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Introduction

Zhuangzi in His Time

Zhuangzi 莊子 lived in the middle of the Warring States period (479-221 BCE), during an exceptionally vibrant time in terms of philosophy and learning. Both Confucianism and Mohism were already well established, exerting considerable influence on politics, society, daily life, and thought. The tradition begun by Laozi had already developed significantly, and its schools of Huang-Lao and Yang Zhu were highly popular.

In addition, the Legalists, with their emphasis on agriculture and warfare, were so much in tune with the needs of rulers at the time that their representatives occupied leading positions in most feudal states.¹ Beyond all this, the Dialecticians, such as Huizi and Gongsun Long, flourished, exerting their analytical wisdom in disputing many concepts and pursuing key questions. During the same time, or maybe a bit later, there was also Zou Yan 鄒衍, representative of the cosmological theories of yin-yang and the five phases. All these philosophers and strands of thought interacted and disputed actively with each other, creating the potent scene known as “the hundred schools competing” in the middle of the Warring States period.

The question then arises to what degree these various thinkers and ideas influenced Zhuangzi’s personal thinking or served as a backdrop for his thought. As Sima Qian 司馬遷 already points out in his *Shiji* 史記 (Record of the Historian), Zhuangzi was in touch with the full spectrum of learning during his time, but to him the schools were not equal, some more dominant and important than others (ch. 63). Just like today, society was inundated by numerous trends of thought, but only very few people truly understood and analyzed them fully. Many trends were, as the Ming philosopher Wang Yangming 王陽明 said, like “wild flowers on

¹ The *Shiji* says, “During this period, Qin employed Lord Shang; he enriched the state and strengthened the military. Chu and Wei employed Wu Qi; he was victorious in war and weakened their enemies. Kings Wei and Xuan of Qi employed the followers of Sun Bin and Tian Ji; they made the nobles to the east of Qi pay homage. The whole world was engaged in alliances with or against Qing, and military conquest was held in high regard” (ch. 62).

the mountainside” – blooming and wilting in solitude, remaining unseen as if they never existed. For this reason, if we are not content with a superficial discussion and want to appreciate Zhuangzi’s thought in some depth, we must begin by looking at his writings and see just who and what exerted an influence on him.

The seven Inner Chapters make it clear that he paid most attention to Confucianism and Mohism.² The text says, “Dao is obscured by petty accomplishments; speech is obscured by vain show,” particularly referring to “the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists” (ch. 2). Taking the theories of these two schools as an illustration of disputes on right and wrong thus indicates both their pervasive influence at the time and the special place they occupied in Zhuangzi’s thought.³

Especially the Confucians were at the center of Zhuangzi’s attention and criticism. Thus, when he speaks of “a man who has wisdom enough to fill one office effectively, good conduct enough to impress one community, virtue enough to please one ruler, or talent enough to be called into service in one state” (ch. 1), he obviously portrays the typical conduct of the Confucian gentleman official. For Zhuangzi, such a one is like the little quail: “It gives a great leap and flies up, but never gets more than ten or twelve yards off the ground before it comes down fluttering among the weeds and brambles.” This critter couldn’t be more different from the great Peng 鵬 bird, which “mounts the wind and takes off into the sky” (ch. 1).

The parable of the sage-king Yao 堯 trying to cede the throne to his adviser Xu You 許由 (ch. 1) similarly is an attack on Confucian veneration for sage rulers. “Great benevolence is not benevolent,” Zhuangzi says. “The way I see it, the rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are all hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discriminations?” (ch. 2). This is directly aimed at the central doctrines of Confucianism.

The allegory of Lao Dan’s 老聃 death (ch. 3) similarly has Qin Shi 秦失 give three cries and leave, representing an attack on the Confucian system of rites and music. Other chapters make the same point, Zhuang-

² Sima Qian says that Zhuangzi’s work “exercised criticism of the Confucians and Mohists,” indicating that these two schools were his most important opponents (*Shiji* 63; Fung 1952, 1:221).

³ This is also reflected in the last chapter of the book (ch. 33). Although not written by Zhuangzi himself, it closely matches the attitude of his followers. While criticizing all kinds of different thinkers, it dominantly targets Confucians and Mohists.

zi featuring Confucius (Kongzi 孔子) and his most important disciple Yan Hui 顏回 directly in various tales. Hovering between truth and fiction, facetiousness and seriousness, he places words into Confucius's mouth that criticize Confucian teachings. This way of ridiculing the world is a major hallmark of Zhuangzi's grotesque and extravagant style. Any suggestion that he seriously esteemed Confucius, or even supposing that he was a Confucian himself, is not only ridiculous but also absurd and unfounded.

Sima Qian correctly states that the book *Zhuangzi* belongs among "those who discredited Confucius" (ch. 63). Some may suggest that *Zhuangzi* chapters 29 and 31, cited in the *Shiji*, as well as other sections of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, reveal an attitude somewhat different from that of the Inner Chapters. In my view, if there is such discrepancy, it is merely one of style: the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters are obvious where the Inner Chapters are subtle. What I mean by "obvious" is that they express content more directly, like prose poems in poetry; "subtle" indicates a more convoluted style, like metaphors in poetry. "Obvious" is when things are straightforward and uninhibited; "subtle" means that there are many areas containing hints and reversals.

