

# Confucius and Laozi at the altar: Reconsidering a Tangut manuscript

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**Abstract:** In the Russian collection of Tangut material there is a manuscript which describes a meeting between Confucius and an old sage. It is generally assumed that it is a translation of a Chinese work but attempts at identifying the source text have not been successful. The Tangut title survives on the last page and it has been translated as the *Altar Record of Confucius's Conciliation*. This paper identifies the Chinese original among Ming-Qing religious scriptures of secret societies and suggests a new interpretation for the Tangut title. Connecting the title and the text with Chinese religious and intellectual traditions of the Song period also enables us to date the Chinese source text to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.

**Keywords:** Tangut texts, Confucius, Laozi, secret societies, Patriarch Luo, *Wubu liuce*, Apricot Platform

In the collection of Tangut material kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg, there is a handwritten booklet with a text describing an encounter between Confucius and an old man.<sup>1</sup> The title of the text, preserved at the end of the manuscript, is *Gor no ywa wa la* 筵籟蓼藜 (Fig. 1), which was translated into English by E. Kychanov, the first scholar to conduct an in-depth study of the text, as the *Altar Record on Confucius' Conciliation*.<sup>2</sup> Later on, Kychanov published a facsimile edition of this manuscript with a complete translation and study, and subsequently this book, with additional information and an improved layout, also appeared in Chinese.<sup>3</sup> Scholars who have studied the text agree regarding its Daoist content and that the old man who teaches Confucius about the mysteries of the Way is no other than Laozi 老子 himself. It is likewise assumed that this work is a translation from Chinese, even though no original has been found so far. While it has an obvious connection with the 'Old Fisherman' 漁父 chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, it has been suggested that it is more likely a translation of a more recent work of popular literature.<sup>4</sup> This paper identifies hitherto unnoticed Chinese versions of this text in Ming and Song religious literature, drawing attention to their similarity with the Tangut manuscript. Although these postdate the Tangut translation by several centuries, they attest to the existence of earlier, possibly oral, versions that did not survive in Chinese. Therefore, even though the Tangut version was unquestionably translated from Chinese, it represents the earliest extant witness of this text. The discovery of Chinese versions among religious literature commonly associated with sectarian movements and secret societies may force us to reassess whether the Tangut manuscript should be classified as a Daoist text. In addition, the Chinese versions offer an opportunity to reconsider the title of the work, which in its current form is rather enigmatic.

## 1. Former research

The Tangut manuscript in question was first noticed in the early 1930s by Nikolaj A. Nevskij (1892–1937) who mentioned it as an example of translations of apocryphal texts that praise Daoist ideas and ridicule Confucian ones.<sup>5</sup> He translated the Tangut title into Russian as *Zapiski ob altare primirenija Konfutsija* (Records about the Altar of Confucius's Conciliation), and reconstructed the Chinese title as *Fuzi hetan ji* 夫子和壇記. Yet for some reason he did not

include it in his inventory of Tangut books which he was compiling at the time. Sometime later, the manuscript seems to have been mislaid but was later located once again by Kychanov who assigned it the pressmark Tang. 426, No. 3781. Kychanov introduced this manuscript in an article, providing an extensive summary of its content and drawing attention to similarities with the ‘Old Fisherman’ chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>6</sup> As the central focus of his article, he suggested that it might be possible to identify the ‘old man’ in the story with the Daoist philosopher Laozi.<sup>7</sup> Finally Kychanov voiced his doubts about the possibility that this was a native Tangut composition merely inspired by the thirty-first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, and suggested that it was a translation of a lost Chinese work, possibly, but not necessarily, an unknown edition of the *Zhuangzi*.

Kychanov continued to work on the Tangut text and in 2000 published a complete translation and study in a book form. He also included facsimile images of the entire manuscript, thereby making the text available for study.<sup>8</sup> The central emphasis of his study was still on the manuscript’s connection with the *Zhuangzi* and Laozi’s encounter with Confucius. Based on remaining fragments of the colophon (Fig. 1), Kychanov managed to date the booklet to 1122, although he also noted that it was impossible to determine whether this date pertained to the translation or the creation of this specific manuscript copy.<sup>9</sup> As for the title of the work, based on the idea that in the *Zhuangzi* the encounter transpires at the *xingtán* 杏壇 (‘Apricot Altar/Platform’), Kychanov changed his original idea of reading the title as ‘records about’ an altar to ‘record at’ the altar. Accordingly, he translated the title (into Russian) as *Record at the Altar about Confucius’s Conciliation*.

A few years later Kychanov’s book, in an updated form, came out in Chinese.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese version included the translation of his introductory study and an improved arrangement of the original text with aligned Chinese translation supplied by Nie Hongyin 聶鴻音. While in the Russian version the facsimile images are placed at the end of the book and thus it is not immediately apparent how particular characters are interpreted, the Chinese edition conveniently mimics the manuscript’s layout and provides a character-by-character translation (*zhiyi* 直譯) of the original, as well as a semantic translation (*yiyi* 意譯). This latter, however, is done not into modern Chinese, which would have been the equivalent of Kychanov’s Russian translation, but into classical Chinese, in an effort to approximate the original text used by the Tangut translator. There are obvious reasons to opt for such a reconstructive translation but without a Chinese text to match it, it also creates the illusion that we are able to restore the missing original fairly well and that the result of this endeavour successfully reproduces the lost Chinese text. Following Kychanov’s translation of the title (i.e. *Record at the Altar about Confucius’s Conciliation*), the Chinese version reconstructed the original title as *Kongzi hetan ji* 孔子和壇記.<sup>11</sup>

In a separate paper about this manuscript, Nie confirmed that the text in the manuscript was indeed connected with the ‘Old Fisherman’ chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, yet he also made a convincing point that the Tangut text was probably based not on the *Zhuangzi* itself but some later Chinese work closer in time to the date of the manuscript. He suggested that the Chinese original belonged to the realm of popular literature and pointed out that the level of education of the translator was not high.<sup>12</sup> He also drew attention to a parallel passage with four adjacent clauses in the commentary to the *Yinfu jing* 陰符經, as quoted in the Ming-dynasty encyclopaedia *Yulin* 喻林, compiled by Xu Yuantai 徐元太 (b. 1536; *jinshi* 進士 1565). Even

though the date of the composition of the *Yulin* is quite late and the *Yinfu jing* commentary has no other content that matches the Tangut text, Nie stressed the relevance of these four matching clauses, suggesting that they may go back to a common source with the Tangut manuscript. Since the commentary of the *Yinfu jing* is generally understood to be the work of the mid-eighth century scholar Li Quan 李筌 (fl. 713–760), he was of the opinion that the text that served as the basis for the Tangut translation must be later than the mid-eighth century.<sup>13</sup> In addition, he called attention to Confucius being described in the manuscript as wearing a fine sword, a habit that was atypical of the image of the Master in early China and during the early medieval period but was attested in Tang-dynasty art. More specifically, the portrait of Confucius by the famous painter Wu Daozi 吳道子 (680–740), a stone-engraved copy of which is still preserved in the Temple of Confucius in Qufu 曲阜, attests that during the first half of the eighth century Confucius was indeed imagined as having worn a sword. Thus Nie suggested that this was yet another indirect evidence in favour of the hypothesis that the Chinese original of the Tangut text must have been produced during or after the Tang dynasty.<sup>14</sup>

A further important point noted by Nie is that the philosophy advocated in the Tangut text is not specifically Daoist, as the *Zhuangzi* is typically classified, but instead discusses the concept of withdrawal from the world, which is typical of both Buddhist and Daoist writings. He highlighted that a belief system that combined the teachings of the two main religions was relatively widespread in the late medieval period and may be viewed as a sign of secularization.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Chinese antecedents of the Tangut text

The Tangut manuscript essentially narrates an encounter between Confucius and an old man who appears to be a Daoist sage. According to the story, Confucius happens to be playing his zither (*qin* 琴) when an old man approaches and, paying no attention to the Master and his disciples, begins to sing and dance as he was all by himself. Afraid that he might disturb the Master, the disciple Zilu 子路 politely tries to strike up a conversation with him, to which the old man pays no attention whatsoever. Zilu raises his voice and the old man finally returns his greeting, calling him a ‘general’. This greatly irritates Zilu, as he considers himself a man of learning, rather than someone with a military background. The old man explains that he meant no disrespect but simply made an assumption on the basis of Zilu’s forceful demeanour and arrogance, adding that if he was indeed a man of learning then his master surely had no knowledge of the Way. Prompted by the old man, Zilu summarizes the teachings of Confucius and proudly notes that he has three thousand followers in various states. The conversation continues along similar lines until the old man gets back into his boat and leaves. Zilu in turn goes back to his own master and relates to him the encounter, at the end of which Confucius scolds him for not recognizing a sage and goes in pursuit of the old man himself. He eventually catches up with him and engages in a conversation in the course of which he learns about the Way and eventually gains some sort of epiphany or realization. Thus the story ends with Confucius fully accepting the teachings of the old man, unlike the less talented Zilu who walks away from the encounter with nothing.

