be sure of the graphs for certain key terms—such as *guoshi*, which the author translates as “national right.”

Roger V. Des Forges


Through the ages, only a small number of scholars have ventured a study of the *Wenzi* 文子, a politico-philosophical text ascribed to a disciple of Laozi 老子. The *Wenzi*, composed more than two thousand years ago, underwent major revisions in the third or fourth century C.E., after which the original version was no longer transmitted. Much of the content of the revised and transmitted version can be found in other texts, most notably in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子. In fact, almost 80 percent of the transmitted *Wenzi* corresponds to the *Huainanzi*. From the eighth century onward, this unusual phenomenon made the vast majority of scholars, who favored the historical priority of the latter, reject the former on account of its alleged plagiarism. However, general scholarly disinterest in the *Wenzi* abruptly ended in 1973, when a fragmentary bamboo copy of the original text was discovered in a Han dynasty tomb (dated 6 B.C.E.) in Dingzhou 定州, Hebei Province. This spectacular archeological discovery sparked renewed interest in the *Wenzi*, mainly among Chinese and Japanese scholars—a trend that is clear from a recent bibliography of contemporary research on Han philosophers, which lists more
than forty articles on the Wenzi published in the past two decades alone (Chen 1998, pp. 449–452). Each of these articles, however, focuses on one aspect of the Wenzi only. Aware of the need for an overarching study, Fu Jen University professor Ding Yuanzhi embarked on his Wenzi project in 1995. Less than five years later, the project was concluded with the publication of three books, totaling over sixteen hundred pages. These three volumes are interdependent, and yet each one has a distinct focus; they can be read as separate entities, and they will be reviewed accordingly.

Wenzi xin lun (New perspectives on the Wenzi)
The first of the three volumes—their preferred order indicated by Ding Yuanzhi himself in the Preface—is an in-depth study of the Wenzi, in five chapters.

In chapter 1, Ding discusses Wenzi the philosopher and Wenzi the text. He first quotes several ancient works that mention a certain “Wenzi,” and then summarizes speculations by scholars of the past on the historical identity of this wise man. One of his conclusions is that Wenzi was indeed a disciple, or at least a later follower, of Laozi, and that he played an important role in the development of Laozi’s thought. As to the text, Ding discusses issues such as the status of the bamboo manuscript of the Wenzi, the transmission of the received Wenzi, and the relationship between the transmitted Wenzi and the Huainanzi.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the Dingzhou Wenzi manuscript, which, unlike the transmitted Wenzi, appears to have consisted entirely of dialogues. Ding first outlines the relationship between the bamboo fragments and the received text, then elaborates on the philosophy of the original Wenzi, that is, of the hypothetical Urtext of the Wenzi of which the Dingzhou manuscript is the only surviving copy to date. Two interesting features of this chapter are: (1) Ding’s tentative and daring reconstruction of a section of the original Wenzi (p. 34), and (2) the rearrangement of the Dingzhou bamboo strips according to philosophical concepts, including “governing the world,” “the way of the ruler,” and “learning” (pp. 50–56). These features offer a first glimpse of what a dialogue in the original Wenzi may have looked like and show the reader the text’s original concerns.

In chapter 3 Ding elaborates on the relationship between the Wenzi and the Laozi, which is shown by the fact that 169 (out of 186) sections of the received Wenzi start with the phrase “Laozi said” 老子曰 and that fifty-two sections actually cite the Daodejing 道德經. After a detailed discussion of these citations, Ding evaluates Wenzi’s position in the exegesis of Laozi’s thought and concludes that he developed it in a “humanitarian” 人文 direction. To put it differently, Wenzi reinterprets his master’s thought by making the people the focal point of the ruler’s government.

Chapter 4 is divided into two parts. The first deals with pre-Qin material incorporated into the received Wenzi. This material includes quotations and para-
phrases of the Mengzi 孟子 and Guanzi 管子, explanations of sixteen Yijing 易經 hexagrams, and elaborations by what Ding calls “the school of Wenzi” on the theory of xingming 形名 (forms and names). In the second part, Ding discusses the relationship between the Wenzi, Huainanzi, and Liuzi 劉子, the latter a text presumably written by Liu Zhou 劉晬 (ca. 516–557). The Liuzi contains many sections similar to both the Huainanzi and Wenzi and is thus of great importance to our understanding of the editing and transmission process of these texts.

The last chapter, titled “The Wenzi and the Development of Pre-Qin Philosophy,” contains four essays explaining pre-Qin philosophical concepts and the Wenzi’s treatment of them. The first three concepts under discussion are daoyuan 道原 (the origin of the way), jingcheng 精誠 (pure sincerity), and ziran 自然 (spontaneity), all of which are chapter titles in the received Wenzi. The book ends with a general essay on the differences between the Chinese concept of yuzhou 宇宙 (space-time) and the Western idea of “cosmos,” in which Ding dismisses yuzhou lun 宇宙論 as an inappropriate translation for the term “cosmology.”

