

INTRODUCTION

Four main characteristics distinguish this book from other translations of *Laozi*. First, the base of my translation is the oldest existing edition of *Laozi*. It was excavated in 1973 from a tomb located in Mawangdui, the city of Changsha, Hunan Province of China, and is usually referred to as Text A of the Mawangdui *Laozi* because it is the older of the two texts of *Laozi* unearthed from it.¹ Two facts prove that the text was written before 202 BCE, when the first emperor of the Han dynasty began to rule over the entire China: it does not follow the naming taboo of the Han dynasty;² its handwriting style is close to the seal script that was prevalent in the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). Second, I have incorporated the recent archaeological discovery of *Laozi*-related documents, disinterred in 1993 in Jishan District's tomb complex in the village of Guodian, near the city of Jingmen, Hubei Province of China. These documents include three bundles of bamboo slips written in the Chu script and contain passages related to the extant *Laozi*.³ Third, I have made extensive use of old commentaries on *Laozi* to provide the most comprehensive interpretations possible of each passage. Finally, I have examined myriad Chinese classic texts that are closely associated with the formation of *Laozi*, such as *Zhuangzi*, *Lüshi Chunqiu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lü*), *Han Feizi*, and *Huainanzi*, to understand the intellectual and historical context of *Laozi's* ideas.

In addition to these characteristics, this book introduces several new interpretations of *Laozi*. For example, I assert that *Laozi* should be recognized as a syncretic text before being labeled as a Daoist one, that it must have been completed sometime between 286 BCE and the time when Text A was written, and that *Laozi* was compiled in the Qin, which many have viewed as typical of Legalist states. Also, I see *Laozi* as basically a political text, fitting to answer the prevailing question among intellectuals when it was completed, "How does one rule?" Of course, this book could reach out to a broader scope of audience by switching the question to, "How does one live?" Despite the possible self-propagation of the question of this sort, *Laozi*, in my perspective

of textual interpretation, will remain as a text practical and thereby conforming to the Chinese “practical reason.”⁴ These are the results of my research over the past few years, which began with the encouragement of a respected scholar of the Qing philological studies, Dai Zhen (1724–1777), who said, “Neither being dominated by others’ ideas nor by their own ideas is the true attitude of people who want to learn.”⁵

MAWANGDUI LAOZI

Among extant editions of *Laozi* deemed “ancient” are the Wang Bi (226–249), the Heshanggong (“the old man by the river”), the Yan Zun (ca. 53–24 BCE), and the Fu Yi (553–639) editions.⁶ These texts are all vital to understanding of *Laozi* and have uniformly been dated before the Tang dynasty (618–907). In this book, I use all of these texts as critical references too. However, none of them is comparable to the texts from Mawangdui (Mawangdui texts hereafter) in their antiquity.⁷ More important, the Mawangdui texts precede the emergence of the “old texts” from which the intricate philological debates of the Chinese classic texts arise.

The “old texts” came on the scene during the Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE) after most ancient classics had perished through the Book Burning in the Qin dynasty. Written in a more ancient script than that used in the Western Han, they have been called the “old texts.” According to the two following records in *Hanshu* (*Book of Han*), two princes of Emperor Jing (r. 156–141 BCE), King Gong of Lu and King Xian of Hejian, collected them:

The old text of the *Documents* was discovered in a wall in Confucius’s old residence. At the end of Emperor Wu’s rule, King Gong of Lu wanted to expand his court by demolishing Confucius’s house, and happened to obtain several dozens of texts, including the old text of the *Documents*, the *Record of Rites*, the *Analects*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety*. They were all written in ancient scripts. When the king entered the house, he heard the sounds of drums, bells, lutes, zithers, and stone chimes in the air. (30: 1706)

King Xian of Hejian whose name was De was anointed as king in the second year of Emperor Jing’s reign. . . . [W]hen he obtained an excellent edition from the people, he certainly copied it well, and gave the copy back to the people, keeping the original. . . . [T]he books he obtained were all written in ancient scripts as old as those preceding the Qin dynasty, such as *Zhouguan* (*Offices of Zhou*), the *Documents*, the *Rites*, the *Record of Rites*, *Mencius*, and *Laozi*. All of

them represent what is recorded in the classics, their commentaries, and what Confucius's seventy disciples discussed. His study included the six Confucian disciplines, and he established the positions of the Erudite for *Mao Shi* (*Poetry of Mr. Mao*) and *Zuozhuan* (*Mr. Zuo's Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals*). (53: 2410)

The books listed in these two records pertain to the “old texts” in the philological controversy of the Chinese classic texts. In addition to these books, *Feishi Yi* (*Changes of Mr. Fei*), the base text for the extant *Changes*, also belongs to the “old texts” because its name appears only in “Rulin zhuan” in *Hanshu*, the record of Confucian tradition written in the Later Han (25–220), not in “Rulin liezhuan” in *Shiji* (*Records of the Historian*) composed in the Former Han (206 BCE–8 CE).

Thus, almost all of the significant Chinese classic texts are classified as the “old texts.” This is because the tradition of the “new texts,” which once dominated the Han academia, was initially suppressed by Wang Mang (45 BCE–23 CE), the usurper and the only emperor of the Xin dynasty (9–23 CE), and nearly became extinct after the “old texts” gained official support from the Wei and Jin dynasties (220–420). Even though the “old texts” have prevailed ever since, their origins are questionable, so the disputes over the classics have continued.

Interestingly, the earlier quote lists *Laozi* as one of the “old texts” beside many Confucian classics. Although the very text King Xian of Hejian obtained is not transmitted to us, scholars have sometimes called it the “old” *Laozi*, to distinguish it from the other received texts. The term “old texts” in this context implies that they were extant prior to the Book Burning, once kept secret in order to elude the first Qin emperor's order to burn them, and later recovered. However, the two texts of *Laozi* from Mawangdui were transcribed in the Qin and the early Han respectively, and thus *Laozi* was neither destroyed in the Book Burning nor later recovered by King Xian. In line with this, *Hanshu* states that Empress Dowager Dou, mother of Emperor Jing, favored sayings from *Huangdi* (*Yellow Emperor*) and *Laozi* (67: 3945). If a powerful dowager favored it, getting a copy of *Laozi* in 131 BCE when King Xian reportedly obtained it from the people might not have been difficult. Considering that the Mawangdui tomb was built for a son of the marquis Li Cang (d. 186 BCE), who ruled the region of Dai, I believe that Texts A and B were two of many copies of *Laozi* circulated among the Han aristocrats.⁸ No matter how persuasive my idea is, in contrast to the obscurity of the “old” *Laozi*, the Mawangdui texts undoubtedly stayed available before the full-scale disputes over the integrity of the Chinese classic texts began.

