Nine Editorial Guidelines

1. **Purpose of the annotations.** The sole purpose is to illuminate moral principle, to end warfare and slaughter, to turn back the fortunes of the age, and to set the human heart aright. This has already been stated plainly in my earlier works -- the *Ceasefire Discourse*, the *Illustrated Account of the Great Chiliocosm*, the *Vernacular Explanation of the Four Books*, and the *Vernacular Explanation of the Conveyance of Rites*. The preface to the present volume explains it again in detail.
2. **Word-by-word glosses.** Difficult characters are singled out and explained. Any character that has already been glossed in an earlier chapter is not glossed again.
3. **Chapter Explanation.** The meaning of each chapter as a whole is explained, conveyed in a spoken register.
4. **Chapter Discourse.** Here I set forth my own views and develop the meaning of the scripture. Where a passage bears most urgently on the present state of the world and the human heart, I explain it with particular earnestness and directness.
5. **Whole-work Discourse.** This is a comprehensive exposition of the entire scripture taken as a single whole. In my earlier annotations on the *Four Books*, I included discourses for each section and for the complete work; the same was needed for the *Dao De Jing*. But once I had finished annotating the Upper Volume, it already ran to nearly two hundred pages. Adding three long discourses on top of that seemed excessively prolix and repetitive. Therefore I incorporated the themes of the Upper Volume into the Discourse for Chapter Thirty-Seven -- that Discourse may be read as the Upper Volume Discourse. I incorporated the themes of the Lower Volume into the Discourse for Chapter Thirty-Eight -- that Discourse may be read as the Lower Volume Discourse. And looking back at the Discourse for Chapter One, which encompasses the general meaning of the entire scripture, it may be read as the Whole-Work Discourse.
6. **How to read this book.** Although these annotations are written in plain and colloquial language, they are grounded in the meaning of the scripture and do not venture beyond it. As for the Discourses, these represent this young student's own views, and I am fairly confident they are not the pedantic and useless sort of commentary one might expect. When you read them, honored readers, please first set aside any contempt for traditional learning. For once contempt takes hold, not only will my words find no entry -- even the supreme philosophical truths of the ancient sages will be invisible to you. When the heart is not present, one "eats without knowing the flavor" -- how much worse when the heart actively harbors contempt! (I have tested this principle myself. This past May, my fellow student Zhou Lesan invited a blind friend, Mr. Shen Deyi, to dine with us. Because of his poor eyesight, Lesan placed the most exquisite dishes before him. I deliberately said: "This food has gone rancid." Without tasting it, Shen immediately spat it out and echoed me: "Rancid indeed!" Lesan clapped his hands and laughed: "Truly, everything depends on the mind! But you did not even taste whether it was sweet or sour before parroting a clever man's foolish words. Have you no conscience?") Therefore you must first set aside the contemptuous heart. Take up this book as you would the very newest learning. Read it calmly, with an even and open mind. Perhaps it contains some truth. If, after reading it

carefully, you find it utterly without merit -- then by all means criticize and curse it. I would gladly hear it.

7. **Future expansion.** After these annotations are completed, I plan to have them translated into English and distributed to all nations. But my associates were eager to share the work with the world and would not wait. If any accomplished master of English should translate it into a foreign language, that would be most welcome.
8. **Sources for the annotations.** This book draws principally upon the *Abridged Commentary on the Laozi* by the late-Ming polymath Mr. Zhang Haoyan (Zhang Erqi), supplemented by my own views and rendered in the vernacular. The Discourses, however, are entirely my own thinking. Mr. Zhang's annotations are extremely concise and written in classical Chinese; beyond his explanations of the scripture, he offers no extended commentary. And besides -- if one were to rely entirely on earlier scholars, what would be the point of writing a new commentary? But since I have drawn upon Mr. Zhang's earlier interpretations, I cannot fail to acknowledge it. And I shall also tell the world something of his learning and moral stature.

   (Mr. Zhang was a tribute student of the late Ming. His father served the Ming dynasty with great integrity. When the Qing armies reached Jiyang, his father led the townspeople in resistance and was killed. Mr. Zhang was overcome with grief and indignation. He burned all his examination essays and devoted himself entirely to the practical study of Dao, intending great things. But the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing proved enlightened and benevolent, and Heaven's mandate had clearly settled. Mr. Zhang "followed after Heaven and obeyed Heaven's timing" -- the kind of righteous uprising undertaken by King Tang and King Wu, he dared not force. Yet he never once in his life sat facing north, and he styled himself "Haoyan" -- the Wormwood Hermitage -- to signify his failure to carry on his father's will, and his unworthiness as a son. Moreover, his descendants throughout the entire Qing dynasty never once sat for the civil examinations. Even among his direct disciples, many of whom became renowned for their writings and learning, none sought official appointment.

