WANDERING ON THE WAY

Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu

A translation by the acclaimed translator of the *Tao Te Ching*

Victor H. Mair

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EARLY TAOIST TALES AND PARABLES OF CHUANG TZU

Translated with an Introduction
and Commentary by
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PREFACE
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Since the initial publication of this book in 1994, about a half-dozen new translations of the *Chuang Tzu* have appeared in the bookstores, most of them partial. In glancing through these recent English renditions, I have noticed echoes of *Wandering on the Way,* some subtle, some not so subtle. While I am flattered that others may have been inspired by the present work to undertake their own versions and happy that the *Chuang Tzu* is finally gaining the recognition that it so richly deserves, I shall not deceive myself into thinking that my favorite Chinese book will ever match the stupendous rate of approximately one new English translation per month achieved by the *Tao Te Ching.*

There are so few changes that I wish to make in this second edition of *Wandering on the Way* that I shall simply note them here. First of all, as I had indicated in the annotations on p. 356, I would now come right out and translate Hu Tzu (p. 69) as Master Pot. Second, on p. 371, under the entry "breathing . . . from the heels," there is a misprint: p. 480 should be p. 52. Also, in line 4 of the same note, instead of "the previous note," it should read "the note above."

An egregious omission from the bibliography of the first

edition is Christopher C. Rand's "Chuang Tzu: Text and Substance," in Mair, ed., *Chuang Tzu: Composition,* pp. 5–58, which is listed but not itemized. Rand's article, although virtually unknown even to Sinologists, is the best study of the composition of the *Chuang Tzu,* and anyone who has a serious interest in the text should consult it.

For those who wish to learn more about the history, nature, and contents of the *Chuang Tzu,* I have just finished writing two articles on these subjects. They are entitled "Chuang Tzu," forthcoming in the supplemental volume to *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature,* William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) and "The *Zhuang Zi* and Its Impact," forthcoming in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

Finally, I am pleased that this new edition of *Wandering on the Way* is being published by the University of Hawai'i Press and hope that those who acquire it will enjoy reading this marvelous work of early Chinese literature as much as I did translating it.

PREFACE
1994

The *Chuang Tzu* is far and away my favorite Chinese book. Although this fascinating collection of essays, tales, and anecdotes presents many difficult problems of interpretation, for two decades it has been the work that I wanted more than any other to render into English. To prepare myself for the task, I gathered together scores of traditional and modern commentaries. Although I have consulted them closely and carefully during the course of my research, I seldom refer to them directly in the Notes on the Translation. The main reason for this is that I view the *Chuang Tzu* primarily as a work of literature rather than as a work of philosophy and wish to present it to the reading public unencumbered by technical arcana that would distract from the pleasure of encountering one of the most playful and witty books in the world.

There have been a few previous translations of the *Chuang Tzu* into English, French, German, Mandarin, Japanese, and other languages (the majority of them incomplete or abridged, others very much out of date) although nothing like the hundreds that have been done for the *Tao Te Ching*, that other well-known Taoist classic. A couple of these renditions are quite

competent, but I believe that none of them has succeeded in capturing the quintessential spirit of the book. Both the style and the thought of the *Chuang Tzu* are extraordinary. If we try to approach them by ordinary means, we will surely fail. Therefore, in making this translation, I have not been afraid to experiment with new modes of expression to simulate the odd quality of writing in the *Chuang Tzu*. The chief aim of this book is philological accuracy. Beyond that, however, I wish to present Chuang Tzu as a preeminent literary stylist and to rescue him from the clutches of those who would make of him no more than a waffling philosopher or a maudlin minister of the Taoist faith. Consequently, this is the only complete translation of the *Chuang Tzu* that renders the poetic portions of the text as verse in English. Furthermore, I have endeavored to reflect the overall poetic quality of the book in my translation. As the noted sinologist Burton Watson has so aptly observed (*Basic Writings*, p. 17):

> Chuang Tzu, . . . though he writes in prose, uses words in the manner of a poet, particularly in the lyrical descriptions of the Way or the Taoist sage. In the broader sense of the word, his work is in fact one of the greatest poems of ancient China.

To ignore the poetics of the *Chuang Tzu* by treating it simply as a piece of philosophical prose would do it a grave injustice.

The main reason I fell in love with the *Chuang Tzu* so long ago, and why my fascination with the book has only increased over the years, is the sheer literary attraction of this strange and wonderful collection of Taoist writings. Reading the *Chuang Tzu*, even after the hundredth time, gives me pure pleasure and helps me to relax in times of stress or anxiety. As imaginative literature, there is no other Chinese work that even remotely compares to it before the introduction of Buddhist narrative and dramatic traditions from India and Central Asia. The *Chuang Tzu*, however, is not simply entertaining. It is also a

highly edifying work in the sense that it is full of profound wisdom and insights on life.

Inasmuch as this is a book that has meant so much to me for decades, I wanted to share it with others. That is the simplest explanation for the genesis of the present work. Another impetus for the creation of this translation is my strong feeling that the *Chuang Tzu* deserves to be better known in the West. The popularity of the *Tao Te Ching* outside of China is nothing short of phenomenal. Almost unbelievably, a new translation of that little book appears at the steady rate of about one per month. There are now so many different English editions of the *Tao Te Ching* available that enthusiasts who have no familiarity with Chinese are emboldened to make their own translations by relying solely on previous versions. As a sinologist, I will not comment on the reliability of such secondary renderings, but at least they demonstrate that the *Tao Te Ching* has by now become a thoroughly domesticated American classic.

It is sad, by contrast, that few Americans beyond scholarly circles have ever even heard of the *Chuang Tzu*, much less experienced the thrill of dipping inside its covers. In a way, I feel a sense of injustice that the *Tao Te Ching* is so well known to my fellow citizens while the *Chuang Tzu* is so thoroughly ignored, because I firmly believe that the latter is in every respect a superior work. We may account for the enormous popularity of the *Tao Te Ching* by pointing to its brevity and its ambiguity: everybody can not only find in it what they want, they can find what they're looking for quickly. The *Tao Te Ching* in its many American renditions is a kind of Taoist fast food—you devour it in several bites and it doesn't cost much. The *Chuang Tzu*, on the other hand, is more like a banquet or a buffet—you are obliged to spend more time savoring its tremendous variety of delightful dishes, and of course you have to pay a bit more because it is bigger.

This is a book to help you slow down and unbend. Some readers may be so captivated by it that they will want to plunge from beginning to end in just two or three sittings. For most,

however, a more leisurely approach is recommended. You can open the *Chuang Tzu* to virtually any of its scores of sections and experience them separately, or you can read one of its thirty-three chapters at a time. The point is that no matter where in the *Chuang Tzu* you turn, there is food for thought.

Here you will learn about the usefulness of uselessness, the joy of wandering, the insignificance of the difference between big and little, what it means to follow nature, and a thousand other stimulating topics. Within the pages of the *Chuang Tzu*, you will discover the weirdest cast of characters this side of Bedlam, most of them invented out of whole cloth by the author(s). You will laugh uproariously at the eccentricities and antics of the most zany bunch of sages ever assembled. This is not some dry, moralistic treatise, nor is it a demanding, philosophical disquisition. Rather, the sublime wisdom of the *Chuang Tzu* is imparted to us by poking holes in our conventional knowledge and assumptions about what is good and bad. It accomplishes all of this, furthermore, with a divine sense of humor throughout. The *Chuang Tzu* deals with very heavy stuff, but it does so with a feather-light touch.

Before proceeding further, I should explain what the name of the book means and how it should be pronounced. "Chuang" is the surname of the supposed author of this marvelous work and "Tzu" simply implies "master" in the sense of a leading figure in a given school of thought in ancient China. Hence, we may render "Chuang Tzu" as "Master Chuang." (I generally refer to the title of the book as the *Chuang Tzu* and the name of the reputed author as Master Chuang.) While the pronunciation of the title is not such an easy matter as its meaning, I would console my poor reader who is afraid to attempt it by saying that speakers of Sinitic languages themselves have pronounced (and still do pronounce) the two sinographs (Chinese characters) used to write it in widely varying ways depending upon where and when they lived. For example, a Cantonese of today would read them quite differently from a Pekingese, and a resident of

the Chinese capital 2,600 years ago would have pronounced them in a manner that would be unrecognizable to either the Cantonese or the Pekingese. Therefore, it does not really matter that much how each of us says the title of the book in his or her own idiolect. For those who are fastidious, however, the "correct" pronunciation in Modern Standard Mandarin may be approximated as follows. The "Chu-" part of Chuang sounds like the "ju" of juice or jute, except that the "u" functions as a glide to the succeeding vowel and thus comes out as a "w"; the "-a-" must be long, as in Ma and Pa; the "-ng" is the same as in English. Perhaps the best way to approximate Tzu is to lop off the initial part of words such as "adze," "fads," and so forth, striving to enunciate only the "d" and the sibilant that comes after it, hence -dze or -ds. To end this little lesson in Mandarin phonology, then, we may transcribe Chuang Tzu phonetically as *jwawng dz* or *jwahng dzuh.*

"Chuang Tzu" is the traditional sinological transcription of the name of the putative author and of the title of the book attributed to him that is translated here. Recently a new transcription system has come into vogue in China according to which the name is transcribed as "Zhuang Zi." The Mandarin sounds these two transcription systems indicate remain the same (as given at the end of the previous paragraph).