The four transmitted “ancient” editions of *Laozi* are also subject to many philological controversies. For example, the genuine features of the Wang Bi edition prior to 1170 when Xiong Ke initially printed its extant version, or of the Heshanggong edition before Xiaozong's reign (1162–1189) of the Song dynasty

have remained concealed;⁹ scholarly conjectures for the possible latest date of the Heshanggong edition vary, spanning the second through sixth centuries;¹⁰ the relationship between historic Yan Zun and the Yan Zun edition, *Daode zhigui*, is still misty; the Fu Yi edition is closer to Text B than to Text A, despite the claim that it was taken in 574 from the tomb of Xiang Yu's concubine, whose time almost corresponds with the time of Text A.¹¹

Questions of this kind also challenge the transcribed texts of *Laozi* found in Dunhuang, such as *Xiang'er* and the *Suodan Manuscript*. For example, an affinity is clear between *Xiang'er* and the stele editions of *Laozi* from Daoist monasteries established during the Tang dynasty, although Rao Zongyi argued that Zhang Lu (?–216) wrote *Xiang'er* at the end of the Han;¹² the alleged date of the *Suodan Manuscript*, that is, 270 CE, is hardly acceptable because it appeals for its plausibility only with the manuscript's self-note about the reign year of the state of Wu, which was too far away from the site of the discovery to enable us to imagine its linkage to the manuscript.¹³

Because the Mawangdui texts are fresh sources in the study of *Laozi* despite their antiquity, understandably, some have raised questions about their nature, value, and affiliation. First, their preservation was not satisfactory: they have scribal errors as well as missing, overlapping, eroded, and erased characters. Fortunately, however, we have at our disposal two texts, Texts A and B, which mutually supplement one another. If one text is found with scribal errors or missing characters, the other text usually corrects or supplements them. With further reference to the Guodian documents,¹⁴ there are fewer than one hundred characters that we cannot redeem. Even these characters have not caused major philological disputes, because the various extant editions mostly provide substituting characters without variation.

Similitude between the Mawangdui texts and the extant editions may frustrate some scholars' ambitious plans to scrutinize them: there is no passage in the Mawangdui texts or the later editions that does not appear in the other. Only a few differences have been reported: different phrases and words are sometimes used, the order of the passages is different in three cases, and in the Mawangdui texts the second part of the later editions precedes the first part. In the study of *Laozi*, however, mere alteration of a character can compel us to rewrite the introduction of *Laozi's* thought. For example, *gu* 古 ("ancient") in all the later editions appears as *jin* 今 ("present") in Texts A and B in chapter 14,¹⁵ and *zuo* 左 ("left") in all the later editions appears as *you* 右 ("right") in Text A in chapter 79. These simple switches necessitate discussions in this book. Due to this subtlety, when studying *Laozi* it is imperative not to overlook even a slight discrepancy in the use of words.

An understanding of their affiliation may occasion a more serious distrust of the Mawangdui texts: they derived from the Huang-Lao tradition, and thus are not orthodox. Since the coexcavated eight texts interposed between

Texts A and B, especially the four texts before Text B, convey the teaching of the Huang-Lao tradition, it is persuasive to align them with this tradition.¹⁶ In this context, the Huang-Lao tradition is a mixture of Legalism and Daoism, a political adaptation of the concept of no-action (*wuwei* 無爲).¹⁷ In my view, however, this affiliation causes no harm to *Laozi*'s reputation. In fact, *Laozi* had haunted the tradition of Huang-Lao before the term *Daoism* (*daojia* 道家) was coined as a bibliographic label in the Later Han. *Laozi*, like other Chinese classic texts, demonstrated the political concerns of that time for which Legalists also explored solutions, so it seems natural that *Laozi* came to have a binding link to Legalism.

The political ideas in *Laozi* can easily veer to a theory of self-cultivation if they bear upon individuals as well as states. Instillation of the metaphysics of the Way into *Laozi*'s teaching is also available if its discussion of the Way is augmented. Following that, expansion of this metaphysical view into mysticism may occur with highlighting of the mysterious union between human spirituality and the Way.¹⁸ Then, the Daoist hygiene practices for longevity or immortality would loom through amalgamation of various concepts, such as vital force (*qi* 氣), essential vitality (*jing* 精), spirit (*shen* 神), yin-yang, and five phases, with *Laozi*'s pursuit of a long, peaceful life. If one integrates the ideas of the early alchemists from the states of Yan and Qi with these practices, *Laozi* will become an alchemistic text.

However, *Laozi*, as a historical product, is bound to the prevalent orientation among Chinese classic texts toward political discourses. When Sima Tan, Sima Qian's father, first classified ancient Chinese thoughts into six schools, that is, the Yin-Yang School (*yinyang* 陰陽), Confucianism (*ru* 儒), Mohism (*mo* 墨), the Logicians (*ming* 名), the Legalists (*fa* 法), and the School of the Way and Virtue (*daode* 道德), he claimed that "all these thoughts concentrated upon how to rule" (*Shiji*, 130: 3288–3289). In consensus with this claim, Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801), one of the prominent scholars in Qing philological studies, described ancient Chinese academia as follows: "None of the ancient people wrote books, nor did they discuss principles, disregarding the practical matters."¹⁹ Ancient Chinese thinkers were eminently practical, and they were basically political advisors attempting to influence the ruling powers and help them govern their countries as effectively as possible.²⁰

Du Daojian (1237–1318) stated, "*Laozi* that the Han people discussed was *Laozi* of the Han dynasty; *Laozi* that the Jin people discussed was *Laozi* of the Jin dynasty; and *Laozi* that the Tang and Song people discussed was *Laozi* of the Tang and Song dynasties."²¹ This remark reveals that *Laozi* has been susceptible to such varying interpretations over centuries because it is so spacious and symbolic. The time of its first introduction, however, was not one of metaphysics and mysticism, but rather of political discourses that established the Huang-Lao tradition. If trying to approach the original *Laozi* to a feasible

extent, one will not concede a preference for the *Laozi* of the Tang and Song at the expense of the Han *Laozi*.

Despite some differences between Texts A and B in their use of characters, wording, and phrasing, they represent the same edition. The correspondence in the order of passages in both texts supports this claim. To be more particular, the order diverges from that of the later editions in three places: chapters 40 and 41 are reversed, chapters 80 and 81 are located after chapter 66, and chapter 24 is placed between chapters 21 and 22. Texts A and B are identical in these changes. This correspondence would not have occurred unless they represented the same edition. The disparity between Texts A and B may merely reflect the evolution of Chinese characters because when Texts A and B were transcribed, Chinese characters were evolving.²² Accordingly, some linguistic variations between Texts A and B is natural.

