

列子

Introduction

Roger T. Ames

The *Liezi* as a text seems almost as elusive as Liezi the historical person. The *Liezi* is associated with perhaps the most mystical of all the Daoist adepts who surfaces here and there in the philosophical literature only to ride elsewhere on the winds. What *Liezi* was originally as a text we do not know, but as it has been received, it is a compendium of hyperbolic anecdotes, seemingly paradoxical aphorisms, and curious parables, an anthology that ranges as far and as wide as the winds blow, that loses its reader in a wild world of unfathomable change and indeterminacy, and that quite literally makes a great deal out of nothing. Like most of the Daoist texts, the *Liezi* is normative, recommending a way of being in this world that presumably enables the willing adept to make the most of the human experience.

This present volume is a long-overdue collection of seminal essays on this most curious *Liezi*, one of the most understudied texts in the classical Chinese corpus. Rather than being read for what it is, *Liezi* has often been disrespected if not dismissed in the historical scholarship because of what it is not. In sum, then, this present volume contests this unfortunate situation. It begins from the recognition that most if not all of the classical Chinese philosophical texts are suspicious in their origins and as such, are other than what they purport to be. Setting aside the problem of “authenticity” as an only marginally relevant question, this set of essays provides a multidimensional argument for the historical, literary, and philosophical importance of this document by an

assembly of some of our finest interpreters of the classical Chinese literature. These scholars certainly embrace the now seemingly incontrovertible evidence against the traditional pre-Qin dating of this text, but on other more compelling grounds, they also insist on reevaluating and indeed reinstating its philosophical and historical worth.

It is entirely appropriate that the opening section of this anthology—a critical discussion of the *Liezi* as a text—begin with a series of essays that engage and make use of Angus Graham’s the “Date and Composition of the *Lieh-Tzu* [*Liezi*].” Although not included in this volume, Graham’s essay is seminal, and is appropriately rehearsed here to remind us of the ground on which these new essays are constructed. Graham’s essay opens by reporting on the ambivalence that Western and Japanese sinologists have had to the unwavering opinion of their Chinese counterparts that the *Liezi* is a spurious document (*weishu* 偽書) dating from the Wei-Jin period in the late fourth century CE. Indeed, it was this groundbreaking essay of Graham’s that effectively turned the tide on this resistance, and brought world sinology into firm agreement that the present *Liezi* far from being that eight-chapter text listed in a Han dynasty bibliography is in fact a later and a most deliberate forgery.

Graham’s essay is comprehensive. He provides a list of passages from the *Liezi* that overlap with other Han and pre-Han texts that in sum run to approximately one quarter of the entire document. Loading the charge of his arguments by invoking various forms of grammatical evidence and textual devices, Graham demonstrates persuasively that by and large, this portion of the *Liezi* as we have it today was compiled by copying directly from earlier sources. Having thus retained the grammatical features of these original documents, this borrowed portion of the text has all the markings of an earlier age. As argued further in the essay by Ronnie Littlejohn below, what complicates the picture somewhat is that where *Liezi* copies from the *Zhuangzi* as its major source, it is a different, fuller, and perhaps better redaction of the *Zhuangzi* than we have available to us today. Again, another interesting observation that Graham makes with respect to the origins of this text is that the compilers of the *Liezi* seem to have scoured the early corpus for any reference to the person Liezi, and to have included all of these passages herein regardless of their length, importance, or overall consistency.

Having explained the nature and the origins of the copied portions of the *Liezi*, Graham then turns to a detailed linguistic analysis of the remaining three quarters of the text, applying the best of our current understanding of the evolution of classical Chinese grammatical patterns and usages. Demonstrating that the language of this substantial portion of the *Liezi* is largely homogeneous, this philological evidence can then be added to other anachronistic historical and literary allusions to claim fairly that this larger portion of the text is of a fourth-century Wei-Jin period vintage. Such then are Graham's conclusions.