Even though the *Chuang Tzu* was written over two millennia ago and in a language that is at times well nigh impenetrable, it still has a vital relevance today. Communist theorists in China continue to debate vigorously the significance of the text, whether it is materialist or mystical, positive or negative. There are those who also perceive distinctly modernist strains in the *Chuang Tzu.* Considering the wide familiarity of the contemporary world with his compatriot, Lao Tzu (the Old Master), who is a far less interesting and stimulating writer, it is likely that we will be hearing more of Master Chuang in the not-too-distant future.

As we shall see in the Introduction under the heading "The

Question of Authorship," the *Chuang Tzu* was clearly not all written by a single thinker. Nonetheless, there is an essentially inimitable spirit that informs the book as a whole. For the purpose of discussion, we may refer to that spirit as Chuang Tzu (Zhuang Zi) or Master Chuang (Master Zhuang).

In spite of the fact that it is richly rewarding, the *Chuang Tzu* is not an easy book. It has been a challenge to me, the translator, to devise means for bringing it alive in English while at the same time remaining faithful to the extraordinary qualities of the original Chinese text. I predict that the *Chuang Tzu* will be equally challenging to you, the reader. But, in the end, you will emerge from your encounter with this wonderful anthology a wiser and happier person. That is my promise to you, reader, so long as you promise not to get hung up on mere words. For, as the *Chuang Tzu* (end of Chapter 26) says:

> A fish-trap is for catching fish; once you've caught the fish, you can forget about the trap. A rabbit-snare is for catching rabbits; once you've caught the rabbit, you can forget about the snare. Words are for catching ideas; once you've caught the idea, you can forget about the words. Where can I find a person who knows how to forget about words so that I can have a few words with him?

INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The core of the *Chuang Tzu* was probably originally composed in the latter half of the fourth century B.C.E., but the text as a whole was not completed until toward the end of the second century B.C.E. To understand the nature of its compilation, we need to become familiar with the historical background and intellectual currents of the era when the book came into being.

The Chou dynasty (circa 1111–255 B.C.E.) was founded on feudalist principles that worked fairly well for a little over four centuries. During the Spring and Autumn period (771–476 B.C.E.), however, the authority of the Chou kings began to be undermined. While the Chou dynasty had not yet broken up entirely, it was divided into spheres of influence controlled by a dozen or so small feudal duchies. Late in this period, the *shih* ("retainer; knight") arose as an important new intellectual force in China. Gradually, they evolved from a warrior class to an influential group of scholars and political theorists who actively sought to alter the policies of the various dukes. Confucius is a good example of one such knight-scholar. Many of China's most prominent early thinkers came from this class, one of the four

main classes of Chinese society during the latter half of the Chou period, the other three being farmers, artisans, and merchants.

The Spring and Autumn period was followed by the Warring States period, also called the period of the Contending Kingdoms (475–221 B.C.E.). The deterioration of the Chou dynasty continued apace, with the imperial house being reduced to mere symbolic status. Real power was vested in the hands of the kings of the increasingly independent states who vied for hegemony. The number of significant states during this period was reduced to only half a dozen (see map, p. lv). Among themselves, they continually struggled for supremacy. Out of this constant conflict, two of the warring kingdoms, Ch'in in the far northwest and Ch'u in the south, finally emerged as the key powers. In 223 B.C.E., Ch'in defeated Ch'u and captured the heartland of China. A couple of years after that, Ch'in (whence the name China) established the first unified Chinese empire, the basic bureaucratic structure of which lasted until 1911, though undergoing countless rebellions and dynastic changes throughout history. To be brief, we may say that the Warring States period witnessed the demise of the old feudal regimes and their replacement by a centralized monarchy.

In spite of the political disruption and the social chaos of the Warring States period, intellectually this was by far the most exciting and lively era in the whole of Chinese history. Peripatetic philosophers wandered through the length and the breadth of the land trying to get the attention of any ruler who might be willing to put their ideas into practice. The Warring States period offers many interesting parallels with developments in Greek philosophy that were going on at the same time. We shall touch upon some of them here and in the Notes, but others deserve separate, intensive investigation for comparative purposes. Suffice it for the moment to say that the majority of China's seminal thinkers lived during this period and that it corresponds to the classical period of Greek philosophy.

Confucianism and Mohism

To understand the *Chuang Tzu*, it is necessary to realize that virtually all of the philosophical schools of the Warring States period were in dialogue with each other and, furthermore, that their vigorous debates are reflected in the pages of this book. Consequently, we would do well to make a survey of the most important thinkers of the age, especially those to whom the *Chuang Tzu* reacts most strongly.

The first intellectual tradition to coalesce as an identifiable school was that of the Confucianists. They were under the leadership of their namesake, the renowned early Chinese thinker, Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.). Confucius was active at the very end of the Spring and Autumn period, just before the outbreak of the Warring States period. Appearing during a time of sociopolitical upheaval, Confucius strove to restore order by propagating his doctrines.

Confucius was a man of great stature, both physically and in terms of his reputation. A profoundly conservative moralist who hearkened back to an imagined golden age at the beginning of the Chou dynasty, it was he who set the tone of reversion instead of progress that characterized the mainstream of Chinese social and political thought until this century and still has a profound influence on traditional Chinese intellectuals. His rationale for glorifying the past was based on the firm belief that the legendary sage-kings of antiquity could provide a model for good government in his own chaotic times.

Confucius' teachings are preserved in the *Analects* which consists largely of conversations between him and his disciples. In the *Analects*, Confucius asserts that a king should rule through virtuous suasion rather than through sheer power. His ideal leader was the superior man (*chüntzu*), a person who was guided by the highest principles of conduct. Confucius and his followers were very much concerned with issues of benefit and harm, right and wrong, good and bad. The Confucians were

moral absolutists, stressing *yi* ("duty; righteousness; justice") and *jen* ("humaneness; benevolence"). At the same time, they were very much status-oriented in their approach to social relationships, insisting that there was an unalterably fixed pattern of domination and subservience between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother.

For Chuang Tzu (Master Chuang), the Confucianists were much too stiff and stuffy, too hidebound and hierarchical. Master Chuang took great delight in making fun of Confucius and his disciples. So formidable were Master Chuang's indictments of the Confucianists that the syncretists who were somewhat sympathetic to them tried to co-opt him by writing several sections subtly espousing their cause and sneaking them into his book. These will be pointed out below ("Structure and Composition of the Text") and in the appropriate chapter introductions.

The Mohists, who were active during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., were the first to challenge the heritage of Confucius. Their founder, Mo Ti or Mo Tzu (Master Mo), lived during the second half of the fifth century, having been born a few years after Confucius's death. It is significant that Master Mo was almost an exact contemporary of Socrates and that there are so many analogies between the system of thought that he propounded and various schools of Greek philosophy from the same period, but especially the Stoics. Tradition holds that Master Mo was originally a follower of Confucianism until he realized that it overemphasized rituals at the expense of ethics, so he parted company and founded his own school.

Master Mo was a skillful military engineer but devoted his talents solely to defensive works. In this sense, he might best be characterized as a militant pacifist. From the titles of ten important chapters of his works, we can gain an idea of the sorts of issues that occupied him and his followers: religion ("The Will of Heaven" and "Elucidating the Spirits"), philosophy ("Rejecting Destiny" and "Universal Love"), politics ("Elevating the

Worthy," "Conformity with Superiors," and "Rejecting Aggression"), morals ("Economy in Funerals," "Economy in Expenditures," and "Rejecting Music"). Master Mo was associated with workers, craftsmen, and tradesmen, quite unlike Confucius and his followers who were aristocratic in their orientation. The Mohists were fiercely egalitarian and tested all dogmas by whether or not they benefited the people. For Mo Tzu, everything was measured in terms of social utility. He criticized the Confucians for their skepticism of heaven and spiritual beings as well as for their fatalism. Consequently, a debate of huge proportions ensued between the Confucians and the Mohists. The Mohist style of argumentation was dry and wooden. This is one of the reasons why their teachings virtually disappeared after the third century B.C.E. and have only been brought to light again in this century. Because of the ostensible similarity in their doctrines, Christians have been especially interested in the Mohists.