As both Kychanov and Nie have pointed out, the story is undoubtedly inspired by the ‘Old Fisherman’ chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which relates a version of the encounter between Confucius and the old man. The story in the *Zhuangzi*, however, is quite different and lacks some key motifs that appear in the Tangut version. The relevant part in the *Zhuangzi* begins as follows:

孔子遊乎緇帷之林，休坐乎杏壇之上。弟子讀書，孔子絃歌鼓琴。奏曲未半，有漁父者下船而來。須眉交白，被髮揄袂，行原以上，距陸而止。左手據膝，右手持頤以聽。曲終而招子貢、子路，二人俱對。客指孔子曰：「彼何為者也？」子路對曰：「魯之君子也。」客問其族。子路對曰：「族孔氏。」客曰：「孔氏者何治也？」子路未應，子貢對曰：「孔氏者，性服忠信，身行仁義，飾禮樂，選人倫，上以忠於世主，下以化於齊民，將以利天下。此孔氏之所治也。」又問曰：「有土之君與？」子貢曰：「非也。」「侯王之佐與？」子貢曰：「非也。」客乃笑而還行，言曰：「仁則仁矣，恐不免其身，苦心勞形以危其真。嗚乎，遠哉其分於道也。」

Travelling in the Forest of Ziwei, Confucius sat down to rest on the Apricot Platform (or Altar). His disciples began studying, while Confucius sang and accompanied himself on the zither. Before he was halfway through the tune, a fisherman got out of a boat and came over. His beard and eyebrows were turning white, his hair was dishevelled and his sleeves were hanging down. He walked up from the riverside and, stepping on dry land, stopped. He listened with his left hand on his knee, supporting his chin with the right hand. When the tune finished, he called over Zigong and Zilu, both of whom responded [to his call]. The stranger pointed at Confucius and asked, 'Who is he?' Zilu replied, 'He is a gentlemen from Lu'. The stranger asked about his clan, to which Zilu replied, 'He is from the Kong clan'. The stranger asked, 'So what does Mr. Kong do for a living?' Zilu did not respond but Zigong answered, 'By nature he follows loyalty and trustworthiness, in his conduct he is benevolent and righteous, he embellishes the rituals and music; he focuses on people's relations to each other; above, he advocates being loyal to the hereditary lords; below, he labours on the transformation of ordinary people. Trying to benefit the subcelestial realm—this is what Mr. Kong in engaged in'. The stranger asked again, 'Is he a ruler of any land?' Zigong replied, 'No, he isn't'. 'Is he then an assistant of a marquis or a king?' Zigong said, 'No, he isn't'. At this the stranger began to laugh and walk away, saying, 'Benevolence is indeed benevolence, yet I am afraid that a man can never escape oneself. By constraining the mind and exhausting the body one endangers one's true nature. Alas! Far indeed is he from the Way!'

Even though the narrative contains no interaction between Confucius and the fisherman, after the old man's leaving Zilu asks why the master gave so much respect to him, even though he is usually quite unmoved when talking to powerful rulers of states. To this Confucius scolds Zilu and explains that the old fisherman is a sage who possesses the Way and should be honoured accordingly. It is undeniable that this passage is the basis of the story we find in the Tangut text but the connection is rather loose and more of an inspirational nature. It seems that the encounter with the fisherman was used as the basic plot for a more elaborate story, which in turn served as an excuse for delivering a lengthy philosophical argument on the inferiority of the teachings of Confucius in comparison with a complete withdrawal from society and politics. In the *Zhuangzi*, Confucius does not attain realization but simply explains to Zilu, and the reader, the superior standpoint of the old fisherman. Accordingly, the Tangut text is not based directly on the *Zhuangzi* and Nie Hongyin is certainly right in trying to find a text much closer in time to the twelfth-century date seen in the colophon of the manuscript.

A version of what seems to be the same story is found in the *Lunyu* 論語 (18.7), describing the encounter of Zilu and an old man who, looking at the unimpressive appearance of Zilu, voices his doubts regarding the abilities of his master. The passage in question reads, in D. C. Lau's translation, as follows:<sup>16</sup>

子路從而後，遇丈人，以杖荷蓆。子路問曰：「子見夫子乎？」丈人曰：「四體不勤，五穀不分。孰為夫子？」植其杖而芸。子路拱而立。止子路宿，殺雞為黍而食之，見其二子焉。明日，子路行以告。子曰：「隱者也。」使子路反見之。至則行矣。

Zilu, when travelling with [Confucius], fell behind. He met an old man, carrying a basket on a staff over his shoulder. Zilu asked, 'Have you seen my Master?' The old man said, 'You seem neither to have toiled with your limbs nor to be able to tell one kind of grain from another. Who may your Master be?' He planted his staff in the ground and started weeding. Zilu stood, cupping one hand respectfully in the other. The old man invited Zilu to stay for the night. He killed a chicken and prepared some millet for his guest to eat, and presented his two sons to him. The next day, Zilu resumed his journey and reported this conversation. The Master said, 'He must be a recluse'. He sent Zilu back to see him again. When he arrived, the old man had departed.

Following this, Zilu presents his assessment of the old man's philosophy, criticizing him for not taking office, which he considers one of the most important duties of an intellectual. The old man in the story is clearly related to that in the *Zhuangzi*, only here his teachings are rejected as being impractical and unethical from the point of view of society.<sup>17</sup> Considering that the *Lunyu* is a collection of stories advocating values that ensure the proper functioning of society, the disapproving attitude to the old man's teachings is hardly a surprise. Still, what is relevant from our point of view is that in the Tangut text we find a similar episode in which the old man, shortly after meeting Zilu, comments that Zilu's teacher seems to have no knowledge of the Way.<sup>18</sup>

The above examples show that various elements of the text translated into Tangut have antecedents in early Chinese literature. Yet the parallels are too haphazard and fragmentary to enable us to establish a direct link with any of these early sources. Fortunately, there is a later text that shows a much closer connection with the Tangut manuscript, taking us considerably closer to identifying the source text on which the translation was based. Two separate versions of this work are preserved among the texts affiliated with Ming dynasty secret societies. Even though there are significant discrepancies with the Tangut text, the similarities seem to justify the assumption that we are dealing with different versions of the same text and a now lost version of the same text was used as the source for the Tangut translation.

One of these two Chinese versions appears in the annotated edition of the *Wubu liuce* 五部六冊 (Five Books in Six Volumes<sup>19</sup>) written by Patriarch Luo 羅祖 (1442–1527), founder of the popular religious movement known under the name of Non-Action Teachings (Wuweijiao 無為教).<sup>20</sup> In his writings, Luo relied on a wide range of sources, freely quoting from a variety of Buddhist and Daoist texts and incorporating these into his own revelations.<sup>21</sup> The longest of the five scriptures that make up the *Wubu liuce* is a text titled *Poxie xianzheng yaoshi juan*

破邪顯證鑰匙卷 (Scroll of the Key to Destroying Heresy and Manifesting Evidence; hereafter: *Poxie juan*), Chapter 22 of which quotes from a certain *Laojun xingtān jì* 老君行壇記 (Record of the Mobile Altar of the Elderly Lord):<sup>22</sup>

《老君行壇記·覽集般若品》云：  
子路下拜曰：「莫不是聖人乎？」老人曰：「夫聖人者，生而自悟，不假脩持，死而不懼，常言如是，故曰聖人也。」

The 'Lanji bore' chapter of the *Laojun xingtān jì* writes:

Zilu bowed deeply and said, 'You must be a sage!' The old man replied, 'Now the sage is enlightened of his own accord as soon as he is born, he does not rely on cultivation, he has no fear at the time of dying. This is what they ordinarily say about him; this is why he is called a sage'.

Merely based on its title, the *Laojun xingtān jì* appears to be a Daoist work.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as we will see below, the situation is more complex and there are also Buddhist overtones in the text. This holds true even for this brief quote, in which the phrase 'he does not rely on cultivation' 不假脩持 comes from the poem 'One strike and I forgot all I knew' 一擊忘所知 by the Chan master Xiangyan Zhixian 香巖智閑 (d. 898). This shows that even though the *Laojun xingtān jì* is essentially a record of a Confucian-Daoist debate, it is eclectic in its sources and at times draws on Buddhist literature and imagery. It is quoted only once in the six volumes of the *Wubu liuce* and the quote is introduced as coming from the 'Lanji bore' chapter 覽集般若品 of the same work. Yet as I will discuss below, the *Laojun xingtān jì* was probably too short to be divided into chapters. Therefore the 'Lanji bore' chapter must denote the 'Bore' chapter of the *Dazang yilanji* 大藏一覽集, which is the second most quoted text in the *Wubu liuce*, with a total of 35 quotations.<sup>24</sup> In fact, a few lines after the quote from the *Laojun xingtān jì* we find a section introduced as being cited from the 'Bore' chapter of the *Dazang yilanji*.<sup>25</sup>

But what is important for us now is that this short quote has obvious resonances with the Tangut text not only because it mentions Zilu talking with an old man about sagehood but also because of the title which is analogous to the title of the Tangut text. Just like the Tangut title, this is also an 'altar (or platform) record' 壇記 and while it is uncertain what the word 'altar' is meant to signify here, it immediately suggests several connections. On the most basic level, it is surely related to the story in the *Zhuangzi*, which describes how Confucius sat on the Apricot Platform (*xingtān* 杏壇) and played the zither while his disciples studied. By modern times the phrase *xingtān* came to refer to the place where Confucius taught his disciples but this meaning ultimately goes back to this particular place in the *Zhuangzi* and offers no clues to what an 'apricot platform' actually was.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the term must have been obscure and confusing even in early medieval times, prompting commentators to try to come up with an explanation. For example, the *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 cites Sima Biao 司馬彪 (246?–306?) who claimed that the word *tan* referred to a higher spot in a lake.<sup>27</sup> The Tang commentator Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–655) concurs with this, adding that the word *xing* ('apricot') signifies that there were lots of apricot trees in that place.<sup>28</sup> Whatever the meaning of the phrase may have been in the *Zhuangzi*, by the Northern Song period it was regarded as the place where Confucius taught his disciples, and was depicted in art as a raised platform surrounded by apricot trees.

