Notes on the Translation

Among the dozens of scholarly commentaries that I have examined during the course of my translation and annotation, the most useful are listed in the Bibliography. All of them suggest various emendations and revisions. I have tried to make the best of the text as it stands, permitting only the most limited changes, in spite of the fact that it is obviously corrupt (i.e., containing errors or alterations) in some places. My aim throughout has been to duplicate as closely as possible in English the experience that a trained student of Classical Chinese would have when he or she reads the *Chuang Tzu*. I should mention that an abstruse, ancient work such as the *Chuang Tzu* has always been inaccessible to all but a minute percentage of the Chinese population who possessed special preparation in grappling with its enormously refractory and artificial language. It is "artificial" in the sense that it is book language only, a dead language that may never have lived or lived only partially in the mouths of priests, seers, and bards, and that for more than two thousand years has not been capable of being understood when read aloud unless the auditor had previously memorized the passage in question. The monu-

mentally difficult nature of Classical Chinese has become even more accentuated in this century with the demise of the imperial institutions that fostered and sustained this "unsayable" hieratic language as a mechanism of control through the powerful literati officials who had spent decades in mastering it. Since 1919, less than a decade after the revolution of 1911, which toppled the last dynasty, the Manchus, Classical Chinese has been replaced as the official written medium of China by the demotic vernacular, Modern Standard Mandarin. Today, modern citizens of China are at least as far removed from the language of the *Chuang Tzu* as modern speakers of English are from *Beowulf*, or as modern speakers of Greek are from Plato's *Republic*—if not further.

Classical Chinese is by its very nature problematic in that it has been dramatically divorced from spoken language for no less than two millennia and may always have been so because of the fact that it was written in a script that was only partially phonetic. The language of the *Chuang Tzu* is even more peculiar in that it purposely distorts and impishly tampers with the conventions of Classical Chinese itself. To render faithfully an extraordinary text like this into a living language such as English or Mandarin requires a stupendous act of transformation, not merely a mechanical translation. Against this need for a creative response to the *Chuang Tzu*'s linguistic mischief is the duty of the conscientious philologist to be as consistent and accurate as possible.

In the Introduction, I have stated that I believe the verse portions of the *Chuang Tzu* to be more nearly reflective of oral tradition than is the prose matrix in which they are embedded. But to assert that an early Chinese work such as the *Tao Te Ching* or the verse portions of the *Chuang Tzu* were of oral derivation is not to assert that the texts as they have been recorded accurately mirror the rhythms, structure, and grammar of the Eastern Chou speech upon which they were presumably based. To be sure, precise linguistic evidence indicates that, in the process of committing utterances to writing in ancient China, various conven-

tions were employed that automatically omitted or simplified certain syntactic, morphemic, and grammatical features of the spoken languages. This was largely due to the partially phonetic nature of the Chinese script which made it virtually impossible to capture in writing with fidelity and facility all of the significant elements of speech.

Consequently, while written Chinese verse may not be a direct reflection of spoken language, it nonetheless reveals a bias in favor of gnomic and oracular modes of discourse which normally are associated with the realm of orality. The Chinese prejudice in favor of poetry at the expense of prose persisted throughout the imperial period and hearkens back to antiquity when knowledge was transmitted by seers and sages who commanded a body of wisdom verse. Chinese prose itself was continually contaminated (or, from another viewpoint, we may say "embellished") by the cadences and structures of poetry, and it is often well-nigh impossible to determine whether a given piece is written in prose or in poetry. This also accounts for the distinctive Chinese literary genres known as the rhapsody (*fu*) and parallel prose (*p'ient'iwen*), which lie somewhere between the realms of prose and poetry. Throughout Chinese history, there have been occasional efforts to "reform" and "purify" Chinese prose by making it less euphuistic, mannered, elevated, and poetic, and more straightforward, simple, practical, and prosaic. But, until the cataclysmic political revolutions of this century, which radically transformed the fundamental premises of Chinese society, there was always a continual reversion to poetry as the preferred form of writing.

As we have seen in the Introduction, the *Chuang Tzu* is an anthology composed of heterogeneous components. The many disparate voices in the text make it one of the most difficult of early Chinese works with which to grapple. The translation strives not to homogenize these various strands into a single, undifferentiated style, but to let the various voices of the whole text, no matter how discordant they may be, sing through by

themselves. Where the original shows the hand of a genius, the translation attempts as best as possible to re-create in English its excellences, but where the original is awkward or clumsy, the translation makes no effort to camouflage its inferiority.

Even with the superior parts of the text, there is a natural tendency for translators to improve them to suit the tastes of Western readers. For example, Classical Chinese nearly always relies on the word *yüeh* to introduce a quotation. It basically means just "said" (or "asked" if a question is involved), but translators are given to rendering it as "responded," "exclaimed," "cried," "expostulated," and so forth. This dressing up of the text gives a false sense of the quality of the original work.

The reader should also be warned about the recurrence in the book of certain tales and parables, sometimes only barely modified. Another perhaps somewhat jarring quality of the book for a modern reader is the manner in which it jumps from one tale or parable to another within a given chapter. If one understands that these phenomena are due to the fact that the *Chuang Tzu* is essentially an anthology, rather than the product of a single mind, this will make it easier to accept. Furthermore, not only is the *Chuang Tzu* an anthology, it is an anthology that expresses the viewpoints of many different schools that debated with and borrowed from each other. Generally, however, each chapter expresses certain broad themes and the tales and parables within it are intended to illustrate them. These primary themes have been highlighted in brief introductory notes by the translator at the beginning of each chapter. Occasionally, the same story will be repeated in several chapters of the book with a slightly different twist because a different message is intended. Yet, regardless of the lack of seamless unity to the book, the scintillating language and wonderful imagery are sure to captivate the reader.