The Mohists were scientifically minded. Their works include estimable treatises on optics and other technical subjects. So practically oriented were they that they even adopted the use of some simplified sinographs in an attempt to ease the burden of a difficult writing system. The Mohists subscribed to an ascetic discipline and behaved like religious fundamentalists. After the death of the founder, Mohism was organized into a church headed by a succession of Elder Masters that lasted for several centuries. As a man, Master Mo was admired by all, but his teachings are considered by most Chinese to have been far too demanding. In a nutshell, we may describe Master Mo as a spartan, populist activist and theoretician of rather dour disposition who advocated universal love, inveighed against excess and luxury, and believed that the only justifiable war was a defensive one—not at all to be scoffed at but, by the same token, not at all to the lighthearted taste of Master Chuang either. He considered the Mohists to be far too preachy and pragmatic, too mechanical and maudlin. We will encounter much wry ridicule of them in these pages.

Other Dominant Philosophies

Chinese historians speak of the Hundred Schools of Thought that flourished during the Warring States period, a round number serving to indicate the many competing schools. It was indeed the most vital period in the development of Chinese thought. All the schools came forth in response to the burning realities of the day and suggested a broad spectrum of solutions to cure the ills of the body politic. The leading thinkers were often government officials themselves or itinerant scholars who traveled from one feudal state to another promoting their programs for social and political reform, trying to find a sympathetic ruler who would put them into action. The ideas of these Hundred Schools are preserved in the conversations between their masters and disciples, in memorials and other types of documents, and in treatises of varying lengths. The chief concepts that all of the schools debated included the following:

Tao (pronounced *dow*)—the Way, or to be more etymologically precise, the Track

Te (pronounced *duh*)—integrity or virtue; etymologically rendered as "doughtiness"

Jen (pronounced *ren*)—benevolence; etymologically equivalent to "humaneness"

Yi (pronounced *yee*)—righteousness; etymologically rendered as "justice"

T'ien (pronounced *teeyan*)—heaven; etymologically equivalent to "divinity"

Each school had its own particular Way or Track. The Confucians, for example, promoted the Way of man, and the Taoists advocated the Way of the Way (cosmos or a universalized concept of nature). The *Chuang Tzu* responded to nearly all the other schools of thought during the middle and late Warring

States period. Since Master Chuang reacted to these schools, elements from a wide variety of sources are operative in his book. To understand the *Chuang Tzu*, then, it is necessary to have some sense of the competing schools of thought that were present during the Warring States period, beyond just the Confucians and the Mohists.

During the fourth century, a new figure enters the fray. This is the individualist Yang Chu. Most of what we know about Yang Chu may be found in the seventh chapter of the *Master Lieh* which bears his name. It shows him as an unorthodox personage, but not as someone who was truly licentious. His enemies called him an egoist and it was unfairly said of him (by a prominent Confucian) that he would not sacrifice a hair to benefit all under heaven. (What he actually said was "If nobody would sacrifice a hair, if nobody would try to benefit the world, then the world would become orderly." In other words, we should live and let live, not imposing ourselves on others nor letting others impose themselves on us. The Confucian distortion is both obvious and self-serving.) This was in direct contrast to Master Mo who was renowned as an extremely hard worker for the public good. The Yangists were intent upon protecting themselves from the dangers of involvement in political strife. Yang Chu held that man must nourish his Heaven-endowed nature by keeping it intact and striving for happiness. We may characterize his philosophy as a brand of moderate hedonism.

It was in this context, then—after Confucius, Mo Tzu, and Yang Chu—that Master Chuang appeared upon the scene. It is not surprising that these three thinkers loom so large in his book, because they had set the terms of the Warring States period's intellectual debates. But Master Chuang does something very unusual. Instead of joining them in a debate, he deflates them by undermining both their basic premises and the methods by which they argued them. Over and over again, Master Chuang demonstrates the futility of debate. Simultaneously with his attacks on disputation, however, a new group materialized who

espoused argument as a legitimate professional pursuit in its own right.

Appearing in the late fourth century, at about the same time as Master Chuang, were the Sophists or Logicians. Perhaps it would be more accurate to refer to them by the literal translation of their designation in Chinese, the School of Names (or Terms), or the School of Names and Debate, because they did not actually develop any syllogistic reasoning nor discover any laws of thought. In diverse ways, this new school affected all the other schools that were active during the fourth century. The leaders of the Sophists were Hui Shih and Kungsun Lung. Like the Mohist school, from which they derived, they were in favor of universal love and opposed to offensive war, but they differed from their predecessors in practicing disputation for its own sake. It was the Sophists who devised a whole set of celebrated paradoxes, such as Kungsun Lung's famous "A white horse is not a horse." Many of these paradoxical statements are preserved in the *Chuang Tzu*, but they are included there almost as a sort of joke. Master Chuang was actually a close friend of Hui Shih's. He mischievously debated with him and poked fun at his logic-chopping.

It is worth noting that the author of the final chapter of the *Chuang Tzu* gives great prominence to Hui Shih, not only by placing him in the culminating position, but simply by devoting so much space to this otherwise largely neglected philosopher. There is, in fact, some evidence that this section of Chapter 33 may originally have been part of a separate chapter devoted to Hui Shih. Like Master Mo, he truly deserves to be called a philosopher in contrast to the vast majority of other early Chinese thinkers who dealt primarily with social and political problems rather than logic, ontology, epistemology, and so forth. Master Mo, interestingly enough, is similarly highlighted in this survey by being placed first and by being awarded generous coverage.

Another major personality who appeared on the scene at

about the same time as Master Chuang was Mencius (circa 372–289 B.C.E.). Whereas Master Chuang satirized Confucius, Mo Tzu, and Yang Chu, Mencius ardently defended Confucius and criticized the other two. For his advocacy of collectivism based on universal love, Mencius singled out Mo Tzu as Confucius's most dangerous rival. His focus was on human nature, a subject that had actually been brought to the fore by Yang Chu. Still, Mencius criticized Yang Chu sharply for his assertion of the primacy of the self over society. Mencius emphasized that human nature is basically good and that all men could become sages by fulfilling their inherent potential. He tempered the aristocratic side of Confucianism by being a champion of the common people and speaking out for humane government. This he did by stressing the role of the scholar-official in inculcating moral values in the ruler who, as a result, would be encouraged to treat his subjects more kindly. Of all the early Confucian thinkers, Mencius was the most concerned with individual human development, but always within the context of creating a good society. During the third century, Master Hsün, another Confucian thinker who was influenced by several other schools, declared human nature to be fundamentally bad, that it could only be kept in check by education and strict moral inculcation. Given these presuppositions, it is not surprising that he believed in authoritarian principles of government.

By the end of the fourth century, all but the Confucians had recognized that the authority of the ancient sages could no longer be depended upon as an adequate guide to the contemporary world that had changed so tremendously. Master Chuang was among those who denied the relevance of the ancient sages for the contemporary world. Furthermore, while Confucian humanism definitely put man at the center of things, Master Chuang thought of man as but one among the myriad things.

Wing-tsit Chan (*Source Book*, p. 178) has pointed out that the Confucians have by and large been critical of Master Chuang. Hsün Tzu (Master Hsün, flourished 298–238 B.C.E.) said that

he was "prejudiced in favor of nature and does not know man." Chu Hsi (1130–1200), the preeminent Neo–Confucian, complained, "Lao Tzu at least wanted to do something, but Master Chuang did not want to do anything at all. He even said that he knew what to do but just did not want to do it."

This antagonism to Master Chuang on the part of the Confucians is understandable, of course, because Master Chuang himself was so critical of them. Master Chuang often plays tricks on us by sometimes having Confucius speak like a Taoist and sometimes like himself. We can never be sure which is which unless we pay very close attention to the drift of an entire tale. The multiplicity of ambiguous personae in the *Chuang Tzu* is part of the exhilarating reading experience that it presents. Sometimes even Master Chuang himself is made to appear antithetical to what we would expect of Master Chuang by sounding Confucian, pedantic, or technical.

To summarize this survey of Chinese thought during the Warring States period, we may say that the Confucians were primarily interested in family relationships as the model for organizing good government, the Mohists were preoccupied by societal obligations, the Yangists were concerned with the preservation and enhancement of the individual, the Sophists were consumed by questions of logic, and the Legalists were focused wholly on the advancement of the ruler and his state. In opposition to all of these were the Taoists who viewed human society and politics as inevitably corrupting and sought to merge with the Way by returning to nature as contemplative quietists and hermits.

