

The Wenzhi: Creativity and Intertextuality in Early Chinese Philosophy, by Paul van Els. Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. xiv + 234. \$108.00 (hardcover).

This is the first full-length monograph in English dedicated to the ancient Daoist text *Wenzi* 文子 (Master Wen). Since the discovery of Dingzhou 定州 (Province Hebei) in 1973, there are two versions of the *Wenzi*: the received work in twelve chapters and fragments of a bamboo manuscript unearthed in a Han dynasty tomb in Dingzhou. The main goal of van Els' study is to analyze the relation between the two versions of the *Wenzi*, to clarify "the dramatic changes that an ancient Chinese text underwent in the course of its transmission," and demonstrate "how the reception of that text has changed over time, even in recent times" (p. 2). This review addresses van Els' investigation and suggests potential avenues for further inquiry.

Chapter 1, "The Dingzhou Discovery", first discusses the Dingzhou tomb, its location, type, the structure of its chambers and the various artefacts found there (pp. 8-12). Van Els determines the contested identity of the tomb occupant as King Huai of Zhongshan 中山懷王 (?-54 BCE), based on the fact that the last year recorded on bamboo strips is 56 BCE, that is, shortly before the passing of this king (p. 15). After introducing the eight manuscripts unearthed in Dingzhou (pp. 16-20), van Els concludes that they demonstrate "the Zhongshan king's proclivity to literature and may reveal something of his personal background and interests", including "philosophy, strategy, and divination" (p. 20).

Chapter 2, "The Dingzhou *Wenzi*", is dedicated to the various aspects of the *Wenzi* manuscript, including the size of the bamboo strips (p. 24), orthographic features of graphs (pp. 24-25), formal structure (pp. 26-29), observance of taboos (pp. 29-31). Combined with similarities in handwriting to a copy of the *Lunyu* 論語 from roughly the same period, these features suggest that "the text of the *Wenzi* was copied onto the bamboo strips around 54 BCE" (p. 33). On a more general level, van Els also remarks that in view of the damaged and disarrayed state of the Dingzhou manuscripts as well as the similar style of handwriting it remains unclear "how bamboo fragments with no corresponding content in the received text can be linked to strips that demonstrably belong to the *Wenzi*, or separated from those that demonstrably do not" (p. 34). Furthermore, the *Wenzi* transcription is carried out in simplified graphs, rendering the original reading ambiguous, it contains modern punctuation which forces a certain interpretation of the text, and it omits ancient punctuation, thus obscuring the original reading (pp. 35-37). In light of these problems, van Els concludes that a new "methodologically accurate" transcription is desirable to "do full justice to the importance of the discovery of the excavated *Wenzi*" (p. 37).

Chapter 3, "The Proto-*Wenzi*: Date, Protagonists, Author", begins with a discussion of the creation date of the original *Wenzi* as distinguished from the Dingzhou manuscript. Based on the appearance of some Han nomenclature in the text and its rejection of harsh politics associated with the Qin 秦 dynasty, van Els places the *Wenzi* during the Western Han dynasty (p. 47). Regarding its two protagonists, King Ping 平

王 and Wenzi, van Els, taking into account the featuring of some Zhou specific terms and concern over betrayal from feudal lords, determines the former as King Ping of Zhou (d. 720 BCE) (p. 51). Accordingly, the possible reason for choosing this particular Zhou ruler was political turmoil at the beginning of his reign which provided “the ideal circumstances for the Wenzi character in the text to prescribe his doctrine as a remedy to the problem the new ruler faced of consolidating power” (p. 52). Regarding Wenzi, van Els notes that, given the wide popularity of this name in early China, a “reader would easily have been able to imagine that an advisor named Wenzi once conferred with King Ping of Zhou even if the name does not refer to a known historical person” (p. 56). Moreover, considering the connotations of the character *wen* as “refined” and “cultured”, the name would indicate “that these are teachings that anyone who wishes to become culturally accomplished needs to study” (p. 57).

Chapter 4, “The Proto-Wenzi: Philosophy”, addresses the main philosophical ideas of the original *Wenzi*. Among them, the Way (*dao* 道) undoubtedly constitutes the main concept serving “as the cosmogonical source of all things, and as the guiding principle in bringing order to the world” (p. 68). Another crucial element is “virtue” (*de* 德), which facilitates the growth and development of beings and, at the same time, is the first of the “four guidelines” (*si jing* 四經), followed by “humaneness” (*ren* 仁), “righteousness” (*yi* 義) and “ritual propriety” (*li* 禮). The importance the proto-*Wenzi* attaches to the “four guidelines” as elements that make order possible marks a sharp contrast to the *Laozi*, which proclaims “propriety” as the beginning of chaos (p. 72). However, while deviating from the *Laozi* in terms of its rhetoric, the *Wenzi* defines its main principles in such a way that, ultimately, it “arrives at a philosophy that is not unlike that of the *Laozi*” (p. 81). The *Wenzi*’s mild, non-polemic tone reflects the cautious attitude of its author and the wish to avoid conflict with representatives of other schools and political fractions.