Tim Barrett in his contribution to this anthology provides us with a history of how the *Liezi* has been read across the centuries. "Reading the *Liezi*: The First Thousand Years" carries us back to the earlier days of the *Liezi* when its readers would be confronted with a very different, much more complex experience. Each passage of this syncretic work would certainly invoke in a literate reader intricate allusions to other familiar works on their library shelves. But further, assumed by its reader to be a transmitted original in the tradition of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, the lines of the *Liezi* themselves became increasingly honeycombed by a persistent yet always evolving commentarial tradition that sought to authorize the fluid intellectual, social, and political machinations of the times. Barrett locates the widespread readings of this increasingly nested Daoist text within the changing material, commentarial, and intellectual culture of early and middle China. He registers the contributions made by an invested company of literati and bibliographers who each in his own unique way sought to perpetuate the aggregating legacy of a living *Liezi*. Indeed, it is this much "appreciated" *Liezi* that has been bequeathed to us today for our own further interrogation and enjoyment.

In "The *Liezi*'s Use of the Lost *Zhuangzi*," Ronnie Littlejohn continues Barrett's narrative in rehearsing the complex textual history of the *Liezi*, and in so doing, brings new light to the notion of textual "overlap" by focusing on a possible relationship between the received *Liezi* and the lost passages from a much longer *Zhuangzi*. This no longer extant, fifty-two chapter version of the *Zhuangzi* was edited into its shorter, received form by Guo Xiang (d. 312). Taking chapter 2 of the *Liezi* as his case in point, Littlejohn provides the reader with one sample of the nine passages that overlap between the *Liezi* and the existing *Zhuangzi*, showing

the remarkable degree of correspondence between these two texts. Building on this evidence, the sleuthing Littlejohn is able to demonstrate persuasively that beyond the identifiable *Liezi* “overlap” we are able to piece together an additional substantial portion of text that probably belongs to the unexpurgated *Zhuangzi*. What distinguishes this “recovered” text and what might well have been Guo Xiang’s rationale in deleting it from his edited thirty-three chapter version of the *Zhuangzi* is the persistent theme of extraordinary powers owned by the Daoist masters. Reflexively, having discovered that Guo Xiang in his editorial work has “rationalized” this seminal Daoist source in some discernible way, Littlejohn on this basis encourages a speculative reassessment of our own tradition. That is, we might be prompted to reconsider the possibility of rehabilitating lost “embarrassing” dimensions of some of our early Greek philosophers. Littlejohn’s detective work is not only enabling in achieving a more nuanced reading of the *Liezi* text itself, but further underscores the indelible worth of a document that has often been deprecated as a “spurious” work.

In the next essay, May Sim asks the question “Is the *Liezi* an Encheiridion?”—that is, is it a manual on how to live the good life? Using both Epictetus and the *Liezi*, Sim finds some compelling similarities between the Stoics and the *Liezi*’s Daoism on how to think about living well. Both of them insist that there are large aspects of the human experience over which we exercise little or no control, and yet at the same time, neither of them recommends passivity or withdrawal. On Sim’s reading, both *Liezi* and Stoicism assume that the conditions of our lives are predetermined and that there is no way for us to change the world around us. Where they differ is that Stoicism promises us freedom, happiness, and tranquility if we comport ourselves according to the ordering of the world as it has been decreed by the gods—an ordering that is recommended to us as the best of all worlds by virtue of its origins in the best judgments of the gods. For the Stoics, the light of reason illumines a way for us because it is consonant with the rational order of the universe. *Liezi* on the other hand offers no such succor in following the indeterminate primordial simplicity, or *dao*, which is itself a mixture of perceptible order and inescapable chaos. Indeed, the *dao* is itself the alternation between joy and sorrow, life and death, and our best path is to achieve a kind of genuine knowledge of the process by resisting distinctions such as outer and inner, self

and world, pleasure and pain. Indeed the sage through a comprehensive knowledge of the primordial indeterminate “nothing” is able to know everything and to achieve a balance and harmony—a virtuosic posture of *wuwei*—that allows for productive transactions with everything that constitutes the world of experience. Although there are commonalities between *Liezi*’s Daoism and Stoicism, the differences are substantial and reflect fundamentally different ways of living in the world. While Stoicism provides us with Epictetus’s *Encheiridion*, the vagaries and paradoxes of Daoism will not accommodate such a rationalization of the good life.

