

## CHAPTER 1

# Culture, Text, and Context

Daoists believe that texts are not created in isolation but are products of a vibrant, interactive environmental field. An account of the historical environment or context for the works of the sages, which are analyzed specifically in the next three chapters, adds richness to the potential meanings and applications of Daoism for rhetoric. Insights about context may help distinguish aspects of the texts that are situation-specific, bound by context in such a way as to be irrelevant in other contexts, from elements that espouse timeless wisdom. Examining the historical environment or milieu, therefore, can assist our understanding of these ancient texts and how their views of Daoism might be applicable to rhetorical theory and criticism.

Exploring the historical context for these texts also engages a theoretical issue of the text/context distinction.<sup>1</sup> It thereby provides an opportunity to investigate important philosophical underpinnings of Daoist rhetoric and contrast those with philosophical suppositions inherent in classical Western rhetoric. I begin this chapter by elaborating on dominant features of classical Greek and Daoist worldviews in order to articulate a Daoist view of text and context. I then consider contextual elements, factors outside of the texts, which I believe interacted most significantly in their assemblage. These factors include the translation process, rhetorical personae, and the political and philosophical environment.

### DAOISM AND CONTEXT

In order to distinguish classical Greek and Daoist rhetorical perspectives on text and context, and thereby delineate the unique Daoist perspective

on this issue, one must begin with their respective fundamental world-views. At a cosmological level, Ames (1993) characterizes the Greek view as a “two-world” theory while the Chinese espouse a “one-world” view. To the Greeks, there is a permanent real world that stands behind appearance. This view is starkly exemplified by Plato’s distinction between the true world of forms and the seductive pseudoreality of the sensual world, and later by the Christian distinction between heaven and earth.

By virtue of the belief in an underlying objective reality, “knowing” to the Greeks means discovering the “mirroring correspondence between an idea and an objective world” (Ames, 1993, p. 57). To know something, therefore, is to discover its “true” reality. Within this conception, reason plays a paramount role. Reason is thought of as “a human faculty independent of experience that can discover the essence of things” (pp. 55–56), and “rational explanation” lies “in the discovery of some antecedent agency or the isolation and disclosure of relevant causes” (p. 56).

The Western notion of dualism is also apparent in conceptions of the self. Individuals are thought to look a certain way or behave in certain ways, but what one exhibits or how one acts at a particular time may be distinct from one’s fixed nature, essence, or core self. The idea of manifest and latent self, as well as body and soul, communicates a dualistic sense of the individual that is foreign to Daoists.

In Daoism, there is one world, and it alone constitutes reality. There is no independent agent, such as a god, to provide order and life. The world’s order results from a continuous interaction of the opposing forces of *yin* and *yang*. Reality is a ceaseless alternation “between rising and falling, emerging and collapsing, moving and attaining equilibrium that is occasioned by its own internal energy of transformation.” This movement “is not ‘cyclical’ in the sense of reversibility and replication, but is rather a continuing spiral that is always coming back upon itself and yet is ever new” (Ames & Hall, 2003, p. 28). The order in the universe is not created by a grand design but is the natural consequence of the dynamic interaction of all life forms—“the many making one.” There are no essences that define, stabilize, and make unique the entities of reality. Instead, everything in the universe is constantly changing, developing, and interacting. The inherent nature of reality is change and novelty.

In contrast to the Greek notion that reality is a “permanent structure to be discovered behind a changing process,” the classical Chinese view is that knowledge is “a perceived intelligibility and continuity that can be mapped within the dynamic process itself” (Ames, 1993, p. 55). Knowing, then, rests on the ability to perceive the connections and interactions, the comprehensiveness, which constitute the world:

Without an assumed separation between the source of order in the world and the world itself, causal agency is not so immediately construed in terms of relevant cause and effect. All conditions interrelate and collaborate in greater or lesser degree to constitute a particular event as a confluence of experiences. “Knowing” is thus being able to trace out and manipulate those conditions far or near that will come to affect the shifting configuration of one’s own place. (p. 56)

Reason is viewed as “coherence—the pattern of things and functions.” One who knows can see the relationship between all things and break them down into the collaborative elements that explain events and phenomena. “Rational explanation” lies “in mapping out the local conditions that collaborate to sponsor any particular event or phenomenon” (p. 56). One must understand the connections between all things, integrating the perceptions of both mind and body in order to see the unity of the universe.