In chapter 5, “A New *Wenzi*”, van Els, after pointing to the fundamental difference between the proto-*Wenzi* and the received text regarding their length, internal division, chapter titles, and main protagonists (pp. 82-84), examines the structure of chapter five of the received text, “The Way and Virtue” (*daode* 道德), with most correspondence with the bamboo manuscript. This “core” chapter, the argument goes, “consists of two distinct interlocking strands of text, namely, dialogues that correspond to the proto-*Wenzi* and monologues that correspond to the *Huainanzi*” (p. 87). When compared to the two sources, it is characterized by “simplification of dialogic structures, reduction of grammatical particles, omission of names of people, places, texts” (p. 100). Apparently, the chapter was created “by borrowing, simplifying, and further editing passages from the proto-*Wenzi* and the *Huainanzi*, and placing them in alternation” (p. 100). As for the remaining eleven, “outer”, chapters of the received text, given the exceptionally high number of their parallels to the *Huainanzi* and the same characteristic pattern of simplification, the author concludes that “large portions of the text [...] are copied from the *Huainanzi*” (p. 107).

Based on this, van Els further attempts to determine the received text's date of creation and author in chapter 6, "The Received *Wenzi*: Date and Editor". A central role in this inquiry is given to Gao You's 高誘 (ca. 160-220) commentary on the *Huainanzi*, dated roughly 212 CE, showing connections to some *Wenzi* passages. Between the two competing views about the direction of borrowing between the two works, van Els follows the position that the *Wenzi*'s editor drew on Gao's work and presents several persuasive arguments to defend it (pp. 124-128). Thus, given that quotations from the *Wenzi* recorded in the early fifth century sources all have counterparts in the *Huainanzi*, one can argue that the received text was created "sometime between the early third and the early fifth centuries" (p. 129). The identity of its author remains, apart from his "inclination towards Daoist writings" (p. 131), obscure.

Bearing the title "The Received *Wenzi*: Philosophy", chapter 7 investigates mainly the "editor's selection and manipulation of source texts in order to uncover his agenda" (p. 133). For the editor's motivation, van Els suggests that, around his time, the proto-*Wenzi* must have already lost its significance and, moreover, become incomplete. The new version "immediately and effectively replaced it as the start of a new tradition" (pp. 134-135). While the *Huainanzi* might have been chosen for its eclectic nature and "ideological resemblance" to the original *Wenzi* (p. 135), the numerous quotations from the *Laozi* served the purpose of increasing "the Daoist caliber of the new *Wenzi*" (p. 146). Moreover, the formula "Laozi said" (*Laozi yue* 老子曰) located in the beginning of most sections made the *Wenzi* appear as Laozi's "actual teaching", while the *Laozi* was seen as "a mere digest of his wisest sayings" (p. 149). In general, the choice of protagonists: Laozi, *Wenzi*, King Ping and Kongzi, demonstrates that the editor was "well-informed concerning contemporary ideas about these figures and the relation between them as they are recorded in texts such as the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*" (p. 152). Concluding, van Els argues that, in its formal aspects, the new *Wenzi* appears as the Daoist counterpart to the *Lunyu*. Given the absence of religious worship of Laozi, the new *Wenzi* was probably created by a "traditionalist" in response "to a growing demand for the wisdom of the forefather of Daoism" (p. 157).

Finally, in chapter 8, "*Wenzi* Reception", van Els, combining "chronological and thematic approaches", distinguishes between three different periods in the reception of the work: "reverence" (Three Kingdoms period to the Northern Song dynasty), "rejection" (Southern Song dynasty to the Dingzhou discovery), and "revaluation" (Dingzhou discovery to the present). During the first phase, the transmitted *Wenzi* was largely regarded as an "authentic pre-Han dynasty text with a distinct Daoist flair that was written by a disciple of Laozi" (p. 179). During the second phase, textual comparison between the *Wenzi* and the *Huainanzi* eventually lead to viewing the former as a "poor copy of the *Huainanzi*, which was not only philosophically irrelevant, but also hardly worth scholarly attention" (p. 194). The third period is characterized by an initial euphoria with regard to the authenticity of the entire received *Wenzi*, which, after the publication of the Dingzhou manuscript in 1995, gave way to more differentiated views that distinguish between the passages of the *textus receptus* with counterparts in

the proto-*Wenzi* and the *Huainanzi*. Interestingly, this view is in line with the first critical assessment of the *Wenzi* through Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) who categorized it as “heterogeneous work” (*boshu* 駁書).