It is probably not inconsequential that the word *xing* 杏 (‘apricot’) in the Apricot Platform in the *Zhuangzi* and *xing* 行 (‘to go; portable’) in the title of the *Laojun xingtān jī* are very close in pronunciation. This was true in medieval China (i.e. *haengX* vs. *hang*<sup>29</sup>) and even more so once we enter the modern period. Considering that texts used in popular religion were often circulated orally, the *xingtān* (‘portable altar’) in the title of the *Laojun xingtān jī* is probably a phonetic loan for the Apricot Platform where Confucius taught his disciples, at least in the eyes of Song intellectuals. Apart from an apparent phonetic similarity, the identity of the two terms is further corroborated by the fact that in each case they occur in connection with a story recounting the meeting with a wise old man, which cannot be written off as a mere coincidence. Consequently, the *xingtān* in the title of the *Laojun xingtān jī* most likely originally designated the Apricot Platform of the *Zhuangzi* but was miswritten either by Patriarch Luo himself or in the source he was drawing on.<sup>30</sup>

It is also conspicuous that the *Laozi xingtān jī* has the Elderly Lord (Laojun 老君) in its title, whereas the title of the Tangut text has Confucius. Strictly speaking, the title of the manuscript (*Gor no ywa wā la* 籍蕪藪藪) does not actually contain the name of Confucius, especially not his surname Kong 孔. Instead, the first two characters of are *gor no* 籍蕪, which correspond to the Chinese word *fuzi* 夫子 (‘master’). The first syllable of this word, written with the character *gor* 籍, simply means a ‘man’ or a ‘male person’, much the same way as the Chinese word *fu* 夫 is used in various compound words. Thus if we translate the Tangut title into Chinese character by character, we end up with *Fuzi hetan jī* 夫子和壇記, which is how Nevskij reconstructed it in the 1930s when he first described the manuscript.<sup>31</sup> But, in order to make it more accessible for Russian readers, he translated this into Russian as *Records about the Altar of Confucius’s Conciliation*. Since *gor no* is used consistently in both this manuscript and the Tangut translation of the *Lunyu* 論語 to refer specifically to Confucius, rendering the name in the title as Confucius was reasonable, if not entirely accurate. Kychanov adopted this title but later changed it to *Record at the Altar about Confucius’s Conciliation*. This Russian title later became translated into Chinese as *Kongzi hetan jī* 孔子和壇記, instead of making use of the technically more correct Chinese title reconstructed by Nevskij (i.e. *Fuzi hetan jī*).

A conspicuous discrepancy between the titles is that in the position where the Chinese one has the word *xing* 行, the Tangut text uses the word *ywa* 蕪, which is generally understood to mean ‘peace; to make peace’. This is why modern scholars interpreted the title as referring to ‘conciliation’. There are two different forms of this character (蕪 and 蕪), and in the first of these, used in the title of our manuscript, the last stroke of the left side component stretches all the way underneath across the character, touching the final stroke of the rightmost component. Modern dictionaries do not define the first form but refer the reader to the second one, and the word is explained under the entry for this second form. This seems to indicate that the second form with a shorter last stroke in the left side component (i.e. 蕪) is the standard form and the other one (i.e. 蕪) is merely an allograph. Examples of this character in the Tangut versions of the *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 and the *Leilin* 類林 seem to be of this standard type, whereas our manuscript clearly uses the first form.<sup>32</sup>

Even if we accept that the two characters are allographs, it is hard to make sense of what 蕤 actually means in the title. In an attempt to provide a solution, Nie suggests that the word in question means not ‘reconciliation’ but ‘to accompany on an instrument’, similar to the Chinese meaning of the word *he* 和 when read with the fourth tone. In support of this theory, he cites Kychanov’s dictionary where this meaning is attested, unfortunately without specifying a primary source where it comes from.<sup>33</sup> Without seeing the word used in this sense in a specific Tangut text, we should probably treat this reading in Kychanov’s dictionary with caution.

As mentioned above, the title of the *Laojun xingtan ji* quoted in the *Poxie juan* is problematic in the same location, and it is hard to understand the meaning of the word *xing* 行 in this context, which is why I suggested that it should be a phonetic loan for the original word *xing* 杏 (‘apricot’). The Tangut word for ‘apricot’ is *xiāj* 藪 and is considered to be a loanword from Chinese. But it is only attested in medieval dictionaries as part of the compound *bē xiāj* 藪藪, which is explained by the Tangut lexicographers using the Chinese compound word *lixing* 栗杏 (‘chestnut-apricot’).<sup>34</sup> This combination does not typically occur in Chinese and thus it is questionable whether it actually denotes the fruit known in China as apricot. In fact, the medieval Tangut dictionary *Sea of Characters* (18.271) defines the word *bē* 藪 (‘chestnut’) with the compound *bē xiāj* 藪藪 (‘chestnut-apricot’), which is an indication that the second syllable of the compound word *bē xiāj* 藪藪 may not actually be the usual Tangut word for ‘apricot’.<sup>35</sup> As far as I am aware, there are no examples of the word for ‘apricot’ in non-lexicographic texts, which makes it hard to verify whether it was in any way related to the character 蕤 used in the title of the Tangut manuscript.

Nevertheless, because of its apparent connection with the Chinese tradition of Apricot Platform, the most tempting solution is to assume that the word in question in the Tangut title originally derives from the word ‘apricot’. Even if the character 蕤 is indeed an allograph of 蕤 and normally stands for the word ‘peace; to pacify’, it makes little sense in the title. Accordingly, we may be justified to consider it an error and try to find a plausible explanation for its corruption. The most probable solution to this is that the Tangut character indeed is a translation of Chinese *he* 和 (‘peace; to pacify’), which is, however, a scribal error for 杏. The graphic similarity of the two characters is apparent, especially that they consist of nearly the same components arranged differently. It is perhaps not coincidental that such a mistake occurred in the title, as titles were often written in seal characters or other fancy scripts. Perhaps the Tangut translator, who may have been less familiar with ornamental scripts, encountered the character 杏 on the front cover of the Chinese book and misread it as one of the variants of 和 (i.e. 哖, 香).<sup>36</sup> Since the word does not repeat in the main text, he would not have caught the mistake. In view of above, I believe that the Chinese text had the word ‘apricot’ in this place and the Tangut title should be *Record of the Master at the Apricot Altar*.

### 3. A Chinese precious scroll

The *Poxie juan* only quotes the short bit of text cited above and, apart from suggesting a connection with our manuscript, this does not give us enough material for a comparison with the Tangut text. Fortunately, the *Kaixin fayao* 開心法要 edition of the *Wubu liuce* has copious

commentaries and these include the text of the *Laojun xingtang ji* inserted as textual support for the short quote in the main text (Fig. 2).<sup>37</sup> Since the story appears as a continuous narrative with a beginning and end, it seems to represent the complete text of the *Laojun xingtang ji*. It starts with describing how at the end of the Zhou period Confucius descended into this world and roamed the world together with his disciples. One time he came across a platform (*tai* 臺) near the Si River 泗水 which had a stele commemorating the location as the place where the Lu 魯 general Zang Wenzhong 臧文仲 had allegedly sacrificed to Heaven. Seeing the inscription, Confucius lamented over the departed heroes by reciting, perhaps even singing, the following quatrain:

暑往寒來春復秋，  
夕陽西下水東流，  
將軍戰馬今何在？  
野草閑花滿地愁。

Summers and winters alternate; spring comes and then it is autumn again;<sup>38</sup>

The evening sun sets in the west; the water flows to the east;

The generals and battle horses, where are they now?

There is only weed and wildflower, the entire land is filled with sorrow.

