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3

Daoism as utopian or accommodationist: The Guodian challenge to Daoist anarchism

Introduction

Although the previous chapters demonstrated that philosophical Daoism¹ undoubtedly contains utopian anarchist strains, whether these tendencies can be traced back to the text known as the *DDJ* is more open to debate.² Those who find a radical utopian³ argument in Daoism stress especially the *DDJ*'s critique of the Confucian ideal of humane rule. Below we trace this critique to previously received versions of the *DDJ* that date to approximately 250–200 BCE. Nevertheless, some scholars would claim that bamboo strips unearthed in 1993 from a tomb in China's Hubei province present a major challenge to the claim that the basic anarchist idea of the state ruling for itself goes back to the earliest roots of Daoist philosophy.

Perhaps the most important find in this tomb were portions of what later became the *DDJ*, thus marking the text as much as a century older than any previously known version.⁴ As the news about the strips spread, some scholars began to claim that the Guodian manuscripts proved that Daoism was more accommodationist toward government than was previously thought to be the case.⁵

This chapter will first present the provisional case for that “accommodationist” view of Daoism. Next we will review the utopian

anarchist strands of Daoism that can be traced back to at least a century after the Guodian manuscripts were transcribed, which will then lead us to question whether the Guodian texts really present such a major challenge to radical Daoism. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of what the identity of the owner of the Guodian strips may tell us about the ultimate meaning of the Guodian texts.

The Guodian challenge examined

The Guodian manuscripts present three main challenges to the view of the anarchist essence of philosophical Daoism. The first is the absence from the Guodian bamboo strips of many *DDJ* chapters that explicitly oppose direct attempts to rule, including, most dramatically, the absence of the entire last third of the received *DDJ*. The second challenge is the lack in the bamboo strips of clear anti-Confucian language in what became Chapter 19 of the received *DDJ*. The third challenge is the relative absence of a “law of return” in the Guodian version of the *DDJ* that would explain how humans could ever have fallen away from the stateless utopia. All three potential challenges are based on the fact that the Guodian text is the oldest known edition of what became the *DDJ* and thus that the clearly anti-statist and utopian statements in the received text may be later additions by other authors.

The absence of the most anti-statist and utopian sections of the *DDJ*

Absent from the Guodian strips are some of the most direct criticisms of other political philosophies and the most anti-statist statements of the received *DDJ*. Most importantly, the Guodian text does not contain the explicit, influential utopian Chapter 80 of the *DDJ* that we analyzed in the previous chapter. Others have argued that this chapter contains the heart of the Daoist critique opposed to technological innovation that would aid the oppressive centralization and militarization of state power, a critique that can be found clearly in Daoist texts of the Warring States period (403–221 BCE)—an era that culminated in the foundation of a centralized imperial state.⁶ Absent as well from the Guodian text are some of the most dramatic examples of Daoist advice to rule by noninterference in the affairs of the world (*wushi*), including the end of Chapter 48 of the received *DDJ*:

In wanting to rule the world
Be always non-interfering in going about its business;

For in being interfering
 You make yourself unworthy of ruling the world.⁷

The Guodian strips also leave out the severe critique of Legalism, a political philosophy that would later be highly influential on the imperial state. This anti-Legalist stance can be seen in chapters in the received *DDJ* missing from the Guodian strips that contain criticism of rule by harsh punishments (Chapter 74) and the idea of suffering and rebellion as caused by over-taxation and the oppression of the rich over the poor (Chapter 75).⁸ Finally, the Guodian text leaves out much of the attack on the Confucian ideal of rule by the morally virtuous, as in Chapter 3 of the received text which is missing from the Guodian strips:

If we stop looking for “persons of superior morality” (*xian*) to
 put in power, there will be no more jealousies among the people.
 If we cease to set store by products that are hard to get, there will be
 no more thieves.⁹

Also absent from the Guodian strips is the explicit critique of the negative political evolution that occurs if Daoist principles are lost, as in Chapter 38 of the received *DDJ*:

After the “power” [*de*] was lost, then came human kindness [*ren*].
 After morality was lost, then came ritual [*li*].
 Now ritual is the mere husk of loyalty and promise-keeping
 And is indeed the first step towards brawling.¹⁰

Chapter 19 and the Guodian accommodation to Confucianism

By far the most highly publicized example of the seeming accommodation toward government in the Guodian strips lies in what became Chapter 19 of the received *DDJ*. The received versions contain language that directly mocks the Confucian values of sageliness (*sheng*), benevolence or humanity (*ren*), and righteousness (*yi*), values at the heart of the ideal of paternalistic rule. As the received *DDJ* puts it,

