

Wenzi 文子

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Entered by

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The *Wenzi* 文子 refers to two separate, but related, Chinese texts, each of which is titled "Wenzi." The proto-*Wenzi* (a name coined by Paul van Els) is known through a bamboo-strip manuscript found in the "Dingzhou Tomb" near the village of Bajiaolang 八角廊 outside of Dingzhou 定州 city in Hebei 河北 province, China, which was first excavated in 1973. The *Wenzi* manuscript itself was later transcribed into modern Chinese characters and the transcription published in 1995. Based on certain features of its vocabulary and argument, it is likely that this text, which clearly bears the title of "Wenzi" on one of its strips, was written at some point during the Western Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE - 9 CE) prior to the sealing of the tomb (the most likely date of which is 54 BCE). The proto-*Wenzi* is written as an anachronistic dialogue between King Ping (平王) of the Zhou 周 dynasty (r. 770-720 BCE) and the character of *Wenzi* 文子, who appears in the text as a political advisor. *Wenzi* has frequently been labelled as a disciple of Laozi 老子 in the later tradition - despite the absence of any information in the text itself regarding his identity. The dialogue covers a variety of subjects (such as warfare) that are related to statecraft. In all cases, the figure of *Wenzi* bases his advice to the king based on a philosophy of quietude that, while milder in rhetoric, appears quite similar to that of the Laozi, a work the manuscript frequently references. A key difference is that, while the *Wenzi* follows the Laozi in basing its argument on the "Way" (dao 道, the source and natural pattern of the cosmos), the *Wenzi* also highlights the virtues of "humaneness," "righteousness," "ritual propriety," "sagacity," and "wisdom" as key components of rule. At some point in the 3rd century CE, the text of the proto-*Wenzi* underwent an extensive process of revision that seems to have concluded by, at the very latest, the turn of the 5th century CE. This process of revision resulted in the "received *Wenzi*," the text subsequently transmitted in later history down to the present day, and exhibits consistent editorial patterns. To begin with, the dialogue between King Ping and *Wenzi* is changed into a dialogue between Laozi (the putative author of the *Daodejing* 道德經) and *Wenzi*, who is presented as a disciple of Laozi and not as a political advisor. King Ping appears only briefly in the text. His presence serves primarily to establish the period of time in which the text is supposedly written and to underline Laozi's authority as *Wenzi*'s teacher. Similarly, the figure of Confucius is added to demonstrate Laozi's superior authority. Despite its nominal dialogical structure, the received *Wenzi* consists primarily of lengthy pronouncements from Laozi, thus making the text largely monological in style. Strikingly, most of the text's content actually comes from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (a Western Han text from 139 BCE that integrates a great deal of earlier material and treats the *Daodejing* as an authority) with approximately 75% of its content being directly taken from the *Huainanzi*. The purpose of these changes seems to have been to establish the *Wenzi* as an authoritative source of ideas associated with Laozi, presenting the text as a kind of prequel to the *Daodejing* and the Daoist equivalent of the *Analects of Confucius* (Lunyu 論語). This effort was a successful one as the *Wenzi* became an extremely important text up to the end of the Northern Song (1127 CE). The high point of its influence was during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756 CE) of the Tang 唐, who in 742 BCE canonized the text alongside the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, bestowing on it the new title of True Scripture of Understanding the Mysteries (Tongxuan Zhenjing 通玄真經). Beginning in the Southern Song, however, the text ceased to be part of a lived tradition as it was increasingly criticized and eventually dismissed as a forgery. This neglect persisted until the Dingzhou discovery described above, which generated a renewal of interest among scholars, though only as an object of study.