Having finished the song, Confucius sank into a melancholic mood and began playing the zither. Just at this time an old man appeared riding a small boat downstream on the river. Reaching the pier, he stopped. Confucius noticed him and immediately told his disciples to go and inquire who he was:<sup>39</sup>

令徒訪之，子路到於河邊，向老人施禮。老人還禮：「萬福，將軍！」子路怒曰：「吾乃儒士，何為將軍？」老人曰：「呼將軍者，不低。夫將軍坐下，運籌幃幄之中，決勝千里之外，講《六韜》、《三略》之法、百陣十數之機。汝為儒士，行如病夫之體，坐似室女之柔，解五經妙意玄言，說三時聖機奧理，持義勸王侯(侯)宰輔，吟詩感天地鬼神，其德雙美，故曰：儒士。」

[Confucius] asked the disciples to go and see him so Zilu went down to the riverside and extended his greetings to the old man. The old man returned the greetings, saying: 'Salute to you, general!' Zilu angrily said, 'I am a man of learning, why would you call me a general?' The old man replied, 'By calling you a general, I am not demeaning you. When the general sits down, he devises the strategies from the comfort of his tent, he determines the outcome of battles from the distance of ten thousand *li*, he discusses the art of war of the *Liutao* and the *Sanlüe*, as well as the device of hundred battle formations and ten calculations. If you were a man of learning, you would walk as if you had the body of an ill man, you would sit as if you had the mellowness of a young maiden; you would interpret obscure passages from the Five Classics; explicate the profound principle of the devices [that lead people to liberation] of the sages from the three time periods; you would uphold righteousness and give advice to kings and lords and their grand ministers; you would chant poems that would affect the spirits of Heaven and Earth. Such men have perfect virtue and this is why they are called 'men of learning'.

Even a cursory reading of the above excerpt shows that it is much closer to the Tangut manuscript than the version preserved in the *Zhuangzi*. Although it is also immediately clear that the Tangut text is not based on this particular version, it shares certain motifs with the Tangut manuscript, which are absent from the *Zhuangzi*. One of these is the old man calling Zilu a general and thereby angering him. In the Tangut version, this happens when Zilu loses his temper because the old man seems to pay no attention to his greetings. So he raises his voice and demands an explanation, which indeed invokes a response:<sup>40</sup>

The old man was startled, immediately opened his eyes and greeted Zilu saying, ‘Salute to you, general! Salute to you, general!’ Hearing this, Zilu’s facial colour changed in anger and he said to the old man, ‘Just now I addressed you two or three times and you did not respond, and all of a sudden you are holding your head high! You are being disrespectful, mocking others! Don’t you know that I am a man of learning, and I have been studying how to conduct affairs and make speeches? Why do you call me a general and bow to me?’

Hearing these words, the old man bowed his head and said with a bitter smirk: ‘These are not just [simple] words. As for the word “general” you just heard, do you think I would use it to address any person? If you observe filial piety within your family, serve your ruler with a loyal heart, are well versed in the art of war, risk your own life in battle, know the enemy’s advantages and disadvantages and are capable of governing a state—now if you possess such skills and knowledge, then you are considered a general, then you deserve to be called a general. Now you, Zilu, have a powerful and robust body, possess a strong voice and speak *woo-woo-woo* like the howling of the wind, your face is ferocious as if you were to go up against someone. Can someone so arrogant be called a learned man?’

As noted before, the two versions have important differences and for this reason the Tangut text could not have been translated from the Chinese version preserved in the *Poxie juan* commentary. Yet it is also apparent that the plot is very similar and reveals specific details absent from the *Zhuangzi*. In both cases the old man calls Zilu a general, even though Zilu considers himself a man of learning. But there are additional parallels which surface once we go back to the Tangut text and look at it in light of the Chinese version. Thus Kychanov is undoubtedly correct in translating the phrase *gja ·jwir* 𪛗𪛗 as ‘the art of war’, especially since it is also part of the title of the Tangut version of the *Sunzi bingfa* (*Swě tsə gja ·jwir* 𪛗𪛗𪛗𪛗), where it corresponds to the Chinese term *bingfa* 兵法 (‘military methods’, i.e. ‘art of war’) Yet the literal sense of the Tangut phrase is ‘military texts’ and if we translate it as such, we achieve a much closer match with the corresponding part of the *Poxie juan* version, where the old man specifically mentions two of the most popular texts on military strategy, i.e. the *Liutao* and *Sanlüe*. Once we translate the phrase *gja ·jwir* as ‘military texts’, the parallelism of Chinese and Tangut versions becomes even more apparent.

Another example where the *Poxie juan* commentary matches the Tangut manuscript, but not the ‘Old Fisherman’ chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, is a series of parallel statements put forward by the old man while trying to explain to Zilu that natural phenomena may occur of their own accord without someone needing to set them in motion. The relevant part appears in the *Poxie juan* commentary as follows:

老人曰：「天不言而四時改變，地不產而萬物齊生，雪不晶而自白，鴉不染而自黑，蛛不教而自網，雁飛寒暑。」

The old man said: 'Heaven does not speak and yet the four seasons change; the Earth does not give birth and yet the myriad things are all born; the snow is not brightened but white of its own accord; the crow is not painted but is black of its own accord; the spider is not taught but weaves its web of its own accord; the wild geese fly in both cold and hot weather'.

The individual clauses in this section are symmetrical in structure, except from the last one which disrupts the parallelism both structurally and semantically. Since it consists of only four syllables, as opposed to the seven syllables of each of the previous clauses, it may have been corrupted. The Tangut version of the text has a corresponding part which reads, once again in Kychanov's interpretation, as follows:<sup>41</sup>

The crane is not washed but is white of its own accord; the crow is black of its own accord without being painted; the spider is not taught but weaves its web of its own accord. The bird is not caught with a net but flies into it of its own accord; the otter sacrifices to heaven at the right time of its own accord; the wild goose arrives at the right time of its own accord.

As before, there are some differences but several clauses match the Tangut version very well. Among these are two adjacent ones describing the blackness of the crow and the weaving of the spider. Still, while the Tangut version uses the crane as an example of natural whiteness, the Chinese version has snow in the corresponding place. Moreover, the Tangut text has additional clauses about birds and otters absent from the Chinese version. That the discrepancies of the Tangut version are not the result of the Tangut translator misunderstanding or changing of the source text is demonstrated by the fact that the same argument appears elsewhere in transmitted Chinese literature, and in some cases the example clauses match those in the Tangut text. The earliest of these is in fact found in the *Zhuangzi*, only it appears not in the 'Old Fisherman' but in the chapter called 'Movements of Heaven' 天運. Here we have a brief account of the same meeting, only the intellectual opponent of Confucius is explicitly identified as Lao Dan 老聃, that is, the philosopher Laozi. Once again, countering Confucius's praise of the virtues of benevolence and righteousness, Laozi pushes forward his idea of spontaneity. Part of his argument is a pair of clauses that are quite similar to the sequence seen in the Tangut text:

夫鵠不日浴而白，烏不日黔而黑。

Now the swan does not bathe daily but is white of its own accord; the crow is not painted daily but is black of its own accord.<sup>42</sup>

Although here we only have two clauses, some later texts contain four, which often are a more accurate match for the Tangut text. One of these instances, as already pointed out by Nie Hongyin, is in the commentary to the *Yinfu jing*:

鳥不染而自黑，鶴不浴而自白，蛛不教而成網，燕不招而自來。

The crow is not painted but is black of its own accord; the crane does not bathe but is white of its own accord; the spider is not taught but weaves its web of its own accord; the swallow is not called but arrives of its own accord.

Obviously, this is a better match for the Tangut text, even if there are still minor discrepancies. One of these is that here the clause about the crow precedes that about the crane, whereas in the Tangut text the two clauses are reversed. The reversed clauses may not necessarily reflect the original sequence in the source text because Tangut translators may have sometimes reversed parallel clauses for no apparent reason.<sup>43</sup> Still, if this was true for our clauses, we would also expect the third and fourth clauses reversed. Moreover, in some Chinese texts the clauses follow each other the same way as in the Tangut text. One such example occurs among the explications added by the Yuan dynasty monk Yuanjue 圓覺 (d. u.) to the *Huayan yuanren lun hejie* 華嚴原人論合解 of Zongmi 宗密 (784–841). Among these we find the following segment:

鶴不浴而白，烏不黔而黑。言皆自然也。

The crane does not bathe yet is white; the crow is not painted black yet is black. This refers to everything being the way it is of its own accord.

The use of the word *qian* 黔 (‘to paint black, blacken’) connects this instance with the *Zhuangzi* where we find the same sequence, only the first clause talks about a swan instead of a crane. In either case, the difference between the verbs *qian* and *ran* 染 (‘to paint, dye’) may not be noticeable in the Tangut translation, just as there would be no way of tell whether the source text had *wu* 烏 or *ya* 鴉, both of which mean ‘crow’.<sup>44</sup> Strictly speaking the *Laojun xingtian ji* in the *Poxie juan* commentary also follows the crane-crow order, only it uses the analogy of snow instead of the crane.

Another important part of the story for our comparison is its ending. The Tangut version ends with Confucius fully accepting the teachings of the old man and attaining a form of realization. This ‘punch line’ is completely absent from the ‘Old Fisherman’ chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The sudden epiphany has a clear Buddhist ring to it, and must have been worded this way under the influence of Buddhist literature or some popular religious tradition. In contrast with this, the *Laojun xingtian ji* in the *Poxie juan* commentary does not specifically mention Confucius attaining realization. Instead, when the old man is about to leave, Confucius becomes alarmed and tries to find out who he really is:

孔子言不下有惶，拜曰：「問聖尊姓。」老人曰：「吾是諸神之師，眾生根網。」孔子曰：「莫不是老子大聖人也？」老子曰：「然哉！然哉！」「問聖何方去？」老人曰：「駕一隻舟過函谷關，流沙河裏去，往靈山禮世尊也。」孔子作禮而退。

In his anxiety, Confucius could not utter a word. He bowed and said, ‘May I ask your esteemed surname?’ The old man replied, ‘I am the master of the gods, the network of the [five] sense faculties of sentient beings’. Confucius asked, ‘You must be the great sage Laozi!’ Laozi replied, ‘Indeed, I am!’ ‘May I ask where you will go?’ The old man replied, ‘I will ride a boat across the Hangu Pass and enter the River of Drifting Sands, then proceed to Lingshan (i.e. the Vulture Peak) to pay respect to the Buddha’.<sup>45</sup> Confucius bowed with respect and withdrew.