Eliminate sageliness, get rid of knowledge,
 And the people will benefit a hundredfold.
 Eliminate humanity, get rid of righteousness,
 And the people will return to filial piety and compassion.
 Eliminate craftiness, get rid of profit,
 And there will be no robbers and thieves . . .¹¹

As opposed to this direct critique, the Guodian text uses the following language:

Eliminate knowledge, get rid of distinctions,
And the people will benefit one hundredfold.
Eliminate artistry, get rid of profit,
And there will be no robbers and thieves
Eliminate transformation, get rid of deliberation,
And the people will return to filial piety and compassion . . .¹²

To critics, this chapter shows clearly that Confucian and Daoist thought were not so opposed at the time when the Guodian texts were transcribed and that both philosophies argued for a humane rule based on paternalistic values of filial piety and benevolence,¹³ not a stateless utopia as some later Daoists from the Warring States to the Wei-Jin period explicitly favored. Thus the Guodian text prefigures scholar-officials who later used Daoist principles to defend the supposedly limited and light rule of the former Han dynasty. Perhaps the best evidence for such an accommodationist position can be found in Chapter 54 of the received *DDJ*, which is also in the Guodian strips with only minor differences and gaps due to broken or missing slips (for which Henricks puts extrapolations in italics):

If you cultivate it in your self, your virtue will be pure;
If you cultivate it in your family, your virtue will be overflowing;
If you cultivate it in your village, your virtue will be longlasting;
If you cultivate it in your state, your virtue will be rich and full;
If you cultivate it throughout the world, *your virtue will be widespread.*
Look at the family from the point of view of the family;
Look at the state from the point of view of the state;
Look at the world from the point of view of the world . . .¹⁴

As many commentators have long pointed out, this chapter is remarkably similar to the later Confucian text the *Da Xue*, or “Great Learning,” which says that great sages of antiquity who wished to order their own states,

first regulated their own families, for which they first corrected their own hearts, for which they first regulated their own intentions, for which they first perfected their own knowledge.¹⁵

The *Da Xue* later became one of the four classic texts that all would-be officials had to master in order to pass the imperial examinations, thus showing how Confucianism became a legitimating formula under which the role of the ruler was similar to that of head of a family. Thus critics of Daoism as anarchism point to this chapter of the *DDJ* to say that early

Daoism was not opposed in principle to the idea of rule as long as it was limited and humane.

The lack of a “law of return” in the Guodian texts

Finally, the Guodian strips severely lack what could be termed the Daoist “law of return” that exists in the received *DDJ*.¹⁶ This law is important in that it helps Daoists both to explain how a “fall” from a stateless utopia could ever have occurred, and to predict the oppressive forms of rule other political philosophies of the time would bring if ever put into practice. This law is most explicit in Chapter 55 of the received text, which is absent from the Guodian strips:

Whatever has a time of vigor also has a time of decay.
Such things are against Tao
And whatever is against Tao will soon be destroyed.¹⁷

In other words, those who try to impose political order either by indoctrinating people with ideas of goodness (Confucianism) or through harsh laws and punishments (Legalism) will only bring about a reaction of nature that will destroy their ideal states.¹⁸ Also, under this principle, Daoists can explain the “fall” from the natural, stateless society not as something unnatural, which would be self-contradictory to a naturalistic philosophy, but instead only as a temporary change that is doomed to fail. Without this law of return, the Daoist critique of other political philosophies is arguably much weaker.

In the Guodian version of what became Chapter 30 of the received *DDJ*, which opposes war and militarized rule, the lines containing the most famous example of the law of return are absent (marked in italics below):

One who uses the Way to assist the ruler of men,
Does not desire to use weapons to force his way through the land.
Such deeds easily rebound.
In places where armies are stationed, thorns and brambles will grow.
Great wars are always followed by great famines.
One who is good at such things achieves his result and that's all.
He does not use the occasion to make himself stronger still.¹⁹

Thus the Guodian version seems to call for modest, humane rule that avoids war if possible but refrains from opposing *any* attempt to use force of arms, which would undermine the idea of Daoism as anarchistic.

For many scholars, other minor linguistic differences between the Guodian and the received *DDJ* demonstrate that the Guodian text is the oldest version of what became the *DDJ* and that much of the received

DDJ was not present at the time of Confucius (b. 579 BCE), but instead was added during or after the third century BCE.²⁰ Thus, according to the “accommodationist” view, the elements of the *DDJ* that contain the anti-Confucian critique must have also been added during the late Warring States era, while the utopian anarchist aspects must have been nonintrinsic additions of later writers.