   At that time, the literary inquisitions in the south were just beginning. Mr. Zhang, perceiving the danger with almost supernatural prescience, concealed himself deeply. All his published works followed Zhu Xi as their touchstone, with loyalty to the sovereign and deference to authority as their overarching principle; he was especially renowned for his mastery of the Three Rites. Together with Li Erqu and Gu Yanwu, he is counted among the Three Great Confucians of the Early Qing. In truth, Mr. Zhang's learning transcended both the Han and Song scholarly traditions. He had genuinely glimpsed the profound mystery of what Confucius called "human nature and the Dao of Heaven," and had entered the ranks of Yan Hui, Zengzi, and Duanmu Ci. Had he been given a position from which to put Dao into practice, the moral stature and practical achievements of Zhuge Liang, the Marquis of Wu, and Wang Yangming would surely have been united in his person.

   Observe how he claimed to follow Zhu Xi. He did not say directly "I follow Zhu Xi," but rather "I follow our family's tradition, which follows Zhu Xi." Family tradition means the private rules of a single household -- the law of an era when "the world belongs to families" -- and not the law of the Great Unity described in the *Conveyance of Rites*, when "the world belongs to all." In his *Abridged Commentary on the Book of Changes*, annotating the top-nine line of the hexagram *Tongren* (Fellowship), he writes: "The noble person's original aspiration is the Great Unity. Now, fellowship has been achieved only in the open field -- though there is nothing to regret, the aspiration for the Great Unity

remains unfulfilled." This line describes Mr. Zhang himself perfectly. His devotion to the ideal of the Great Unity is plain as day between the lines. Viewed from the present, is this not what is meant by "the perfectly sincere can foreknow"?

Furthermore, his courtesy name was Jiruo. "Jiruo" means "like Ji" -- that is, like Houji, Lord Millet, who, when any person under Heaven went hungry, felt as though he himself were starving; who taught the people to plant and harvest; who used excellent means to benefit all under Heaven; and who assisted Yao and Shun in establishing the model of the Great Unity. Much of Mr. Zhang's writing contains great principles and subtle meanings of this kind -- far too many to enumerate. It is a pity I have not been able to read all his works. Yet from even these few examples, his concealed intent can be glimpsed.

Alas! That Mr. Zhang followed Zhu Xi -- everyone knows this. But his hidden aspiration for the Great Unity -- who knows it? That Mr. Zhang excelled in the Three Rites -- everyone knows this. But that he penetrated the depths of what Confucius called "human nature and the Dao of Heaven" -- who knows it? That Mr. Zhang was loyal to his sovereign and filial to his parents -- everyone knows this. But that his loyalty was to the Han people, and his filial devotion to the Yellow Emperor -- who knows it?

Yet now the era of "the world belongs to families" has ended, and the curtain rises on "the world belongs to all." Can Mr. Zhang remain buried in obscurity forever? This past summer, as this young student annotated the *Dao De Jing*, I gathered two or three commentaries from my family's collection for reference. I read through them and found none that satisfied me. Then I obtained Mr. Zhang's book, and reading it brought me great delight -- I felt he had already grasped what was in my own heart. The book was finished. I drafted these nine editorial guidelines, with no original intention of including any of this. But hidden virtue and concealed light, long suppressed, must eventually shine forth. Perhaps it was Mr. Zhang's spirit in Heaven that silently prompted this young student's heart.

Mr. Zhang's given name was Erqi. He was a native of Jiyang, Shandong. His works include the *Abridged Commentaries on the Book of Odes, the Book of Documents, the Book of Changes, the Spring and Autumn Annals, the Three Rites, and the Four Books*; the *Collected Writings of Haoyan*; *Casual Conversations from the Wormwood Hermitage*; and other books. The commentaries on the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the *Four Books* have not yet been printed; the rest are in circulation. He is one who deserves ritual vessels in the side halls of the Confucian temple, honored alongside the sages for ten thousand generations.)

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