

PREFACE

IN THIS BOOK, WE ATTEMPT A READING OF DAOIST PHILOSOPHY that departs from more common spiritual or metaphysical frameworks. We approach the *Zhuangzi* as a sometimes biting and provocative sociopolitical critique of its times and reflect on its often comical expression of a subversive existential mode that allows one to better endure or even to thrive in adverse circumstances. For us, this text, among other things, advises against the common human tendency to develop an inflated ego in reaction to success—or to lose confidence in response to failure. The socially induced identity one adopts may turn out to be an ominous chimera. For the sake of maintaining sanity, the *Zhuangzi* undermines rigid beliefs, judgments, preferences, and dislikes by fostering a humorous attitude toward the world and, in particular, toward oneself.

When we arrived at the idea for this book, we first imagined it as both a study of the *Zhuangzi* and an outline of a New Daoist philosophy.¹ Eventually, we decided to rein in our ambitions and focus on the first goal only, saving

the second endeavor for another occasion. Still, we hope that a sympathetic reader may be able to infer a trajectory toward a potential New Daoism from the gist of our interpretations.

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GENUINE PRETENDING