Review: The case for radical Daoism

To make the case for radical Daoism as genuine and intrinsic, one should start with unambiguous anarchist Daoism of the Warring States and Wei-Jin periods and work backward to the time of the Guodian texts.

First, as we saw in the previous chapters, later radical thinkers definitely used Daoist language to describe a stateless utopia.²¹ These utopian depictions included explicit opposition to Confucian moral virtue and Legalist rewards and punishments, ideas that provided legitimated succeeding Chinese imperial dynasties. Radical Daoism developed to its fullest extent in the early Wei-Jin period (ca. 220–316 CE).²² As we noted in the previous two chapters, the poet Ruan Ji took Daoist anarchism to its height in his poem “The Biography of Master Great Man,” which describes a stateless utopia in terms based on the received *DDJ*. Ruan Ji has the Great Man denounce serving in government, based on the *Zhuangzi*. Based also on received versions of the *DDJ*, Ruan Ji in his poem criticizes Confucian and Legalist ideas of rule as “nothing more than the methods of harmful robbers, or trouble-makers, of death and destruction. . . .”²³ As we also saw in previous chapters, Ruan’s harsh, anti-Confucian tone is continued in the tract of the obscure Daoist philosopher Bao Jingyan (ca. 300 CE) who also presents the Daoist stateless utopia found in other Wei-Jin writers, but in very direct and forceful language. These Wei-Jin Daoist anarchists took their language directly from the “outer” chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, especially Chapter 10, which as we saw was itself highly resonant of Chapter 80 of the received *DDJ* and is dated by scholars to at least 250–200 BCE. As in Chapters 18 and 19 of the received *DDJ*, we saw above how Chapter 10 of the *Zhuangzi* also blames Confucian and Legalist “sages” for bringing oppression into the world, if in much harsher language that calls us to “cudgel and cane the sages and let the thieves and bandits go their way” and concludes that “the world will then be peaceful and free of fuss. . . .” if we “. . . cut off sageliness, cast away wisdom” and “. . . destroy and wipe out the laws that the sage has made for the world. . . .”²⁴

As we saw in the second chapter of this book, Chapter 9 of the *Zhuangzi* also depicts a Daoist utopia where the world is free of sages trying to order the world,²⁵ a utopian picture that relates to language of the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and the received *DDJ* concerning the need to

“return to the root” and reject technological refinements that came with the increasing centralization of power in the Warring States era.²⁶ Even if these accounts from the outer *Zhuangzi* chapters and the received *DDJ* were later extrapolations, as we saw in Chapter 2, there is no doubt that their utopian ideal harkens back to a preexisting tradition of a stateless agrarian community that was supposedly begun by the mythical founder of agriculture, Shen Nung. A. C. Graham’s argument that the Shen Nung ideal “appears to be an anarchistic order based on mutual trust in small communities . . .” that is “. . . ancestral to all Chinese utopianism”²⁷ would backdate the utopian Daoist ideal to a time at least roughly contemporaneous with the historical Zhuang Zhou himself, if not earlier, even if this ideal was later sharpened during the harsh Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE). Graham’s argument supports the view that even the inner *Zhuangzi* chapters suggest the spontaneous order that exists in the universe without human intervention and thus the lack of any need to impose political order. We should recall that in the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* the greatest sages often refuse to serve in government, while the great second chapter, “Discussion on Making All Things Equal,” satirizes the idea that hierarchical rule is natural in the famous section we noted in Chapter 1 that contains a cybernetic view of the human body.²⁸

Further, as we saw in Chapter 2 of this work, another (inner) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* puts forth the metaphorical anecdote about the disaster that will follow from artificial attempts to impose order when, after trying to repay Hun-tun for his generosity, the emperors of the north and south seas tried to bore the seven human orifices in him so that he could see, hear, eat, and breathe, “every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hun-tun died.”²⁹

Clearly the inner *Zhuangzi* chapters oppose the idea of rule as morally virtuous, if in more gentle language than used by later Daoists.