Even without reference to enlightenment, this part also has clear Buddhist overtones, such as the use of the expression ‘the network of the [five] sense faculties of sentient beings’ 眾生根網, which occurs in the Chinese version of the *Avataṃsaka sūtra*.<sup>46</sup> The last bit of the text seems to bring up the incident known from the *Laozi huahu jing* 老子化胡經 originally composed around AD 300. Although the notion of Laozi leaving the Chinese world behind and taking off in a westward direction originates in his biography in the *Shiji* 史記, the details such as passing through the Hangu Pass and heading expressly to India are traceable to the *Huahu jing*.<sup>47</sup> The somewhat mysterious River of Drifting Sands 流沙河 is also recognizable from the *Huahu jing* where it appears simply as Drifting Sands 流沙 and denotes the great deserts of Chinese Central Asia.

#### 4. An alternate Chinese version

In addition to the version of the story that was incorporated into the commentary of the *Poxie juan*, another variant survives among Qing dynasty court archives related to secret societies. This version was recorded from the words of a certain Liu Zhaokui 劉照魁, a native of Weinan county 渭南縣 (Shaanxi 陝西), who was detained by the authorities and related the story during his trial in 1791. He himself received the story along with several other ones in the 1780s as part of the oral tradition of the Eight Trigrams Teachings (Baguajiao 八卦教) from Liu Shufang 劉書芳, a native of Shan county 單縣 (Shandong 山東), whom he met in Guangxi 廣西.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, the title is not mentioned but the text more or less follows that of the *Laojun xingtian ji* in the commentary to the *Poxie juan*.<sup>49</sup> Although there are also lots of discrepancies between the two versions, there are parts that match word for word, confirming that they ultimately derive from the same source text. Still, the Liu Zhaokui version appears to have been corrupted, perhaps as a result of being related from memory in the process of an interrogation. Therefore parts of it are hard to interpret and at times are simply incomprehensible. A comparison with the parallel version in the *Poxie juan* commentary resolves a number of textual problems.

For example, when talking about what a general does, the *Poxie juan* commentary says, ‘he determines the outcome of battles from the distance of ten thousand *li*’ 決勝千里之外, whereas in the Liu Zhaokui version the same phrase *juesheng* 決勝 (‘to determine the outcome of battles’) occurs as ‘defeat and victory’ (*fusheng* 伏勝), which disrupts the parallelism with the previous clause. Similarly, the phrase ‘to explicate the profound principles of the devices [to lead people to liberation] of the sages of the three time periods’ 說三時聖機奧理 appears in the Liu Zhaokui version as *jiang san’gang aoli zhi shengji* 講三綱奧里之勝紀, which does not lend itself to straightforward interpretation.<sup>50</sup> Although in some cases discrepancies between parallel texts may account for a different agenda and may represent deliberate changes, most of the differences seem to be simply the result of erroneous transmission.<sup>51</sup>

To illustrate the similarities and differences between the two versions, consider the following passage towards the beginning of the story. The reading of the *Poxie juan* version is straightforward and poses no interpretative challenges:<sup>52</sup>

嘆罷，心中悶倦。撫琴一操，只見綠水河中，有一老人，駕一小舟，順水行來，到渡口挽住，孔子見己。令徒訪之，子路到於河邊，向老人施禮。

Having finished sighing, [Confucius] felt melancholic at heart. As he held his zither and began strumming it, he saw that amidst the green-watered river there was an old man riding a small boat, coming downstream. He reached the pier and stopped when Confucius saw him. [Confucius] asked the disciples to go and see him so Zilu went down to the riverside and extended his greetings to the old man.

The narrative chain in the corresponding part of the Liu Zhaokui version is basically the same but there are some differences and at least in one place the syntactical structure seems to have some problems:<sup>53</sup>

夫子悶倦，抚琴中間，見一老人，架一小舟，順水而來。來在渡中，攔船鎖住。夫子途（徒）中（眾）訪知（之）：「子路，你到渭水河邊，見一老人，躬身施禮，口稱：『萬福，老人。』」

The Master felt melancholic at heart, and as he was playing his zither, he saw an old man riding a small boat, coming downstream. When he reached the pier, he held back the boat and stopped. The Master [asked one] from among his disciples to go and see him: 'Zilu! Go down to the bank of the Wei River and when you see an old man, bow and extend your greetings to him, saying, "Salute to you, old man!"'

In this version clarity seems to break down at the point where the Master asks his disciples to go and visit the old man. The phrase 途中訪知 is very problematic and probably stands for 徒眾訪之, which would have been roughly homophonous in the late eighteenth century. Even so, there is a verb missing from the sentence. Moreover, in the following sentence we see the vernacular second person pronoun *ni* 你 as a form of address.<sup>54</sup> Especially problematic is the part where Confucius asks Zilu to go down to the bank of the Wei River, as this river was certainly not in the state of Lu where Confucius was at this time but far to the west, at the cradle of Zhou civilization in modern Shaanxi province. Travelling to the banks of the Wei River would have taken Zilu at least a couple of months, which also means that Confucius could not have seen the old man himself, unless the first half of the story was describing a vision or a dream. At the same time, the reference to the Wei River is not entirely random because it provides an immediate link to another well-known encounter with a sage teacher, namely, the story of King Wen 文王 of Zhou visiting the sage Lü Shang 呂尚 (i.e. Taigong 太公) who at the time was fishing by the Wei River.<sup>55</sup> The parallel is obvious and quite relevant but we are left wondering how it fits the narrative here, as the Wei River is definitely a long way from the spot where Confucius supposedly played his zither.<sup>56</sup>

Some of the discrepancies, however, are not necessarily due to textual corruption but may represent influences from other channels of transmission. For example, in both versions Confucius recites the quatrain commemorating general Zang Wenzhong. Yet the second line of the quatrain (i.e. 'The evening sun sets in the west; the water flows to the east' 夕陽西下水東流) appears in the Liu Zhaokui version as 'Under the Sunset Bridge the water flows to the east' 夕陽橋下水東流. Yet this very reading is attested in other works from the Ming period onward when the quatrain was relatively popular. For example, this variant appears in Feng Menglong's

馮夢龍 (1574–1646) novel *Xingshi hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Eternal Stories to Awaken the World), in which the protagonist meets an old blind man who sings and accompanies himself on an instrument called the ‘fisherman’s drum board’ 漁鼓簡.<sup>57</sup> He also performs the quatrain in question, singing the second line with the Sunset Bridge variant.<sup>58</sup> In view of this and other similar examples, it is clear that the version of this line in the Liu Zhaokui version is not a scribal mistake but goes back to earlier precedents. In contrast with this, the fourth line of the quatrain, which in the *Poxie juan* commentary reads ‘There is only weed and wildflower, the entire land is filled with sorrow’ 野草閑花滿地愁, is completely different in the Liu Zhaokui version: ‘The ancient stories of former worthies remain everywhere through the land’ 先賢古話遍地留. Yet even if this variant does not seem to have other attested occurrences, it is a semantically possible solution which also maintains the rhyme.

In view of the above, we can determine that despite the textual problems of the Liu Zhaokui version and its limited contribution to the interpretation of the *Poxie juan* version, the fact that alternate versions survive demonstrates that the text may not have had a stable version or, even more likely, was predominantly transmitted in oral form. This also means that it is very likely that there were other versions in circulation at the time, a fact amply demonstrated by the Tangut translation which must have been based on yet another version that did not survive in Chinese. Finally, the curious phenomenon that all of the versions of this text survive exclusively among writings related to popular religious sects points at a connection of the text with secret societies. This connection, as well as its oral transmission, may explain why the text fell into oblivion and almost completely disappeared. Naturally, since the Tangut manuscript comes from the early part of the twelfth century, it may stem from a tradition when the text was not yet associated with sectarian movements.

## 5. The platform

We do not know the title of the Liu Zhaokui version but the one that appears in the commentary to the *Poxie juan* is explicitly named *Laojun xingtai ji*. The word *tan* (‘altar; platform’) in the title does not feature prominently in the text itself, appearing only once as part of the compound word *tantai* 壇臺, which denotes the platform Confucius sat on while playing the zither. Indeed, earlier in the text, this platform is simply called *tai* 臺, probably because the meaning of this word was less ambiguous. The Liu Zhaokui version only uses the word *tai*, never *tan*. Nevertheless, title of the *Poxie juan* version includes the word *tan* in its very title, demonstrating its relevance in this context.