The Chinese, lacking the notion of a unique identity for things and people that stands apart from the experiential thing or person, would say that a person’s identity is grounded in her or his relationships with other things. A person has no unique essence, but is simply a part of the many. An individual exists and is defined in relation to everything else, by his or her roles and relationships with others, meaning that the human is “irreducibly communal” (p. 64). A person may therefore be known as the man who lives next to the butcher, the father of Qi, or the son of Wu. It is the association of things that constitutes all things. Nothing stands apart from everything else because “the many make the one.”

The classical Western tendency to emphasize the uniqueness and stability of the elements of reality conditions views of rhetoric. Rhetorical action involves three distinct elements: rhetor, message, and audience. The message (text) responds to a preexisting situation—the mind of the rhetor, the historical circumstances, and the predispositions of the audience—or context. The text is thus a product of the context, and it, in turn, affects the attitudes and beliefs of the audience. Artful rhetoric, as Aristotle suggests, is the faculty of observing the available means of persuasion in a given case. Rhetoric becomes a quasi-scientific enterprise, as rhetors apply reason to divine the underlying aspects of the context and then fashion texts that produce desired audience responses. This approach clearly identifies component parts of the rhetorical process and specifies, in a linear way, the movement from preexisting situation to text to audience effect. It also makes it incumbent on rhetors and critics to account for contextual factors in crafting and/or critiquing a text.

Daoists believe, contrarily, that reality is a unified whole and the individual is not distinct from the rest of the universe. As I will further explore in chapter 2, the temporary assemblage of elements into a body, message, or physical object creates the illusion of stability and uniqueness, but only because one is looking at that assemblage from a particular vantage point at a particular time. Over time, elements in the universe generate a body that alternately degenerates and regenerates, before ultimately returning its elements to the environment. The assemblage of that body over the course of what we term a “lifespan” is actually temporary and indistinct from the grand mix that constitutes the universe. Accordingly, distinctions such as text and context are not true distinctions but rather arbitrary and time-bound labels. A text is simply a temporary assemblage of symbols whose meaning interacts cyclically with everything else in the environmental field: “Particular ‘things’ are in fact processual events, and are thus *intrinsically* related to the other ‘things’ that provide them context. Said another way, these processual events are porous, flowing into each other in the ongoing transformations we call experience” (Ames & Hall, 2003, p. 15). Meanings and identities change and are never fully formed or stable. In fact, change and interaction produce the identity and meaning of things in the world. Text and context, like rhetor and audience, are inseparable.

Distinguishing text and context, then is an arbitrary imposition on the fundamental nature of reality. It is nonetheless useful and necessary. The Daoist view that context is both an important and arbitrary category appears contradictory, but as we shall learn, in Daoism opposites do not negate or repel but complement. Context is important because rhetorical artifacts are situated historically—there is a spatial and temporal dimension that is relevant when a text is created and has some bearing on meaning. Texts are connected to time and place because, in Daoism, nothing stands apart from the world. The artifact is a product of all aspects of the environmental field, and the more we know about the interconnected aspects of the environment, the more we can understand. Of course, when we refer to something as a distinct entity or product of a particular set of circumstances we are speaking of how it presents itself at a particular time. We can propose an arbitrary historical context, as long as we recognize that claims regarding context, while important, are provisional: “Sages envision a world of changing events that they can, for whatever reason, choose to freeze momentarily into a distinct pattern of discrimination, but that they recognize, when they see clearly, as being beyond such distinction” (p. 43). Articulating a historical context temporarily places events in the foreground amid the background of reality.

As a practical matter, we must be able to isolate events and individuals from time to time so that we can communicate and organize activities. For example, the distinctions between the four seasons are arbitrary. There have been blizzards in the middle of summer and heat waves in the depths of winter. There have been epochs where weather stayed relatively stable from season to season for centuries. Furthermore, “spring” is not discrete but is a blend of winter and summer. At the same time, farmers are wise to teach their children to follow the seasons regarding when to plant, when to fertilize and water, when to harvest, and when to leave the soil fallow. We pull things into the foreground and speak of them as though they are discrete in order to do business. When we do this, which includes any instance when we use language, we create artificial distinctions because they are useful.

Daoists use language and create categories, such as context, as a way of foregrounding. They see no problem in this because they do not think that they are making statements about the ultimate reality or an individual’s essence, and recognize that the parts we focus on are actually facets of a larger whole. It can serve a practical purpose to create categories or distinctions and label them so that we can act in this world. As long as we recognize what we are doing, there is no harm or issue. In fact, we must do these sorts of things in order to survive.