Indeed, the first ramification in the *Laozi*'s edition seems to have happened between the times of King Xian and Ban Gu (32–92) at earliest, after the transcription of Texts A and B. Recording that *Laozi* was recovered and dedicated to the court by King Xian, Ban Gu in *Hanshu* listed four books regarding *Laozi*: *Laozi Linshi jingzhuan* (*Mr. Lin's Commentaries on the Classic of Laozi*), *Laozi Fushi jingshuo* (*Mr. Fu's Discussion of the Classic of Laozi*), *Laozi Xushi jingshuo* (*Mr. Xu's Discussion of the Classic of Laozi*), and *Liu Xiang shuo Laozi* (*Liu Xiang's Exposition of Laozi*) (30: 1729). This may attest that when Ban Gu made this record, based on Liu Xiang's *Qilüe* (*Seven Categories*), four understandings of *Laozi* existed. And these four understandings might have resulted in four editions of *Laozi* because in the Han classical studies each school tended to form its own text rather than sharing standard editions, as seen in the Han study of the Confucian classics. However, this ramification could have happened only after King Xian's "recovery" of the book.

Besides the linguistic variations, two more differences between Texts A and B have been noted: Text B divides the book into two parts by putting memos at the end of the first and second parts, and Text A does not; Text A has marks for separating chapters, and Text B does not.²³ The memos in Text B say, "*de* 德 ("virtue"), 3,041" and "*dao* 道 ("way"), 2,426," respectively. However, Text A also divides the text into two parts by changing a line at the end of the first part. Because this practice does not befall to other places of Text A, it is evidently meant to show the demarcation of parts. According to "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" ("Biographies of Laozi and Han Fei") in *Shiji*, *Laozi* was originally comprised of two parts (63: 2141), and Jiang Xichang argued that ancient books were generally compiled in two parts.²⁴

Mawangdui texts have three types of marks: black dots, double lines as dittos, and clamp-shaped marks as commas. The double lines and clamp-shaped marks are extensively used in Texts A and B, and their functions should cause no suspicion. Black dots appear in the first part of Text A and nowhere else.

The argument that Text A is chaptered is contingent on the presence of these dots, which are put at the ends of passages in most cases. These dots, however, can hardly prop the argument. Above all, only the first part of Text A uses them and only in eighteen places. In addition, these dots sometimes appear twice in a single passage equivalent to a chapter in the extant editions, as in those passages equivalent to chapters 51 and 75, and they are sometimes placed in the middle of a passage, as in those equivalent to chapters 52, 72, and 81. If the marks divide chapters, these instances would not have occurred. In my view, the scribe of Text A used them when he wanted to note that the following sentences or phrases had distinctive origins. Supporting this point, the passage in the Guodian documents related to chapter 52 contains only a part of it, which corresponds to the part following the black dot in Text A. Also, before the excavation of the Mawangdui texts Gao Heng had pointed out inconsistency in chapter 81 between the two parts separated by the black dot in Text A.²⁵ In this understanding, Text B presumably did not use the black dots because the *Laozi* passages had been finalized prior to its transcription.

As a matter of fact, chaptering *Laozi* is quite expedient. How the division of the book into eighty-one chapters, a division adopted by most of the later editions, originated is not clear. Wang Yinglin held that it was initiated by Heshanggong,²⁶ whereas Xue Hui (1489–1539) speculated that Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE) and Liu Xin (50 BCE–23 CE) began the practice when they were in charge of extensive editing of the ancient Chinese classic texts.²⁷ Wang's opinion is somewhat assertive because the presumption of Heshanggong's historical existence is vulnerable to modern skepticism. The latter suggestion is also the subject of critical investigations because Xue Hui further explained that the two Lius rearranged the original 143 chapters into 81 chapters, drastically reducing the volume of the book: this is disproved by the fact that the structure of the Mawangdui texts is consistent to that of the later editions.

Shao Ruoyu (fl. 1135) from the Song dynasty argued that this practice might be associated with certain concepts in the *Changes*. According to him, in the tradition of perceiving the *Changes* as a complex of numerological symbols, that is, *xiang shu Yi* 象數易 (the *Changes* in view of image and number) tradition, the number nine conceived perfectness, so that people created eighty-one chapter divisions (nine times nine) in the hope of securing a more auspicious meaning for *Laozi*.²⁸ On the other hand, Wu Cheng (1255–1330) stated that the Zhang Junxiang edition comprised seventy-two chapters,²⁹ and the preface to the Yan Zun edition reveals that it also had seventy-two chapters before the loss of the first half. This preface gives the reason for the seventy-two chapters as follows: “The Way of yin is number eight, while the Way of yang is number nine. Since nature enables yang to move with reference to yin, therefore there are seventy-two heads (chapters).”³⁰ Wu Cheng, seeing that this kind of explanation was irrational, claimed that the chapters should

be separated based on context and finally rearranged the text into sixty-eight chapters. Lu Deming (ca. 550–630) also noted, “The main text of the Virtue part consists of forty-four chapters, but some editions contain only forty-three chapters.”³¹ Thus, in his time there was an edition with eighty chapters. Although it is extinct, the Emperor Taizu (r. 1368–1398) edition of the Ming dynasty is known to have sixty-seven chapters.³² More recently, Ma Xulun expanded the number of the chapters into one hundred and fourteen,³³ and Yan Lingfeng condensed it to fifty-four.³⁴ Even though chaptering passages of *Laozi* might spontaneously have occurred in reflection of their distinctive provenances, the Mawangdui texts features no numbers or marks for chaptering.³⁵

LAOZI-RELATED GUODIAN DOCUMENTS

Guodian was a thriving center of the state of Chu in the Warring States period, only nine kilometers north of its capital Ying, and accordingly many tombs of the important personages of the state were constructed there. In October 1993, the provincial government authority launched an excavation in reaction to repeated tomb robberies, which resulted in an unexpected discovery of a large number of bamboo slips, more than seven hundred of which were covered with writing. After the excavation, these slips were divided into six groups, chiefly depending on their length. Three of them contained writings related to *Laozi* and have been labeled A, B, and C. Specifically, on thirty-nine slips in group A, which are each 32.3 cm long, passages related to nineteen chapters of *Laozi* were found; on eighteen slips in group B, which are each 30.6 cm long, passages related to eight chapters were found; and on fourteen slips in group C, which are each 26.5 cm long, passages related to five chapters were found. Because two of the passages relate to chapter 64, in sum, the passages found in Guodian relate to thirty-one chapters of the extant *Laozi*. It is noteworthy, for my argument, that fifteen of these thirty-one chapters were partially transcribed, and the three groups of bamboo slips contained not only writings related to *Laozi* but also other writings such as “Wuxing” (“Five Conducts”) and “Ziyi” (“Black-Dyed Robes”) in group A, “Lu Mugong wen Zisi” (“Duke Mu of the State of Lu’s Questions to Zisi”) in group B, and “Taiyi sheng shui” (“Great One Bears Water”) in group C.³⁶