While agreeing with most points put forth by van Els, I would like to address some problematic issues at this juncture. The most general of them concerns the fact that the PhD thesis this monograph is based on was completed in 2006. While the author is aware of the main recent publications on the topic, he deals only with some of them in the book and does not clarify criteria for his selective approach. For example, evidence provided by Xiong Liangzhi 熊良智 in 2009 regarding the early date (Western Han) of *Wenzi*’s identification as Xin Jiran 辛計然 is absent from the monograph.² At the same time, however, van Els engages with the article by Fech, which examines the implications of Xiong’s discovery.³ A careful examination of the new evidence appears all the more necessary as it runs against van Els’ view that the given identification was created in the sixth century CE and did not gain prominence until the twelfth century CE (pp. 184-185).

Moving on to individual chapters, I find it regrettable that, in chapter 1, the author, otherwise providing a wealth of information on the Dingzhou tomb, ignores Xiao Wangzhi’s 蕭望之 (?-46 BCE) memorial. Although this memorial was, astonishingly and for unknown reasons, excluded from the main report on the tomb manuscripts,⁴ it was mentioned in several other publications connected with the Dingzhou discovery.⁵ In addition to shedding further light on the identity of the tomb occupant, Xiao Wangzhi’s political carrier and academic preferences could also explain the appearance of texts like the *Lunyu* and the *Baofu zhuan* 保傅傳 in the tomb and, possibly, even corroborate such traits of the *Wenzi* as the appearance of King Ping of Zhou or its specific stance on warfare.⁶

I also find depicting the reception history of the text as divided into three phases characterized through “internally coherent but mutually exclusive evaluations” (p. 159) in the concluding chapter somewhat problematic. Du Daojian 杜道堅 (1237-1318), for instance, who evaluated the *Wenzi* positively and lived well into the phase of “rejection” is first called an “exception” (p. 159), only to be mentioned together with his “associates” on the next page. And, as van Els noticed later, there was a number of scholars from

² Xiong Liangzhi, “*Wenzi* zuozhe kaolun” 《文子》作者考論, in *Wenshi* 文史 2009.3, pp. 19-32.

³ Andrej Fech, “The Protagonists of the *Wenzi* in Light of Newly Discovered Materials,” in *Oriens Extremus* 54 (2015), pp. 209-248.

⁴ Guojia wenwuju guwenxian yanjiushi 國家文物局古文獻研究室, “Dingxian 40 hao Hanmu chutu zhujian jianjie” 定縣 40 號漢墓出土竹簡簡介, in *Wenwu* 1981: 8, pp. 11-13.

⁵ For a list of these publications, see Andrej Fech, *Das Bambus-Wenzi: Versuch der Rekonstruktion des philosophischen Standpunktes eines daoistischen Textes der frühen Han-Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), p. 32n75.

⁶ Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC-AD 24)* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000), pp. 606-608.

the “rejection” period, who viewed the *Wenzi* as an “authentic” work (even after comparing it with the *Huainanzi*) (pp. 191-193). Given that and in view of the fact that the *Wenzi* had also received critical evaluations during the “reverence” phase, I believe it would be more fitting to say that the positive and negative evaluations coexisted throughout the *Wenzi*'s transmission with the latter starting to prevail only towards the very end of the Qing 清 dynasty.

Finally, I deem a discussion on the *Wenzi* entries in the early catalogues absolutely necessary, given the main topic of the manuscript. Some catalogues from the late fifth and early sixth centuries contain entries on the *Wenzi* in eleven and ten chapters deviating from the scope of the received text and possibly suggesting the existence of different text versions around this time.⁷ Remarkably, while mentioning the catalogues in question (pp. 162-163) van Els does not seem to find the issue of deviating chapter numbers worthy of discussion. This is especially regrettable, since he suggests that the new *Wenzi* was created between the early third and early fifth centuries and “immediately and effectively replaced [the old version] as the start of a new tradition” (pp. 134-135).

These issues notwithstanding, I believe that Paul van Els succeeded excellently in dealing with a highly complex topic ranging from the interpretation of the excavated manuscripts to the evaluation of authenticity criteria of the transmitted texts. His work stands out through careful and thorough reasoning and will most certainly provide great help for those who study excavated manuscripts, especially the ones with counterparts in the received texts.

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A Study of Two Classics: A Cultural Critique of The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and The Water Margin, by Liu Zaifu and translated by Shu Yunzhong. Amherst: Cambria Press, 2012. Pp. 254. \$109.99 (hardcover); ebook and Kindle editions also available.

For scholars and students of Chinese literature, Liu Zaifu of course has been a familiar name for decades. Yet his critical works on traditional Chinese fiction would not have found their way to the Anglophone world without Shu Yunzhong's outstanding service of translation. Following his 2008 English translation of Liu Zaifu's *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*, the same translator, again with his admirable command of English, has brought us another major scholarly work by the same author.

Like his *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber*, Liu Zaifu's *A Study of Two Classics* is unconventional in both format and structure. It does not parade a large

⁷ The catalogues in question are Lu Xiuqing's 陸修靜 (406-477) *Xuandu guan jing mulu* 玄都觀經目錄 and Ruan Xiaoxu's 阮孝緒 (479-536) *Qilu* 七錄 respectively.