Date Range: 206 BCE - 499 CE

Region: Dingzhou Tomb (Bajiaolang Village, Dingzhou City)

Region tags: China, East Asia, Hebei

The bamboo manuscript of the proto-Wenzi was found in the "Dingzhou Tomb" near the village of Bajiaolang 八角廊 outside of Dingzhou 定州 city in Hebei 河北 province, China, which was first excavated in 1973. Because it is unclear exactly when the proto-Wenzi was written, the dates of this entry are from the beginning of the Western Han (206 BCE) to 499 CE, thereby encompassing the period when the proto-Wenzi may have been written prior to its entombment in 54 BCE and the 3rd-5th centuries CE when the proto-Wenzi was likely edited into the received Wenzhi. Within this range, the year 212 CE is used, somewhat arbitrarily, to divide the proto-Wenzi from the received Wenzhi as this is the last year mentioned in Gao You's 高诱 commentary to the Huainanzi, a work the editor(s) of the received Wenzhi likely had access to.

Status of Readership:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists

Sources and Corpora

Online Corpora

Relevant online Primary Textual Corpora (original languages and/or translations)

DRAFT

– Source 1 URL: ctext.org

– Source 1 Description: The Chinese Text Project is a free website that contains a complete copy of the primary text of the received Wenzhi.

DRAFT

– Source 2 URL: www.chant.org

– Source 2 Description: The Chinese Ancient Text Database (CHANT) is a scholarly website that also contains a complete copy of the primary text of the received Wenzhi.

General Variables

Materiality

Methods of Composition

DRAFT

– Written

↳ Inked

DRAFT

– with Ink

Notes: The bamboo manuscript of the "proto-Wenzi" discovered at Dingzhou was written with ink on bamboo strips. Presumably, later versions of the text would have also been written with ink even once the medium changed to paper.

DRAFT

– Impressed

↳ Tool for making the impression(s)

DRAFT

– Other [specify]: Woodblocks

Notes: In later history, the Wenzi (as opposed to the proto-Wenzi) would have been printed using woodblock printing as was standard in China prior to the invention of moveable type.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

DRAFT

– Printed with moveable type

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Number of sheets

DRAFT

– Bound

Notes: Once printing with moveable began to be practiced in China, the Wenzi would have been printed in that fashion.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

Medium upon which the text is written/incised

DRAFT

– Paper

↳ Specify type of paper

DRAFT

– Specify: Unknown

Notes: The use of paper would have applied primarily to the received Wenzi as bamboo strips were a more common medium in the Western Han period (206 BCE - 9 CE). The earliest

manuscript that resembles the received Wenzhi is a manuscript from Dunhuang that contains 3,000 legible graphs and is dated by a colophon to the year 751 CE suggesting that paper was being used as a medium for the received Wenzhi by the Tang dynasty (and likely even earlier) (Van Els, 2018, 114).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

DRAFT

– Bamboo

Notes: The proto-Wenzhi manuscript excavated at Dingzhou was written on bamboo strips, the likely dimensions of which were 21 by 0.8 cm. At present, 277 fragments of the proto-Wenzhi manuscript have been excavated, though damage to the text makes it impossible to say with certainty how many strips would have composed the text in total. This specific manuscript would have been written at some point prior to its entombment in 54 BCE (although other manuscripts of the proto-Wenzhi likely circulated into the 3rd century CE).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 54 BCE

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

DRAFT

– Other [specify]: It is unknown how the materials used to create both the proto-Wenzhi and Wenzhi were modified prior to the writing process. At the very least, the bamboo strips would have needed to be cut and the paper processed, but details are lacking.

Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

DRAFT

– Other [specify]: It is unknown if, or exactly how, the text may have been modified prior to writing. However, given that major editing appears to have taken place between the text of the proto-Wenzhi and received Wenzhi, it could be said that the text of the proto-Wenzhi was heavily altered prior to being written down as the received Wenzhi.

Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

DRAFT

– No

Notes: Although our knowledge of the proto-Wenzhi is limited, we know that the received Wenzhi was widely circulated in many different copies and so it is not confined to a specific location.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: While the received Wenzhi circulated widely in multiple copies, there is only manuscript of the proto-Wenzi. This bamboo manuscript was discovered in a tomb near Bajiaolang village outside of Dingzhou city. The tomb appears to have been built for a regional king who was a member of the Liu clan - the royal family that ruled the Han dynasty. The tomb was likely closed around 54 BCE and consists of a passage way leading to a front and rear chamber, each of which is divided into three compartments. The proto-Wenzi manuscript was discovered in the eastern compartment of the rear chamber. When first built, the tomb would have been surmounted by a burial mound of an estimated 16 meters in height and 90 meters in diameter. The mound would have been surrounded by an earthen wall of 145 by 127 meters. However, both mound and wall have worn down since construction and the area is now virtually flat. The tomb contained a single corpse and a number of grave goods, many of which were damaged during a fire that was likely set by fleeing tomb robbers who attempted to loot the tomb (likely not long after its construction). The tomb's most notable grave good is a jade suit worn by the tomb's sole occupant, which was not reached or removed by the robbers (Van Els 2018, 8-15). The bamboo strips unearthed from the Bajiaolang tomb are now stored in the Hebei Institute for Cultural Relics 河北省文物研究所 in Shijiazhuang 石家莊.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 212 CE

↳ Tomb

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The Dingzhou tomb described above.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 212 CE

↳ Cemetery

DRAFT

– No

↳ Temple

DRAFT

– No

↳ Shrine

DRAFT

– No

↳ Altar

DRAFT

– No

↳ Devotional marker

DRAFT
– No

↳ Cenotaph

DRAFT
– No

↳ Church

DRAFT
– No

↳ Mosque

DRAFT
– No

↳ Synagogue

DRAFT
– No

↳ Triumphal Arch

DRAFT
– No

↳ Monument

DRAFT
– No

↳ Mass Gathering Point

DRAFT
– No

↳ Cave(s)

DRAFT
– No

↳ Hilltops

DRAFT
– No

↳ Other natural sanctuaries

DRAFT

– No

↳ Boundary markers or lines

DRAFT

– No

↳ Domestic contexts

DRAFT

– No

↳ Library/archive

DRAFT

– No

↳ Specify

DRAFT

– Specify: The text was stored in the eastern rear chamber of the Dingzhou tomb.

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

DRAFT

– No

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

DRAFT

– No

Production & Intended Audience

Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

DRAFT

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Based on the orthography of the proto-Wenzi, it is possible that it was copied by scribes working at the court of the kingdom of Zhongshan during the rule of King Huai between 69 and 54 BCE.

However, even if this were the case, it does not mean that the text was first composed by those scribes, simply that they may have produced the specific manuscript excavated at Dingzhou.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 212 CE

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The editorial modifications that transformed the proto-Wenzi into the received Wenzi (such as changing the dialogue-format of the proto-Wenzi into a series of monologues in which Laozi delivers judgements about various topics) seem to suggest that the intention of the editor-author was to produce an authoritative text that would act as the "Daoist counterpart to the Confucian bible that is the Lunyu [Analects of Confucius]" (Van Els 2018, 150). Further to this point, the received Wenzi seems to have been intended as the prequel to the Daodejing, an authoritative collection of Laozi's true teachings recorded by Laozi's disciple, Wenzi, at the moment when those teachings were first formulated. This would be in contrast to the Laozi, which would then be seen simply as a later digest of those original words (Van Els 2018, 149).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE



Is there a culture of oral recitation?

DRAFT

– Field doesn't know



Is there a story associated with the origins of scripture?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The received Wenzi is presented as a record of Laozi's teachings written down by his disciple, Wenzi, thus accounting for the origins of the text (Van Els 2018, 149).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE



Revealed by a high god?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE



Revealed by other supernatural being?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Inspired by high god?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Inspired by other supernatural being?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Originated from non-divine human being?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Laozi and his disciple, Wenzhi, are presented by the text as wise but fully human figures.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Are the scriptures alterable?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: As only one manuscript of the proto-Wenzi has been unearthed, it is impossible to tell whether or not it was considered alterable. At the same time, Tang dynasty quotations contain differences between them and there are also differences between currently extant versions of the text. In this sense, the text can be considered alterable.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Do the practitioners generally consider the scripture open to alteration?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting scriptures?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: In 742, emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty declared the Wenzhi to be the True Scripture of Understanding the Mysteries (Tongxuan zhenjing 通玄真經), canonizing it alongside the Daodejing and Zhuangzi. As part of this effort, Xuanzong established "Colleges for Revering the Mysteries" (chongxuan xue 崇玄學), in which the three texts served as the curriculum (Van Els 2018, 178).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

