

PREFACE

WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE TO READ THE *Dàodé jīng* again for the first time? To read it anew without the fetters of received opinion? This is what the present annotated, bilingual Chinese-English translation and interpretive study attempts to offer. The *Lǎozǐ* 老子 (*Lǎo-tzǔ*; Book of Venerable Masters), more often referred to with its honorific title of *Dàodé jīng* 道德經 (*Tào-té chīng*; Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power), is one of the most translated and most misunderstood Daoist classics. Although traditionally attributed to the legendary *Lǎozǐ* 老子 (*Lǎo-tzǔ*; “Master Lao”; trad. dat. 6th c. BCE) and presented as the *Book of Master Lao*, the work is actually a multivocal anthology consisting of historical and textual layers dating from at least the fourth to the second centuries BCE and containing teachings and practices associated with various anonymous elders of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. This is the *Lǎozǐ* as the *Book of Venerable Masters*. With the present annotated translation and study, I seek to

recover the *Dàodé jīng* as a contemplative and mystical work, one in which inner cultivation and apophatic meditation form its core. In the process, this book returns the ancient classic to its rightful place as a foundational and central scripture of the Daoist tradition. Challenging and remedying received interpretive legacies and current trends of philosophical, popular, and spiritualist appropriations, *Dàodé jīng: A Contextual, Contemplative, and Annotated Bilingual Translation* focuses on the technical specifics of the work, including its unique language of Daoist cultivation and realization. Here is a translation that provides access to the classical Chinese Daoist source-text, with specific emphasis on its contextual and contemplative meaning. As an exercise in historical retrieval and contemplative hermeneutics, rooted in a Daoist scholar-practitioner approach, it helps readers to reimagine both the *Dàodé jīng* and classical Daoism, and opens new vistas into some of the foundations of the Daoist tradition as a whole.