Perhaps the best and most authoritative introduction to Warring States philosophy is the concluding chapter of the *Chuang Tzu* itself. A systematic account of the outstanding thinkers of the age, this chapter presents—in tightly argued, analytical fashion—many of the themes and figures that appear in narrative form elsewhere in the book. From a strictly scholarly point of view, therefore, it may well be the most valuable chapter

of the *Chuang Tzu*, even though it was clearly not written by Master Chuang himself, but probably by the editor(s) of the book who brought together the disparate materials that go to make it up. "All Under Heaven" amounts to a critical review of the major (and some minor) thinkers of the pre-Ch'in period. Considering the unprecedented nature of its accomplishment, the last chapter of the *Chuang Tzu* is a most remarkable document, a veritable intellectual tour de force.

Relationship to the *Tao Te Ching*

Of all the philosophers who were active during the Warring States period, Master Chuang's closest affinities are naturally with Lao Tzu (the Old Master or Masters—there were probably more than one of them). Like the Old Masters, Master Chuang held that what can be said of the Way is not really the Way, and there are many other points of similarity between them. The Old Masters were the originators of the sayings that were compiled as the *Tao Te Ching* around the end of the third century B.C.E. Master Chuang quotes from the *Tao Te Ching* repeatedly; dozens of examples could be cited. Those who are well acquainted with the *Tao Te Ching* will frequently notice echoes of that text in the pages of the *Chuang Tzu*. What is intriguing, however, is that they usually are not exact quotations. In other instances, sayings attributed to the Old Masters are not to be found in the standard edition of the *Tao Te Ching*. This indicates that the *Tao Te Ching* was still probably circulating as oral tradition at the time of Chuang Chou and had not yet coalesced as a written text, certainly not the text that we know today.

The *Tao Te Ching* is extremely terse and open to many different interpretations. The *Chuang Tzu*, on the other hand, is more definitive and comprehensive as a repository of early Taoist thought. The *Tao Te Ching* was addressed to the sage-king; it is basically a handbook for rulers. The *Chuang Tzu*, in contrast, is the earliest surviving Chinese text to present a philosophy for the

individual. The authors of the *Tao Te Ching* were interested in establishing some sort of Taoist rule, while the authors of the *Chuang Tzu* opted out of society, or at least out of power relationships within society. Master Chuang obviously wanted no part of the machinery of government. He compared the state bureaucrat to a splendidly decorated ox being led to sacrifice, while he preferred to think of himself as an unconstrained piglet playing in the mud. The *Tao Te Ching* offers the Way as a guide for life and it propounds nonaction as a means to achieve one's purpose in the workaday world. Master Chuang believed that the Way had supreme value in itself and consequently did not occupy himself with its mundane applications. Rather than paying attention to the governance of human society (the fundamental concern of most early Chinese thinkers), he stressed the need for transcendence and the freedom of the individual from such worldly concerns. In spite of all the differences, however, Master Chuang was clearly attracted by the doctrines of the Old Masters and many of his writings may be thought of as expanded metaphors or meditations on the brief sayings of those early Taoist luminaries whose ideas have been enshrined in the *Tao Te Ching*.

There is no text listed in the earliest authoritative catalogue of Chinese books as having been written by the Old Masters (Lao Tzu), nor is there a *Tao Te Ching* in 5,000 sinographs (its legendary length) or in eighty-one chapters (the number in the received version) that can be dated to the pre-Ch'in period. This fits with my contention that a single Old Master never existed, that the text associated with the Old Masters is a Ch'in period (or from a time shortly before then, in the latter half of the third century B.C.E.) compilation of adages and wise sayings attributed to a type of sage, many of whom were active during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (722–221 B.C.E.), and that the text in question only came to be called the *Tao Te Ching* several centuries later under the impact of the rise of

religious Taoism (which itself came into being as a result of the massive influence of Buddhism upon Chinese society and thought around that time). The questions of the dating and authorship of the *Chuang Tzu* are no less complicated than those for the *Tao Te Ching*. We shall devote a special section to them below.

Although the problems surrounding the authorship of the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Chuang Tzu* may be dissimilar, their respective literary forms can give us some insight into their composition. The *Tao Te Ching* is written entirely in verse, snatches of which are also to be found in other texts dating to about the same period in which it took shape. One of the functions of gnomic verse, especially when it is rhymed, is that it is easily memorized. Indeed, in traditional societies where the technology of writing is not widespread, the regular structure of verse itself is a sort of mnemonic device. In contrast, unrhymed prose with its varying cadences is much harder to commit to memory and is a sign of the emergence of cultures premised upon the written word as the primary technology for preserving and transmitting information.

The *Tao Te Ching* is renowned for its density and brevity. The *Chuang Tzu*, on the other hand, is best characterized as being written in a "rambling" mode. This expansive style reflects the freedom of life advocated by Master Chuang. The very first parable in the book, about the inability of little fowl to comprehend the stupendousness of the giant P'eng-bird, is typical of the relaxed quality of the book as a whole.

The shape of the *Tao Te Ching* is exactly what we would expect of a body of sage wisdom that was normally conveyed orally—it was poetic and communal in the sense that its authorship was shared (that is, it cannot readily be attributed to a single, easily identifiable creator). The *Chuang Tzu* evinces a stage when writing was just starting to free itself from the exclusive control of priests and diviners (esoteric specialists in sacred lore

and ritual), and authorship by identifiable intellectuals was beginning to take on a more definite role in Chinese society. Therefore, the *Chuang Tzu* is fundamentally a work of prose, but it still includes sizable chunks of verse having an oral heritage, some of it gnomic as with the *Tao Te Ching*, some of it epic (though severely fragmented, as was all early Chinese myth that encountered the stridently anti-mystical strains of Confucianism), and some of it oracular (notably the stunning series of cosmic riddles that opens Chapter 14). I consider the verse portions of the *Chuang Tzu* as being oral wisdom embedded in the prose matrix of a single thinker and his followers and redactors. The transitional nature of the *Chuang Tzu* is further evident in the fact that much of its prose is highly rhythmic and parallel, partaking of certain qualities of verse. It might have been possible to set off more passages as verse or semiverse, but I have resisted the temptation to do so on the grounds that the *Chuang Tzu*, in the final analysis, is a work of prose. We must remember, however, that the Warring States philosophers, of whom Master Chuang was one, were mostly peripatetic persuaders who went about trying to convince the rulers of the contending kingdoms to adopt their policies and, through them, to bring peace to the empire. The word for persuasion in Classical Chinese is *shui*, which is cognate with *shuo* ("to say, speak"). Hence, even though the *Chuang Tzu* represents one of the earliest attempts in China to write discursive prose, it is still imbued with the oral tradition out of which it grew.

The third major Taoist text, the *Lieh Tzu*, is of questionable authenticity. Most scholars would agree that it was put together during the third century C.E. and that it was much colored by Buddhist sources. Nonetheless, the *Lieh Tzu* does contain some passages that undoubtedly are based upon pre-Ch'in lore. Master Lieh figures prominently in the *Chuang Tzu* and was even awarded his own chapter (32). The fourth major Taoist collection is the *Master Huainan* which dates to around 130 B.C.E. It is a highly eclectic work, selecting elements from a variety of sources.

The Question of Authorship

The *Chuang Tzu* in its present form was certainly not written by Chuang Chou, the putative author. Before explaining how we know this to be the case, let us examine what facts may be gleaned about the life of our supposed author. Born around the year 369 B.C.E., Chuang Chou was from Meng, a district of the northern state of Sung (it lay south of the Yellow River near the border between the modern provinces of Shantung and Honan). Though Sung was considered to be a northern state, Meng was very close to the border with the powerful southern state of Ch'u and consequently strongly influenced by southern culture. It is not surprising that later, in an imperial proclamation of the year 742, the *Chuang Tzu* was awarded the honorific title *True Scripture of the Southern Florescence (Nanhua chen ching)*.

Not much else is known of Chuang Chou's life except that he seems to have spent some time in Ch'u and in the Ch'i (a northern state) capital of Lintzu where he must have associated with scholars from the celebrated Chihsia "academy" that was located there. Chuang Chou probably died in about 286 B.C.E. In fact, the evidence for the existence of a historical Chuang Tzu (Master Chuang) is only slightly greater than that for a historical Lao Tzu (Old Master), the alleged author of the *Tao Te Ching*, which is virtually nil. In fact, as we have seen, the Old Master was most likely not a single historical personage at all but a congeries of ancient sages. Nonetheless, the great historian Ssuma Ch'ien managed circa 104 B.C.E. to devise a sort of "biography" for Chuang Chou in scroll 63 of his celebrated *The Grand Scribe's Records (Shih chi)*. Ever since that time, devotees have believed that Chuang Chou really did exist and that it was he who wrote the *Chuang Tzu*.