↳ Can interpretation also take place outside these institutions?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Many commentaries were written on the Wenzhi outside of, and unaffiliated with, the short-lived institutions created by emperor Xuanzong. The last full commentary on the Wenzhi was written by Du Daojian 杜道堅 (1237-1318).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Interpretation is only allowed by official sanctioned figures?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Are there common disagreements? (such as two or more different schools of interpretation?)

DRAFT

– I don't know

Notes: The Wenzhi eventually declined in popularity due to debates over its authenticity, but these debates did not treat the text as a scriptural authority.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

↳ Are there methods of permanently tabling or resolving debates amongst groups of interpreters?

DRAFT

– I don't know

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

↳ Is there a select group of people trained in transmitting the scriptures?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Is there a codified canon of scriptures?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The Wenzhi was proclaimed a scripture (jing 經) by emperor Xuanzong alongside the Zhuangzi and the Daodejing in 741 CE (Van Els 2018, 178), though this canon was not accepted through all subsequent time periods or by all people (as evidenced by the eventual claims that the Wenzhi was a fraudulent work).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Can the canon be altered or added to?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: This question is marked "yes" because Emperor Xuanzong's canonization does not seem to have continued past his reign and so the issue of alteration does not really pertain.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

↳ Are additional commentaries part of the canon as it is currently understood?

DRAFT

– I don't know

Notes: While the received Wenzhi inspired many commentaries, it is unclear if any of these commentaries were considered part of Xuanzong's canon, though they are part of the general received tradition of Chinese texts.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

DRAFT

– No

Notes: There is little evidence to suggest that the proto-Wenzi was considered religious scripture. If anything, it appears similar to other philosophical/religious texts of the Warring States and Western Han that were engaged in extensive debates with one another. However, certain bamboo fragments found in the tomb do refer to textual units using the term "scripture" (jing 經), so it is possible that the text may have been accorded higher status (Van Els 2018, 27-280).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 212 CE

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

DRAFT

– No

Notes: Both the proto-Wenzi and received Wenzi were written in classical Chinese, which would have been accessible to all educated readers.

Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

DRAFT

– Field doesn't know

Notes: However, the fact that only one manuscript has been found (in the tomb of a Han king) suggests that the proto-Wenzi was not in wide circulation and that its readership may have been confined, in practice if not formally, to the highest echelons of society.

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

DRAFT

– No

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

DRAFT

– No

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

DRAFT

– I don't know

Notes: It is possible that it may have been used in some ritual contexts during Xuanzong's reign.

Is there material significance to the text?

DRAFT

– I don't know

Notes: Although unknown, it is worth noting (for both this question and the one above on ritual practice) that the manuscript was placed in the Dingzhou tomb as part of the posthumous library of a Han king, thus suggesting some possible ritual and/or material significance.

Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

DRAFT

– No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: As described above, there are two texts that are often referred to by contemporary scholars as the "proto-Wenzi" and "received Wenzi" or similar appellations.

↳ Are multiple versions viewed as proper?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Both the proto-Wenzi and the received Wenzi were considered authentic texts in their own time periods, though they can be distinguished by their respective ages and differing content. The authenticity of the received Wenzi was later questioned, beginning with Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819 CE). The discovery of the bamboo manuscript of the proto-Wenzi at Dingzhou in 1973 sparked renewed scholarly interest in the Wenzi and new discussions over its authenticity as ancient, pre-Qin text (Van Els 2018, 158-199).

↳ If multiple versions are proper, is there a differentiation among versions by any means?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Age of extant version of text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Content of text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Ritual purpose of text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Is there debate about which version is proper?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Among debates about proper versions of the text, how is authority established?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Debates over the Wenzhi's authenticity during both the Qing dynasty and within contemporary scholarship typically focus on the date of the text's authorship and the content (i.e. whether it includes unique or borrow content and to what extent its content accurately matches its purported age). These factors have fuelled the recent resurgence of interest in the proto-Wenzi found at Dingzhou.