Aside from its notorious heterogeneity, another aspect of the *Chuang Tzu* that makes it so hard to deal with is the fact that it is occasionally textually corrupt. This is the result of a long and

complicated process of redaction and transmission. All conscientious students of the text are frustrated by those parts of the *Chuang Tzu* that are manifestly garbled or have evident contradictions. In many instances, I have been able to solve these problems by resorting to various text-critical methods, but in some I have simply had to make difficult decisions about what I thought the authors were really trying to say. In my deliberations on the most complicated points, I have usually come up with two or three alternative interpretations, but in the end had to choose the one I thought most probable for the translation.

My policy is always to stay as close as possible to the Chinese text without becoming unintelligible or overly awkward in English. Occasionally, I have had to add a few words for grammatical or syntactical clarity in English. As a rule, however, I have endeavored to keep such additions to a minimum, not going beyond what is in the Chinese text itself. This accounts for the spareness of the English rendition, which is a deliberate attempt to convey a sense of the terseness of the Chinese original. In a few cases, I have provided brief parenthetical explanations to help the reader who has no background in Chinese history or culture. The notes in the Glossary should suffice to solve most of the remaining difficulties initiates will encounter.

For all of the reasons outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the reader will swiftly come to the realization that the *Chuang Tzu* is not as easy to read as a collection of Chinese folk tales. While the demands placed upon the reader are thus heavier, the rewards are correspondingly greater.

So as not to interfere with the reader's appreciation of this inimitable work itself, I have refrained from excessive annotation and commentary. In general, I have provided only those notes that I felt were essential for comprehending unfamiliar material. These are listed in the Glossary, which is divided into three sections: Names, Places, and Terms and Allusions.

I have found it convenient to invent one new word to match

an ubiquitous Chinese technical term, namely, "tricent" (three hundred [paces]) for *li* (one third of a mile), on the model of the word "mile," which literally means "a thousand [paces]." This was necessary to avoid confusion because the syllable *li* may also be employed to indicate so many other important concepts in Chinese, e.g., "principle," "ritual / ceremony / etiquette," "benefit / profit / gain," "one third of a millimeter," and so forth, which are also often cited by sinologists in their romanized form.

It has been my practice to translate (rather than simply to transcribe) the names of characters who appear to be fundamentally the product of the author's (or, more precisely, the authors') imagination. Often these names constitute puns or are otherwise intimately operative in the unfolding of a given tale; to ignore them would be to eviscerate a key feature of the diction. Sobriquets and other types of pseudonyms are also often translated if their meaning is sufficiently transparent, even for historical figures, since they were often chosen by individuals to express an aspect of their personality that they wished to emphasize. When, however, an individual is already relatively well known in Western sinology by the transcribed form of his name, then I provide only that.

Ideally, all transcribed proper nouns should be given in the reconstructed form that is appropriate for the time when and place where they were current. Unfortunately, our reconstructions of the sounds of ancient and archaic Sinitic languages, topolects, and dialects are still grossly inadequate, so we must resort to the makeshift of citing them in Modern Standard Mandarin. This is often deceiving, especially when the phonetic quality of a word is operative in what an author is trying to express. In the present translation, I have regularly given the archaic pronunciation of the names of two southern states to indicate that they were originally inhabited by speakers of non-Sinitic languages.

For the information of sinologists and other scholars who

may need to know, the basic text that I have relied upon in making this translation is that of CH'EN Kuying, although I do not always follow his recommendations for emendations and excisions. Therefore, those who may wish to compare this translation with the original Chinese should also consult the standard edition as presented in the first section of the Harvard-Yenching *Concordance.* The latter, incidentally, has been my most important tool in producing this rendition. When deciding upon the best English equivalent of a given word or expression in the *Chuang Tzu,* I have constantly checked its occurrences elsewhere in the text. Without the *Concordance,* this would have been a maddening, virtually impossible task.

The next most important research work that I have relied upon are the splendid scholarly tomes in Japanese by AKATSUKA Kiyoshi. There are two primary reasons for this. First, Akatsuka points out those portions of the *Chuang Tzu* that are in verse. This is not evident from the format of the original, since ancient Chinese texts consisted wholly of unpunctuated strings of sinographs. To determine whether or not a given passage is in verse, one must analyze the rhymes at the ends of clauses and sentences. Because the phonology of archaic Sinitic and Modern Standard Mandarin is so different, this is no mean task. The second great contribution of Akatsuka lies in interpreting the semantic content of the names of the fictional figures who people the pages of the *Chuang Tzu.* This, too, requires formidable learning because many of the names are disguised by the device of employing homophonous sinographs to write them. Few commentators, interpreters, and translators pay any attention to these two tremendously vital aspects of the *Chuang Tzu.* Consequently, in my estimation, they do not succeed in conveying to their readers the unique literary qualities of the work. Both in identifying portions of the text that were originally composed in verse and in construing the names of characters who appear in it, I have gone beyond Akatsuka, but his superb contributions in these areas have lightened my burden immeasurably. His gen-

erous accounts of the historical background for events and persons mentioned in the *Chuang Tzu* have also been highly appreciated.

More extensive annotations (including indication of parallels to the *Tao Te Ching* and other early Chinese texts), together with an introduction directed to specialists, have been separately published in *Sino-Platonic Papers* and are available by writing to the author.