Here is what Ssuma Ch'ien actually had to say about Master Chuang:

> Master Chuang was a man of Meng and his given name was Chou. Chou once served as a minor function-

ary at Lacquer Garden and was a contemporary of King Hui of Liang and King Hsüan of Ch'i. There was nothing upon which his learning did not touch, but its essentials derived from the words of the Old Masters. Therefore, his writings, consisting of over a hundred thousand words, for the most part were allegories. He wrote "An Old Fisherman," "Robber Footpad," and "Ransacking Coffers" to criticize the followers of Confucius and to illustrate the arts of the Old Masters. Chapters such as "The Wilderness of Jagged" and "Master K'angsang" were all empty talk without any substance. Yet his style and diction were skillful and he used allusions and analogies to excoriate the Confucians and the Mohists. Even the most profound scholars of the age could not defend themselves. His words billowed without restraint to please himself. Therefore, from kings and dukes on down, great men could not put him to use.

King Wei of Ch'u heard that Chuang Chou was a worthy man. He sent a messenger with bountiful gifts to induce him to come and promised to make him a minister. Chuang Chou laughed and said to the messenger of Ch'u, "A thousand gold pieces is great profit and the position of minister is a respectful one, but haven't you seen the sacrificial ox used in the suburban sacrifices? After being fed for several years, it is garbed in patterned embroidery so that it may be led into the great temple. At this point, though it might wish to be a solitary piglet, how could that be? Go away quickly, sir, do not pollute me! I'd rather enjoy myself playing around in a fetid ditch than be held in bondage by the ruler of a kingdom. I will never take office for as long as I live, for that is what pleases my fancy."

Judging from the dates of King Hui of Liang (reigned 370–355 B.C.E.), King Hsüan of Ch'i (reigned 319–301 B.C.E.), and

King Wei of Ch'u (reigned 339–329 B.C.E.) who are mentioned in this account, Chuang Chou was roughly a contemporary of Mencius (372–289 B.C.E.). Ssuma Ch'ien states that Chuang Chou was born in Meng, located just north of Shang Hill City (Shangch'iu shih) in eastern Honan province. The location of the Lacquer Garden, where he is supposed to have held a minor position, is not certain. In fact, Lacquer Garden may not even be a place name at all but only a general designation for a plantation. Some scholars hold that it was located about fifty miles northeast of the modern city of Kaifeng (also in Honan province). It is noteworthy that none of the five chapters from the *Chuang Tzu* cited by Ssuma Ch'ien as written by Chuang Chou himself occur among the "inner," supposedly more authentic, chapters of the book.

We must remember that this skimpy biographical sketch was written more than two centuries after the time of Chuang Chou and that, during the intervening period, there were no other works that provided any useful information about his life. Furthermore, most of Ssuma Ch'ien's brief portrait of Chuang Chou is drawn from anecdotes in the *Chuang Tzu* itself. Since the *Chuang Tzu* is full of hyperbolic invention, this means that they have no necessary basis in fact. Aside from those recounted by Ssuma Ch'ien, there are a number of other memorable anecdotes about Chuang Chou in the later chapters of the *Chuang Tzu*, but these are largely apocryphal. According to these anecdotes and to the hagiographical legends that have grown up around him, it would appear that Chuang Chou was a highly unconventional person who paid no attention to physical comfort or social status. He is said to have worn raggedy clothing and to have tied his shoes on with string to prevent them from falling apart. Although he was poor, Chuang Chou by no means thought of himself as unfortunate or miserable.

There are a number of tales in the *Chuang Tzu* that indicate that Chuang Chou did not consider death as something to be feared. For example, when his philosopher-friend Hui Shih came

to console him upon the death of his wife, he found Master Chuang sitting sprawled out on the floor beating on a basin and singing.

> "When she first died, how could I of all people not be melancholy? But I reflected on her beginning and realized that originally she was unborn. Not only was she unborn, originally she had no form. Not only did she have no form, originally she had no vital breath. Intermingling with nebulousness and blurriness, a transformation occurred and there was vital breath; the vital breath was transformed and there was form; the form was transformed and there was birth; now there has been another transformation and she is dead. This is like the progression of the four seasons—from spring to autumn, from winter to summer. There she sleeps blissfully in an enormous chamber. If I were to have followed her weeping and wailing, I think it would have been out of keeping with destiny, so I stopped." (18.2)

When Master Chuang himself was about to die, his disciples planned an elaborate burial, but he protested, saying that all he wanted was for heaven and earth to be his inner and outer coffins, the sun and moon to be his paired jades, the stars and constellations to be his pearls, and all natural phenomena to be his mortuary gifts. Apparently, Master Chuang viewed death as a natural process or transformation. Death to him was but the giving up of one form of existence and the assuming of another. Master Chuang believed that the wise man or woman accepts death with equanimity and thereby achieves absolute happiness.

Occasionally, the names of ancient Chinese philosophers afford a clue to their affiliations or intentions (like Master Mo ["Ink," as used by carpenters in drawing a straight line], Master Kuan ["Tube," purpose unknown], Old Master [a hoary sage],

and Lieh Yük'ou ["Resist Tyranny"]). Chuang Chou's surname and name, which ostensibly mean "Solemn Round," do not help us much in this regard because he was anything but sedate, though he may well be thought of as slipperily circular.

The connection between Chuang Chou and the *Chuang Tzu*, though less tenuous than that between Lao Tzu and the *Tao Te Ching*, still presents obstacles of its own. As a historical personage, Chuang Chou remains an enigma. Inasmuch as there are almost no hard facts available about Chuang Chou the man, we are forced to rely on information that may be gleaned from the *Chuang Tzu* itself in an attempt to figure out what sort of person he was. As we have seen, however, this is not a very reliable procedure either, given the playful propensities of the author(s) of the text. Even the synoptic Chapter 33, "All Under Heaven," gives only an enigmatic, though endearing, account of Chuang Chou the individual.

Whether or not there ever was a Chuang Chou (there probably was), of one thing we can be sure: he did not write all of the *Chuang Tzu*. The sheer amount of blatantly contradictory ideological materials that occur in the various chapters alone is proof enough of that. The literary quality of the chapters is also tremendously uneven, some of them being among the finest masterpieces of Chinese writing, brilliantly conceived and expressed, while others are tritely composed and sloppily executed. The Sophist, Kungsun Lung, is mentioned three times in the *Chuang Tzu*. Since he was active after Chuang Chou, this indicates that the *Chuang Tzu* was compiled after the time of the master himself. In the survey of schools of thought that constitutes Chapter 33 and elsewhere in the text, Chuang Chou is discussed from a historical viewpoint. This is further evidence that the *Chuang Tzu* was put together by someone other than Chuang Chou. In order to find out who that might have been, we need to discuss in more detail the separate strands and layers of the book.

Structure and Composition of the Text

Since the middle of the third century C.E., scholars have regarded the *Chuang Tzu* as a composite text. The current edition (standard from the fourth century C.E.) has thirty-three chapters, but there is good evidence that a fifty-two-chapter edition of the *Chuang Tzu* existed as late as the first century B.C.E. Kuo Hsiang (d. 312 C.E.), basing his work on that of a previous commentator named Hsiang Hsiu, wrote the first extant and what many consider to be the best commentary on the *Chuang Tzu*. By doing so, he secured its position as the primary source for early Taoist thought. Kuo Hsiang was undoubtedly also the compiler of the *Chuang Tzu* in its present form.

The *Chuang Tzu* as we now have it is divided into three parts: the Inner Chapters (1–7), the Outer Chapters (8–22), and the Miscellaneous Chapters (23–33). The first seven chapters, the Inner Chapters, are considered by the majority of scholars to reflect best the thought of Master Chuang himself. Of the three sections, they are the most often translated and are widely considered to be the most authentic. This is not to assert, however, that they are the only excellent parts of the book. Many connoisseurs of the *Chuang Tzu*, for example, would claim that the most beautiful chapter is 17, which includes the magnificent dialogue between the Earl of the Yellow River and the Overlord of the Northern Sea. And Chapter 29, which contains the long, bizarre conversation between Robber Footpad and Confucius, is held by many devotees of the book to be the most humorous.

The great discrepancies among the contents of the various chapters are due to a number of factors. First are the doctrinal differences among the Taoist factions that came after Master Chuang and were identified with him. Some of these were undoubtedly affected to one degree or another by other schools and hence would have brought in material from them. Next are the non-Taoist thinkers who recognized the enormous appeal of

Master Chuang and wanted to appropriate part of his popularity to advance their own programs. The incorporation of sections by such thinkers in the *Chuang Tzu* further complicated the text. The *Chuang Tzu* is thus a very heterogeneous work that does not speak with a single voice. The number of ways of looking at the *Chuang Tzu* are as plentiful as the disparate facets of the text itself.

