

Paulos Huang, *Lao Zi, The Book and the Man* (Studia Orientalia; 79), Helsinki [Societas Orientalis Fennica] 1996, 178 pp. ISBN 951-9380-29-9.

Roughly 200 years ago and just one generation before the first complete European translation by Stanislas Julien (Paris 1842),

the great Qin sceptic Cui Shu (1740-1816) for the first time forcefully argued against the tradition that sees the *Laozi* as a product of the Spring and Autumn period. As it were, Cui thereby initiated a lively, at times rather contentious debate, which continues to this day and also forms the subject of Paulos Zhanzhu Huang's contribution.

The main objective of his book, repeated *ad nauseam* on every other page and presented with a rather morose kind of antithalian proselytism, is to show that 'a misunderstanding concerning the *Laozi* has plagued the West, based on a wrong-headed reliance on the theories of Liang Qichao, Feng Youlan and their followers' (p. 164). What Huang is striving for, valiantly, is to save his hero, the 'religious sage' (p. 13) Lao Dan, from the clutches of the hypercritical movement in Chinese classical scholarship and historiography during the first half of this century—those nasty scholars who not only dared to deny the *Laozi* its inveterate dating to the end of the Chunqiu period, but sometimes (goodness!) even went so far as to reject the historicity of Lao Zi, 'the Man'. In this 'battle' (p. 15) of opinions, Huang unmistakably envisages himself as the saviour of *the tradition*. With the devotion of 721 footnotes, he does his utmost to enlighten 'the Western world' in its alleged guilelessness, led astray by the inconsistent arguments of the Liang coterie. Curiously then, Huang makes ample use of Western scholarship throughout his book, and, more often than not, even relies on the summaries of Chinese authors available in the works of Boltz, Kaltenmark, Wagner, Henricks, Hendrichske *et al.* in his argumentation.

To his credit, Huang tries to be explicit in his refutation of the theories presented by those who see the *Laozi* as a product of the Warring States or even later periods. He has performed a valuable service by diligently assembling a comprehensive compendium of quotations and translations of most major modern commentaries on the plethora of details surrounding those two seemingly inextirpable *Laozi* questions—*who* and

when. Indeed, this systematic conspectus of previous theories in translation, rather than Huang's own methodology or argumentation, would appear to be the main contribution of this book. It could have been greatly enhanced by an index or at least a list of quotations. Unfortunately, the book barely conceals its origins as a PhD dissertation, which seems to have undergone only the most cursory revision during the publication process. I counted some forty mistakes in the ten-page bibliography alone (pp. 168-78), some of which simply result from careless editing (missing or wrong Chinese characters, impossible *Pinyin* segmentations or capitalisations, simple typos, inconsistent formats etc.), others displaying a more serious lack of philological acuity (i.e. *min* 'people' is consistently misspelt as *ming*, likewise *shen* as *sheng* 'deep', and *guan yu* as *guangyu* 'concerning'; Huang sometimes has *Daocang* instead of *Daozang* 'Daoist canon', *Xiangkang* for *Xianggang* 'Hong Kong', Zuo Qiuming for Zuoqiu Ming etc.). Equally annoying are abundant stylistic, grammatical or logical mistakes, as well as unnecessary verbatim repetitions throughout the text: In the opening abstract of the book we read that 'the author ... is of the traditional opinion clearly stating that the author of the *Laozi* is Lao Dan' (p. 5). A few pages later we are informed that '[t]ogether with Confucius, Lao Zi, whose name has also been written as Lao Zi [*sic*], is probably the most eminent figure in Chinese history' (p. 15). Moreover, for those who have missed footnote 138 on p. 49, it is repeated as no. 424 on p. 102, while there is no apparent appreciation whatsoever of the sources mentioned in these notes on either occasion.

The core of the book is made up of Huang's synopsis of answers to the *when*-question. After an introduction to the main lines of previous scholarship, the different editions, commentaries and manuscripts (excluding, oddly enough, the Dunhuang mss. fragments), Huang proceeds to discuss mainly five types of evidence bearing on the dating question: grammatical and structural features of the text; alleged Chu dialectal ele-

ments in it; quotations in easier datable works; diagnostic vocabulary; and rhyming. Bruce Brooks and his delightfully iconoclastic Warring States Project have recently reminded us how shaky most 'commonly accepted' datings of ancient Chinese texts still are, despite hundreds of years of 'evidential research' [*kaozhengxue*] in China. It would seem that, even in the late 1990s, philology continues to be 'the deadliest enemy of eternal realities' (Stephen Owen). (For a first impression of Brooks' radically different assessment of the textual history of the *Laozi*, see his review article on Loewe 1993 in *Sino-Platonic Papers* 46.) It is thus no good idea to anchor one's personal textual chronology in any single edited Pre-Qin document, as it might, after all, turn out to be just as unreliable as the *Laozi* itself.