These groups of bamboo slips differ from each other in many aspects. First, they differ in length³⁷ due to the conventional practice of using longer slips to transcribe more significant writing.³⁸ This means that the compiler(s) of the Guodian documents regarded “Wuxing” and “Ziyi,” written on the longest slips, as more significant than “Lu Mugong wen Zisi” or “Taiyi sheng shui.” In fact, only “Wuxing” and “Ziyi,” two out of sixteen writings found in Guodian, had been known before the excavation: “Wuxing” is part of the writing with the same title excavated in Mawangdui, and “Ziyi” is a chapter of the *Record of*

Rites. Also, they differ in their shapes because the slips in group A have beveled ends, whereas those in groups B and C have straight ends. In addition, they differ slightly in handwriting style, and the spaces between characters are also inconsistent. More important, the distances between holes used for binding the bamboo slips together also differ: the distance in groups A and B is 13 mm, while that in group C is 10.8 mm. These differences imply that they do not comprise a single coherent book because a book in ancient times indicates a group of bamboo or wooden slips that are massed together. As certain writings from these three mutually different groups of bamboo slips are now found together in a single book called *Laozi*, they must have been assembled at some point. For example, the first half of chapter 64 is written in group A slips 24–27, whereas the second half appears twice, in group A slips 10–13 and group C slips 11–14. Thus, chapter 64 in the extant edition is a product of combining these two components. Here, one might wonder if the slips 24–27 and 10–13 in group A are consecutive because they are found in the same group.

Each group of the bamboo slips actually consists of some subgroups, which were formed by the continuation of each slip. If a slip begins with any character in the middle of a passage in *Laozi*, we can determine which slip should be placed before this slip, based on the book. However, if the first character of a slip coincides with the first character of a passage in *Laozi*, determining which slip should be placed in front is impossible because the order of passages is inconsistent with that of the extant *Laozi*. The string used to hold together the slips has vanished, and there is no mark telling the right order. As a result, the thirty-nine bamboo slips in group A have been rearranged into five subgroups: slips related to chapters 66, 46, 30, 64 (second half), 37, 63, 2, and 32; to chapters 25 and 5; to chapter 16; to chapters 64 (first half), 56, and 57; and to chapters 55, 44, 40, and 9. The eighteen slips in group B have been rearranged into three subgroups: slips related to chapters 59, 48, 20, and 13; to chapter 41; and to chapters 52, 45, and 54. Finally, the fourteen slips in group C have been rearranged into four subgroups: slips related chapters 17 and 18; chapter 35; chapter 31; and chapter 64 (second half). The order of the subgroups is arbitrary.

As seen here, the two subgroups in group A, which are related to chapter 64, are not consecutive. The scribe transcribed the first half of chapter 64 after the passage related to chapter 30, and then transcribed the passage related to chapter 37 after that, whereas the second half of the passage was transcribed in other slips. In conclusion, chapter 64 was not originally one passage.³⁹ The Guodian documents have as many as fifteen passages of this nature.⁴⁰ Therefore, the Guodian documents do not correspond with *Laozi*. Rather, they are writings that were integrated into the book at a later date.

Those who call the Guodian documents “Guodian *Laozi*” tend to see it as one of the earliest editions.⁴¹ Their presumption is that many editions of *Laozi* existed at the time the Guodian documents were transcribed, and the Guodian

documents were one of them. According to this view, the various editions were reputedly transmitted by different sages: the gatekeeper Yin Xi, who allegedly met Laozi and received his dictation of the book; Guan Yin, introduced in early sources as having a close relationship with *Laozi*, especially in “Tianxia” (“All under Heaven”) in *Zhuangzi*; Laolaizi, who died at Mt. Meng located in Jingmen; and Grand Historian Dan, introduced by Sima Qian as one of the possible authors of *Laozi*. All of these suggestions are, however, awaiting verification.

On the other hand, quite a few scholars have argued that *Laozi* was compiled. Kimura Eiichi claimed that it had not necessarily existed as a single volume before its final completion in the early Han; D. C. Lau asserted that it was an anthology of the teachings of many masters of the Warring States period, including Yang Zhu, Song Xing, Yin Wen, Guan Yin, Liezi, and Shen Dao; Chad Hansen concluded that *Laozi* “consisted of sayings from the oral tradition of a Warring States *shih* school” and that “these sayings have been deliberately arranged in artfully composed of collages of sayings,” based on his understanding of the current textual theory. More recently, some scholars continue to persuade their readers of the theory that the sayings in the book had been orally transmitted, implying that they must have been compiled into the book.⁴²

The Guodian documents seem to provide a critical reference in establishing a date for such compilation. In this respect, Tomb no. 1, where the bamboo slips were found, has been tentatively dated between the mid-fourth century BCE and the early third century BCE, based on comparisons between archaeological artifacts,⁴³ whereas 278 BCE may be the latest date for it, suggested with consideration of the historical developments.⁴⁴ However, textual analysis should not be dismissed. In this analysis, it is intriguing to see that some texts from Guodian, such as “Xing zi ming chu” (“The Inborn Nature Comes from Necessity”), “Zun deyi” (“Respecting Virtue and Rightness”), “Tang Yu zhi dao” (“The Way of Tang and Yu”), and “Qiongda yi shi” (“Misery and Prosperity Depend on Time”), all display a strong connection to Xunzi’s thought.⁴⁵ For example, “Qiongda yi shi” states, “There are heaven and human beings, and they are distinctive from each other. Through understanding the differences between heaven and humans, you come to know what should be done.”⁴⁶ This apparently stems from the idea of Xunzi, who states, “If one knows the difference between heaven and humans, he can be called the Perfected” (*Xunzi*, 695: 218d). Another passage in the same sheaf also has a counterpart in *Xunzi*. It states, “Whether you can be recognized or not depends on heaven.”⁴⁷ Correspondingly, *Xunzi* says, “Whether you can be recognized or not depends on time” (695: 296b).