New Perspectives on the Wenzi is an overarching study, for it treats numerous issues and problems concerning the Wenzi. It is not, however, a systematic treatise. Sections 2.1 and 2.3, for example, first appeared as articles in the journal Zhexue yu wenhua 哲學與文化 and are incorporated into the book in virtually unchanged form. Also, the two parts of chapter 4 are unrelated, and the concluding section of the book has nothing to do with the Wenzi, other than that this text, according to Ding, was the first to explain the terms yu (space) and zhou (time) (p. 341).

Another demerit of this volume—partly due to its heterogeneous nature—is the redundant repetition of statements and ideas; for example, that Wenzi developed Laozi’s thought in a “humanitarian” direction (e.g., Preface, pp. 9, 47, 75, 77–94, 197, 203), and that Wenzi was an important pre-Qin philosopher (e.g., Preface, pp. 9, 22, 337). Ding’s casual tone indicates that he regards these as unquestionably true. In fact, two aspects of the latter statement, echoed by many present-day Wenzi specialists, can be called into question.

First, Wenzi’s status as an important philosopher remains questionable. If the importance of a thinker can be determined empirically by establishing the number of his disciples and readers, both supporters and opponents, then Confucius, for instance, may justly be called an important thinker: he is known to have had many disciples; he inspired a multitude of people (including Mengzi and Xunzi 荀子) and was ridiculed by others (Zhuangzi 莊子). Of Wenzi, on the other hand, little is known, and only a handful of people in the Han and pre-Han period mention him or his work (Ding, Wenzi xin lun, pp. 3–5). A related problem is whether Wenzi was a pre-Qin philosopher, as Ding and the vast majority of Wenzi scholars maintain. The earliest surviving source that mentions Wenzi and quotes his work is the Hanfeizi 韓非子 (chapters 23, 30, and 33). However, Han
Fei (ca. 280–233 B.C.E.) lived at the very end of the Warring States period, and many chapters of the work that carries his name were arguably written several decades after his death (Brooks 1994, pp. 17–26). Moreover, the Wenzi phrases quoted in the Hanfeizi correspond neither to the Dingzhou Wenzi nor to the received text. Obviously, both the relationship of the Hanfeizi to the Wenzi and the dating of the latter merit more careful attention.

In chapter 1, Ding offers a detailed outline of the composition of the received Wenzi, claiming that it consists of: (1) original Wenzi material, (2) Laozi exegesis by the Wenzi school, (3) ancient proverbs and sayings, (4) “an alternative Huainanzi version” 淮南子別本, (5) “external Wenzi material” 文子外編, and (6) material from other pre-Qin works. Questions arise with regard to categories (4) and (5), which have hitherto not been commonly used in Wenzi scholarship. According to Ding, at one time various editions of the Huainanzi circulated in society. One became the standard transmitted Huainanzi, while another concise version was incorporated into the received Wenzi. The relevant passages in the Wenzi are referred to as an “alternative Huainanzi version.” Ding regards these passages as ancient and authentic Huainanzi material. The “external Wenzi material” involves the retainers at the court of Liu An 呂安, who freely refer to the writings of the pre-Qin masters for the compilation of the Huainanzi. After Liu An committed suicide and his scholars fled, this reference material, Ding claims, was spread and transmitted among the people. These texts did not make it into the transmitted version of Liu An’s work, but some were copied into the Wenzi. Ding refers to this as “external Wenzi material.” The frequency with which Ding employs both self-coined labels is less than justified by their actual value. Although they are used throughout his work, we have no way of knowing whether these historical events actually took place or whether this actually was how all this material ended up in the Wenzi. More importantly, these labels are overused. Certain portions of the Wenzi, which Ding says belong to an authentic “alternative Huainanzi version,” instead seem to be concise (and sometimes even incomplete or illogical) copies of a later version of the Huainanzi. In other words, these terms have little added value, and maintain the presentation of the Wenzi–Huainanzi relationship as more complex than it really is.

Wenzi ziliao tansuo (Exploration of the Wenzi materials)
The second part of Ding Yuanzhi’s Wenzi research constitutes a complete modern edition of the Wenzi. This volume is a welcome addition to Li Dingsheng and Xu Huijun’s edition (1988), which has served as the standard modern edition of the Wenzi for over a decade.

The strength of Li and Xu’s work lies in its innumerable footnotes, offering explanations of difficult passages, alternative readings of characters in the various Wenzi editions, and references to similar phrases in other ancient philosophical
texts. These references are plentiful for texts that are only sporadically cited in the Wenzi, for example the Mengzi, the Guanzi, and the Xunzi. For the Huainanzi, a text closely related to the Wenzi, Li and Xu provide no more than an occasional note saying “the Huainanzi has x” or “x reads y in the Huainanzi.” Given the intimate relationship between both texts, this is far from sufficient.

A thorough understanding of the complex Wenzi–Huainanzi relationship requires a complete survey of their parallel passages. The cumbersome task of scrutinizing both lengthy treatises in the search for parallels was first performed by Barbara Kandel (1974, pp. 323–332). Appended to her work is a long list of references to passages in the Huainanzi with references to the matching Wenzi passage placed alongside. In Ding’s volume, Ding does not merely list references of corresponding passages; he brings the actual text of these passages together and makes each the subject of detailed analysis.

