 忘 as “forgetting”. From a methodological standpoint, what *Zhuangzi* emphasizes is unproblematic: once the meaning is grasped in the actual process of thinking, words and images may indeed be forgotten. Wang Bi himself would not deny this. What we wish to highlight, rather, is that Wang Bi presses further into the inner mechanism of this “forgetting”. In other words, *wang* 忘 is not empty of content in the mind’s activity, even though in ordinary speech we may simply say “I have forgotten”. The movement from words to images and finally to the grasping of meaning, as well as the reverse movement from meaning to images and words, is by no means a direct identity, but a complex, dialectical process that involves a series of mental activities, including the work of the imagination. It is precisely this that Wang Bi seeks to disclose. This is why we have chosen the concept of *Aufhebung* to render this dynamic process. It stands in an internally unified, rather than oppositional, relation to “forgetting” as a result. Put differently, using *Aufhebung* to express the real movement of *wang* 忘 in the mind’s activity does not negate the fact that its outcome is indeed the “forgetting” of words and images. The example of the *Mingyi* 明夷 hexagram above has already illustrated this process clearly: beginning with the concrete hexagram statement and image, the reader ultimately grasps the transcendent insight that the noble man holds fast to the right path in dark times.

It is well known in religious traditions that the reading of sacred texts is never merely about acquiring information. It is a form of spiritual cultivation: through repeated recitation, meditation, and comprehension, the reader is transformed by the text. The act of reading is not a cognitive operation performed by a subject on an object, but a participation in a larger spiritual order. Wang Bi’s description of the movement from pondering to perceiving to grasping to sublating/forgetting closely parallels this religious reading experience. The reader does not extract meaning from the text, but enters meaning through a dynamic, imaginative activity. Once *yi* 意 is internalized, *yan* 言 and *xiang* 象 are transcended, yet the meaning remains alive in the reader’s apprehension. This is precisely the ultimate goal of reading sacred text in religious traditions: from words to spirit, from symbols to the transformation of life. The reading process described in “Clarifying the Images” thus shares a structural affinity with the practice of scriptural reading as spiritual cultivation across various religious traditions. It is not merely an interpretive method, but a path of spiritual transformation. Through repeatedly traversing the domains of *yan* 言 and *xiang* 象, the reader ultimately arrives at a state where external signs are no longer needed, and his or her entire life becomes the bearer of meaning.

Finally, the structure of Augustine’s thought, from *vox* and *verbum* to the Incarnation, presents a movement from human speech to the divine Word, from sound to flesh, unfolding in a paired, contrastive relation. Wang Bi’s “words–images–meaning” structure, by contrast, presents a threefold hermeneutics framework. This difference reveals two distinct symbolic logics at work in the two religious traditions. In the Christian tradition, the Incarnation is a singular, historical event. The Son enters time in the flesh, accomplishes salvation on the cross, and after his resurrection and ascension, continues to be present through the Holy Spirit, working through the visible media of Scripture and sacraments. The Incarnation is an event that happens once and is then mediated through tradition. In Wang Bi’s framework, however, the sacred, or *yi* 意, manifests itself not as a single historical

event, but in a continuous, recurrent process. Each generation of readers, in encountering the *xiang* 象 and the *yan* 言, can grasp *yi* 意 afresh through the imaginative activity of the mind. *Xiang* 象 is not the endpoint of history, but an eternal mediation. This makes *xiang* 象 not merely a cognitive category, but a central category of religious semiotics. It explains why the *Zhouyi* can be read and re-read, always yielding fresh meaning without ever being exhausted. In this sense, *xiang* 象 functions as an eternal mediation, not unlike what early Christian biblical interpretation calls typology, that is, the reading of Old Testament figures, events, and institutions as prefigurations of the New Testament. Yet there is a crucial difference. Typology points forward to a single, historical fulfillment in Christ, whereas Wang Bi's *xiang* 象 points to no such historical endpoint. It remains perpetually open to each new act of reading, each new movement of the mind. "Clarifying the Images", then, is not merely a commentary on the *Zhouyi*, but a philosophical meditation on the operation of religious symbols.