There are many conjectures about Xunzi’s dates. Primary materials dealing with his life and activities show as wide as 140 years’ difference in dating his time.⁴⁸ Within this time range, records related to the state of Chu include the following: in 286 BCE Xunzi moved to Chu due to the downfall of the Jixia academy caused by the mischief of King Min of Qi,⁴⁹ in 255 BCE he was

appointed as governor of Lanling by Prince Chunshen.⁵⁰ Because the Guodian documents include passages influenced by Xunzi's thought, and 286 BCE is the earliest time that Xunzi was possibly known to Chu, I believe that the Guodian documents were written after that date. Accordingly, I assert, *Laozi* was compiled after 286 BCE and before the writing of Text A of the Mawangdui *Laozi*.

The Guodian documents supplement the Mawangdui texts, enabling us to explore *Laozi's* origin. In particular, they show how source materials might have been modified when the book was compiled. My translation, however, adheres to the Mawangdui texts, especially Text A, because the Guodian documents do not comprise *Laozi*. Even when the context in the Guodian texts seems more comprehensible, in every case that they do not conform to the Mawangdui texts, I follow the latter.

Robert Henricks has summarized the philosophical tendency among all the passages in the Guodian documents: the frequently discussed concepts in the Guodian documents are no-action, no-commitment, simplicity (“uncarved wood”), and self-sufficiency; only one of nine chapters appears that discuss the metaphysics of the Way; all sentences related to the metaphysical concept “One” are omitted; only one of six chapters appears that discuss the Way of heaven; chapters after chapter 66 do not appear; passages articulating the symbolism of infants and babies are missing; and passages uttering the symbolism of water and female rarely occur.⁵¹ In short, the Guodian documents lack a metaphysical perspective because core concepts in its metaphysics of the Way, such as the Way, One, and the Way of heaven, are not present. This aspect may need to be highlighted because I primarily view *Laozi* as a political text.

THEORY ON LAOZI'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE QIN

The state of Lu dominated academia in ancient China after its center shifted from the Zhou's court to private schools in the Spring and Autumn period. It originated from the enfeoffment of the Duke of Zhou and was praised as “having all the rituals of the Zhou within Lu” (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhushu*, 144: 269a) even before the time of Confucius (551–479 BCE). More important, it was the birthplace of the two great masters of Confucianism and Mohism, Confucius and Mozi.⁵² These were the only two schools referred to as “prominent schools” in “Xianxue” (“Prominent Studies”) in *Han Feizi* during the late Warring States period. Though they competed with one another, they had much in common: both respected the Way of Yao and Shun and admired humaneness and rightness. As Xiao Gongquan pointed out, “Mozi is a common people-oriented Confucius and Mohism is a common people-oriented Confucianism.”⁵³

A new academic challenge against Confucianism and Mohism began within the Jixia Academy in the state of Qi. This academy, as an assembly of

minor schools represented by Zou Yan, Chunyu Kun, Tian Pian, Jie Yu, Shen Dao, and Huan Yuan, neither displayed a single philosophical proclivity nor explicitly opposed Confucianism or Mohism. Quite a few philosophers from the schools of Confucianism and Mohism, including Xunzi, also traveled to Jixia for study and debate. Therefore, the Jixia Academy was a sort of clearinghouse for a variety of thoughts and ideas, which functioned through the mixing of traditions and naturally tended to espouse syncretism. After its decline, its tradition was upheld by the academy of the Four Princes: Prince Mengchang from the state of Qi, Prince Pingyuan from the state of Zhao, Prince Chunshen from the state of Chu, and Prince Xinling from the state of Wei.

Although the Jixia Academy was responsible for generating syncretism at that time, the true challenge against Confucianism and Mohism came from the schools in the three states from Jin: the states of Han, Wei, and Zhao. They gave birth to the Legalists, Militarists, Diplomats, and Logicians, and uniformly reformed the transmitted political systems in order to eliminate the degenerating legacy of the rituals of the Zhou. In contrast with Confucianism and Mohism, which valued moral principles such as humaneness and rightness, the schools in these three states were inclined to embrace utilitarianism.⁵⁴ Whereas Confucianism and Mohism respected the past, they valued the present. It was also these states' utilitarian academia that greatly influenced the state of Qin, following its emergence as a supreme power in the late Warring States period.⁵⁵

Lü Buwei (291?–235 BCE) is accredited with introducing a new academic impetus to Qin's sweeping utilitarian tradition. Before Qin's unification, he felt ashamed that Qin trailed behind the Four Princes in academic accomplishments, so he invited many scholars to his place, providing them with warm hospitality. In doing so, his academy succeeded that of the Four Princes, which itself succeeded the Jixia Academy. Consequently, Lü Buwei's academy revived the vanished Jixia Academy. Following the syncretic philosophical tendency of the Jixia Academy, it also tended to be syncretic, embracing diverse ideas, the accomplishment of which was crystallized into *Lüshi Chunqiu*. For the completion of this book, Lü Buwei invited writers and philosophers from all the states to record what they heard and as a result, it came to contain the stories and theories collected from the Chinese world, both past and present. Proud of his book, he displayed it at the gate of the city of Xianyang in front of the public, boastfully declaring that anybody who could improve it by adding or deleting even one character would win one thousand pieces of gold.⁵⁶ The book was completed either in the seventh year (240 BCE) or the eighth year of the rule of Ying Zheng of the state of Qin, who later became the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty.

As Gu Jiegang states, approximately two-thirds of the teachings of *Laozi* are found in *Lüshi Chunqiu*.⁵⁷ First, this firm connection between *Lüshi Chunqiu* and *Laozi* attests to my theory that Qin is *Laozi's* birthplace. *Laozi* must have come into existence through someone who had intimate knowledge of *Lüshi*

Chunqiu. Also, *Laozi* is a syncretic text like *Lüshi Chunqiu*. In this discussion, it is seminal to confirm an affinity between two definitions: one on Daoism (*daoia* 道家) in the “Lun liujia yaozhi” (“Discussion of the Essence of the Six Schools”) by Sima Tan and the other on Syncretism (*zajia* 雜家) in “Yiwenzhi” in *Hanshu*. Sima Tan wrote, “The tactics of Daoism followed the great order of the Yin-Yang School, adopted good points from Confucianism and Mohism, and embraced the essences of the Logicians and Legalists.”⁵⁸ Meanwhile, “Yiwenzhi” defines Syncretism as “including Confucianism and Mohism and integrating the Logicians and Legalists” (30: 1742). As seen here, Daoism defined by Sima Tan is almost identical to the Syncretism characterized in “Yiwenzhi.”