Tacitly aware of this, Huang's argumentation for an early date of the *Laozi* frequently makes reference to the Jingmen bamboo strip version of the text, discovered in Guodian village, Hubei, in 1994, and assumed to date from at least the middle Warring States period. Unfortunately, next to nothing about this version was known during the preparation of Huang's dissertation, and it was rather unwise to base far-reaching conclusions on the first superficial reports in *Zhongguo Wenwubao*, the *Beijing Review* and 'information possessed by the present author personally' (p. 44). Even today, after the publication of the Guodian texts in March 1998, we are far from any scholarly agreement on the date of the Jingmen materials, the reliability of the excavation stratigraphy, nor even if the texts could legitimately be called a '*Laozi* version' at all. To be sure, there can be little doubt that dated palaeographical materials will ultimately prove to be the most important testing ground for hypotheses about the dates of the *Laozi* (as well as any other Pre-Qin text). It is to be regretted then, that Huang tried neither to verify the famous Karlgrenian grammatical feature cluster and diagnostic vocabulary against the background of contemporaneous bronze inscriptions, nor to make use of

parallel passages and quotations in such materials as the Yinqueshan inscriptions, the Qin bamboo strips from Shuihudi, especially the rhymed *Wei li zhi dao* chapter, or the Mawangdui *Jingfa* and *Shiliujing* sections, all of which have been accessible since the late 1970s. Mukai Tetsuo's seminal contribution on this topic ('"Rôshi" no seiritsu jiki to seishô no keika ni tsuite', *Tôhō Shûkyô* 79 [1992], pp. 1-18), which, incidentally, argues for a late Zhanguo date for the end of the *Laozi* editing process, is simply ignored.

Huang's treatment of the other most promising type of evidence—rhyming—is again rather disappointing. As far as his sources are concerned, he cannot be blamed for not taking into account William Baxter's 'Situating the language of the Lao-tzu: The probable date of the Tao-te-ching' (in: L. Köhn and M. LaFargue [eds], *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, Albany: SUNY Pr., 1998, pp. 231-53) which would give serious phonological support for a late fourth or early third century BC date. But Huang not only ignores Sergej Starostin's recent complete reconstruction and discussion of the rhymes of the *Laozi* (in his *Rekonstrukcija drevnekitajskoj fonologičeskoj sistemy*, Moscow: Nauka, 1989), as well as Chinese studies on rhyming in the Mawangdui texts (such as Chen Guangzhong, 'Boshu "Laozi" de yongyun wenti', *Fudan Xuebao* 6, 1985; Tian Yichao, '"Laozi" boshu yiben 'X' zi yundou kao', in: Wu Wenqi et al., *Yuyan wenxue yanjiu zhuanji*, vol. A, pp. 142-60, Shanghai: Guji, 1986 etc.), he also seems to be unaware of Dong Tonghe's classic critique of Karlgren's first (1932) reconstruction of the *Laozi* rhymes (*Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 7, 1938, pp. 533-43), which would have been directly relevant to his discussion of Chu dialectal features as well. His unfamiliarity with the phonological literature in general is vaguely felt in his uncritical discussion of Wang Li's, Zhu Qianzhi's and Liu Xiaogan's assessments of the *Laozi* prosody and his rather clumsy rendering of standard terms (i.e. *youbu* as 'the part of you'). It sometimes obscures his analysis, as in his discussion of

the interrhyiming between the rhyme classes *you* und *zhi* (pp. 124-26), where the barred-*i* (**i*, i.e. central, unrounded *i*) of Baxter's Old Chinese reconstruction, which is phonologically and argumentatively central to the possibility of interrhyiming, is first omitted, then misprinted as plain **i* in his examples. More seriously, Huang's phonological casualness impedes the whole argument on other occasions, as in his discussion of the alleged Laozi surnames Lao (GSR 1055a, *C-ru?), Li (GSR 978a, *C-rji) and Li (GSR 980a, *C-rji?), where it is argued these are interchangeable *because of their identical initials* *C-. Yet *C- in Baxter's reconstruction is, of course, a cover symbol for *any* first consonant of an initial cluster ('pre-initial'). In fact, there is good evidence from the phonetic series and word-family relationships, that *C- was *not* identical in these items, so that they almost certainly represent the part of the root which is *least* suited to sustain Huang's identification! Moreover, while *lao* and *li* might indeed have been interchangeable during certain periods and in certain dialects despite their belonging to different rhyme classes in the *Shijing* phonology, this is (contrary to p. 124) *not* due to a phonetic surface similarity between the rhymes **-i* (*zhibu*) and **-iw* (subclass of the *youbu*), since *lao* clearly belongs to the subclass of the *youbu* which rhymes in **-u* (not **-iw*).

On balance then, Huang's book is a valuable addition to the steadily growing *Laozi* literature, and it could serve as a handy introduction to the history of textual research on the text for the student. Yet the questions it asks and claims to have answered, remain open. 'My words are very easy to understand ... yet under heaven, nobody is capable of understanding them.'

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