John Berthrong thinks through what “process” might mean cosmologically in his essay, “Torches of Chaos and Doubt: Themes of Process and Transformations in the *Liezi* 列子.” He explores the signature themes of generativity, transformation, growth, and the spontaneous emergence of novelty in the early Daoist cosmology that is much in evidence in the *Liezi*. Locating the *Liezi* historically as it is being transported on the road to the south in the troubled times of early-fourth-century Wei-Jin China, he argues that the actual survival and subsequent influence of this eclectic text is an object lesson in its own message: that is, the pursuit of harmony amid chaos, and the achievement of a productive spontaneity in the midst of ceaseless flux. Building upon the insights of our best sinologists, Berthrong searches the *Liezi* itself to make explicit the particular features of the Daoist process cosmology, summoning persistent Zhuangzian expressions of ceaseless change as made explicit in the vocabulary of “generativity” (*sheng* 生), “transformation” (*hua* 化), “reform” (*gai* 改), “propensity” (*shi* 勢), “alternations of shape” (*bian* 變), “primal change” (*yi* 易), “spontaneity” (*ziran* 自然), and implicated in the very notion of *qi* 氣 itself. Berthrong allows the text to speak for itself in his explication of a montage of passages that are dedicated to the theme of process, a sensibility that is sedimented into an extraordinary range of its images and metaphors such as water, the echo, the mirror, the infinite, and so on. In thus making these grounding cosmological assumptions explicit, Berthrong is able to provide the reader with the interpretive context necessary to take the *Liezi* on its own terms.

In Thomas Michael’s contribution to this volume, he explores the intricacies of early Chinese cosmology and thus follows Berthrong in attempting to provide a broad context for a nuanced reading of the *Liezi*. Beginning from the Western philosophical and religious

narrative, Michael surveys the importance of the notions of “God” and “Truth” as foundational concepts that have had a defining force on setting both the cultural boundary of the Western narrative and its frontier, too. In so doing, “God” and “Truth” have provided both “closure” and “challenge” to the evolving human experience. By way of contrast, in early China, it was the protean notion of *dao* as first consolidated in the seminal works of Confucianism and Daoism—the *Analects* and the *Daodejing* respectively—that became the foundational concept for the growth of Chinese culture. The reference to *dao* in these early works ranges from cultural to cosmogonic significance—from *dao* as a specific way of thinking and living in the world to *dao* as a primordial source of all that is. In the absence of any strict sense of transcendence and the dualism such transcendence entails, the early Han sources were able to negotiate the gap between these two different meanings of *dao* and establish them on a “this-worldly” continuum. Although we must not elide the significant differences between the notions of *dao* and *God*, we can still allow that *dao* served the early Daoist tradition as both closure and challenge, as both a specific image of the divine source of things, and as something bottomless and ineffable that challenges the limits of human thought. Although it has been resolved that the *Liezi* is a work of a much later vintage, Michael argues persuasively that broadly speaking, and particularly in its various allusions to “*tai* 太” cosmogony and the cosmogonic *dao*, this composite text is a more genuine expression of ideas found in the seminal Daoist texts than the interpretations offered by the later commentators such as Wang Bi, Heshanggong, and Guo Xiang.

P. J. Ivanhoe in his essay explores a quality of “unselfconsciousness” in thought and conduct as a hard-won achievement characteristic of classical Chinese thinkers broadly, but particularly in evidence in the Daoist anecdotes of the *Liezi*. Beginning by identifying three modalities of unselfconsciousness that facilitate knowing, doing, and being—that is, that assist in our understanding, in our actions, and in our state of mind—Ivanhoe then turns to reconstruct the seemingly persistent value of overcoming a preoccupation with oneself. In the process, he makes a distinction between two senses of unselfconsciousness: a modest and limited *everyday* sense that makes daily life easier, and an achieved *religious* unselfconsciousness that we might aspire to—an ultimate ideal of selflessness that is the result of being able to identify oneself

utterly with the patterns of the cosmos. From a careful analysis of passages from the *Liezi* and stories about the person Liezi in the *Zhuangzi*, Ivanhoe is able to provide examples of these three felicitous modes of unselfconsciousness, and then to show how there is a demystifying continuum to be found between the everyday sense of developing unselfconsciousness, and the demanding yet elusive religious sense of unselfconsciousness as an ultimate goal. To the extent that unselfconsciousness is ever achieved, it is this religious sense as an ultimate ideal that suffuses all of one's knowing, one's actions, and one's dispositions as a fully consummate way of life. It is, however, the ideal that the religious sense shares with the more prosaic sense of unselfconsciousness that allows for an appreciation of its basic value.