Likewise, the received *DDJ* often depicts the idea of morally virtuous rule as at best a step down from the ideal, as in Chapter 17:

With the most excellent rulers, their subjects only [barely] know that they are there,
The next best are the rulers they love and praise,
Next are the rulers they hold in awe,
And the worst are the rulers they disparage.³⁰

Given the Daoist admonition to (would-be) sages to rule by *wuwei* throughout the received *DDJ*, in addition to its denigration of laws and punishments, taxes, warfare, education, and virtually any other element of rule, we argued in the first chapter that even the received *DDJ* is trying to subvert government by advising the ruler to emulate leaders of hunter-gatherer bands and thus remove the ruler’s monopoly on the legitimate use

of coercion—advice that would do away with the state as it is minimally defined by Max Weber. Following Joseph Needham, we have argued above that even the authors of the inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and the received *DDJ* may have lived early enough to have at least dim memories of surviving remnants of wild hunter–gatherer or semi-sedentary ways of life in the south of ancient China and thus opposed the increasing centralization of power from the late Spring and Autumn to the Warring States periods.³¹ We know that Daoist thinkers often came from more recently settled or partially settled regions of China, such as the “madman” Xiu Xing from the State of Chu who argued with Mencius, the great fourth-century Confucian exponent of the doctrine of humane rule.³² Here the earlier date of the Guodian text may help heighten the argument, since the Guodian tomb is located within the historical boundaries of the state of Chu, which perhaps would place its ideas within this “southern” tradition of Chinese political thought opposed to harsher types of rule. Before we return to that question below, we must first reexamine the Guodian text to see whether it really lacks anti-Confucian and anti-statist utopian language.

The Guodian Texts Reexamined

The questions of dating and authorship

In refuting the claims that the Guodian texts point to an “accommodationist” Daoism, one must first examine the issue of dating. Though it is currently the oldest known version of the text, whether or not all later editions of the *DDJ* were additions to the Guodian texts or whether there was a preexisting oral and/or written tradition to all received or discovered versions of the *DDJ* is a matter of dispute. Even if one accepts the view of scholars who point to linguistic evidence to suggest that sections of the Guodian texts were more succinct and thus that later *DDJ* versions contained many emendations,³³ this does not mean that later authors of texts that entered into the received *DDJ* were starting wholly new traditions. Instead their texts could have been based on preexisting utopian traditions, as we noted above, such as that of Shen Nung, which might have had a history predating the Guodian manuscripts.

Robert Henricks points out that the Guodian strips were discovered in the tomb in at least three bundles, which were copied separately in at least two different hands probably from at least three other written sources.³⁴ The complete text of the *DDJ* may have existed by 300 BCE in more than one version, and the common ancestor of all versions may have been written earlier in the fourth century.³⁵ The Guodian strips thus may be copies of copies and transcribed from versions of the text that date to as early as 350 BCE.

Whether or not the idea of one man named Lao Zi as the author of the *DDJ* was a later invention—as Chinese intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s

believed and most contemporary Western and Japanese scholars contend—or whether the *DDJ* really dates back to someone such as the sixth century BCE legendary figure Lao Tan or Li Erh, certainly at a minimum the main principles of the received *DDJ* date to the Warring States period.³⁶

Perhaps based on the traditional Chinese view of Lao Zi as the author of the *DDJ*, most contemporary Chinese scholars contend that the Guodian texts prove there was an already existing version of the *DDJ* much earlier than previously believed. Most Western scholars, on the other hand, believe that the lack of many *DDJ* chapters in the Guodian texts and other linguistic evidence shows that the complete *DDJ* was not yet in existence in 300 BCE.³⁷ While many Western observers find the Chinese belief in an early *DDJ* as authored by Lao Zi to be based more on a conjectural “act of faith” rather than hard evidence,³⁸ other Western scholars are starting to come around to the Chinese position, including Edward Shaughnessy, who finds that Western views might also be faith-based and prematurely based on the evidence at hand, and Robert Henricks,³⁹ who as we saw above is willing to consider that a complete version(s) of the *DDJ* may have existed as early as 300 BCE. Liu Xiaogan sees a possible third, compromise position: that much of the *DDJ* may have been composed after Confucius (sixth century BCE) but before the historical Zhuang Zhou (i.e. before the mid-fourth century).⁴⁰ If so, that would put much of the *DDJ* much farther back than 200 BCE, showing that much of the radical side of Daoism can be traced before the rise of China’s early imperial dynasties and thus further in Chinese history than many observers previously believed.

Even if much of the *DDJ* dates far back into the Warring States period, critics of Daoism as originally anarchist would still raise the questions noted above, which we will now consider successively, that is, the “missing” (radical) chapters from the Guodian strips, the changes in what became Chapter 19 of the *DDJ*, and the question of the “law of return.”