Without doubt, the significance of the word in the title is linking it with the tradition that Confucius taught his disciples on an Apricot Platform 杏壇.<sup>59</sup> Although the idea of the platform goes back to the *Zhuangzi*, enquiries into what it actually meant largely remained a philological matter until the early Song period when we can detect a renewed interest in it as part of the cult of Confucius. It is hard to identify the point in time when this tradition emerged but when Kong Daofu 孔道輔 (986–1039), the forty-fifth generation descendant of the Master, rebuilt the Confucius temple in Qufu, he also installed an Apricot Platform there.<sup>60</sup> This information, as well as other references to this tradition, come from the *Dongjia zaji* 東家雜記 (1134) compiled by Kong Chuan 孔傳, the forty-seventh generation descendant of Confucius.<sup>61</sup> Unlike modern

editions of this book, early versions include a picture of Confucius sitting on the Apricot Platform and talking to his disciples (Fig. 3), plus a small note called ‘Explanation to the Apricot Platform’ 杏壇說. The note tells the story how when the Master was leaving Lu through the eastern gates, he saw the Apricot Platform and ascended the stairs, then told his disciples that this was the place where general Zang Wenzhong had sworn his oath of allegiance. Overwhelmed by the sanctity of the place, the Master sang the quatrain cited above from the *Laojun xingtian ji* (i.e. 暑往寒來春復秋...).

Among the early versions of the *Dongjia zaji* that include the image and the note is the earliest extant printed edition of the book, currently kept at the National Library of China in Beijing.<sup>62</sup> Scholars have raised doubts regarding the date of the picture and the note at the beginning of this edition, as the style of characters in the note is different from the rest of the book and in general different from that typically used in Song printed books, possibly because these two pages were added later.<sup>63</sup> That this may have indeed been the case is corroborated by the absence of a description of the Apricot Platform picture in the main text of the *Dongjia zaji*.<sup>64</sup> The early history of the *Dongjia zaji* can be partly reconstructed on the basis of comments made by book collectors, such as Qian Zeng 錢曾 (1629–1701), who wrote in his *Dushu minqiu ji* 讀書敏求記 that in the winter of 1682 he had borrowed from a friend a Song edition of the book, and made a handwritten copy of it. This edition had a picture of the Apricot Platform with the note called ‘Explanation to the Apricot Platform’.<sup>65</sup>

Over a century later, the well-known book collector Huang Pilie 黃丕烈 (1763–1825) mentioned seeing an edition with the Apricot Platform picture and the accompanying note, just like the one described by Qian Zeng. But he also hastened to add that the picture and the note looked like later additions and were probably not the work of Kong Chuan.<sup>66</sup> It seems logical, however, that if at a later point in time (e.g. the Yuan period) someone supplemented his copy of a Song edition with material that was not originally in it, he would have only changed that single copy, leaving other surviving copies of the same edition unchanged. This observation suggests several possibilities. The first is that both Qian Zeng and Huang Pilie were looking at the same copy of the *Dongjia zaji*, which is also the one currently in the Rare Books collection of the National Library of China. The second is that the newly added pages were technically not new but were replenishing pages that had originally been part of the book but became damaged or lost in the particular copy seen by Huang Pilie. This scenario seems to be corroborated by the fact that Huang Pilie made note of the discrepancy but a century earlier Qian Zeng did not.

The *Dongjia zaji* published in the *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 also includes the picture and the note. This version is based on the Qing-dynasty collectanea *Linlang mishi congshu* 琳琅秘室叢書 (1853) assembled by Hu Ting 胡珽 (1822–1861), who supposedly based the *Dongjia zaji* on a manuscript traced from a Song version. The manuscript came from the Airi jinglu 愛日精廬 collection of Zhang Jinwu 張金吾 (1787–1829).<sup>67</sup> The picture of the Apricot Platform in this version is noticeably different from that at the beginning of the Song edition in the National Library of China. Although the overall composition is analogous, individual details such as the faces of Confucius and the disciples, the leaves of the apricot tree and the grass show marked differences. But the Rare Books Department of the National Central Library in Taipei contains an undated manuscript of the *Dongjia zaji*, which also has the Apricot Platform picture and note. This manuscript was originally in the Metropolitan Library in Beijing but was shipped

during WWII to the Library of Congress in Washington DC for safekeeping. Before the collection was ‘returned’ to Taiwan, microfilms were made and these can now be consulted at various libraries around the world.<sup>68</sup> The picture of the Apricot Platform in this manuscript is very similar, if not entirely identical, to the one in the *Linlang mishu congshu*. People’s faces, the tree leaves and the grass are all alike and the discrepancies might simply be caused by both versions having been drawn by hand. Therefore, these two images may go back to the same source and this source, in turn, may be the same copy of the Song edition which included the added picture and note.

But what is more important from the point of view of the current paper is that early editions of the *Dongjia zaji* may have indeed contained the picture and the note called ‘Explanation to the Apricot Platform’ 杏壇說, demonstrating that the cult of the Apricot Platform existed already in the 1130s. Additional evidence for this comes from a Song-dynasty stone engraving excavated in the 1980s and now kept in the Hengxian Museum 橫縣博物館, Guangxi province. This engraving was commissioned in 1154, not long after the Song court’s move to the south, by the Assistant Department Magistrate (*zhoupan* 州判) He Xianjue 何先覺 (*jinshi* 1128), and was allegedly based on Gan Yan’s 甘彥 (d.u.) copy of a painting created by the Tang painter Wu Daozi. The eighteenth-century Qing dynasty gazetteer *Hengzhou zhi* 橫州志 (1746) records that in 1155 He Xianjue erected two stones with pictures of Confucius at the local academy, and the Apricot Platform image was probably one of these.<sup>69</sup> The stone has a caption identifying the scene as the ‘Picture of the Master at the Apricot Platform’ (*Fuzi xingtian tu* 夫子杏壇圖), although the image itself has no apricot branches in the background and the platform is what is usually called a ‘small table’ (*ji* 几 or *pingji* 憑几). Indeed, the composition is strikingly similar to the image of Confucius seated with ten disciples in the Temple of Confucius, dated 1095.<sup>70</sup> The lack of visual elements associated with the Apricot Platform scene (i.e. apricot tree and platform) suggests that something is amiss here and the picture and the text do not really belong together. Still, the caption in itself attests to the significance of the theme of the Master at the Apricot Platform in the 1150s.<sup>71</sup> These sources are, of course, very close in time to the date in the colophon of the Tangut manuscript (i.e. 1122), which is unlikely to be a coincidence.<sup>72</sup>

A similar image with the caption ‘Picture of the Master at the Apricot Platform’ 夫子杏壇之圖 is known from the *Shilin guangji* 事林廣記 (Fig. 4), an encyclopaedia compiled during the Yuan period.<sup>73</sup> The caption itself—along with that on the Hengxian Museum engraving—is of importance because it establishes a direct link with the tradition which produced the Tangut manuscript. While the *Shilin guangji* picture is close to that at the beginning of the Song copy of the *Dongjia zaji*, there are also immediately noticeable differences, such as the colour of Confucius’s beard or the way the tree is depicted. Moreover, in the *Shilin guangji* the picture is by itself, without the note, and is used as an illustration to a section devoted to zither music. The link of this theme with music is also evidenced in the Yuan dynasty storytelling book called *Sanguozhi pinghua* 三國志平話 (1321–1323), where at one point the protagonist Zhou Yu 周瑜 is described as preparing to play the ‘Master at the Apricot Platform’ (*fuzi xingtian* 夫子杏壇) tune on the zither.<sup>74</sup> The quatrain, and no doubt the music, survived into later times and transmitted literature includes many references to the Apricot Platform as a musical tune. For example, the Ming dynasty encyclopaedia *Shantang sikao* 山堂肆考, compiled in 1595, records the quatrain—without the illustration—and cites the *Dongjia zaji* as a source.<sup>75</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

This article examined the background of the Tangut manuscript *Gor no ywa wa la* 筵羴羴羴羴, dated by a colophon to 1122. The text is known in modern scholarship by its reconstructed Chinese title *Kongzi hetan ji*, which is primarily based on the interpretation of the title by Russian scholars who translated it into Russian as *Records about the Altar of Confucius's Conciliation* (Nevskij) or *Record at the Altar about Confucius's Conciliation* (Kychanov). Most recently, Nie has suggested that the word 羴 *ywa* in the title probably does not mean 'conciliation' but 'playing on a musical instrument', thus the title should be interpreted in reference to the altar or platform where Confucius had once played music. The findings presented in this paper, however, connect the manuscript with the tradition of Confucius at the Apricot Platform and parallel versions of the text in Chinese. In view of these links, I am of the opinion that the Tangut manuscript's title should be interpreted as *Record of the Master at the Apricot Platform*, presumably based on a Chinese original called *Fuzi xingtān jì* 夫子杏壇記.

Of major significance for the study of the Tangut manuscript is the identification of a Chinese text with very similar content. I was able to locate two versions of this text, one in the commentary to the *Poxie juan* (i.e. *Poxie juan* version) and the other among the Qing dynasty court archives related to the secret societies (i.e. Liu Zhaokui version). The first of these was explicitly titled *Laojun xingtān jì* 老君行壇記 (Record of the Elderly Lord's Mobile Altar) but in view of its obvious connection with the 'Old Fisherman' chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where the same platform is called Apricot Platform, it is reasonable to suppose that the word *xing* 行 ('to go; mobile') is a phonetic loan for the nearly homophonous word *xing* 杏 ('apricot'). Considering the predominantly oral transmission of similar religious texts, such a phonetic substitution is perfectly in accord with the types of mistakes and variants commonly seen in such texts. Accordingly, I suspect that the original title of this text was *Laojun xingtān jì* 老君杏壇記 (Record of the Elderly Lord at the Apricot Platform).

