

COMMENT ON  
 “TRANSLATING *CHUANG TZU* INTO WORLD LITERATURE:  
 TEXT AND CONTEXT”

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Commented Article: LIN, Jiaxin; YU, Xinbing; LIU, Song; LUO, Mingqiao; CHOU, Younkun. Translating *Chuang Tzu* into world literature: text and context. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp journal of philosophy, v. 46, n. 1, p. 121-142, 2023.

Bias is difficult to overcome when translating from Eastern languages into Western ones. The main consequence is a loss of conceptual coherence from the original, but the parables continue to pique Westerners' interest in philosophy. We experience the thrill of being completely immersed in another philosophical tradition with comparable antiquity and richness. Even though they may disagree with their philosophical conclusion, readers inside and outside China consistently have the suspicion that the Zhuangzi's appealing style is filled with philosophical genius. The interpretive malleability of Zhuangzi's dialogues, which invites or even demands that we participate in the author's philosophical thought, may, in fact, be a large part of the work's attraction from a philosophical standpoint.

This attraction is mostly attributable to the caliber and intricacy of his episodes, which each revealed a certain philosophical area and concluded with a thought-provoking query, much like Nietzsche or the Later Wittgenstein.

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<https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2023.v46n1.p143>



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Zhuangzi clearly enjoys studying contradictions, especially linguistic ones of the kind that appeal to analytical Western intellectuals. Each interaction presents or exhibits bits of knowledge with open-textured conclusions. Each represents a different, natural way of existence that may be difficult to access. The sometimes ambiguous conclusion “the answer is X” leaves interpreters debating how X may be an answer – or what X is (for example, “free and easy wandering,” “walking two roads,” “goblet words,” “clarity,” and so forth) – hundreds of years later, like Fermat. Each one seems to fit itself easily into a variety of conundrums that intellectuals in both traditions are familiar with. One speculates that we discover the correct interpretation by escaping from some philosophical cauldron like Wittgenstein’s fly. The right philosophy is also the right way to understand Zhuangzi.

Zhuangzi’s ancient religious narratives identified him as Laozi’s student. Laozi is regarded as the creator of a mystical religion that worships an unidentified enigmatic entity, and the translations of his name prefer to portray him as Laozi’s disciple. Metaphysical monism, epistemic intuitionism (sometimes expressly anti-rationalist), political anarchy, and a hazy form of moral absolutism – follow The Dào – were all acceptable philosophical approaches. The majority of contemporary popular and religious interpretations continue along this interpretative path, positioning Zhuangzi as Laozi’s “follower” and presenting Laozi as the foundation of “Daoist mystical philosophy” or “Lao-Zhuang” thought.

A century after Zhuangzi’s death, the narrative of his religious philosophy began (4th century BC). Following the classical era, there was the superstitious Qin dynasty (221-206 BC), which shut down philosophical schools, destroyed books, and suppressed ideas. The “Dark Age” of Chinese philosophy began as a result. Following was the more traditional Confucian Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). The Han emperor’s hereditary Grand Historians, Sima Tan and Sima Qian (a father-son pair), penned an official history of the legendary Yellow Emperor (about the third millennium BC) to the Han over the course of two decades (109-91 BC). The division of intellectuals into the three thought schools of Daoist, Legalist, and School of Names first appears in this narrative. Graham hypothesizes that the Outer Chapters may have been the source of the notion that Zhuangzi and Laozi were related. There, in a series of discussions, Zhuangzi’s pupils mocked Confucius by using his legendary master, Lao Dan or Laozi.

In the Qin, Huang-Lao's religion had developed itself, which revered the Yellow Emperor and Laozi as deities. The Huang-Lao masters taught the father and son historians. The myth of Zhuangzi as a disciple and interpreter of a semi-divine Laozi was well established by the time of Han's fall. The editing of Laozi's received edition (WANG BI 226-249) and afterward Zhuangzi's one marked the beginning of the Neo-Daoist revival in the post-Han period (GUO XIANG d. 312 see above). Daoism and Buddhism, in the eyes of the public, became intertwined as a result of Neo-Daoist debating techniques and concepts that influenced the interaction of Buddhist and Chinese philosophy (especially with Chinese Chan Buddhism). Throughout the period when Buddhism dominated the Chinese intellectual world, a Daoist "religion," which borrowed models of religious organizations from Buddhism (monasteries, monks, and nuns), impacted discourse about Daoism (achieved gradually during the Six Dynasties period 220–589 and extending through the Tang 618–907). From the Middle Ages on, Neo-Confucians regarded Buddhism and Daoism as being fundamentally identical religions.

The Zhuangzi's modern text theory has grown as a result of two recent discoveries: the reconstruction of the Later Dialectical Works of Mohist, and the reconstruction of Daode Jing text by archaeologists. Their dual influence on how we perceive Zhuangzi is covered in the part that follows.

Chinese intellectuals adopted the European notion of philosophy, with its implicit separation from religion, as a result of events that took place in China during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The basis of this distinction was thought to be logic, which is the theory of proof or argument. They began dividing their own writings into those supported mostly by credulity and tradition from those that seemed most like reasoning, deduction, and logic. They started to separate the philosophical components of their old thoughts from their more superstitious and religious ones. Reconstruction of the Mohist Canon by Sun Yirang (1848–1908) in 1897 offered solid proof that analytically motivated and rigorous reasoning had developed in Classical China. Intellectuals of the 19th century like Yan Fu (1854–1921) and Liang Qichao were inspired by this example (1873–1929). The ancient schools that were more directly tied to the logical paradigms of Western philosophy and Mohist analytics began to receive more attention. Hu Shih (1891–1962) carried on this legacy by reorienting and refocusing Chinese philosophy away from the Confucian scholasticism that had predominated since the decline of Buddhism. Hu Shih was a key figure in this movement.