6. Conclusions

To summarize, the foregoing analysis has unfolded in four interconnected steps. First, we examined the three other Wei-Jin views on the words–meaning relationship and found that, despite their divergent conclusions, they all treat words and meaning as objective entities, thus remaining at the ontological level. This stands in marked contrast to Wang Bi's approach, which we argue opens a religious perspective on how the *Yijing* conveys the sages' insight, rooted in the activity of the mind. Second, we turned to the opening four sentences of "Clarifying the Images" and argued that Wang Bi shifts the inquiry to the agent's concrete thinking activity. On that basis, we interpreted *jin* 盡 not as "exhaust" but as "express properly", thereby capturing the dialectical interplay of loss and gain that accompanies the expression of the sages' meaning through images and words. Third, we analyzed Wang Bi's creative appropriation of the *Zhuangzi* metaphor and his use of *wang* 忘. Through a concrete reading of the *Mingyi* hexagram and a brief analysis of the Chinese script (which reveals the etymological connection between *yan* 言 and *yin* 音 and the internality of *yi* 意), it became clear that *wang* 忘 does not simply mean "forgetting" in a negative sense; rather, it carries a threefold movement of discarding, preserving, and transcending, a meaning that closely parallels the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* (sublation). Through this movement, the mind is able to go beyond fixed images and words, allowing the sages' meaning to be properly expressed in a living, self-transcending process. Finally, building on this, we drew a parallel with Augustine's distinction between *vox* and *verbum* to illustrate the universal religious significance of Wang Bi's hermeneutics. This comparison revealed that the "words–images–meaning" triad offers not only a model of religious epistemology, that is, how the transcendent becomes accessible through symbols, but also a vision of scriptural reading as spiritual cultivation. The difference between Augustine's paired, contrastive structure (*vox/verbum* to Incarnation) and Wang Bi's threefold structure (words–images–meaning) further points to two distinct symbolic logics at work in the two traditions. With these findings in hand, we now turn to the core of Wang Bi's achievement.

The crucial point Wang Bi reaches is this: he "creatively adapts" the *Zhuangzi*'s word *wang* 忘 into something like *Aufhebung* (sublation), so as to bring out the dialectic of "loss" and "gain" within the "properly expressing" that Confucius speaks of. What Wang Bi sets out to do in "Clarifying the Images" is not to define "what images are", but to elucidate "how the real images move within the thinking activity of the agent". This movement, we argue, opens a religious perspective on how the *Yijing* conveys the sages' meaning, precisely because it takes the mind's own activity as the site where sacred insight becomes accessible. Our point here is not to claim that Wang Bi's interpretation of the *Xici* is the only reasonable one, for that would be of limited philosophical interest. We seek to show

that in his interpretation of the *Zhouyi*, Wang Bi discovered, and one might even say inaugurated, a path of inquiry, rooted in the Chinese intellectual tradition, into the human capacity for knowing. Such an inquiry is at once epistemological and religious: it shows that the sages' meaning is not a fixed content to be exhaustively captured, but a living reality that discloses itself through the mind's self-transcending engagement with images and words. If we compare this to the "epistemological turn" in Western philosophy, Wang Bi's investigation of how the "words–images–meaning" relationship operates within thinking activity likewise possesses the significance of epistemological reflection. But it also offers a distinctively religious–epistemological account of how a sacred text shapes the mind's grasp of meaning. This, we hold, is the universal philosophical and religious value of Wang Bi's "Clarifying the Images".

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Notes

- ¹ The *Zhouyi Lüeli* is a collection of essays in which Wang Bi outlines his interpretation of the *Zhouyi*. The work consists of seven chapters: "Clarifying the Judgement", "Clarifying How the Lines Are Commensurate with Change", "Clarifying How the Hexagrams Correspond to Change and Make the Lines Commensurate with It", "Clarifying the Images", "Considering the Line Positions", "General Remarks, Part Two" and "Cursory Remarks on Some Hexagrams". Among these, "Clarifying the Images" has attracted the most scholarly attention. On the composition of the *Zhouyi Lüeli*, Wagner points to the influence of Zhuang Zun's exegetical strategy: "By writing both a Commentary and his Purport, Zhuang Zun found a way out of the conflict between the phrase-by-phrase commentary with its danger of getting lost in the particular, and the grand perspective of the general essay, with its danger of losing contact with the text. Wang Bi himself appreciated this solution by following its pattern in his work on both the *Laozi* and the *Zhouyi* with his *Laozi weizhi Lüeli* 老子微旨略例 and his *Zhouyi Lüeli* 周易略例." (Wagner 2000, p. 37).
- ² In this paper, we retain "meaning" as a working translation of *yi* 意, and "image" for *xiang* 象, for consistency with established English scholarship on the *Zhouyi* and Wang Bi tradition. Neither quite captures the full richness of the Chinese concepts, however. We will address this question in more detail below, especially in Section 5.
- ³ The *Xici* is part of the *Yizhuan* (*Commentaries on the Yijing*, "Ten Wings"). As Liao Mingchun 廖名春 (b. 1956) explains, strictly speaking, the *Zhouyi* originally referred only to the *Yijing*, the core text formed during the Western Zhou dynasty, and did not include the *Yizhuan*, which were later commentaries. However, because the *Yizhuan* were traditionally believed to be the work of Confucius, a figure venerated as a "sage" in ancient China, they were naturally elevated to the rank of canonical classics. As a result, the *Zhouyi* came to encompass both the *Yijing* and the *Yizhuan*, and accordingly, "*Zhouyi* studies" has come to cover the study of both texts (Liao 2004, pp. 3–4). In this paper, we follow Liao's usage: *Zhouyi* and *Zhouyi* studies serve as general designations, while *Yijing* and *Yizhuan* are used only when the distinction matters.
- ⁴ We provisionally adopt the conventional rendering of *jin* 盡 as "exhaust", but will reassess this translation below in light of Wang Bi's understanding.
- ⁵ The method of Image-number *Yi* can be summarized as follows: interpreters combined and recombined standardized images, using various arcane mathematical operations, to generate new trigrams and hexagrams relationships out of original hexagrams (Lynn 1994, p. 17).
- ⁶ Other terms used in scholarship for this method include *wangxiang wangyan* 忘象忘言 (forgetting the images and forgetting the words) (Tang 2009, p. 2) and *wangxiang qiuyi* 忘象求意 (forgetting the images to seek the meaning) (B. Wang 1997, p. 88).
- ⁷ This practice of character evaluation was highly significant because it was closely tied to the official selection system of the Han dynasty. Among the various avenues to official promotion during the Han was the nomination of "filial and incorrupt" (*xiaolian*