The second version of the this text from the case files of Liu Zhaokui lacks a title but is clearly related to the *Poxie juan* version, often matching it word for word. Yet the text of this version is problematic and in some parts has been rendered incomprehensible. Nevertheless, it is a crucial textual witness and in places contains variant readings of certain phrases, as well as bits of text absent from the *Poxie juan* version. More importantly, however, it provides evidence for the popularity and wide distribution of the text, which survived in at least three different sources: (i) *Poxie juan* version; (ii) Liu Zhaokui version; (iii) the Tangut manuscript. Even though the Tangut text cannot be fully aligned with the Chinese, they share the basic narrative structure, including a number of specific motifs, and in general present the same types of arguments that favour withdrawal from the world over the Confucian ideal of engaging in social and political affairs. These considerations suggest that the Tangut text was based on a source text that was similar, if not identical, to the two surviving Chinese sources. Yet it is important to keep in mind that the title of the *Laojun xingtān jì* features the Elderly Lord, rather than the Master (i.e. Confucius) seen in the title of the Tangut manuscript.

Another vital piece of the puzzle is the tradition of depicting Confucius at the Apricot Platform, which appears around the end of the eleventh century when Kong Daofu erects an Apricot

Platform in Qufu. Other references to this tradition come from the first half of the twelfth century. This time frame is more or less contemporaneous with the Tangut manuscript and possibly with the emergence of the narrative structure presented in the *Laojun xingtan ji*. The texts also connect with the pictures through the quatrain performed by Confucius, which appears in the ‘Explanation to the Apricot Platform’ that accompanies the picture in early editions of the *Dongjia zaji*. Unfortunately, the first pages of the Tangut manuscript are damaged and thus we do not have the corresponding part but it is probable that the missing pages included the quatrain. Interestingly, the *Laojun xingtan ji* and the Tangut manuscript have quite a bit of additional content that is not part of the Qufu-based tradition of the Confucius at the Apricot Platform. In particular, there are a number of motifs and phrases that derive from Buddhist and Daoist sources, and an examination of these may shed additional light on the sources of the *Laojun xingtan ji* and the development of the religious tradition associated with this text.

With regards to the dating of the Chinese source text behind the Tangut manuscript, based on the similarity between the relevant part of the *Yinfu jing* commentary with the Tangut text, Nie proposed that the Chinese original used for the Tangut translation dated sometime around or after the compilation of the *Yinfu jing* commentary, i.e. the mid-eighth century. The connections with the tradition of the Apricot Platform uncovered in this paper enable us to establish the date at the late eleventh or early twelfth century as the time of its composition. Accordingly, the Tangut translation would have been done from a Chinese text that was relatively recent and, at the same time, had a wide circulation—either orally or in textual form—in northern China.

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Fig. 1. The last page of the Tangut manuscript, showing the title (third line from the right) and the colophon. (Source: Kychanov, *Zapis' u altarja*, 149.)

論曰。這點光明。乃天地同根。萬物一體。就是人人本性。說話當人。與太虛空裡外一體。風雲雪雨同顯神通。恒沙諸佛。一相無二。

頌曰

光明寂照滿恒沙

凡聖含靈是我家

一念不生全體現

六根纔動被雲遮

斷除煩惱重增病

取向真如亦是邪

隨順世緣無罣碍

涅槃生死等空花

老君行壇記覽集般若品云。

破邪 卷四 品第二十二

論云。昔者周公末帝。孔子降。領徒衆雲遊天下。到潞陽泗水縣。東有一臺。上高數丈。臺上有硯。碑上寫藏文仲。祭天之臺。孔子曰。暑往寒來。春復秋。夕陽西下水東流。將軍戰馬。今何在。野草開花滿地愁。嘆罷。心中悶倦。撫琴一操。見綠水河中。有一老人。駕一小舟。順水行來。到渡口。挽住孔子。見已。令徒訪之。子路到於河邊。向老人施禮。老人還禮。萬福將軍。子路怒曰。吾乃儒士。何爲將軍。老人曰。呼將軍者。不低。夫將軍坐下。運籌幃幄之中。決勝千里之外。講六韜三畧。

Fig. 2. A page from the *Kaixin fayao* edition of the *Poxie juan*, showing a longer excerpt from the *Laojun xingtian ji* in the commentary. (Source: *Wubu liuce*, 240.)



Fig. 3. The Master's Apricot Platform (*Dongjia zaji*, 15).



Fig. 4. Picture of the Master's Apricot Platform. (Source: *Shilin guangji*, v. 5, 90.)

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<sup>2</sup> Kychanov, 'The Altar Record' and Kychanov, *Zapis' u altarja*.

<sup>3</sup> Kychanov, *Zapis' u altarja*; Keqianuofu & Nie, *Xixiawen 'Kongzi hetan ji'*.

<sup>4</sup> Nie, 'Kongzi hetan ji de Xixia yiben', 93.

<sup>5</sup> Nevskij *Tangutskaia Filologija*, v. 1, 87.

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<sup>6</sup> Kychanov, ‘The Altar Record’, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the title of the Russian paper was “A Tangut apocryph about the meeting of Confucius with Laozi,” which thereby managed to draw a considerably wider readership than the narrow group of Tangut specialists. See Kychanov, ‘Tangutskij apokrif’.

<sup>8</sup> Kychanov, *Zapis’ u altarja*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> Keqianufu & Nie, *Xixiawen ‘Kongzi hetan ji’*.

<sup>11</sup> As far as I can see, this Chinese title was first used in a translation of one of Nevskij’s articles; see Nielishan, ‘Xixia wenzi yu Xixia wenxian’, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Nie, ‘*Kongzi hetan ji de Xixia yiben*’, 90–92.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Lau, *The Analects*, 185–187. For the sake of consistency, I have converted the transcription of Chinese names to pinyin.

<sup>17</sup> The same episode, without Zilu’s comments at the end, is briefly recounted in the genealogy of the Kong family in the *Shiji* 史記 (47, 1929).

<sup>18</sup> Keqianufu & Nie, *Xixiawen ‘Kongzi hetan ji’*, 62–63.

<sup>19</sup> In translating the titles of the books in the *Wubu liuce*, I am following the translations used in ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology*; ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture*; and ter Haar, ‘Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader’.

<sup>20</sup> The background and history of Wuweijiao is introduced in ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture*, 35–46.

<sup>21</sup> For a study of the composition of the *Wubu liuce* and its patterns in quotations from earlier literature, see ter Haar, ‘Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader’.

<sup>22</sup> *Wubu liuce*, 240. Unless stated otherwise, quotes from the *Wubu liuce* presented here are based on the *Kaixin fayao* edition.

<sup>23</sup> Randall Nadeau (*Popular Sectarianism*, 248) suggests that it is an apocryphal Daoist text inspired by a couple of passages in the *Lunyu*.

<sup>24</sup> Ter Haar, ‘Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader’, 27. Nadeau (*Popular Sectarianism*, 255n71) suggests that the text may be referencing the *Laojun xingtian ji* from the “Bore” chapter of the *Dazang yilanji*. I am more inclined to think that the mention of the “Bore” chapter is simply an interpolation from the following quote which does come from that chapter of the *Dazang yilanji*.

<sup>25</sup> The edition of the *Poxie juan* in the *Zhonghua zhenben baojuan* 中華珍本寶卷 only references the title of the *Laojun xingtian ji* without the problematic chapter title, which may be an indication that in this place this edition preserves a more accurate reading. See Ma, *Zhonghua zhenben baojuan*, v. 2, 453.

<sup>26</sup> For a study of Apricot Platform, see Peng 1995; this study also points out that the earliest occurrence of this term is in the *Zhuangzi*.

<sup>27</sup> *Zhuangzi*, 1023.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> The Middle Chinese pronunciations are cited from the Baxter-Sagart Old Chinese Reconstruction, version 1.1 (20 September 2014), url: <http://ocbaxtersagart.lsa.umich.edu/BaxterSagartOCbyMandarinMC2014-09-20.pdf>; last accessed 29 August 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Luo may have quoted the *Laojun xingtian ji* from an anthology, rather than from an actual copy of the book he had at his disposal. According to ter Haar (‘Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader’), there is a clear distinction between the way the *Wubu liuce* quotes texts, citing some of them dozens of times and others only once or twice. These latter quotes may have been cited from anthologies or simply from memory, rather than directly from the sources named. Especially the idea of quoting from memory fits well with the phonetic nature of mistakes.

<sup>31</sup> Nevskij, *Tangutskaja Filologija*, v. 1, 87.

<sup>32</sup> The phrase *šjij ywa* 𐰇𐰣𐰚 (“sue for peace”) appears in the Tangut *Sunzi* several times. In the *Leilin*, we find the expression *šjij da ywa* 𐰇𐰣𐰚𐰇 (“ask for peaceful matters”).