The “Missing” chapters from the Guodian texts

Despite the fact that some chapters and sections of the received *DDJ* are missing from the earlier Guodian texts, upon closer examination one can find even in the Guodian strips precursors of much of the later radical utopian argument. To take a crucial example, the concept of *wuwei*, nonaction or doing nothing, still can be found in the Guodian texts despite the lack of several *DDJ* chapters that focus on the concept. For example, in the Guodian version of what became Chapter 57, the author has the perfect sage say the following:

I am unconcerned with affairs, and the people on their own enjoy good fortune;

I do nothing, and the people transform on their own . . .⁴¹

Besides *wuwei*, other *wu* forms such as *wuzhi*, literally “not knowing,” and *wuyu*, literally “not desiring” (or “unprincipled knowing” and “objectless desire” respectively, as David Hall more clearly translates those terms⁴²) exist in one form or another in the Guodian texts.⁴³ These terms were crucial in developing the Daoist ideal of rule by noninterference with the natural order, which Hall regards as central to the philosophical anarchist vision of Daoism.

Likewise, despite the fact that the Guodian slips contain only about one-third to two-fifths of the received *DDJ*, in addition to the *wu* forms, the Guodian texts include other key concepts such as *pu* (uncarved wood) and *si* (raw silk),⁴⁴ terms that related to advice to return to an “original” simple and unrefined nature and thus pointing to a critique of overly refined methods of rule.

Especially if one accepts the argument of Liu Xiaogan that later versions of the *DDJ* mostly amount to, first, a “linguistic assimilation” that may have amplified and intensified but not directly changed the meaning of the text and, second, a “conceptual focusing” that “highlights key concepts but also strengthens consistency in language,”⁴⁵ then one can argue that the core message of the later *DDJ* is contained in the Guodian strips. For example, Liu contends that concepts such as *wuwei* may be used less often and in less intense fashion in the Guodian texts, but they can still be found, just as the anti-Confucian questioning of rule by benevolence or morally virtuous leaders is still present if one looks more closely, which leads us back to the question of Chapter 19.

The changes in Chapter 19

Even if some terms and concepts of the received *DDJ* can be found in the Guodian texts, there is still the celebrated change in lack of explicitly anti-Confucian language in what became Chapter 19 of the received *DDJ*. Even here, however, Liu Xiaogan’s point applies about the received text of the *DDJ* only amplifying and not distorting the fundamental message in the Guodian text. As Liu says, “. . . in chapter nineteen in [later versions of the *DDJ*] neither the amendment of sentences nor criticism of Confucianism are sudden or incomprehensible. They do not distort the original thought of the bamboo versions.” For Liu the changes in Chapter 19 are “special case[s] of conceptual focusing” that mostly “amplify criticisms in the bamboo versions” and intensify the criticism without changing the essential meaning of the text.⁴⁶ This is especially true if one looks at the eighteenth chapter in the received *DDJ*, which was found intact in a separate bundle of Guodian strips. In the latter part of this chapter the anti-Confucian language survives, as follows:

Therefore, when the Great Way is rejected, it is then that “humanity” and “righteousness” show up on the scene;

When the six relations are not in harmony, it is then that we hear of
 “filial piety” and “compassion”;
 And when the state is in chaos and disarray, it is then that there is praise
 for the “upright officials.”⁴⁷

For Henricks, combining the sentiments in this paragraph with the advice in what became Chapter 19 to eliminate attempts to use knowledge and distinctions to morally transform the people makes it clear that even if this Guodian chapter is “not yet ‘anti-Mencian’,” that is, not explicitly opposed to that fourth-century philosopher’s focus on humane rule, “it is still very ‘anti-Confucian’,” that is, against the idea of sages trying to inculcate morality and compassion in the people.⁴⁸

The “Law of Return”

Though differences between the Guodian text and what became Chapter 30 of the received *DDJ* are not as famous as the changes in what became Chapter 19, to this author the lack of a clear “law of return” in the Guodian texts may be the biggest difference between the Guodian strips and the received *DDJ*. Again, this absence is important, since anyone who wants to argue that a stateless utopia is the natural human condition has to explain how people could ever have fallen so far as to live under Confucian or Legalist-influenced governments.

In making the case for the continuity of the Daoist anarchist tradition, one should first note that a law of return is implicit in the Guodian texts since they still emphasize that ruling through inaction or nonconcern with affairs is the best way for the sage to endure. Most scholars who have examined the Guodian version of what became Chapter 30 emphasize that it is very likely that a punctuation error in the text should be corrected so that the final line reads, “such deeds [i.e., those achieved by being modest and not desiring to use weapons] are good and endure”⁴⁹ or “its affair tends to be prolonged” [*qi shi hao chang*].⁵⁰ In other words, one who rules by doing nothing will survive, clearly implying the opposite for those who fail to heed this warning. Thus again, the later, clearer versions of the *DDJ* that talk about those “not being on the Way [coming] to an early end”⁵¹ are merely examples, to borrow Liu Xiaogan’s terminology, of “intensifying” or “focusing” concepts that can be found in the Guodian texts.⁵²