When we isolate text and context we are using them as a basis for understanding, not positing a claim about the nature of reality. Specifying a context foregrounds the elements in the field—historical and cultural events, rhetors, audiences—that seem to be of great importance in their interaction with each other. If a Daoist were to talk about a rhetorical interactant, text, or context it would be assumed that the conversation is not treating these elements as fixed or stable entities that exist in isolation from one another or anything else.

Furthermore, context does not imply causation. Daoists reject linear explanations of events. Texts are not caused by situations but are part of them. There is an interactive flux that dynamically conditions all features in the environmental field. Situating Daoism within a time frame in which certain events took place does not mean that those events caused the sages to say what they did in a linear sense. It is more appropriate to say that Daoist thought influenced historically situated events just as those events affected Daoist thought.

To treat Daoism with an appreciation for its texts and contexts is to recognize its fluid and dynamic presence in the world. Locating a context or historical framework for the crafting of key texts does not tell us what Daoism is, but what it might have been to emerging identities at one time.

Of course, I cannot claim definitively that the aspects or events that I focus on were necessarily on the minds of the crafters of those texts, nor can I say, even if they were, that the rhetors were interpreting these contextual elements in the same way that I do. My examination of historical context indicates, from my vantage point, what I think was in play during the construction of the texts. While we cannot contain Daoist thought or objectify its teachings, situating Daoism contextually may help us understand Daoist thought not as timeless prescriptions but as living events. We may even discern how these lessons might be meaningful in our unique circumstances.

## TRANSLATION

Chinese is a highly contextual language that demands a great deal of interpretation. For example, “because Chinese contains neither definite nor indefinite articles, no recorded distinction could be made between references to Lao Tzu, the person, or to the *Lao Tzu*, the writings” (Grigg, 1995, p. 125). The translation problems of which I speak are not simply encountered in moving from Chinese to English but originate in translating classical Chinese, which has not been used for centuries, to modern Chinese.

Classical Chinese, the form in which the various versions of the *Lao Tzu* are recorded, is simply long columns of uninterrupted characters with no indication of chapters, stanza/paragraphs, or even sentences. Sentences are determined by what appears to be meaningful units of thought. The present chapter divisions have simply evolved by convention. There is no textual basis for dividing them as they are; the stanza/paragraphs are still discretionary, even in modern Chinese. For translators and readers alike, the meaning of the text is undoubtedly influenced by these divisions. (p. 121)

The grammatical structure and paucity of characters in classical Chinese make the language “compressed and cryptic” (Clarke, 2000, p. 52). Grigg (1995) proclaims that “translating the *Lao Tzu* is so difficult that intelligent guessing rather than translating is often the rule rather than the exception” (pp. 111–12).

Because of the difficulties in translating classical Chinese works, the *Dao de jing* has been translated in Chinese several hundred times and “continuously reinterpreted throughout Chinese history” (Clarke, 2000,

pp. 50–51). Interestingly, there are no extant copies of the original version. Existing traditional renditions are rife with errors.

Of the traditional texts that do exist, most scholars now agree that some of the characters are incorrect and the meanings of others are uncertain. Still other characters—indeed, whole lines of them—are incorrectly placed. And some characters and lines are missing entirely. This has been confirmed by the recently discovered *Ma-wang-tui* texts, which have filled in as many as three lines in one so-called chapter. (Grigg, 1995, p. 119)

While some of these errors were wholly inadvertent, some were deliberate, most likely made by Confucians who “adjusted the Taoist texts to accommodate their own particular purposes” (p. 119). Daoism is certainly affected by the politics of translation.

One might wonder to what extent translation politics may have affected Western versions of the text. For example, the Western appropriation of Hinduism during the colonial period “helped both to reinforce European hegemony over India and at the same time to construct a nationalist Indian ideology” (Clarke, 2000, p. 7). In this case, however, the study of Daoism in the West came largely after the primary colonial period. Hence, “Daoism has neither helped to shape the mentality of colonial rulers nor been a focus of anti-imperialist struggle.” More recently, Western encounters with Daoism have been diverse and complicated, indicating that “the recently emerging relationship with Daoism cannot be understood simply in terms of Western power over a passive and subjugated Orient” (p. 7). Thus, while there is always a certain politicization of texts, in the case of Daoism this has not been particularly pervasive. Nonetheless, as we read these germinal works we must remain aware that all translations are perspectival interpretations.