In "Reading the *Zhuangzi* in *Liezi*: Redefining *Xianship*," Jeffrey Dippmann challenges the conventional wisdom that would site the *Liezi* as an elite, philosophical text fundamentally impatient with the religious upheaval of fourth century China. Dippmann argues vigorously for a continuity between the anecdotes of the *Liezi* and the magico-religious practices of sectarian Daoism. He claims that not only does the *Liezi* seem to accept the cultivation of miraculous powers and the concomitant pursuit of immortality associated with the shamanistic tradition, but it also attempts to read the appropriated portions of the *Zhuangzi* as fundamentally sympathetic to its own religious aspirations after "*xianship*" or immortality. This claim raises an interesting question that is not lost on Dippmann, and that would bring the two editors of this volume—Dippmann and Littlejohn—into dialogue. Recalling that Guo Xiang's principle of expurgation in editing the *Zhuangzi* seems to have been the editing out of those passages that would ascribe magical powers to the Daoist masters, are we in fact given access to an original *Zhuangzi* that was itself sympathetic to such religious Daoist practices (Littlejohn's thesis)? Or alternatively, does the *Liezi* "reread" the appropriated *Zhuangzi* passages to make them consistent with the shamanistic practices of sectarian Daoism (Dippmann's position)? In either case, the *Liezi* does seem to at least endorse if not even advocate a practicable Daoism that would resist the contention that it is antagonistic to the religious dimensions of this tradition.

Livia Kohn's essay, "Body and Identity," is the first foray in the final and more pragmatic section of this volume entitled

“Applying the Teachings of the *Liezi*.” Kohn begins by registering the resonances between the holistic and integrative assumptions of traditional Chinese medicine and the Daoist understanding of the lived body—itself a concentration of vital *qi*-energies—as the locus of personal growth and spiritual transformation. Because the body lies at both the beginning and at the end of the process of recovering our primordial state, somatic practices and a nuanced bodily regimen are integral to the Daoist aspirations to attain pure spirituality and personal longevity. An analysis of the *Liezi* as a seminal Daoist text provides insights into the Daoist conception of the body and its role in a complex range of cultivation practices. Kohn uses the language of the contrasting *adaptive* and the *transformative* functions of the body to explain the more passive and the more active roles that the body must play in the *Liezi*’s account of the ultimate accommodation sought between the outer and the inner landscapes. Not only do Daoist practitioners seek to become one with *dao*, but they also seek to have access to and a guiding hand in what emerges from its creative core.

Daoist philosophy is generally assumed to be a kind of naturalism in which the cosmic patterns and natural order are taken as models for human action, and in which artificial and contrived activity is dismissed as an obstruction to the consummate human experience. However, in “I, Robot: Self as Machine in the *Liezi*,” Jeffrey L. Richey explores two strange tales from the *Liezi* that seem to celebrate artifice and contrivance. The first is an anecdote sited in the Zhou court of King Mu who is historically renowned for his Daoist associations. A humanoid figure entertains and then awes the King and his entourage. The second story describes a machine-like person whose actions are wholly lacking in any degree of self-awareness. With respect to the first anecdote, by first identifying the allusions that this story of an automaton might be making to the Chinese domestic and Buddhist corpus, Richey then speculates on its many possible implications without advancing any one in particular, leaving it up to his readers to make their own best choice. The second story is repeated from *The Book of the Yellow Emperor* that describes the superlative human being in terms that associate the conduct of this figure with cyborgs. Richey finds some points of comparison between the restorative function of a cyborg and the various strategies for personal cultivation offered by the early Chinese corpus. Perhaps the most intriguing speculation that

these stories bring to mind is the resistance Daoist philosophy has to allowing human beings any special status in their interactions with the rest of the myriad things. Recalling the essay of P. J. Ivanhoe above, these texts are uniformly suspicious of those deliberate and self-conscious qualities that ostensibly set the human being apart from other things.