孝廉) candidates. If a person was recognized as “filial and incorrupt” in his community, he could be recommended for an official position. Since this title could dramatically change one’s life, many people went to great lengths to obtain it. A case in point is recorded in the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (“Biographies of Chen Fan 陳蕃 [?–168] and Wang Yun 王允 [137–192]”). During the Eastern Han period, Zhao Xuan 趙宣, seeking the reputation of being “filial”, moved into the tomb passage after his parents died and remained there in mourning for over twenty years. However, when the local governor Chen Fan later investigated, he discovered that Zhao had fathered five children during this period (according to ancient ritual codes, those in mourning were required to observe a strict set of life norms, with spousal separation being one of the central requirements). Chen Fan therefore concluded that Zhao’s behavior was a deception of the public and a profanation of ritual norms, and had him punished.

- 8 In rendering *li* 理 as “pattern”, we follow the convention of Graham (1990), Makeham (2003), and Shun (2010). While “principle” is a common translation, it does not adequately convey the sense of the term in this context. We do not discuss the distinction between “pattern”, “principle” and “coherence” here, as it is not central to the main argument of this paper.
- 9 We have numbered each sentence of the “Clarifying the Images” for ease of reference and to help readers unfamiliar with the text follow its sequence. Provisionally, we continue to render *jin* 盡 as “exhaust”.
- 10 Wang Bi’s *Zhouyi* commentary does not cover the *Xici*. Scholars generally hold that Wang Bi nonetheless expressed the ideas of the *Xici* in his *Zhouyi* commentary (Lu Cheng 陸澄 [425–494]; Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 [1893–1964]; Yu Dunkang 余敦康 [1930–2019]), while others attribute his lack of a *Xici* commentary to his early death (Gao Chenyang 高晨陽 [b. 1944]). In either case, his *Zhouyi* commentary was inevitably influenced by the *Xici* (see Dong 2016, p. 46). The use of *jin* 盡 in sentences (2), (4) and (12) and the wording of sentence (12) are clearly taken from the *Xici* passage quoted above; sentence (1) also summarizes that passage, which supports the point.
- 11 The sense conveyed by *zhu* 著 in “images are brought out by the words” (*xiang yi yan zhu* 象以言著) is identical to that of *jin* 盡.
- 12 What we wish to emphasize is that Wang Bi, as a philosopher, uses the character *jin* 盡 and, as we shall see below, *wang* 忘 in a particular way. As we know, many thinkers, past and present, East and West, can be highly idiosyncratic in their use of concepts, even when employing common terms, they may deviate from ordinary usage. Therefore, in philosophical research, we ought to inquire into the reasons for such special, and even seemingly strange, uses rather than confine ourselves to a literal translation of the words.
- 13 For a brief survey of Wang Bi’s citations of the *Zhuangzi*, see Jiang (2009).
- 14 Wagner points out that Wang Bi, Heshang Gong and Xiang Er were all familiar with the meaning of *chugou* 芻狗 in the *Zhuangzi* as the “straw dogs” used in rituals, yet they all rejected this reading of the *Laozi*. He argues that if this passage in the *Laozi* were interpreted in terms of the ritual straw dog, then it would have to be read as: Heaven and Earth are not kindly, they first treat the ten thousand entities as something very precious, and then discard them as worthless. However, no statement elsewhere in the *Laozi* confirms such a shift in Heaven and Earth’s attitude. See Wagner (2003b, pp. 429–30). In addition, D’Ambrosio also observes: “If we first reserve judgement on what seems to be an obvious misreading of ‘straw dogs’, we find out what is being said is actually quite plausible.” (D’Ambrosio 2022, p. 418).
- 15 Scholars differ on whether *Mingyi* 明夷 refers to the injured sun, to a bird named *Mingyi*, or to the mythical sun-bird. Since this debate is not crucial to our argument, we follow the context and take it simply as “bird”.
- 16 We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to the graphic and etymological relationship between the characters *yan* 言 and *yin* 音, which has greatly informed our interpretation of the internality of *yi* 意, and for pointing us to Augustine’s distinction between *vox* and *verbum* as a parallel. The comparative breadth of this study owes much to these suggestions.

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