#### RHETORICAL PERSONAE

Many traditional approaches to textual analysis make the seemingly obvious assumption that it is valuable to examine the author, or rhetor, as a central contextual factor. If nothing else, identifying authorship provides a historical time frame for the text that can point to significant social forces that may have interacted with the rhetorical act or artifact. Situating the texts upon which I rely, however, is complicated by the fact that there were no extant or systematic historical records of China until centuries after the

deaths of the Daoist sages; the lack of clear records makes it difficult to separate folklore from fact. Grigg (1995) points out “there is no definitive evidence that Lao Tzu himself even existed” (p. 123). The book *Dao de jing* was originally titled *Laozi*, in accordance with the Chinese custom of attributing philosophical texts to a named figure thought to have originated or popularized the ideas (Kaltenmark, 1965). The most prevalent, and I think credible, view is that *Dao de jing* is a composite work. Ames and Hall (2003) agree: “It would seem that a great many hands across an expanse of time set down, sorted, re-sorted, edited, and collated the *Daodejing* and the materials that constitute it” (p. 7). While the precise compilation dates for *Dao de jing* are unknown, Ames and Hall, in a recent and impressive translation and commentary, maintain that the book was “born” during the Warring States Period (circa 403–221 B.C.E.). The text is also referred to in *Zhuangzi*, indicating the order in which those works were rendered.

Like the *Dao de jing*, the authorship of the *Zhuangzi* is uncertain. The text is widely considered to be a composite of several works by different authors from different periods of time (Clarke, 2000). The book is divided into three sections—the Inner Chapters (1–7), the Outer Chapters (8–22), and the Miscellaneous Chapters (23–33). The Inner Chapters are thought to be composed by a single individual, most likely the historical Zhuang Zhou (Chuang Chou), during the Warring States period (Clarke, 2000; Graham, 1986; Roth, 1991). The Inner Chapters, which are my focus in chapter 3, contain “all the major themes for which the Chuang Tzu has been renowned” (Roth, 1991, p. 80).

The core text of *Art of War*, consisting of thirteen chapters, was probably written by Sun Wu or his disciples (Ames, 1993; Griffith, 1963; Huang, 1993; Sawyer, 1994). Because of questions regarding the accuracy of historical records, and the possibility that *Art of War* was compiled by adherents of Sun Wu after his death, there are conflicting ideas regarding when it was written. According to Ames, the historical Sun Wu is estimated to have lived circa 544–496 B.C.E., making him “a contemporary of Confucius at the end of the Spring-Autumn period” (p. 18). Most scholars date the compilation of *Art of War* somewhere between the end of the Spring-Autumn period and the late Warring States period (Ames, 1993; Griffith, 1963; Huang, 1993; Sawyer, 1994). Regardless of its exact date of compilation, *Art of War* responds to major philosophical perspectives and political events that occurred during the intense military campaigns of the latter Spring-Autumn period (circa 770–481 B.C.E.), and the text informed military strategists during the brutal Warring States period (circa 403–221 B.C.E.).

In sum, all three texts upon which I rely were most likely compiled between the fifth and third centuries B.C.E., during the Spring-Autumn

and Warring States periods. Sunzi's teachings appear first, followed by Laozi and Zhuangzi, who were preceded by and highly aware of Confucius.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it is likely that many hands, either original authors and/or translators, have crafted the works of these sages. They are "not the heroic inventions of a single originating author but redactions created over periods of time out of a variety of sources, shaped by a mixture of influences and interpreted in widely different ways" (Clarke, 2000, p. 50). Consequently, I treat Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Sunzi as rhetorical personae and not necessarily actual historical figures solely responsible for particular texts.

### POLITICAL CONTEXT

The political climate of the Spring-Autumn and Warring States periods is a critical spur to not only Daoism but also many of Asia's most profound thinkers, writers, and artists. The years of chaos spawned a free and diverse intellectual environment that "laid the foundation for subsequent literary forms, philosophical thinking, and cultural formation" (Lu, 1998, p. 66). This era, the "Golden Age" of Chinese literature, includes the life and works of Confucius, as well as Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Sunzi. Graham (1989) observes in reference to the ancient scholars that their "whole thinking is a response to the breakdown of the moral and political order which had claimed the authority of Heaven" (p. 3).

This political context is rooted in the Zhou (Chou) dynasty, which was formed around 1100 B.C.E. While the early years of Zhou rule are thought of as a Golden Age that unified the world, the "dynasty" gradually disintegrated to a point where city-states operated on an independent basis with little or no acceptance of, let alone deference to, the house of Zhou.