In “Dancing with Yinyang: The Art of Emergence,” Robin R. Wang rehearses an anecdote from the *Liezi* that offers a distinction between the diagnosis for an illness available from three different kinds of doctors—the “common doctor” (*zhongyi* 眾醫) who focuses on the environment alone, the “good doctor” (*liangyi* 良醫) who focuses only on the medical history of the patient, and the “divine doctor” (*shenyi* 神醫) who prescribes the cultivation of the life force itself. In exploring the vocabulary of this life force, Wang tries to bring some nuance and sophistication to our understanding of the familiar and yet still opaque vocabulary of *yinyang*: the oscillating and rhythmic movement of an autogenerative *qi* 氣, its inexhaustible process of generation and transformation (*hua* 化), the calibrational and proportional (*zhi* 質) aspects of *qi*, the emerging patterns of its interaction (*jiao* 交) and the quality of its responsiveness (*ganying* 感應). Using recent advances in biology as her inspiration, Wang argues that although a now familiar “correlative” vocabulary respects the transformational nature of the *qi* process, the emergent and consummatory character of *qi* requires that we move from a binary to a trinary way of describing Chinese cosmology, and from a correlative to a trinary model in our thinking about it. Indeed, we need to understand the trinary nature of *qi* in order to appreciate the prescription of the “divine doctor” (*shenyi*): that is, to abjure medication and simply cultivate your life force.

In “How to Fish like a Daoist,” Erin M. Cline uses a careful comparison of an anecdote from the *Liezi* with the Butcher Ding story in the *Zhuangzi* to develop a more complex and sophisticated understanding of a major theme in Daoist philosophy, the notion of “effortless action” (*wuwei* 無為). It is this modality of activity that enables the Daoist fisherman Zhan He to comport himself effortlessly and unselfconsciously, and in so doing, to accord spontaneously with the natural circumstances as they unfold—that is, to follow the rhythms of nature in returning to the unadulterated *dao* 道. A persistent cosmological claim found in the *Liezi* is that all creatures are part of the same whole, and that skill in living

in the world emerges from a cultivated respect for an inclusive, symbiotic relationship with nature. It is this sense of the oneness of nature with the human experience that distinguishes the Daoist from the anthropocentric Confucians. In comparing the fisherman Zhan He story with the *Zhuangzi*'s Butcher Ding, Cline remarks on how both of these exemplars describe in detail the long process of cultivating their *wuwei* state of mind. Beyond the more obvious commonalities here, however, an additional comparison with the *Daodejing* brings into focus a contrast between the supple, flexible quality of the natural objects out of which the fisherman's gear has been shaped, and the sharp, penetrating character of the butcher's chopper. This difference between the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* is magnified in the repeated association that the *Daodejing* makes between *wuwei* and effective social and political leadership (*de* 德), an association not to be found in a *Zhuangzi* text that seems oblivious to political responsibility as a desired outcome of an achieved *wuwei* relationality.

In the closing essay of this volume, David Jones illustrates the Daoist theme of "returning" by using the *Liezi* to reverse the gravity of the human experience. Rather than celebrating the putatively numinous and abstract, the *Liezi* rehabilitates the body and locates the human life within the complexity of our much maligned and all too often denigrated physical experience. In "When Butterflies Change into Birds: Life and Death in the *Liezi*," Jones argues that the *Liezi* has a unique contribution to make to some of the major themes of the classical Daoist literature—in particular, an appreciation of the emergent and evolutionary nature of change, and of the inseparability of life and death. While these themes are certainly present in the other Daoist texts, the virtue of the *Liezi* is the accessibility and consistency of its accounts of them. The *Liezi* offers us straightforward and explicit counsel on the most profound of life's vagaries.

Jones cites at length and analyzes in detail the *Liezi* passage that provides a vivid account of the organic and interdependent nature of species transformation in the living world where the life of one creature emerges from the death of another. In this spontaneous, autogenerative process there is no guiding hand or grand teleology to lead the way, and no special value ascribed to the human form. Being human is no more than just one among many of *qi*'s diverse phases. Perhaps the most compelling wisdom of this *Liezi* text is

captured in the Daoist notion of returning: that is, to go down and to go back. In the *Liezi* we have an exhortation to abandon our arrogance and superiority both as individuals and as a species, to cultivate of an unselfconscious humility in how we live our lives, and to return to nature by comporting ourselves as one modest aspect in an organic whole.

With this substantial collection of essays, a new opportunity emerges to re-engage the *Liezi* and to find overlooked dimensions of Daoist philosophy. Perhaps the most important contribution of this anthology is a reasoned argument that puts any lingering doubts about this text into proper context, and in so doing, that reasserts the proper place of the *Liezi* in the Daoist canons.