No one has yet discovered a trustworthy method for firmly attributing even the Inner Chapters to Chuang Chou, although a growing consensus tends to do so. Beyond the first seven Inner Chapters, some scholars see a number of other identifiable strands operative. Chapters 8–10 and parts of 11 reflect a primitive, naturalist cast associated with the followers of the Old Masters (Lao Tzu). Chapters 12–16 and perhaps 33 are said to belong to the Syncretists who probably edited the book as a whole. Their role will be further examined in the following paragraph. Chapters 16–27 are thought to represent the ideas of later members of Master Chuang's own school. Finally, there are the individualists of a somewhat Yangist disposition who seem to be responsible for Chapters 28–31. This breakdown by no means exhausts the complexity of the *Chuang Tzu*, but it does give some notion of the difficulties inherent in dealing with early Chinese texts.

The precise responsibility for the composition of the separate portions of the *Chuang Tzu* is shrouded in mystery. Nor are we on much firmer ground when it comes to determining who first collected them into a single volume. Several critical scholars now believe that the *Chuang Tzu* was compiled by Liu An (d. 122 B.C.E.), the Han dynasty Prince of Huainan, with the assistance of attendants at his court. The lavish, un-Chuang Tzu-ish praise of the sovereign in some of the Outer Chapters and Miscellaneous Chapters seems like the kind of sycophancy expected of the court literati who danced attendance upon Liu An. Liu An and his circle of scholars did espouse a brand of philosophical syncretism (aimed at reconciling differing schools of thought into a single system) that seems to be compatible with the overall

composition of the *Chuang Tzu* and especially the signaturelike final chapter. Still, we lack hard data to ascribe with confidence the initial editing of the *Chuang Tzu* to anyone in particular.

Kuo Hsiang's standard edition of the *Chuang Tzu* that has been transmitted down to us contains many commentaries that appear to have worked their way into the text. In the present translation, I have removed some of the more egregious instances (they have been transferred to the section at the back entitled Deleted Passages). All thirty-three chapters of the Kuo Hsiang edition of the *Chuang Tzu* have titles, but they do not derive from the period of the initial composition of the text and thus are not to be taken overly seriously.

The original heart of the *Chuang Tzu* probably consisted of relatively short, vivid parables and fables such as the opening paragraphs of the book. Another good example is the first paragraph of 5.5. The ensuing paragraphs beginning "Thus" and "Therefore" may be later explanatory additions. This pattern is frequently repeated elsewhere in the book: a short, graphic tale or parable followed by more abstract expositions of the point that it makes, e.g., 24.10. The two types of materials frequently clash in mood and in style. Naturally, it is the concrete narratives that are more memorable than the abstract expositions.

In short, Chuang Chou did not write the *Chuang Tzu*. For the sake of convenience, however, we may collectively refer to the nominal author(s) of the core passages of the *Chuang Tzu* as Master Chuang (Chuang Tzu), which is to say that we associate the text with the school of thought that was grouped around that shadowy name.

Importance of the *Chuang Tzu*

After the Old Master(s), the fathers of the Taoist church have always looked upon Master Chuang as the most important fountainhead of their tradition, but one wonders how much of Taoist religion the wag would have been able to stomach. A wide

spectrum of Chinese thinkers has similarly tried to pre-empt Master Chuang, or parts of him, for their own. But this is perhaps the most serious mistake in dealing with the protean Master Chuang, namely, to treat him as a systematic philosopher. Master Chuang's game is to put dents in, if not annihilate altogether, human thought processes. Rather than rationality, it is intuition that he favors. Such a figure can scarcely be taken as a model upon which to build a system of thought. The importance of the *Chuang Tzu* lies far more in its function as a literary repository than as a philosophical disquisition.

There are scores of famous passages from the *Chuang Tzu* that are among the most memorable in all of Chinese literature. Here I shall cite only two:

> The emperor of the Southern Sea was Lickety, the emperor of the Northern Sea was Split, and the emperor of the Center was Wonton. Lickety and Split often met each other in the land of Wonton, and Wonton treated them very well. Wanting to repay Wonton's kindness, Lickety and Split said, "All people have seven holes for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing. Wonton alone lacks them. Let's try boring some holes for him." So every day they bored one hole, and on the seventh day Wonton died. (7.7)

This demonstrates graphically the disastrous consequences of going against nature. What makes us remember the lesson is not so much the contents of the doctrine espoused but the inimitable manner in which it is expressed.

> Once upon a time Chuang Chou dreamed that he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting about happily enjoying himself. He didn't know that he was Chou. Suddenly he awoke and was palpably Chou. He did not know whether he were Chou who had dreamed of being a

> butterfly or a butterfly who was dreaming that he was Chou. Now, there must be a difference between Chou and the butterfly. This is called the transformation of things. (2.14)

Here Master Chuang is playing on the theme of transformation. So striking is the imagery that whole dramas have been written on this theme. If Master Chuang had been merely a pedestrian, prosaic philosopher, no one would pay any particular attention to his claim about the "transformation of things."

Conveyed by the literary grandness of Master Chuang is a grandness of soul. Through it, we are led to liberation. In the very first chapter, Master Chuang tells us that there are varying degrees of happiness. The greatest happiness is achieved through a higher understanding of the nature of things. For the full development of oneself, one needs to express one's innate ability. This is *te*, whose basic meaning for Master Chuang, as for the Old Masters, is integrity or character. *Te* is the manifestation in the individual of the universal Way/Track or Tao. The Tao is thus immanent in all creatures and things, even in excrement. (22.6)

That which belongs to beings and objects by nature is intrinsic or internal; that which is imposed upon them by man is extrinsic or external. All the myriad things in the world are different by nature and they have different innate abilities, but they are equal (each in their own way, of course) when they freely exercise their innate abilities. In other words, for Master Chuang equality exists only in the universal Way that both permeates and embraces the enormous variety of the myriad things. Yet, instead of letting a duck keep its short legs and the crane its long legs (8.1), man intervenes and tries to impose an artificial equality (that is, uniformity) by making them have legs of the same length. This runs counter to the nature of both the duck and the crane. Artificiality forcibly attempts to change things according

to its own conceptions and enforces uniformity (not equality). This is the purpose of all morals, laws, institutions, and governments, namely, to promote sameness and to eradicate difference.

The motivation of those who promote uniformity may be entirely laudable. For example, if they believe that something is good for themselves, they may wish to see others enjoy it too. In the process, however, they are more than likely to demean, if not destroy, those whom they intend to help because they oppose their individual natures. We may say, then, that Master Chuang was the first great proponent of true diversity and that he had the good sense to recognize that it could not be achieved through government fiat.

Master Chuang strenuously opposed the formal mechanisms of government. In his view, the best way to govern is through no government at all. In this, he agreed with the Old Masters, but for different reasons. The Old Masters were deeply concerned with governance, but advocated a minimalist policy simply because they felt that the more government there was the less effective it would be. For Master Chuang, however, the whole notion of government was problematic because of the opposition between man and nature. Better to let things take their own course, he would say, and not govern them at all, not even minimally. Lest he be misinterpreted, it is questionable whether Master Chuang's position is tantamount to anarchy, and he was by no means in favor of violence. It was not Master Chuang's business to describe what sort of governing apparatus there should be; his purpose was to tell us what government should not do.

According to Master Chuang, every person can achieve happiness for himself or herself. Just let them be. Master Chuang's social and political philosophy is quite different from every other thinker in early China in that it was directed toward the private person rather than to groups. He encouraged individuals to seek inner happiness rather than trying to enforce happiness through government policy. To him this was a contradiction

in terms. As soon as government intervenes in natural affairs, it destroys all possibility of genuine happiness.

Another lesson taught by Master Chuang through his parables is that of the humble artisans whose perfect mastery of their craft reveals a mastery of life itself. Butchers, wheelwrights, bell-stand makers, and others are shown to possess a superior wisdom that cannot be expressed in words and can only be acquired through experience and practice.

Modern critics often assert that Master Chuang was an anti-rationalist. The situation, however, is not quite so straightforward as that. While he is dubious about the efficacy of reason to solve all human problems, he does not assert its utter futility. To come to grips with Master Chuang's ambivalent attitude toward human rationality, we must explore the sources of his discontent with it. Master Chuang's animus toward rationality stems from historical circumstance. It was the Mohist plodding predilection for logic that left Master Chuang so disenchanted with this dull species of rationality. Master Mo's doctrines were so unusual in the context of Chinese thought that they had to be defended in open debate. As a result, he and his followers were the first thinkers in China regularly to engage in formal disputation. Honing their elocutionary expertise in this fashion, the Mohists came the closest of all schools in ancient China to constructing a coherent system of logic. Their initial success with this new technique of persuasion encouraged other schools to follow suit in developing the techniques of debate they had introduced. Consequently, philosophical disputation became endemic to the period. More than ever before, debaters paid attention to defining their terms, structuring their arguments, and seizing upon the fallacies of their opponents. Ultimately, as with Hui Shih and Kungsun Lung, logic became a pursuit for its own sake. Master Chuang was a younger friend and perhaps even initially a disciple of Hui Shih. His intimate familiarity with paradox and sophistry indicate that he must have dabbled with logical subtleties himself when he was young, but he obviously outgrew them.

