

## Book Review: *Riding the Wind with Liezi*

Littlejohn, Ronnie and Jeffrey Dippmann, *Riding the Wind with Liezi: New Perspectives on the Daoist Classic*, SUNY Press, 2011, 272 pp, \$75.00  
(hbk) ISBN 1-4384-3455-3, \$25.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-4384-3456-8.

The subject of *Riding the Wind* is the *Liezi*, widely said to be the third of three Daoist classics after the *Laozi* (*Daodejing*) and *Zhuangzi*, although much less known and studied. The book is an edited volume of twelve essays by scholars of Daoism that describe various issues concerning the writing and interpretation of the *Liezi*. The essays are divided into three sections that do different but interrelated things. While the first will be most useful to those with a background in Daoism, the other sections will particularly appeal to beginners in undergraduate classrooms.

*Riding the Wind* is neither an introduction to the *Liezi* nor a translation of it. For that, the text refers readers to A. C. Graham's translation and analysis of "The Date and Composition of *Lieh-tzu*," both from the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> What it does offer is fresh insight into technical scholarly issues and valuable discussions of philosophical and practical matters central to the *Liezi* that also reach beyond it. Both can easily be brought into undergraduate classrooms.

The sections of the book are titled "The Text of the *Liezi*," which consists of three articles, "Interpretive Essays" (four articles), and "Applying the Teachings of the *Liezi*" (five articles). T. H. Barrett opens the discussion by reminding us that the way the *Liezi* is read today is much different from how it was formerly read in China. In his careful consideration of the latter, Barrett tells us "the *Liezi* was scarcely ever read without the commentary of Zhang Zhan" (4th century CE, 15). This is important information, and thus rightly referenced throughout the remainder of the book, likely something the editors considered in their choice to open with this article. The second article is titled "The *Liezi*'s use of the Lost *Zhuangzi*." Through it, Ronnie Littlejohn, one of the editors of the book, provides a valuable analysis of the two texts mentioned in his title through a detailed examination of the *Liezi*, especially its second chapter. As a result, he argues convincingly that materials have been left out of the received version of the *Zhuangzi*, perhaps intentionally, which he discovers through the *Liezi*. Even if the rest of the book did not yield the valuable materials it does, the strength of Littlejohn's article alone is sufficient reason to recommend this collection to scholars of Daoism.

Articles in the second and third sections are usable in undergraduate classes as lecture materials, reading assignments, or material for individual student research projects. For example, John H. Berthrong writes in "Torches of Chaos and Doubt" about process in Daoism: flux, change, spontaneity, etc., with focus on passages from the *Liezi*. The idea of "flux" has long been a favorite topic of students, and Berthrong's article makes for enjoyable reading on the subject. Likewise, Thomas Michael's "The That-Beyond-Which of the Pristine Dao" describes early Chinese cosmogony. Beginning with a consideration of Abrahamic ideas of God and cosmogony makes Michael's article particularly approachable and interest-

ing to students looking to understand Daoist conceptions from that perspective.

Recently, I was approached by an art major who is required as a part of his senior project to define his goals in creating art. His response to his senior thesis committee that he has neither goals nor motivating factors was deemed unacceptable. Remembering talk of *wuwei* and *ziran* from World Religions class, this student came to me for documents supporting his position, which he considered to be Daoist-like. I promptly referred him to Philip J. Ivanhoe's article in *Riding the Wind*, "The Theme of Unselfconsciousness in the *Liezi*." Ivanhoe provides plenty of help for battling the self-conscious demands of college, prefacing his remarks by saying that his ideas might strike "Western readers as particularly strange and exotic" (127), a useful quote for our young student in itself. Ivanhoe describes "Three Expressions of the Theme of Unselfconsciousness": (1) excessive looking for an answer that only becomes clear when we stop looking so hard, (2) excessive self-reflection that keeps us from performing well, and (3) excessive attribution of standards that are crippling when we cannot live up to them. Whether judged right, wrong, or simply self so (*ziran*) as Daoists might have it, the art student could cite any or all of these in his defense. Turning to the *Liezi* for examples, Ivanhoe goes well beyond even these conceptions, which he calls "everyday expressions of unselfconsciousness," and focuses on the deeper issue, which he refers to as "religious expressions of unselfconsciousness." The latter seeks a "radical and thoroughgoing loss of self." It remains to be seen if our art student is willing to go this far in defense of his position. But if so, he may draw on Ivanhoe's example of the Yellow Emperor and others referenced in the *Liezi*. If not, I may next direct him to "Dancing with Yinyang, The Art of Emergence" by Robin R. Wang, or any number of the articles in the third section of this book that apply Daoist teachings found in the *Liezi* to practical matters of action in life, many of which are bound to be attractive to undergraduate students interested in Daoist thought and practice.

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#### NOTES

1. Graham, A.C., tr. 1960, revised 1990. *The Book of Lieh-tzū: A Classic of Tao*. New York: Columbia University Press, and Graham, A.C. "The Date and Composition of *Lieh-tzu*," *Asia Major* 8, pp. 139-198. 1961.