Likewise, the anti-militarism of the received *DDJ* is present in the Guodian text with or without an explicit law of return, as in the likely suggestion of what became Chapter 31 that “weapons are instruments of ill omen.”⁵³ Henricks finds that the key characters found in later texts contained what the missing characters in the strips must have said, which in any case is

consistent with the Guodian version of what became the opening lines of Chapter 30:

One who uses the Way to assist the ruler of men
Does not desire to use weapons to force his way through the land.⁵⁴

Indeed, Shaughnessy speculates that the separation of the two chapters in the Guodian text may have been due to a misplaced bamboo strip, which would not be hard to imagine given the chaotic state in which the strips were first found in the tomb. This strip may have in fact contained the more direct language “where troops are based brambles will grow,” a clear example of the law of return that might have later been moved to a different place in the received version of the *DDJ*.⁵⁵

The surviving radical utopian vision of the *DDJ* in the Guodian texts

To relate this technical debate among specialists on ancient China to the point of trying to find the genesis of the radical anarchist utopia in the Guodian texts, we should conclude this section by examining the main point in the *DDJ* shared by all philosophical anarchists who present a utopian vision of what society would look like without government, namely, that humans can find morality on their own, that is, they can find the link between individual freedom and community without the need of outside intervention. In Western anarchism that point is made most clearly and consistently in the works of Peter Kropotkin, who asserts that “mutual aid” is the natural and voluntary method humans have always used in order to survive, as opposed to the more hierarchical concept of “charity” projected by those trying to justify rule of some over others.⁵⁶ Similarly Leo Tolstoy argues that the spirit of love as expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount points to a voluntary process where individuals see the link to each other inside their own hearts, as opposed to orthodox Christian doctrines that preach the need for sinful humans to be saved from without.⁵⁷ If such ideas are indeed at the core of all philosophical anarchism, then the Guodian strips contain the same message. That message is for the (would-be) sage to let go, not to direct the people, and let things take care of themselves. The Guodian version of what became the latter part of Chapter 64 of the received *DDJ* contains this message most clearly, while also containing the germ of the law of return:

The rule to follow in approaching all matters, is—
If you’re as careful at the end as you were at the beginning
You will have no disasters.

The Sage desires not to desire and places no value on goods that are hard to obtain.

He teaches without teaching, and backs away from matters in which the masses go to excess.

As a result, the Sage is able to help the ten thousand things to be what they are in themselves, and yet he cannot do it.⁵⁸

This Guodian chapter especially contains both the idea of opposing “charity” and a version of the law of return. If the sage does nothing, the people will eventually find their true nature. They may stray from the Way, in which case the sage would back away from them and remove his approval, like a tribal elder but not a ruler possessing the power of coercion, but on their own they would return to the Way, that is, to the natural morality that is contained in all of us. That trust in people to rule themselves is the heart of the utopian vision of anarchism, and at root, one could argue, that belief is still contained in the Guodian strips.

Conclusion: The Guodian Texts and the State of Chu

Why then, if the core utopian message remains in the Guodian texts was the man who owned the texts, and perhaps those who first wrote and transcribed them, so seemingly willing to embrace the idea of humane rule? To answer this question, it may be useful to look at who was buried in the tomb where the strips were found. The owner of the Guodian strips may have been a relatively high-ranking, Confucian-influenced teacher of the heir apparent to the ruler of the state of Chu.⁵⁹

The state of Chu was an important southern state during the Warring States period, famous among other things for some of the most legendary “madmen,” the hermits and poets who perhaps based their anti-statist ideas on earlier, pre-sedentary traditions.⁶⁰ The idea of Daoism as part of China’s “southern” tradition more apart from and skeptical of official life has a long history.⁶¹ In other words, it may be that even the Confucian tradition in Chu was affected by Daoism. Li Cunshan, for example, points out that some of the other texts unearthed at the Guodian tomb were examples of a southern form of Confucianism very much influenced by Daoism.⁶²

Thus it may not be so much that Confucianism tamed Daoism in this time and place but that Daoist ideas affected Confucian thinkers, for example, in leading some of them to oppose “artificial” filiality and to favor ruling more by *wuwei*, inaction, or doing nothing. Others have similarly argued that the Guodian texts demonstrate that early Confucianism was more than a dispassionate elitism and was instead influenced by Daoist ideas to put more stress on human feelings (*xing*).⁶³

Thus one could easily speculate that in choosing which parts of what became the *DDJ* to recopy for the use of tutoring his pupil, the owner of the Guodian strips may have selected sayings that backed up his own views and would best aid his goal of influencing his student to rule less harshly once he succeeded to the throne.⁶⁴ The teacher could not be openly anti-statist but only gently suggestive of less harsh doctrines of rule, a goal perhaps of southern Chinese intellectuals who saw such doctrines as based on dangerous “northern” traditions that were starting to take over the Chinese world.