Zhou kings were plagued by the problem of controlling a vast empire of "disparate peoples and far-flung territories with only a small Chou population" (Sawyer, 1994, p. 48). Barbarians to the north and west presented an ongoing danger to the dynasty. The kings countered these threats by granting fiefs and monetary rewards to feudal lords who pledged loyalty to the Zhou. As the feudal lords became more powerful, the central government became increasingly ineffectual. Within a few generations, the power of the western Zhou began to erode precipitously.

In 770 B.C.E., after years of barbarian attacks, the Zhou lost their western capital. The Zhou capital was retrenched in the east, and the loss of political power by the Zhou royal house allowed the city-states, ruled by feudal lords, to exert increasing power. Lords of some of the more power-

ful states were eager to fill the power vacuum left by the weak central government, but no city-state was strong enough to control the others. The result was a period of continual battle for conquest and survival. In the period from 722–464 B.C.E., at least 110 states were conquered or annexed (Sawyer, 1994). Eventually, a permanent imbalance of power prevailed:

The conflicts of the Spring and Autumn period had segmented China into seven powerful survivor-states, each contending for control of the realm, and fifteen weaker states for them to prey upon. The feudal lords had by then evolved into despotic monarchs who were compelled to nurture the development of extensive economic and political bureaucracies just to survive. (Sawyer, 1994, p. 53)

No state was immune, “and even the most powerful state, should it fail to prepare its defenses and train its soldiers, could be vanquished” (Sawyer, 1994).

In the following centuries, from 464–222 B.C.E., “wars were even longer and larger” (Hsu, 1965, p. 77), so much so that 403–221 B.C.E. became known as the Warring States period (Ames, 1993; Sawyer, 1994). This era was noted for its “political and emotional turmoil, constant warfare, treachery, and personal danger” (Major, 1975, p. 265). According to Sawyer (1994), “the scale of conflict surged phenomenally” (p. 53). Even the minor states “easily fielded armies of 100,000 and the strongest . . . reportedly maintained a standing army of nearly a million,” mobilizing “600,000 for a single campaign” (Sawyer, 1994, p. 54). As the size of warfare increased so did its brutality:

The “art” of warfare progressed from swarming militia to the efficiency of phalanx-like fixed troop formations. At every level of innovation, from the introduction of cavalry, to standard issue crossbows, to siege engines, these instruments of aggression made a folly of defense. Cities were walled and fortified only to be breached; borders were drawn up only to be redrawn; alliances were formed only to be betrayed; treaties were signed only to be reneged upon. (Ames & Hall, 2003, p. 1)

The ability to project these powerful armies into battle constituted an enormous threat to all: “In the race to empire, the game was zero-sum. And to lose was to perish utterly” (p. 1).

Constant offensive warfare, political betrayal, and official corruption dominated life in classical China. Ames and Hall (2003) point out that

“for generation after generation, death became a way of life, so that mothers gave birth to sons with the expectation that they would never reach majority” (p. 1). Tremendous energy was devoted to coping with the uncertainty and brutality of everyday life.

## PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

The political context in classical China had significant philosophical implications. The central authority, both politically and spiritually, was disrupted during the Spring-Autumn and Warring States periods and China was divided into independent feudal territories ruled by various lords. These rulers tended to the ceremonial needs of spiritual practice, but because of the decentralization of political power, spiritual authority had also been scattered. Rulers were desperate for sources of philosophical insight, political ideas, and military strategies that “would ensure peace and prosperity to their people, increased power for themselves and hegemony over the whole land” (Smith, 1980, p. 3). This invigorated the *shih*, or scholar class, who found themselves with valuable opportunities to influence rulers and thus increase their own prestige.

The rulers, with but little understanding of the arts of government, sought the advice of learned men of various schools of thought. In return they offered positions of prestige and dignity, and lavished wealth and honours on those whom they trusted. To these blandishments of the rulers the Taoist mystics turned a deaf ear. (p. 3)

These philosophers proliferated, “traveling from one court to another, gathering adherents, propounding their theories and arguing them in open debate, each seeking a prince who would put their way in practice” (Parinder, 1983, p. 317). The various philosophical perspectives—including Mohist, Legalist, Sophist, and Logician, as well as Daoist and Confucian—have been described as the “Hundred Schools” of philosophy.