Master Chuang's fascination with Hui Shih's brand of rationality stemmed from a desire to probe the limits of reason, not to deny its validity altogether. Master Chuang uses reason to put reason in proper perspective.

The late Mohist *Canons* (circa 300 B.C.E.) contain the most logically sophisticated texts from early China. In them, we see clearly the resort to reason as the arbiter of conflicting viewpoints. This approach, which had already become the hallmark of Greek philosophy and subsequently characterized the whole of the Western philosophical tradition, in the end was decisively rejected by later Chinese thinkers who preferred to rely more on moral persuasion and intuition. Master Chuang played a vital role in the emergence of Chinese skepticism toward rationality, turning it on its head and satirizing it trenchantly. In the *Chuang Tzu*, arguments that seem to have the appearance of reason are ironically designed to discredit it. Master Chuang was also very much interested in the intricate relationship of language and thought. His work is full of intentional non sequiturs and absurdities because he uses these devices to explore the inadequacies of language itself, an approach similar to that later taken by Zen masters with their koans. Again, we find Master Chuang ironically using a device to cast doubt upon the infallibility of that same device. This proves that he abandoned neither language nor reason; he only wished to point out that overdependence on them could limit the flexibility of thought.

Another key theme in the *Chuang Tzu* is that of relativity. A person who understands that big and little, soft and hard, good and bad are not absolutely counterposed transcends the ordinary distinctions among things and the distinction between self and other. In this way, he or she identifies with Unity and essentially becomes immortal.

Above all, Master Chuang emphasized spontaneity. He was a mystic who recommended freedom from the world and its conventions. Most philosophers of ancient China addressed

their ideas to a political or intellectual elite, but Master Chuang focused on those who were striving for spiritual achievements.

The *Chuang Tzu* was involved in a vibrant interaction with Buddhism as this originally Indian religion developed in China. Chinese Buddhists received more inspiration from the *Chuang Tzu* than from any other early Chinese text. This is especially true of members of the Zen (Ch'an) school. We may, therefore, say that one of the major contributions of the *Chuang Tzu* to Chinese culture was the role that it played in the evolution of Zen, which has now become a world religion, particularly in its Japanese guise. But this is a phenomenon that occurred long after the composition of the original text. There is, however, evidence of Indian influence in the very formation of the *Chuang Tzu*, some of which has been pointed out in the Notes on the Translation (see, for example, the entries on "breathing . . . from the heels" and "bear strides and bird stretches" in the Glossary of Terms). We should also pay attention to the ancient Iranian elements in the *Chuang Tzu*. To give only one instance, the story of Chi Hsien and Master Hu (7.5) is about a contest of spiritual powers between an Iranian-style mage and an Indian-style sage. The mage, Chi Hsien, also appears in 14.1 playing the role of dispenser of cosmic wisdom who can answer riddles that would stump even an ancient Chinese sage. The puzzles that he solves have an even broader, trans-Eurasian compass since they take the form of an extended series of riddles uncannily like those posed by early Indo-European seers and priests. Also awaiting further investigation is the striking resemblance of the colloquy on the joy of fishes between Master Chuang and Master Hui (17.7) to many philosophical dialogues found in the works of Plato. Master Chuang was not an isolated Chinese thinker, but the impressive product of a long process of national and international cross-fertilization.

Master Chuang is claimed by both religionists and philosophers, but I think of him more as a fabulist, that is, as a composer of fables and apologues. It is as a literary stylist that Master

Chuang had his greatest impact on culture—probably more than any other single Chinese author, succeeding generations of writers have turned to him for allusions, themes, turns of phrase, and modes of expression. Painters likewise have found abundant stimulation in the tales of Master Chuang.

The *Chuang Tzu* is, first and foremost, a literary text and consequently should not be subjected to excessive philosophical analysis. Unfortunately, this is practically the only way that scholars have viewed the text during this century. In my estimation, this distorts its true value. What is more, the *Chuang Tzu* is not merely a literary text; it is actually an anthology or compilation of literary texts. Hence it is even less susceptible to systematic philosophical analysis. This is by no means to say that the *Chuang Tzu* is devoid of importance for the history of Chinese philosophy. To be sure, it contains much valuable information that documents intellectual trends during the Warring States period, but these must be sorted out very carefully. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the text, it is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to determine a system of thought to which Chuang Chou subscribed. The *Chuang Tzu* is a monument of Chinese literature; it is in this light that we should read and interpret it.

Notes on the Translation

Among the dozens of scholarly commentaries that I have examined during the course of my translation and annotation, the most useful are listed in the Bibliography. All of them suggest various emendations and revisions. I have tried to make the best of the text as it stands, permitting only the most limited changes, in spite of the fact that it is obviously corrupt (i.e., containing errors or alterations) in some places. My aim throughout has been to duplicate as closely as possible in English the experience that a trained student of Classical Chinese would have when he or she reads the *Chuang Tzu*. I should mention that an abstruse, ancient work such as the *Chuang Tzu* has always been inaccessible to all but a minute percentage of the Chinese population who possessed special preparation in grappling with its enormously refractory and artificial language. It is "artificial" in the sense that it is book language only, a dead language that may never have lived or lived only partially in the mouths of priests, seers, and bards, and that for more than two thousand years has not been capable of being understood when read aloud unless the auditor had previously memorized the passage in question. The monu-

mentally difficult nature of Classical Chinese has become even more accentuated in this century with the demise of the imperial institutions that fostered and sustained this "unsayable" hieratic language as a mechanism of control through the powerful literati officials who had spent decades in mastering it. Since 1919, less than a decade after the revolution of 1911, which toppled the last dynasty, the Manchus, Classical Chinese has been replaced as the official written medium of China by the demotic vernacular, Modern Standard Mandarin. Today, modern citizens of China are at least as far removed from the language of the *Chuang Tzu* as modern speakers of English are from *Beowulf*, or as modern speakers of Greek are from Plato's *Republic*—if not further.

Classical Chinese is by its very nature problematic in that it has been dramatically divorced from spoken language for no less than two millennia and may always have been so because of the fact that it was written in a script that was only partially phonetic. The language of the *Chuang Tzu* is even more peculiar in that it purposely distorts and impishly tampers with the conventions of Classical Chinese itself. To render faithfully an extraordinary text like this into a living language such as English or Mandarin requires a stupendous act of transformation, not merely a mechanical translation. Against this need for a creative response to the *Chuang Tzu*'s linguistic mischief is the duty of the conscientious philologist to be as consistent and accurate as possible.

In the Introduction, I have stated that I believe the verse portions of the *Chuang Tzu* to be more nearly reflective of oral tradition than is the prose matrix in which they are embedded. But to assert that an early Chinese work such as the *Tao Te Ching* or the verse portions of the *Chuang Tzu* were of oral derivation is not to assert that the texts as they have been recorded accurately mirror the rhythms, structure, and grammar of the Eastern Chou speech upon which they were presumably based. To be sure, precise linguistic evidence indicates that, in the process of committing utterances to writing in ancient China, various conven-

tions were employed that automatically omitted or simplified certain syntactic, morphemic, and grammatical features of the spoken languages. This was largely due to the partially phonetic nature of the Chinese script which made it virtually impossible to capture in writing with fidelity and facility all of the significant elements of speech.

Consequently, while written Chinese verse may not be a direct reflection of spoken language, it nonetheless reveals a bias in favor of gnomic and oracular modes of discourse which normally are associated with the realm of orality. The Chinese prejudice in favor of poetry at the expense of prose persisted throughout the imperial period and hearkens back to antiquity when knowledge was transmitted by seers and sages who commanded a body of wisdom verse. Chinese prose itself was continually contaminated (or, from another viewpoint, we may say "embellished") by the cadences and structures of poetry, and it is often well-nigh impossible to determine whether a given piece is written in prose or in poetry. This also accounts for the distinctive Chinese literary genres known as the rhapsody (*fu*) and parallel prose (*p'ient'iwen*), which lie somewhere between the realms of prose and poetry. Throughout Chinese history, there have been occasional efforts to "reform" and "purify" Chinese prose by making it less euphuistic, mannered, elevated, and poetic, and more straightforward, simple, practical, and prosaic. But, until the cataclysmic political revolutions of this century, which radically transformed the fundamental premises of Chinese society, there was always a continual reversion to poetry as the preferred form of writing.