More important than these parallel definitions is the fact that a large number of the Many Masters’ ideas are found in *Laozi*. In fact, much research construes *Laozi*’s relationship with the Many Masters. For example, Cui Shu maintained that Yang Zhu’s idea of “valuing life” was associated with *Laozi*.⁵⁹ Qian Mu argued that the concept of “the Way” in *Laozi* was derived from *Zhuangzi* and that Zhan He was the most likely author of *Laozi*.⁶⁰ P. M. Thompson analyzed the affinity between the ideas of Shen Dao and *Laozi*.⁶¹ H. G. Creel pointed out that Shen Buhai was responsible for creating the idea of no-action, one of the core teachings in *Laozi*.⁶² Takeuchi Yoshio claimed that *Laozi* was stimulated by Legalists such as Shen Dao and Han Fei.⁶³ Harold Roth stated that four chapters of *Guanzi*, especially “Neiye” (“Inward Training”), exhibited its close relationship with *Laozi*.⁶⁴ Mark Lewis observed the trace of Militarist thought in *Laozi*, as noted earlier by Wing-tsit Chan.⁶⁵ Guo Moruo discussed the connection between Song Xing, Yin Wen, and *Laozi*.⁶⁶ Also, as mentioned earlier, D. C. Lau defined *Laozi* as an anthology of the teachings of the Many Masters such as Guan Yin, Liezi, Shen Dao, and Gu Jiegang investigated the similarities between *Lüshi Chunqiu* and *Laozi*. In addition, as this book will show, *Laozi*’s way of life is fermented out of many teachings from the ancient classics such as the *Documents*, the *Poetry*, and the *Changes*, not to mention the Confucian texts such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Xunzi*.

Lüshi Chunqiu introduces ten prominent thinkers at that time as follows: “Lao Dan valued softness, Confucius valued humaneness, Mo Di valued uprightness, Guan Yin valued purity, Master Liezi valued emptiness, Chen Pian valued evenness, Mr. Yang valued self, Sun Bin valued power, Wang Liao valued taking initiative, and Er Liang valued standing behind. These ten persons are all the prominent figures of all under heaven” (848: 421d–2a). Among these ten leaders in the ancient intellectual world, at least seven people—Lao Dan, Guan Yin, Liezi, Tian Pian, Yang Zhu, Sun Bin, and Er Liang—are tied with *Laozi*. All these strata of thoughts eventually dissolved into *Laozi* in varying degrees. Even though nothing is wrong with the traditional perception of *Laozi*, its philosophical webs naturally point to its syncretic nature prior to being defined with Daoism.⁶⁷

Concerning the relationship between *Lüshi Chunqiu* and *Laozi*, many see the former as a sort of commentary of the latter. However, it is required to pay attention to Lü Buwei's boastful and confident announcement that anyone who could add to or delete even one character from the book to make it better would win one thousand pieces of gold. If *Lüshi Chunqiu* were a commentary or a quasi-copy of *Laozi*, he would have not boasted of it as such. *Lüshi Chunqiu* was attributed to a man who reigned supreme in the state of Qin, which was about to unify China for the first time. On the contrary, *Laozi* had rarely been known among scholars and politicians at that time. How could *Lüshi Chunqiu* possibly be a commentary on *Laozi*? Moreover, trying to collect as many ideas and stories with various provenances as possible, *Lüshi Chunqiu* usually noted its references.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it never mentions *Laozi* on any page. If *Lüshi Chunqiu* knew of *Laozi* but deliberately did not mention it, this would exhibit an attitude of disrespect. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, however, illustrates Lao Dan, who Sima Qian introduced as one of the possible authors of *Laozi*, as one of the masters teaching Confucius. It would be the first source to single out Lao Dan as such save some dubious narrations in *Zhuangzi* in this respect. The book also lauded Lao Dan as one of the three great sages.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the name of *Laozi* is absent in this book starring Lao Dan as one of the teachers of Confucius. No explanation but the one that those involved in the completion of the book did not know about *Laozi* would suit with this situation.

The political doctrine of Qin, a powerful legalism, does not please the teaching of *Laozi*. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, however, also criticizes political hegemony and supremacy as *Laozi* does. Gao Sisun (1158–1231) diagnosed that *Lüshi Chunqiu* aspired to criticize the First Emperor's hegemony.⁷⁰ Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402) also observed, "This book often talks about the faults of the previous kings of Qin, but did not receive punishment by the laws of Qin. This means that the laws of Qin were more generous than we think they were." He also added that what *Lüshi Chunqiu* discussed in such chapters as "Dayu" ("Elimination of Obstructions") and "Fenzhi" ("Division of Work") was "perfectly pertaining to the problems of the First Emperor."⁷¹ Echoing these views, Guo Moruo explained that *Lüshi Chunqiu* demonstrated a political stance distinguished from that of Qin politics.⁷² If *Lüshi Chunqiu* was tolerated in Qin, compilation of *Laozi* would have been possible there as well. Whether the Qin policy was aligned with its teaching is another issue.

Let's look back at what happened to Lü Buwei, who directed the publication of *Lüshi Chunqiu*. *Shiji* does not detail his last moment. Sima Qian, who was fond of collecting unusual and odd stories, recorded that he was divested of power by the First Emperor after being implicated in an improper relationship between the disguised eunuch Lao Ai and the Empress Dowager Di, his onetime concubine. He left the government post in the tenth year of Ying Zheng's reign and committed suicide two years later in 235 BCE (*Shiji*, 85: 2512–2513).⁷³ Lü

Buwei's life came to a miserable end. His funeral was held secretly, and among those who attended it, those from the state of Jin were all expelled out of the state, and those from Qin were punished depending on the degree of their involvements (*Shiji*, 6: 231). When the project of *Lüshi Chunqiu* was under way, three thousand guests stayed in Lü Buwei's academy, a prosperous number compared to that of the Jixia Academy, which had seventy guests in its early years and reached only one thousand during its heyday. Lü Buwei's academy was much greater in size and number, but eventually most of its guests perished from the state, with only a few remaining in Qin.

As a matter of fact, in the history of *Laozi*, the name of Qin has not been brushed aside as much as many people believe because one of the possible authors of *Laozi* in the record of "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" of *Shiji*, that is, Great Historian Dan, supposedly visited Duke Xian of Qin and predicted Qin's unification of China.⁷⁴ Of course, the cynosure of "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" is Lao Dan, not Great Historian Dan. According to it, he was originally from the state of Chu,⁷⁵ later became a librarian at the Zhou's court, left the Zhou when it was about to decline, and eventually dictated *Laozi* on the request of the gatekeeper, Yin Xi, when he reached Hangu Pass. This is one of the two main narratives in the Laozi's biography recorded in "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan."