Exploration of the Wenzi Materials consists of twelve chapters, corresponding to the chapters in the received Wenzi. Each chapter is prefaced by an introduction in which Ding explains its title and briefly outlines its philosophy. Footnotes, the main feature of Li and Xu’s edition, are kept to a minimum. Instead, most Wenzi sections are followed by the author’s “Exploration of Related Material” and “Analysis and Explanation.”

Quoted under the heading of “Exploration of Related Material” are passages from other texts related to the Wenzi section under scrutiny, for example the Huainanzi, the Lushi chunqiu 呂氏春秋, the Laozi, the Liezi 列子, and, of course, the Dingzhou Wenzi. Each Huainanzi passage contains punctuation marks (including braces, brackets, and quotation marks) and different fonts. These tools allow the reader to see at a glance which phrases also appear in the Wenzi section and what character variations exist between both related pieces of text. The “Analysis and Explanation” contains Ding’s meticulous examination of the preceding Wenzi section. Here Ding explains the differences between the Wenzi and related material, points out mistakes in the text, and discusses its philosophical ideas in detail. Equipped with the information in the “Exploration of Related Material” and “Analysis and Explanation,” readers are led through this at times difficult-to-understand treatise. When problems appear, they can check how the passage appears in other works, or turn to Ding’s insightful information for help.

Huainanzi yu Wenzi kaobian (Examination of the Huainanzi and Wenzi)
The Ding Yuanzhi trilogy is concluded by his Examination of the Huainanzi and Wenzi. This volume is a reverse image of the preceding one: it contains a modern Huainanzi edition with the corresponding text of the Wenzi (and other works) included with each passage.

Each chapter starts with Liu An’s description of its purport (as provided in “Outline of Essentials,” the postface to his work), Gao You’s 高誘 interpretation
of the chapter title, and Ding Yuanzhi’s explanation of the gist of the chapter. Sections and passages are also furnished with Ding’s outline of their general meaning. One of the main aims of this volume is to show that, as Ding puts it, “the received Huainanzi material in itself contains serious problems” (Preface). He points out and explains these, mainly textual, problems, thus producing a critical modern edition of the Huainanzi. As a critical edition, this book contributes to the thriving international scholarship on the Huainanzi, but it has its disadvantages.

The layout of the second volume is clear: each section starts with the text of the Wenzi, followed by corresponding material from the Huainanzi (and other texts), and ends with Ding’s analysis of the section. The structure of the third volume, on the other hand, is less clear: the main text (Huainanzi) and corresponding material (Wenzi) are not separated. Individual passages contain only the Huainanzi text, interwoven with Wenzi variations and textual notes. In other words, in the Huainanzi passages, Wenzi material and textual notes are put between brackets or shown through the use of different fonts and font sizes. Due to the lack of a clear structure, these tools, the forte of the second volume, vitiate the clarity of the third.

Does the world need a new, modern edition of the Huainanzi? There are several richly annotated modern editions, some with Modern Chinese translations. And Ding’s work is not a complete Huainanzi, since chapters 3, 4, 5, and 21 of the Huainanzi, unrelated to the Wenzi, are not included.

Basically, what Ding proves is that the Huainanzi has a turbulent textual history and that the text in its received form is not the same as the one that was presented to Emperor Wu in 139 B.C.E. Given that the Wenzi’s textual history is equally unclear, Ding claims that it is wrong to make simple statements about the Wenzi–Huainanzi relationship—that is, who copied whom—based on a comparison of the received editions of both texts. He certainly has a point, but the question is whether it should take a 652-page book to show this.

Concluding Remarks
While one may find fault with some of the claims made in Ding Yuanzhi’s first volume, this does not alter the fact that it is an outstanding study. It is impressive in that it at once treats a broad range of issues concerning the Wenzi and discusses each in great detail. The only other work that is similarly embracing is that by Barbara Kandel.

Those who are looking for a good modern edition of the Huainanzi need not consider the third volume. This volume is mainly useful for Huainanzi specialists aspiring to check how certain passages appear in other writings. Translators of the Huainanzi, for instance, often use the Wenzi variant on those occasions when the
Huainanzi is incomprehensible or corrupt. The third volume greatly facilitates this kind of work.

The second volume is undoubtedly the most valuable of the three. It will be of great help to Wenzi or Huainanzi scholars trying to understand the complex relationship between the two treatises. Beyond that, Ding’s meticulous scrutiny of both texts and the neat presentation of these efforts serves as a model for other Chinese philosophical works (e.g., the Lüshi chunqiu) that also contain many passages traceable in other sources. It can only be hoped that these works will one day appear in a modern edition as clear and easy to use as this one.

In sum, Ding Yuanzhi’s monumental work may have its flaws, but it is a veritable milestone in Wenzi scholarship.

Paul van Els

Paul van Els is a Ph.D. student at Leiden University, the Netherlands. His research focuses on intertextual aspects of the Wenzi and its citation strategies.

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