As we have seen in the Introduction, the *Chuang Tzu* is an anthology composed of heterogeneous components. The many disparate voices in the text make it one of the most difficult of early Chinese works with which to grapple. The translation strives not to homogenize these various strands into a single, undifferentiated style, but to let the various voices of the whole text, no matter how discordant they may be, sing through by

themselves. Where the original shows the hand of a genius, the translation attempts as best as possible to re-create in English its excellences, but where the original is awkward or clumsy, the translation makes no effort to camouflage its inferiority.

Even with the superior parts of the text, there is a natural tendency for translators to improve them to suit the tastes of Western readers. For example, Classical Chinese nearly always relies on the word *yüeh* to introduce a quotation. It basically means just "said" (or "asked" if a question is involved), but translators are given to rendering it as "responded," "exclaimed," "cried," "expostulated," and so forth. This dressing up of the text gives a false sense of the quality of the original work.

The reader should also be warned about the recurrence in the book of certain tales and parables, sometimes only barely modified. Another perhaps somewhat jarring quality of the book for a modern reader is the manner in which it jumps from one tale or parable to another within a given chapter. If one understands that these phenomena are due to the fact that the *Chuang Tzu* is essentially an anthology, rather than the product of a single mind, this will make it easier to accept. Furthermore, not only is the *Chuang Tzu* an anthology, it is an anthology that expresses the viewpoints of many different schools that debated with and borrowed from each other. Generally, however, each chapter expresses certain broad themes and the tales and parables within it are intended to illustrate them. These primary themes have been highlighted in brief introductory notes by the translator at the beginning of each chapter. Occasionally, the same story will be repeated in several chapters of the book with a slightly different twist because a different message is intended. Yet, regardless of the lack of seamless unity to the book, the scintillating language and wonderful imagery are sure to captivate the reader.

Aside from its notorious heterogeneity, another aspect of the *Chuang Tzu* that makes it so hard to deal with is the fact that it is occasionally textually corrupt. This is the result of a long and

complicated process of redaction and transmission. All conscientious students of the text are frustrated by those parts of the *Chuang Tzu* that are manifestly garbled or have evident contradictions. In many instances, I have been able to solve these problems by resorting to various text-critical methods, but in some I have simply had to make difficult decisions about what I thought the authors were really trying to say. In my deliberations on the most complicated points, I have usually come up with two or three alternative interpretations, but in the end had to choose the one I thought most probable for the translation.

My policy is always to stay as close as possible to the Chinese text without becoming unintelligible or overly awkward in English. Occasionally, I have had to add a few words for grammatical or syntactical clarity in English. As a rule, however, I have endeavored to keep such additions to a minimum, not going beyond what is in the Chinese text itself. This accounts for the spareness of the English rendition, which is a deliberate attempt to convey a sense of the terseness of the Chinese original. In a few cases, I have provided brief parenthetical explanations to help the reader who has no background in Chinese history or culture. The notes in the Glossary should suffice to solve most of the remaining difficulties initiates will encounter.

For all of the reasons outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the reader will swiftly come to the realization that the *Chuang Tzu* is not as easy to read as a collection of Chinese folk tales. While the demands placed upon the reader are thus heavier, the rewards are correspondingly greater.

So as not to interfere with the reader's appreciation of this inimitable work itself, I have refrained from excessive annotation and commentary. In general, I have provided only those notes that I felt were essential for comprehending unfamiliar material. These are listed in the Glossary, which is divided into three sections: Names, Places, and Terms and Allusions.

I have found it convenient to invent one new word to match

an ubiquitous Chinese technical term, namely, "tricent" (three hundred [paces]) for *li* (one third of a mile), on the model of the word "mile," which literally means "a thousand [paces]." This was necessary to avoid confusion because the syllable *li* may also be employed to indicate so many other important concepts in Chinese, e.g., "principle," "ritual / ceremony / etiquette," "benefit / profit / gain," "one third of a millimeter," and so forth, which are also often cited by sinologists in their romanized form.

It has been my practice to translate (rather than simply to transcribe) the names of characters who appear to be fundamentally the product of the author's (or, more precisely, the authors') imagination. Often these names constitute puns or are otherwise intimately operative in the unfolding of a given tale; to ignore them would be to eviscerate a key feature of the diction. Sobriquets and other types of pseudonyms are also often translated if their meaning is sufficiently transparent, even for historical figures, since they were often chosen by individuals to express an aspect of their personality that they wished to emphasize. When, however, an individual is already relatively well known in Western sinology by the transcribed form of his name, then I provide only that.

Ideally, all transcribed proper nouns should be given in the reconstructed form that is appropriate for the time when and place where they were current. Unfortunately, our reconstructions of the sounds of ancient and archaic Sinitic languages, topolects, and dialects are still grossly inadequate, so we must resort to the makeshift of citing them in Modern Standard Mandarin. This is often deceiving, especially when the phonetic quality of a word is operative in what an author is trying to express. In the present translation, I have regularly given the archaic pronunciation of the names of two southern states to indicate that they were originally inhabited by speakers of non-Sinitic languages.

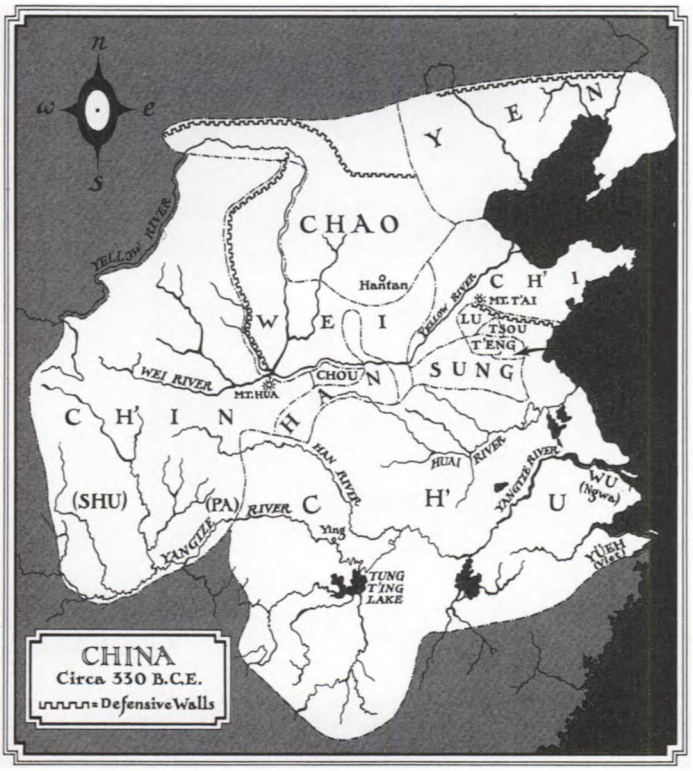
For the information of sinologists and other scholars who

may need to know, the basic text that I have relied upon in making this translation is that of CH'EN Kuying, although I do not always follow his recommendations for emendations and excisions. Therefore, those who may wish to compare this translation with the original Chinese should also consult the standard edition as presented in the first section of the Harvard-Yenching *Concordance.* The latter, incidentally, has been my most important tool in producing this rendition. When deciding upon the best English equivalent of a given word or expression in the *Chuang Tzu,* I have constantly checked its occurrences elsewhere in the text. Without the *Concordance,* this would have been a maddening, virtually impossible task.

The next most important research work that I have relied upon are the splendid scholarly tomes in Japanese by AKATSUKA Kiyoshi. There are two primary reasons for this. First, Akatsuka points out those portions of the *Chuang Tzu* that are in verse. This is not evident from the format of the original, since ancient Chinese texts consisted wholly of unpunctuated strings of sinographs. To determine whether or not a given passage is in verse, one must analyze the rhymes at the ends of clauses and sentences. Because the phonology of archaic Sinitic and Modern Standard Mandarin is so different, this is no mean task. The second great contribution of Akatsuka lies in interpreting the semantic content of the names of the fictional figures who people the pages of the *Chuang Tzu.* This, too, requires formidable learning because many of the names are disguised by the device of employing homophonous sinographs to write them. Few commentators, interpreters, and translators pay any attention to these two tremendously vital aspects of the *Chuang Tzu.* Consequently, in my estimation, they do not succeed in conveying to their readers the unique literary qualities of the work. Both in identifying portions of the text that were originally composed in verse and in construing the names of characters who appear in it, I have gone beyond Akatsuka, but his superb contributions in these areas have lightened my burden immeasurably. His gen-

erous accounts of the historical background for events and persons mentioned in the *Chuang Tzu* have also been highly appreciated.

More extensive annotations (including indication of parallels to the *Tao Te Ching* and other early Chinese texts), together with an introduction directed to specialists, have been separately published in *Sino-Platonic Papers* and are available by writing to the author.



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