↳ Age of extant version of text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Content of text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Ritual purpose of text?

DRAFT

– No

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Both the proto-Wenzi and the received Wenzhi can be considered part of larger collections of texts. The proto-Wenzi was found in the "Dingzhou Tomb" along with a number of other works, while the received Wenzhi was canonized alongside the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi by the Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang in 742 CE.

↳ Is there a sense of canonization?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The received Wenzhi was declared a classic by the Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty alongside the Daodejing and Zhuangzi in 742 CE. These works formed a canonical collection that was taught in learning academies established by Xuanzong (Van Els 2018, 178-179).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ How is the authority established?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The authority of the received Wenzhi and the canon of which it was a part were established by the Emperor Xuanzong.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Can the canon be altered or added to?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: As mentioned above, this question is marked "yes" because Emperor Xuanzong's canonization does not seem to have persisted and so the issue of alteration is not relevant.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Have major debates shifted the sense of the place of the text with respect to the larger canon?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

DRAFT

– No

Notes: The proto-Wenzi was found alongside a number of other bamboo texts in the Dingzhou tomb, including an early manuscript of the Analects of Confucius (Lunyu 論語). It is unclear whether or not the texts were considered a cohesive corpus by the tomb's occupant or simply a varied library of works loosely connected by a shared concern with statecraft (Van Els 2018, 16-22). Some fragments of the proto-Wenzi mention textual units termed "scriptures" (jing 經), which suggests that the text may have been accorded a high status, which may in turn relate to the issue of canonization, though the evidence is more suggestive than definitive (Van Els 2018, 27-28).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 212 CE

↳ Is the text part of a series of volumes?

DRAFT

– No

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Cultural with religious implications?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Behavioral literature?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Other

DRAFT

– Other [specify]: What to put for this?

Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary?
(Select all that apply)

DRAFT

– Other [specify]: None of the above.

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The received Wenzhi transforms the dialogue of Wenzhi and King Ping into a dialogue between Wenzhi and Laozi, presenting the former as the student of the latter. In this way, it establishes a lineage of authority based on the student-teacher relationship between Wenzhi and Laozi (Van Els 2018, 148-151).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Does the lineage involve establish a chain of authority?

DRAFT

– Yes

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ Is the lineage defined by concrete cycles or measures of time?

DRAFT

– No

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

↳ How is the lineage established?

DRAFT

– Student-Teacher Relationship

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

Does the text express a formal legal code?

DRAFT

– No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

DRAFT

– No

Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Spirit-Mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other parts?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Other spirit-body relationship?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Within conceptions of the mind: are there distinct notions of psychological states or aggregates?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Are there generally positive or negative associations with aggregates?

DRAFT

– Generally negative

↳ If associations with mental aggregates are neither positive or negative, are there other important details to know?

DRAFT

– Specify: Calmness

↳ Do practitioners engage in debates about mind-body dualism?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Are debates framed in other ways?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Do practitioners distinguish between a corporeal body and an incorporeal soul or spirit?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Are there other sides or features of the debate?

DRAFT

– No

↳ What are historical mainstream and minority positions?

DRAFT

– I don't know

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Is the temporality of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group?

DRAFT

– No



Is there debate in the interpretation of the language of the afterlife?

DRAFT

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dicated in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

DRAFT

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Among others, the text mentions the "Yellow Emperor" (huangdi 黃帝) and the "Five Thearchs and Three Kings" (sanwang wudi 三皇五帝).



A supreme high-god is present

DRAFT

– No

Previously human spirits are present

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The text mentions the hun 魂 and po 魄 souls/spirits of humans, which are associated with Heaven and Earth respectively.

↳ Human spirits can be seen

DRAFT

– No

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt

DRAFT

– No

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world

DRAFT

– I don't know

Notes: Presumably they do, but the text does not make the point explicitly.

