

Preface

Several years ago, Ping and I came to an hiatus in our work on a proposed bilingual version of the *Zhuangzi* for The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press (CUHK Press). While we awaited readers' reports, I decided to use the time to study the *Liezi*, a work of particular relevance to the *Zhuangzi* and of course to Daoism generally — a work with which I felt I was insufficiently familiar.

To my delight, I found the *Liezi* to be an intriguing work in several ways. It seemed to express the essence of early Daoism in a relatively straightforward and engaging fashion through a series of anecdotes and dialogues, clear in meaning and laced with humour. It has, however, come in for a significant amount of criticism, primarily regarding authenticity, leaving the overall impression, at least from Western studies, that it is barely worth studying! I found this difficult to equate with the fact that, in China over the centuries, it has acquired a considerable body of secondary material, including a very interesting and informative commentary by Zhang Zhan, a noted Xuanxue intellectual, who himself contributed importantly to the debate on non-being and being. Subsequently, the work underwent an apotheosis during the Tang dynasty flowering of Daoism under the aegis of the Emperor Xuanzong, when two important Tang commentaries were added, one by Lu Zhongxuan and one by Yin Jingshun, corresponding respectively to the commentaries of Cheng Xuanying and Lu Deming on the *Zhuangzi*. During the Song dynasty, further commentaries were added and the work was preserved in the *Dao Zang*. During the Qing dynasty, the *Liezi* was included in all major collections such as the *Siku Quanshu*, as well as drawing the attention of important Qing scholars such as Yu Yue and Qian Mu. More recently, in the West, the excellent collection of essays, edited by Ronnie Littlejohn and Jeffrey Dippmann, seemed to signal a more positive attitude to the work.

These facts, combined with the nature of the work itself, could be taken as confirmation of the view that the *Liezi* is a significant component of a triad of early Daoist works — works which are in fact complementary.

After discussing the matter, Ping and I suggested to the CUHK Press that we do a bilingual version of the *Liezi* accompanied by Zhang Zhan's commentary. In addition, a substantial amount of supplementary material — prefaces and other essays etc. — was to be added. Happily, the Press agreed! On a personal note, the more I worked on this text, the more I liked it and appreciated what I saw as its value. I am sure Ping would say the same.

This volume is the result. Basing the text on the *Siku Quanshu*, which includes Yin's commentary, we also made extensive use of two excellent modern editions — those of Yang Bojun and Zhuang Wanshou. We relied particularly on the former for the supplementary material, including the complete Tang dynasty commentary of Lu Zhongxuan which was added to our Chinese text. The essays include the short piece by Liu Zongyuan (773–819), who is often cited as the first to raise the issue of authenticity. In this, he gives his reasons for taking up the *Liezi*: “Its literary style is similar to the *Zhuangzi* but more substantial (down to earth) and rich, with few false notes being struck. How can those who love literature cast it aside?” We would echo this view!

Ping and I would like to express our considerable gratitude to the CUHK Press, particularly its Director Gan Qi, Ye Minlei, and Brian Yu, for publishing this work and, more generally, for supporting our bilingual projects over the years. We would also like to thank Susie Collis, to whom this work is dedicated, for all the help she has given (and continues to give) us in all our endeavours.

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