Another narrative features Confucius asking Laozi about rituals. Because of the apparent distinction between the ideas of Confucius and *Laozi* as well as the criticism of ritual in *Laozi*, few academics today see this story free from fabrication. However, in a recent trend of the Chinese classical studies, scholars tend to discover some historical fragments in this story, rather than entirely dismissing it. In this perspective, Confucius is believed as having asked a "senior," the literal meaning of "Laozi," about rituals.⁷⁶ This understanding is plausible because many widely circulated stories in ancient China were reproduced by simply changing the protagonists and settings from those of the original stories. In the same manner, we can insert some names in place of the originals seen in another part of Lao Dan's story, which is that he left the Zhou in anticipation of its fall.

Laozi's departure from the Zhou has been understood as his departure for the west by passing through Hangu Pass. However, *Shiji* does not mention any specific direction, except that he "left" and "reached the Pass." Thus, we may assume that the compiler of *Laozi*, not Lao Dan, moved from Qin, not Zhou, in the west toward Hangu Pass in the east, instead of moving from the east to west, anticipating the downfall of Qin, not Zhou again. As a matter of fact, this is the trail traveled by Lü Buwei's expelled guests after his death.

If predicting Qin's fall immediately following Lü Buwei's death and the deportation of his guests is premature, consider the Book Burning. The First Emperor unified China in 221 BCE, the twenty-sixth year of his reign, and fourteen years after Lü Buwei's death. In 213 BCE, the thirty-fourth year

of his reign, the First Emperor ordered that all the useless books be burned. Contrary to the historical prejudice that sees the Qin dynasty as a mere regime of violence, seventy masters (*boshi*) were working in the Qin's court at the time this incident occurred, and they were teaching a wide range of subjects from the ideas of the Many Masters to the classics. Among these masters of the Qin were Fu Sheng from the state of Qi, later known as the transmitter of the "new text" of the *Documents*, the Confucian Chunyu Kun from the state of Qi, who advocated the old tradition, and Shusun Tong, who became a prominent Confucian scholar during the early Han dynasty (*Shiji*, 99: 2720). Non-Confucian scholars also showed up in the list of the "masters." For example, "Yiwenzhi" in *Hanshu* cataloged *Huanggong* (*The Elder Huang*) as a work of the Logicians, noting that its author was a master from the Qin (30: 1736). Some of these masters moved from other states to the Qin after the unification in 221 BCE, but others emerged from Qin, who had probably been Lü Buwei's guests. According to "Baiguan gongqing biao" ("Table of the Lords and Ministers in the Hundred Offices") in *Hanshu*, these masters were high-ranking officials of the Qin in charge of "things of the past, present, and future" (19A: 726). Similarly, "Lü Buwei liezhuan" ("Biography of Lü Buwei") in *Shiji* describes *Lüshi Chunqiu* as a book about "things of the past, present, and future" (85: 2510). Thus, if the Qin had people supervising things of the past, present, and future in its court, those involved in *Lüshi Chunqiu* were second to none for these positions.

These masters did not fade immediately after the Book Burning. Instead, all of the seventy masters kept their positions for a while. The following year of the Book Burning, the thirty-fifth year of the First Emperor, Daoists Housheng and Lusheng complained, "Even though there are seventy masters, they are merely filling the positions, but are never used" (*Shiji*, 6: 258). In fact, it was their soothsaying of the fall of the Qin that infuriated the First Emperor that he reportedly buried the Confucian scholars and Daoists alive. This tells that since the outbreak of the Book Burning, even the Daoists sensed the dynasty's decline. Thus, some of the seventy masters, if not all of them, must have been aware of it as well. Though pinpointing who the person was is not possible, if someone predicted the fall of the Qin instead of the fall of the Zhou, left the Qin, and reached Hangu Pass, and if that person was also engaged in completion of *Lüshi Chunqiu*, then that person could be the compiler of *Laozi*. This theory will ascribe the description of Lao Dan's leaving the Zhou, not the Qin, in "Laozi Han Fei liezhuan" to an effort to bring consistency to the whole narration wherein *Laozi* from the Zhou taught Confucius.

Affiliating *Laozi* with the Chu culture is generic among scholars. Truly, neither the states of Lu nor Qi could usher in *Laozi's* ideas because the state of Lu was the hub of Confucianism and Mohism and the state of Qi, the neighbor of Lu, was also greatly influenced by these traditions. These predominant

traditions would neither fertilize the burgeoning idea nor allow it to abnegate humaneness and rightness. An etymological example in *Laozi* buttresses this point. In chapter 67 *Laozi* states, “All under heaven say that I am great but look unwise (67).” “Unwise” here is a translation for *bu* 不 (“not”) *xiao* 肖 (“to resemble”). According to *Fangyan*, *xiao* was used in the provinces of western Chu, Liang, and Yi, while in the state of Qi its synonym *lei* 類 was more often used for the same meaning.⁷⁷ These provinces fell under the territory of the three states from Jin (Zhao, Wei, and Han), the state of Chu, and the state of Qin during the Warring States period.

Meanwhile, *Laozi* was not solidly receptive to the new academic orientation of the three states from Jin. Although militated by the Militarists, Legalists, and Logicians, *Laozi* was not utterly eclipsed by their utilitarianism, nor was it as aggressive as these schools in its pursuit of the utilitarian goal. It not only considered the well-being of a state but also addressed the issue of the salvation of the world, topics seldom discussed in the traditions of the three states from Jin.

If *Laozi* belongs neither to Qi nor to Lu, nor to the three states from Jin, only the states of Qin and Chu remain. They were two of the seven leading states in the Warring States period, but scholars have revolved around the state of Chu in weighting the origin *Laozi* thus far. This was a conventional practice in the Chinese academia dating back thousands of years because when *Laozi* gained reputation in the early Han period, the Qin was branded as a dynasty of enmity and tyranny, and accordingly it was part of a baleful history. Associating *Laozi* with the Qin has been inauspicious ever since.

However, some scholars have disputed on the conjugation of the Qin with a mere tyrant dynasty that conducted the burning of books and burying of Confucian scholars. Zheng Qiao (1104–1162) wrote:

Liu Jia was a great Confucian of the Qin; Li Yiji was a Confucian from the Qin; and Shusun Tong, with his understanding of literature, was invited by the Qin to the position of Erudite (*boshi*) and stayed in that office for several years. When Chen Sheng’s revolt erupted, the Second Emperor of the Qin summoned about thirty Erudite and Confucian scholars to inquire into the reason for the rebellion, and they responded to his inquiry based on the meanings of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. This indicates that the Qin never abandoned the intelligence of the Confucian scholars or the study of the Confucian classics. Moreover, Shusun Tong nurtured more than one hundred disciples from the beginning of the Han, so the tradition of the states of Qi and Lu had not vanished yet. . . . [W]e can notice that the Confucian tradition was never abolished during the Qin, and that the people buried by the First Emperor were at odds with him in their opinions at that time.⁷⁸

Before Zheng Qiao, Wang Chong (27–ca. 97) also questioned the Han scholars' criticism of the Qin's Book Burning, stating, "the Qin was quite cruel but did not burn the books of the Many Masters."⁷⁹ These estimations suggest that the Qin's image as a state of tyranny and atrocity was to a large extent created and sustained by the rivaling Han.