The view that Confucian intellectuals in the period of the Guodian texts and later were trying to convince their pupils to accept less interventionist forms of rule while preserving their own role as advisors perhaps resonates with Roger Ames’ view of the later Daoist text, the *Huainanzi*. Later Daoists in times of more centralized order in the early imperial era of the Qin and Han dynasties (ca. third to second centuries) may have interpreted Daoism as supporting the principle of rule at the same time that they were trying to subvert rule in practice.⁶⁵ Whether they succeeded in this double game or in the end helped more to legitimize the new imperial forms of rule would of course depend on one’s own underlying political perspective.

That Confucian scholars even before the time of Mencius were trying to promote a “humane rule” doctrine that would mitigate authoritarian rule, and thus that Confucianism is at root not dictatorial or “feudal” is an important part of more contemporary Chinese intellectual discourse. The idea that Confucianism can be reconciled with constitutional monarchy and even democracy was a crucial part of the later Chinese “Hundred Days” reforms of 1898. The idea of Confucianism as a pro-democratic doctrine can be found in the works of “liberal” Chinese intellectuals from the 1920s and 1930s up to contemporary philosophers such as Tu Wei-ming, who has explicitly focused on the Guodian manuscripts as showing that there is a long history in China of limits to autocratic rule.⁶⁶

A radical Daoist, on the other hand, might point out the remaining danger that any doctrine of humane or democratic rule could subvert true equality and freedom. The Daoist anarchist might point to the potential for intellectuals to use such humane rule doctrines to satisfy themselves that they are not responsible for harsher forms of rule even as their acquiescence in the rule of supposedly more benign leaders not only preserves their elite status but helps to legitimate the state in general.

In any event, in times of disorder in China, when fighting between rival states intensified and state power in general became increasingly centralized and oppressive, some intellectuals started to make more directly radical statements based on the utopian anarchist side of Daoism. This chapter argues that these more direct statements are not distortions of the original message represented by the Guodian texts but instead a more explicit statement of Daoist anti-statist impulses that always exist for many people. In times when the state’s rule becomes more oppressive and more

obviously for the benefit of rulers rather than the ruled, for example, during times when states swallow each other up in war and become increasingly centralized, earlier, more gentle critiques of rule can often evolve into more blatant anti-statist doctrines. In times of disorder, with constant warfare, pestilence, disease, and famine, perhaps at least some intellectuals who feel they have nothing to lose in a situation when their lives are under constant threat anyway are more likely to return to Daoism and bring out its utopian anarchistic tendencies, as was the case for Liu Shiwei in the early twentieth century, as we will see in Chapter 6, and for the individual in the mid-ninth century CE writing under the pseudonym of Wu Nengzi, as we will see in the next chapter, even if their own interests in serving in government or merely surviving led them to compromise their original Daoist anarchist visions.

Notes

- 1 As noted in the introduction to this book, many China scholars argue that the idea of philosophical versus religious Daoism, not to mention the very idea of clearly delineated schools of “Daoist,” “Confucian,” and “Legalist” thought, was a much later idea in Chinese history that later scholars projected back to earlier periods. Nevertheless, this author would contend that the *DDJ*, including the Guodian partial version, contains similar political ideas to those in texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and later works, ideas which can be grouped together and contrasted with ideas in texts that later became part of imperial ruling ideology. Thus for the purposes of this chapter the terms Daoist, Confucian, and Legalist are used to denote those contrasting ideas.
- 2 See Chapters 1 and 2 of this volume.
- 3 To review the previous chapter, the terms “radical utopian” or “utopian anarchist” in this chapter refer to the suspicion shared by Daoist and Western anarchists of other, statist utopias, even while Daoist and other anarchists present their own vision of an ideal (stateless) society.
- 4 See Robert Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian*, 22. For the original transcription of the strips, see Hubeisheng Jingmenshi bowuguan (Hubei Province Jingmen City Museum) (ed.), *Guodian Chu mu zhu jian* (The Guodian strips in the Chu tomb).
- 5 See Tu Wei-ming, quoted in A. Shen, “Ancient Script Rewrites History,” *Harvard College Gazette* (February 22, 2001): 8.
- 6 As we noted in the previous chapter; also see Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, II: 86–9, 121–32.
- 7 Roger Ames and David Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation*, 151.
- 8 See Chapter 2.
- 9 Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, 145.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 189–90.
- 11 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 12.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 13, 29.