Daoism and Confucianism arose from the debates of the Hundred Schools as China’s two principal philosophies and indigenous religions.<sup>3</sup> From its beginnings in the *Dao de jing*, Daoism is offered as an alternative to Confucianism. Hence, Daoism is seen in a richer light when juxtaposed with Confucianism as competing responses to challenging social, political, and philosophical conditions in ancient China.

Confucius was the founder of the earliest of the “Hundred Schools.” By the year 100 B.C.E. Confucianism became the official philosophy of

China, emerging as “final and permanent victor” of the battle for religious dominance. Furthermore, “for nearly two thousand years the Confucian canon was the mainstay of the curriculum in Chinese education” (Parrinder, 1983, p. 305). The imperial house and the Chinese ruling establishment have been pre-eminently Confucian, and Confucianism as the dominant philosophy of administrative classes became institutionalized in official rites and ceremonies and in the imperial sacrifices. In this way, it became part of the apparatus of government.

Classical Chinese philosophy is centered on the Dao, but Confucians and Daoists view the Dao differently. While Daoists emphasize *tian* Dao, the Way of Heaven, Confucians focus on *ren* Dao, the Way of Human. Confucius was interested in the perfection of the human in society. He taught what he believed was the correct, moral way to live, prescribing detailed guidelines for behavior.

Confucius believed that the good order once existed in the two preceding dynasties and that the only hope for the future was to recapture the past splendor by restoring the values and practices of a prior golden age. Drawing on the authority of revered ancestors, and from a long and sacred tradition of religious ceremony, Confucius created a system of moral conduct governing virtually every aspect of life. His code for proper conduct governed not only morality, but also dress, manners, demeanor, and gesture (Parrinder, 1983). Enlightenment was achieved through study of the classics and respectful participation in correct ritual, custom, and tradition (Schwartz, 1985). This orientation allows everyone to know what is expected of them and others as well as how to conduct oneself. Duty and social propriety are clearly marked paths.

Daoists would agree with Confucians that the Dao had been lost and that this explained the current problems in society. They disagree in the notion of why the Dao was lost and where it may be discovered. For Confucians, the problem was forgotten traditions and the solution was a strict conduct code, the observance of rituals, and resurrection of practices of sage monarchs. For Zhuangzi, the Dao had been lost because of the human’s alienation from nature. The answer was not duty to ancestral traditions but to align oneself with the eternal, universal force of the Dao by living consistently with the natural world, recognizing the unity of things rather than their distinctions, and transcending the material world.

Disillusioned by the scheming, intrigues and sycophancy of the feudal courts, and highly critical of the social conventions, elaborate ceremonial, moral precepts, and detailed rules of behaviour which formed a veneer to cover hypocrisy and self-seeking, the early Taoists contrasted the artificialities of man-

made institutions with the ordered sequences of natural processes. (Smith, 1980, p. 4)

While Confucius's "superior man" overcomes natural, base drives, Zhuangzi's "pure man" or "true man" adapts to nature and avoids imposing human ways on the rhythm of the universe.

The Confucian solution to chaos, from the perspective of the Daoists, entrenched the problem, by insisting on conformity with human-made laws, and moved humans further from the Dao of Heaven. The natural way is thus "trivialized by recourse to contrived rules and artificial relationships that are dehumanizing, and by strategies for social regulation that privilege an ordered uniformity over spontaneity" (Ames & Hall, 2003, p. 32). While the Confucian perspective created order, it endorsed humanism and hierarchy. To a Daoist, it is capable of leading "socially to nepotism, parochialism, and jingoism, and within the natural environment, to anthropocentrism, speciesism, and the pathetic fallacy" (p. 32).

## CONCLUSION

While the task of approaching classical Daoism with sensitivity toward context might seem problematic, especially for an English speaker in the twenty-first century, the dynamic, generative nature of Daoism deproblematizes this issue. There is no inherent reason why a scroll penned by Laozi himself would be more "genuine" or useful for us than an English translation rendered over two thousand years later. The Dao itself is universal, but changing. The ways we perceive and talk about the Dao are always reflections of our perspectives. Our discussions will always be tempered by the inadequacy of language to account for the ineffable. Yet these difficulties are no different from the ones Laozi faced, and they are not insurmountable. In fact, what makes this book unique is that its objective is not only a deeper understanding of Daoism, but also a study of the uses of rhetoric. What is of particular interest to rhetoricians, and will be centered throughout this book, are the methods the sages used to communicate given these difficulties. A study in Daoist rhetoric is a study in working with the fluctuating ineffable with imperfect tools. It is because of these challenges that we can learn much from the rhetoric of the Daoist sages.