Sima Qian believed that the Qin's unification began with the achievements of the Marquis of Rang, who became the states' prime minister in 295 BCE, the twelfth year of King Zhao's reign (*Shiji*, 72: 2330). Although military superiority does not always entail cultural effulgence, from that time on, the state of Qin was apparently able to enjoy the finest of Chinese culture. The First Emperor was the first emperor in Chinese history, and he was received with the highest protocol, as seen in his ritual of Feng-Shan. Such protocol is a window to the rich culture of the Qin. It was also the protocol that inspired the first emperor of the Han dynasty to change his attitude and begin to treat Confucian scholars with respect, even though he had previously abhorred even the color of their costumes.⁸⁰

Most institutions of the Han in its early period "by and large succeeded those of the Qin" (*Shiji*, 23: 1159). Then, the Qin was most likely more than a tyrannical dynasty. Emperor Wu's reign in the Han dynasty had only seven masters, whereas the Qin's court had seventy masters. Gu Yanwu (1613–1682) maintained that the Qin dynasty did not culturally lag behind, stating, "The First Emperor erected six steles in order to commemorate each of the six states he conquered. Upon examining them, we come to know that the punishment system in the Qin seemed to be excessive, but its intention to guide its people and rectify customs was the same as that of the three sage kings."⁸¹ Modern scholarship, for example, that of Xiao Gongquan and Kanaya Osamu, has also refuted such bias against the Qin dynasty, and more recently, Martin Kern expressed "doubt about notion of extreme legalist harshness for which the short-lived Chin dynasty has been notorious for over two millennia."⁸² Despite all of these rebuttals, however, the negative impression of the Qin has remained unaltered. This would be the main reason why scholars have not investigated *Laozi* in light of its relationship with the Qin so far.

In contrast to the Qin, the first Han emperor was born in the state of Chu, so we may reasonably assume that various attempts were made in the early Han to connect *Laozi* with the state of Chu. The endurance of the Han dynasty for more than four centuries would have solidified some plausible allegations from those attempts into "facts" that were not challenged for two millennia. Mawangdui texts, however, may help us not hastily conclude that *Laozi* is a product of Chu culture. Here lies another of the Mawangdui texts' contributions. First, one of the oldest arguments that conjoin *Laozi* with Chu pertains to its use of the rhyming particle *xi* 兮, which helps streamline a phrase. Because this particle frequently appears in Chu writings such as *Chuci*, one could champion the close

relationship between *Laozi* and Chu. The archaeological documents, however, invalidate this argument because the Mawangdui texts use the particle *a* 阿 in place of *xi*, and the Guodian documents use *hu* 乎⁸³ instead of *xi*. Interestingly, *Lüshi Chunqiu* also used *hu* in place of *xi* in general. In addition, whereas Text B of the Mawangdui *Laozi* and the later editions of *Laozi* use *shuang* 爽 (“spoiled” in the context), a word from the Chu dialect, in chapter 14, Text A uses an obsolete but utterly different character in place of *shuang*.

Second, a passage in *Laozi* reads, “Those who are good at locking gates do not have crossbars and bolts, but no one can open the gates (27).” In the later editions, “crossbars and bolts” appears as *guan* 關 *jian* 鍵, while it appears as *guan* 關 *yue* 籥 in the Mawangdui texts. According to *Fangyan*, *yue* in *guan yue* was used in the area to the west of Hangu Pass, which belonged to the Qin.⁸⁴

Third, the term “right tally” (*you* 右 *xie* 契) in Text A in chapter 79 appears in Text B and the later editions as “left tally” (*zuo* 左 *xie* 契). This change from “right tally” to “left tally” mirrors the Han culture, which prioritized the left side over the right side, compared to the more common practice in the Warring States period, which valued the right side over the left. However, the state of Chu valued the left side more even during the Warring States period. If *Laozi* is related to the state of Chu, it should have stated “left tally” from the beginning.

Finally, in chapter 14, Texts A and B state, “Hold on to the Way of the present in order to manage the actualities of the present, thereby to understand the ancient beginning.” In the later editions, “The Way of the present” has changed into “The Way of the past.” This is yet another case of a later modification of the text. The reason for this change is that the expression, “Hold on to the Way of the present in order to manage the actualities of the present,” did not match the notion of “respecting the past,” which initially prevailed in the states of Qi and Lu and remained prevalent even until the Han stabilized its political system. However, during this period, the state of Qin or the Qin dynasty unyieldingly contradicted the tradition of “respecting the past” and espoused learning from the present. Thus, if neither the states of Qi and Lu nor the three states from Jin, the possible place where *Laozi* could have originated is Qin, not Chu.⁸⁵ The origin of *Laozi* has remained veiled and the Qin has also remained forgotten from the history as well. Therefore, if *Laozi* originated in Qin, it was perhaps destined for a life of mystery.

The title of this book is “The Old Master,” which is a literal translation of *Laozi*. I do not call it “*Dao De Jing*,” or “*De Dao Jing*,” the terms favored today. Jiao Hong (1540–1620) held that not until Emperor Jing’s reign of the Han (157–141 BCE) did this book begin to be called “*jing*,” a classic. Because “Yiwenzhi” in *Hanshu* recorded three interpretations of the classic of *Laozi*, it was probably dubbed as a classic in the Han dynasty. The Mawangdui texts, however, existed before the reign of Emperor Jing. Thus, calling it *Laozi* would

be more appropriate, which was the name used by other earlier classic texts. While no other suggestions than reading *zi* in *Laozi* as meaning “master” is presented, the meaning of *Lao* is still disputable. I am inclined to agree with Zheng Xuan’s (127–200) opinion, who contended that it “indicated an aged person in ancient times.”⁸⁶ I believe that this view exposes the spirit of the book well because its teachings have derived from a deep, old experience of both historical and personal “changes.”

In this book, the Chinese texts following my translations primarily come from the Mawangdui Text A, which has been supplemented throughout the book by Text B for the missing characters in it. When a wording of Text B overrides that of Text A due to the obvious errors in Text A, it is noted at the end of the Chinese texts. All wordings coming from sources other than the Mawangdui texts are also noted as such. All obsolete characters in the Texts A and B have been replaced with their parallel characters in current use with meticulous investigations.