- 13 See, for example, Pang Pu, "Gu mu xin zhi" (New Information from an Old Tomb), 7–12, translated in Defoort and Xing, "Guodian, Part I," 46–9.
- 14 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 108.
- 15 Translated in A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 132; also see Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing*, 160–2.
- 16 For the idea of "return" in the *DDJ*, see for example Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing*, 27–9.
- 17 Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, 209.
- 18 See Chapter 2.
- 19 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 15, 36–7. The emphasis is Henricks' for the lines missing from the Guodian.
- 20 See, for example, Boltz, "The Fourth-Century B.C. Guodian Manuscripts," 594.
- 21 As argued in the previous chapter.
- 22 As argued in Chapter 1.
- 23 Holzman, *Poetry and Politics*, 195.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 26 See previous chapter.
- 27 Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 64–74.
- 28 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 38.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 97.
- 30 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 112. Henricks finds the last phrase largely intact in the Guodian version, if combined with the next chapter.
- 31 Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, 100–32.
- 32 Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 70–2.
- 33 See Li Cunshan, "Cong Guodian Chu jian kan zaoqi Dao Ru guanxi" (Early Daoist and Confucian Relations as Seen from the *Guodian Chu* Slips), 199, translated in Defoort and Xing, "Guodian, Part II," 82.
- 34 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 21–2.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 36 For a summary of the 'doubting of antiquity' debate in the *DDJ*, see Edward Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts and Their Place in Twentieth-Century Historiography on the 'Laozi'," 417–28; 433–44.
- 37 Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts," 445; also see Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams (eds), *The Guodian Laozi, Proceedings Of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May 1998*, 142–6.
- 38 William Boltz, "The Fourth-Century B.C. Guodian Manuscripts," 594.
- 39 Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts," 447–8; Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 21–2.
- 40 Liu Xiaogan, "From Bamboo Slips to Received Versions: Common Features in The Transformation of the Laozi," 340.
- 41 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 68.
- 42 David Hall, "The Metaphysics of Anarchism," 59.
- 43 See Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing*, 48–53; Liu, "From Bamboo Slips to Received Versions," 363–8, and Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*, 45–58.
- 44 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 17.
- 45 Liu, "From Bamboo Slips to Received Versions," 339.

- 46 Ibid., 373.
- 47 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 112.
- 48 Ibid., 15.
- 49 Ibid., 36.
- 50 Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts," 453–4.
- 51 Ibid., 453.
- 52 Liu, "From Bamboo Slips to Received Versions," 339.
- 53 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 117–18.
- 54 Ibid., 36.
- 55 Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts," 455–56.
- 56 Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Human Evolution*.
- 57 For a summary of Tolstoy's and other Christian anarchists' interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, see Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel*, Chapter 1, "The Sermon on the Mount: A Manifesto for Christian Anarchism," 43–82. The original dissertation on which that work is based, "Theorising Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel," includes an appendix (274–8) containing a reprinted translation of Tolstoy's "harmonized" version of the Sermon.
- 58 Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, 42.
- 59 Ibid., 4–5; also see Liu Zuxin, "An Overview of Tomb Number One at Jingmen Guodian," in Allan and Williams, *The Guodian Laozi*, 32, and Jiang Guanghui, "Guodian Chu jian yu zaoqi ruxue" (The Guodian Chu Slips and Early Confucianism), 81–92, translated in Defoort and Xing, "Guodian, Part II," 6–38.
- 60 Needham, *Science and Civilisation II*, 100–32.
- 61 See Watson's introduction to *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* for the application of this idea to the *Zhuangzi*. For the application of China's north–south divide to the contemporary era, see Edward Friedman, "China's North-South Split and the Forces of Disintegration," in Friedman, *National Identity and Democratic Prospects in Socialist China*, 77–86.
- 62 Li Cunshan, "Cong Guodian Chu jian kan zaoqi Dao Ru guanxi," 87–90.
- 63 For example, see Tu Wei-ming cited in Andrea Shen, "Ancient Script Rewrites History," 8; also see Pang Pu, "Kong Men zhi jian," 22–35, translated in Defoort and Xing, "Guodian, Part II," 39–54.
- 64 This argument leaves aside the question of whether the robbers who first broke open the tomb and scattered its contents made off with any of the strips.
- 65 Ames, *The Art of Rulership*.
- 66 Tu, quoted in Shen, "Ancient Script Rewrites History," 8.