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Spirits are described as being able to support the king ("ghosts and spirits assist them" guishen fu zhi 鬼神輔之), suggesting a degree of causal efficacy (Van Els 2018, 66 no.2).

↳ Human spirits can reward

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Insofar as their support could be considered a reward.

↳ Human spirits can punish

DRAFT

– No

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world

DRAFT

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits have memory of life

DRAFT

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion

DRAFT

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion

DRAFT

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living

DRAFT

– I don't know

Non-human supernatural beings are present

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can be seen

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can be physically felt

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world

DRAFT

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world

DRAFT

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings communicate with the living according to the text?

DRAFT

– No

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world

DRAFT

– No

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion

DRAFT

– No

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature

DRAFT

– Specify: Sign

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Organized hierarchically?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Power of beings is domain specific?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Other organization of pantheon?

DRAFT

– Specify: The Way

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

DRAFT

– No

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

DRAFT

– No

Are other categories of beings present?

DRAFT

– Other [specify]: No other categories of being are present.

Does the text guide divination practices?

DRAFT

– No

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: For both the proto-Wenzi and the received Wenzi, the most important concept is the "Way" (dao), which refers to the cosmogonical source of all things, and as the guiding principle in bringing order to the world" (Van Els 2018, 68). Accordingly, the texts emphasize a distinction between the immediate circumstances of the world and the more enduring element of the Way. Understanding that element is open to all people, though it is especially important for rulers because it enables them to bring order, and so the importance of understanding the Way can be seen as a fundamental value of the text that transcends any specific, conventional morality (Van Els 2018, 64-69)

↳ What is the nature of this distinction?

DRAFT

– Weakly present

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the text?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Moral norms apply to (select all that apply)

DRAFT

– All individuals (any time period)

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Both the proto-Wenzi and the received Wenzi can be seen as essentially quietist texts that advocate the cultivation of humility, tranquility, and restraint in order to develop the perspicacity needed to perceive and harmonize with the Way. Accordingly, virtues associated with this practice are highly valued by the texts. However, other virtues, such as compassion, righteousness, and courage are presented positively as important (albeit not as crucial) individual traits and means for establishing social order (Van Els 2018, 69-76).

↳ Honesty/trustworthiness/integrity

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Courage (in battle)

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Courage (generic)

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Compassion/empathy/kindness/benevolence

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Mercy/forgiveness/tolerance

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Generosity/charity

DRAFT

– No

↳ Selflessness/selfless giving

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Righteousness/moral rectitude

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Ritual purity/ritual adherence/abstention from sources of impurity

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Respectfulness/courtesy

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Familial obedience/filial piety

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Fidelity/loyalty

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Cooperation

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Independence/creativity/freedom

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Moderation/frugality

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Forbearance/fortitude/patience

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Diligence/self-discipline/excellence

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Assertiveness/decisiveness/confidence/initiative

DRAFT

– No

↳ Strength (physical)

DRAFT

– No

↳ Power/status/nobility

DRAFT

– No

↳ Humility/modesty

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Contentment/serenity/equanimity

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Joyfulness/enthusiasm/cheerfulness

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Optimism/hope

DRAFT

– No

↳ Gratitude/thankfulness

DRAFT

– No

↳ Reverence/awe/wonder

DRAFT

– No

↳ Faith/belief/trust/devotion

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Wisdom/understanding

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Discernment/intelligence

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Beauty/attractiveness

DRAFT

– No

↳ Cleanliness (physical)/orderliness

DRAFT

– No

↳ Other important virtues

DRAFT

– No

Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require castration?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require fasting?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

DRAFT

– Yes

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

DRAFT

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

DRAFT

– No

Institutions & Production Environment of Text

Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

DRAFT

– An empire

Notes: The proto-Wenzi was produced during the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE - 9 CE) and its textual history, as well as the subsequent textual history of the received Wenzi, all occur within the imperial period of Chinese history. During this time, major polities were all empires or aspiring empires.

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

DRAFT

– Other

Notes: Unknown.

Are there specific elements of society involved with the destruction of the text?