<sup>33</sup> Kychanov, *Slovar’*, 276, #1640. The dictionary explains Tangut words in three languages, yet in the case of this word it is only the Russian text that records the meaning “to play on the zither.” One is inclined to think that this specific meaning is actually based on the interpretation of the title of the Tangut manuscript in question, except that this was not how Kychanov himself interpreted the title.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the Tangut-Chinese dictionary *Timely Pearl in the Palm* (Kwanten, *The Timely Pearl*).

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<sup>35</sup> Shi et al., *Wenhai yanjiu*, 573.

<sup>36</sup> I am grateful to Andrew West who realized how we may arrive from the Chinese character 杏 to the character in the Tangut title. He suggested that the character 杏 may have been corrupted into 香 (a variant of 和) in a Chinese edition; then written as 和 in another Chinese edition; and then faithfully translated into Tangut.

<sup>37</sup> This edition is included in vol. 2 of the *Ming-Qing minjian zongjiao jingjuan wenxian* 明清民間宗教經卷文獻; see *Wubu liuce*, 113–258. A manuscript version of the *Poxie juan* is also included in the same volume but this comes with a different commentary which is shorter and does not quote the *Laojun xingtian ji* (ibid, 676).

<sup>38</sup> This first line is closely reminiscent of lines 5–6 of the *Qianziwen* 千字文, which reads “winters and summers alternate, in the autumn they harvest [the grains] and in the winter they store them” 寒來暑往，秋收冬藏。

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>40</sup> Kychanov, *Zapis' u altarja*, 44–45. Kychanov's translation is of course into Russian, which I include here in my own English rendition. Thus unless stated otherwise, the English translation presented here essentially follows Kychanov's interpretation of the Tangut text.

<sup>41</sup> Kychanov, *Zapis' u altarja*, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, in a place where the *Peiwen yunfu* 佩文韻府 (1711) quotes the *Zhuangzi*, this line appears slightly differently, in a way that matches the Tangut version better: “The swan does not bathe yet is white, the crow is not blacked yet is black” 鵠不浴而白，烏不黔而黑. Presumably the *Peiwen yunfu* relies here on an edition where this sentence is appeared in this way.

<sup>43</sup> Nie, ‘*Yijian zhi Qidan songshi*’ mentions this phenomenon while analyzing the way Chinese poetry was read by the Khitans who apparently sometimes also reversed parallel clauses. The same phenomenon is also discussed in Peng, ‘*Xiayi Hanji*’.

<sup>44</sup> A variant that appears in the *Songshan yezhu chanshi yulu* 嵩山野竹禪師語錄 is *ya bu nie er qian* 雅不涅而黔, in which the word *nie* 涅 is used as the verb “to paint black” and *qian* 黔 is used in place of *hei* 黑. Once again, none of these differences would be noticeable in a translation

<sup>45</sup> Lingshan more commonly appears as Lingjiushan 靈鷲山, and it refers to the place in India where the historic Buddha was believed to have delivered several of his sermons.

<sup>46</sup> Still, this expression does not make sense here, especially in parallel with the previous phrase about being the master of the gods. Therefore it is likely that the words *zhongsheng genwang* 眾生根網 are the result of textual corruption.

<sup>47</sup> The relevant part in Laozi's biography is in *Shiji* 63, 2141.

<sup>48</sup> Yu, *Ming Qing Bailianjiao*, 252–253. An English translation of Liu Zhaokui's testimony of 1971 is available in Hegel, *True Crimes*, 177–183. See also de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution*, 347 and Naquin, ‘Connections between Rebellions’, 355–56.

<sup>49</sup> For the full text of this version, see Yu, *Ming Qing Bailianjiao*, 253–255. Since the publication of this book, the archives of the Qing court have been made available in a 40-volume collection (Liu, *Qingting chaban*), and v. 18 seems to include a transcription of the same file with the story discussed here. Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult this edition before the submission of this paper.

<sup>50</sup> Christoph Anderl suggests to read this alternative wording as “to lecture on the victorious (supreme) records of the subtle principles (>奧理) of the eminent monks (abbots).” The translation of *san'gang* 三綱 is based on the *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten* 佛書解說大辭典 (vol.3: 395c-d) which explains the term as referring to the leading officers of a monastery, i.e. *shangzuo* 上座, *sizhu* 寺主 and *duweina* 都維那.

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, the two examples cited here do not seem to be mistakes caused by oral transmission, especially since there are no instances of phonetic errors in them. Instead, they appear to be written mistakes, perhaps as a result of having been put down on paper by Liu Zhaokui in the process of interrogation. Further mistakes could have been introduced by court personnel copying material the content of which was unfamiliar for them. Nevertheless, in other parts of the text, including the section below, there are also mistakes of phonetic nature. In either case, a thorough analysis of such mistakes may shed some light on the ways such texts were received and transmitted.

<sup>52</sup> *Poxie juan*, 240.

<sup>53</sup> Yu, *Ming Qing Bailianjiao*, 253. I have slightly changed the punctuation of the text in order to reflect my own understanding of the narrative. I have also added, based on phonetic similarities, suggested substitutions for some characters as a means to improve the legibility of the text.

<sup>54</sup> To be fair, in some places the *Poxie juan* version also uses vernacular forms. For example, phrases such as *xiang zheli* 向這裡 (“to here”) and *yan buxia* 言不下 (“could not continue speaking”) clearly belong to the realm of

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spoken language. This, however, is not unusual for the books in the *Wubu liuce* part of which was written in colloquial Chinese; see ter Haar, ‘Patriarch Luo as a Writer and Reader’.

<sup>55</sup> This story survives, among other places, in the *Liutao*, 2–4.

<sup>56</sup> The story of Confucius meeting the old fisherman (*Lunyu*, *Zhuangzi*) probably has a genuine genetic connection with the earlier story of King Wen meeting Lü Wang on the banks of the Wei River (*Liutao*). The potential affinity between these two famous legends, however, is not immediately relevant to the reliability of the Liu Zhaokui version.

<sup>57</sup> *Xingshi hengyan*, 519. An English translation of the novel has recently come out as Feng, *Stories to Awaken the World*. For the encounter with the old blind man, see *ibid.*, 899–902. In the novel, we are far removed from the original plot but there are several motifs which are preserved: (i) the protagonist meets an old man; (ii) the same quatrain is sung, only here this is done by the old man; (iii) a faint reference to a fisherman in the name of the musical instrument; (iv) a connection with the *Zhuangzi*, as in the poem the old man immediately after singing the quatrain begins to perform the story of Zhuangzi’s discussion with a skeleton. In the novel, the narrative is placed in the Tang period but the story of the old blind man obviously comes from the Song, or even the Ming, period; on this point, see Nagasawa, *Nagasawa Kikuya chosakushū*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> This variant is also attested in modern ritual texts from Anhui and other provinces in southern China, e.g. Wang, *Anhui Chizhou Dongzhisucun Gaoqiang*, 58 and Wang, *Anhui Chizhou Qingyangqiang*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> A summary of the iconographic aspects of Confucius teaching his disciples by the Apricot Platform is available in Murray, ‘Confucian Iconography’, 822–827.

<sup>60</sup> *Dongjia zaji*, 1022.

<sup>61</sup> Although Kong Chuan’s preface to the *Dongjia zaji* dates from 1134, it is possible that he had compiled the book a decade earlier; see Murray, ‘Descendants and Portraits of Confucius’, 5.

<sup>62</sup> This edition was recently published in facsimile format in the 200-volume collection *Quzhou wenxian jicheng* 衢州文献集成; see *Dongjia zaji*.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Peng, ‘Xingtian kao’, 177.

<sup>64</sup> Murray, ‘Descendants and Portraits of Confucius’, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Qian & Ding, *Dushu minqiu ji*, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Huang, *Shiliju cangshu*, 26.

<sup>67</sup> *Congshu jicheng chubian* 3315.

<sup>68</sup> See Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, *Guoli zhongyang tushuguan*, 44. I have been able to consult a microfilm of this manuscript at the University Library at Cambridge, and I am grateful to Charles Aylmer for alerting me to the existence of this source.

<sup>69</sup> *Hengzhou zhi*, 118. This image is also recorded in the epigraphic collection compiled by the Qing scholar Xie Qikun 謝啓昆 (1737–1802) in 1801; see *Yuexi jinshi lüe*, 253a. See also Huang, ‘Hengxian chutu’, 213 and Mei, ‘Guangxi Kongmiao’, 56.

<sup>70</sup> See Murray, ‘Heirloom and Exemplar’, 246.

<sup>71</sup> I hasten to add that there this does not resolve the question whether the Song edition of the *Dongjia zaji* originally included the Apricot Platform picture. The Hengzhou picture merely opens up this possibility.

<sup>72</sup> Perhaps it is also not entirely random that the stone engraving comes from Guangxi, which is also the place where the Liu Zhaokui version of text was transmitted as part of the teachings of the Eight Trigrams sect. A counter-argument to this would be that both Liu Zhaokui and his master Liu Shufang were originally from the north, which is also where the Eight Trigram Teachings were most influential; see Tiedemann, ‘Conversion Patterns’, 116n25.

<sup>73</sup> *Shilin guangji*, “Wenyi lei” 文藝類. See Murray, ‘Confucian Iconography’, 825.

<sup>74</sup> *Sanguozhi pinghua*, 106.

<sup>75</sup> *Shantang sikao* 162.