The interpretation of the Zhuangzi and the Xunzi in the west has lately started to be influenced by the reformation of early 20th-century logic, which was partly motivated by Angus Graham, who saw that these ancient writings showed mastery of the technical terminology of Mohist linguistic theory.

Zhuangzi has gained philosophical acclaim in recent years thanks to Graham's 1969 essay "[Zhuangzi Essay]'s on Seeing Things as Equal" (Graham 1969, predating his work on Mohism). Graham quips that whoever created that conceptually dense passage is the person we would want to think of as Zhuangzi in response to Wang Fuzhi's hypothesis that Shen Dao, not Zhuangzi, had written the beloved chapter. Graham suggested comparing the seemingly at odds ideas of the text to a contemplative thinker's "inner conversation", who develops a viewpoint, weighs it, and then rejects it. Graham also remarked on the author's intense interest in, apparent fluency in, and complex challenges resulting from Classical Chinese ideas of language, which he was only beginning to explore.

The ancient Chinese story of a pupil named Zhuangzi, who followed a semi-divine Laozi in worshipping The Mystical Dao, was in direct opposition to Graham's outlook. Graham joked that Zhuangzi was unaware that he was a Daoist. Later, Graham asserted that internal evidence indicated Zhuangzi had never read the Laozi (The *Dào Dé Jing*) and most likely believed Lao Dan to be a Confucian. The contrast between Graham's textual arguments and the conventional historian's portrayal of Zhuangzi as a religious, mystical Daoist adherent of the semi-divine Laozi, worshipping "The *Dào*," to a greater or lesser extent, underlies most interpretation disagreements.

Archeological finds of various Laozi's manuscripts served to tangentially corroborate Graham's textual assertions. Together, the early 1970s and 1990s finds suggested that the Laozi's text emerged very late in history – perhaps a few years after Zhuangzi had died and possibly concurrent with the writing of a series of dialogues between Laozi and Confucius in the "Outer Chapters" part. Graham hypothesized that Zhuangzi's pupils may have opted for the fabled Lao Dan (Confucius' instructor) rhetorically to give them the right to lecture and make fun of the renowned master while they were crafting the cycle of Laozi-Confucius conversations.

The possibility of speculation regarding Zhuangzi's relationship to the relativist, linguistic theorist Hui Shi, who is typically seen as belonging to the School of Names, arises when we reject Zhuangzi's conventional identification

as Laozi's follower. Christoph Harbesmeier conjectured that he might have been Zhuangzi's mentor, instructor, or classmate. If he had been a teacher, he eventually grew to view his pupil as an equal or even superior being. He is portrayed by Zhuangzi as having an important part in the development of Zhuangzi's philosophical abilities as an intimate philosophical interlocutor and ultimately as a foil for honing his analysis. Hui Shi's ten theses, which are among the writings that focus on "many names," distinguish him as a relativist answer to Mohist realism on the relationship between names and "things," with a particular emphasis on comparative and indexical words.

Accordingly, we might interpret Zhuangzi's relativism as an alternative, possibly more reflectively nuanced, indexical relativism about judgments and about choices of paths (*dào*s) of appropriate usage of names, words, and concepts as markers for our behavior. This explains both Zhuangzi's relativist line of thought and his appreciation of sound Mohist and realist responses to Hui Shi's relativist line of thought. Graham's philosophical view is developed and expanded upon in this article, which places more emphasis on this relationship to Hui Shi than to Laozi.

The majority of interpretive historical and theological literature sits between the conventional, pious, mystical Daoist religious interpretation and the closest intellectual neighbors to that view. What follows shouldn't be seen as ecumenical, given the philosophical context of this piece.

This description enables us to understand Zhuangzi's style of argument, which avoids the common Western sentence-based analogies of laws, rules, and principles with standards of compliance, belief, or propositional desire. Zhuangzi would have the basis for a differentiation between a cause and a reason if he used the Western vocabulary and the related practical logical statement of belief-desire explanation, which he doesn't appear to do in his discussion of independence. A path can be inferred through choices, interpretations, etc., and behavior can be guided by internal feedback through our skill at "reading" other paths.

Zhuangzi would not argue that issue using a normative assumption or principle as a starting point. Our walking behavior has a causal and normative relationship to the internal and external pathways. Similar to this, a stronger sentential focus would refer to the result as an action rather than a protracted pattern of walking or the following behavior. Instead of, as would fit in this metaphorical space, playing a role in a play or part in a symphony, a sentence

would describe the action or the intent – more like the conclusion of a practical syllogism.

Zhuangzi employed the road metaphor to comprehend language, but, once more, not with a sentential focus. Zhuangzi constructs language in *dào* form as opposed to sentential form while creating *dào*s. Ancient Chinese thinking centred on names as metaphorical waypoints, such as “walk past the tree, turn right, and then down to the lake.” Names become significant as markers along physical buildings. The designations of social positions and statuses were given more weight in Confucian social versions than those of natural categories. They adopted the broad anti-naming stances that Later Mohists demonstrated to be self-condemning due to primitivist resistance to Social *Daos*.

This vast topic is summed up beautifully by the writers. It takes scholarly sublimity and intellectual prowess to even just attempt to do this rather complex subject. The World of Literature is just awakening to absorb and appreciate the beauty and greatness of Chuang Tzu's eternal works. The wisdom of the “Sun of Chuang Tzu”, which is portrayed thru his works, is destined to shine even brighter. This is my comments to Lin, Yu, Liu, Luo and Chou (2023).

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Received: 06/09/2022

Approved: 08/09/2022