ABSTRACT

This is a comparative study of the historical transformation of five different versions of the Taoist text *Laozi*: the Bamboo versions, the Silk versions, the Fu Yi’s version, the Heshang Gong’s version, and the Wang Bi’s version. This thesis combines micro-computer analysis of their textual similarities and differences with an explanation of the historical development of the *Laozi* text.

It argues that there is a close interrelationship in terms of the chapter sequence, sentence structure, and word difference among the five versions, however, there is no substantial change in the content of *Laozi*, while the Bamboo versions are similar to the Silk versions, and the latter is much closer to the Wang Bi’s version. The Fu Yi’s version is a transitional one in between the earlier Bamboo and Silk versions and the Heshang Gong’s and Wang Bi’s versions which came after them. The thesis concludes with a theoretical reflection on the methodology of *Laozi* studies.