DRAFT

– Other

Notes: There is no evidence to suggest that the Wenzi was ever the subject of deliberate, destructive efforts.

Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The received Wenzi advises rulers to "accumulate [grain] in inexhaustible granaries" and "stock

[supplies] in bottomless storehouses," which would presumably have been used for famine relief (Van Els 2018, 108).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The received Wenzhi advises rulers to "accumulate [grain] in inexhaustible granaries" and "stock [supplies] in bottomless storehouses," which would presumably have been used for poverty relief (Van Els 2018, 108).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

DRAFT

– No

Other forms of welfare?

DRAFT

– No

Notes: While neither the proto-Wenzi or the received Wenzhi appear to offer many specific, institutional forms of welfare, they were generally concerned with a good government that would care for its people.

Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: In 742, emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty declared the Wenzhi to be the True Scripture of Understanding the Mysteries (Tongxuan zhenjing 通玄真經), canonizing it alongside the Daodejing and Zhuangzi. As part of this effort, Xuanzong established "Colleges for Revering the Mysteries" (chongxuan xue 崇玄學), in which the three texts served as the curriculum (Van Els 2018, 178).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 BCE - 1127 CE

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

DRAFT

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

DRAFT

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

DRAFT

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: Insofar as scholars are aware, most educational traditions in Chinese history seem to have been exclusive to men.

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

DRAFT

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: While the received text does not present general models of teacher-student relationships, the received *Wenzi* is based on the idea that *Wenzi*, a disciple, is recording the words of his master, *Laozi*, which implies a certain type of teacher-student relationship.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE

DRAFT

– No

Notes: The proto-*Wenzi* does not feature the master-disciple relationship of *Laozi* and *Wenzi*, but instead presents *Wenzi* as a wise advisor to King *Ping*.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 206 BCE - 212 CE

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: In both the proto-Wenzi and received Wenzi, self-cultivation to understand the Way (which could be considered a form of education) is presented as the key to mental equanimity and effective, successful governance.

Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: While it does not engage in discussions of specific forms of regulation, the both the proto-Wenzi and the received Wenzi present self-cultivation as the general means for effective government. Presumably, this would apply to regulation of state bureaucracy as well.

↳ Does the text regulate bureaucracy permanently?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Does the text regulate bureaucracy temporarily/seasonally?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Does the text dictate how the group's adherent's interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Does the text dictate how individuals interact with other institutional bureaucracies?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Does the text regulate the primary supporting income of the place?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Does the text provide for provisions to lease out land?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Does the text provide for provisions to lease out tools?

DRAFT

– No

Public Works

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

DRAFT

– No

Taxation

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

DRAFT

– No

Warfare

Does the text mention warfare?

DRAFT

– Yes

↳ Does the text dictate how to control an institutionalized military?

DRAFT

– No

↳ Does the text restrict/advocate for participation in exogenous military organizations?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: While both the proto-Wenzi and the received Wenzhi accept certain types of warfare as legitimate state practices, they attempt to heavily curtail how much a ruler would actually engage in warfare. To that end, the two works classify warfare based on five motives: righteousness (to liberate suppressed peoples), reaction (i.e. defence against invaders), aggression, greed, and arrogance. Of these five types of warfare, only the first two are considered permissible (Van Els 2018, 76-81).

↳ Does the text celebrate/bemoan protection/subjugation by an exogenous military force?

DRAFT

– No

Food Production

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

DRAFT

– Yes

Notes: The received Wenzhi makes general references to food production and disbursements in its discussions of governance (as seen above in its discussion of granaries), but it does not offer specific regulations surrounding food production or consumption.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 212 CE - 1127 CE



Does the text in question dictate how the religious group in question provide food for themselves?

DRAFT

– No



Does the text celebrate/restrict food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question?

DRAFT

– No



Which of the follow are forms of ritual food production [choose all that apply]?

DRAFT

– Large-scale agriculture (E.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

DRAFT

– Fishing

DRAFT

– Hunting (including marine animals)

DRAFT

– Small-scale agriculture/horticultural gardens or orchards

DRAFT

– Gathering