The image of Confucius in the Inner Chapters, moreover, can be divided into two kinds: for one, he is the object of ridicule or lecturing; for another, he is the spokesman of Zhuangzi's thought. As an object of ridicule, he appears, for example, when Jie Yu 接輿, the madman of Chu, sings a song passing by Confucius's door (ch. 4) or when the master speaks with Shentu Jia 申徒嘉 who had lost a foot (ch. 5). As Zhuangzi's spokesman, Confucius is pervasive in the remainder of the text. The two roles are also distinct in their literary presentation.

When ridiculed, Confucius speaks or interacts with fictional figures, born from Zhuangzi's imagination; set up for humiliation, he suffers embarrassment and is cut down to size. When serving as Zhuangzi's spokesman, his dialogue partners are historical figures: his main disciples (especially Yan Hui) or local lords (e.g., Duke Ai of Lu). He serves as a teacher and is taken seriously but his teachings reflect Zhuangzi's ideas and are radically opposed to anything remotely Confucian. Both images yet have a few things in common: they show very little respect for the historical Confucius;⁴ and they contain both fact and fiction, switching

⁴ One may compare this to the relation of Plato and Socrates in ancient Greece. In Plato's works, Socrates appears commonly as a leading dialogue partner – doubtlessly a sign of respect, since Plato continued Socrates's thought. An analogy in Warring States philosophy appears in references to Confucius in

unexpectedly between them. For example, when Confucius patiently explains the principle of mind-fasting to Yan Hui, anyone can spot Zhuangzi's smile in the background. Yet when followers of Lao Dan critically claim that Confucius can never let go of his fetters, who can say that this doesn't reflect the shadow of the historical Confucius?

Still, this disrespectful attitude and unrestrained exaggeration, even absolutization, is not aimed at Confucius as a person. Most commonly, philosophers are not thought of as people of flesh and blood but rather as representatives of certain concepts and theories. Zhuangzi's disrespect toward Confucius thus reflects their philosophical divide. This divide forms an important background of Zhuangzi's thought, as can be documented throughout his writings. Yet, this is not to say that there are not shared points among the two and, as much as they are opposed to each other, their common ground forms the best platform for uncovering their differences.

Confucius, in the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects; trl. Lau 1979) says of himself that he "knows something cannot be done and does it anyway" (14.38). Extending this logic further, Zhuangzi is someone who "knows something cannot be done and does *not* do it." Here we have a discrepancy between the attitudes of "do" and "not do," while "knowing that it cannot be done" forms the common basis of both positions. The phrase highlights the distance between thought ideals and practical reality, a difference that any philosopher knows. From this position, then, there is a connection between the two thinkers that goes beyond the tension and conflict among philosophers, transcends their mutual attacks and recriminations. This is something deep, which only philosophers can truly apprehend. From this position, moreover, we can uncover connections and continuities among different philosophies, however much they are opposite in their outward expressions. Nevertheless, these connections are not as simple as they have been described historically – seeing Zhuangzi's thought as merely another form of Confucianism.

From Zhuangzi's perspective, the teachings of Confucius and his school are like a dream, a dream that can never come true. The text's frequent references to the intermingling of dream and reality (ch. 2) can be seen as a way of criticizing Confucian convictions. When the madman of

works of his own school, often introduced with "The Master said" or "Confucius said." Although some passages are more authentic than others, for the most part they are probably just attributed to him. This kind of attribution can, to a certain extent, be understood as a sign of respect. But it is obviously completely different from the way Zhuangzi uses Confucius.

Chu, wanders by Confucius's gate, singing, "When the world has Dao, the sage succeeds" (ch. 4), we know that Zhuangzi is not a radical escapist or world hater. The text also says,

Recluses in ancient times did not actually choose to hide themselves, suppress their words, or conceal their knowledge. But the times were awry. If they had been right, they could have done great deeds in the world, returned to oneness and left without a trace. But the times were against them and brought them great hardship. Therefore, they burrowed deep, rested in their own nature, and waited. In this manner they preserved their life. (ch. 16)

This shows that Zhuangzi's critique of Confucianism is not an abstract denial but the recognition that its teachings do not match the needs of the time. A world in disorder has no room for the unrealistic ideals of Confucius and his ilk. Their blind pursuit of ideals with total disregard for concrete circumstances to Zhuangzi is like "the praying mantis waving his arms about, trying to stop an approaching carriage" (ch. 3). Their valor may be highly laudable, but their failure is inevitable. Having ruin stare one in the face yet failing to retreat is *not* a smart way of doing things.

Through this comparison with the Confucians, we are starting to see Zhuangzi's detachment. A well-known metaphor suggests itself. When a neighboring house is lost to fire, should we throw a bucket of water on the hopeless heap or not? Confucius comes running with his bucket, not only in outward behavior but even in the expression of his innermost feelings. He pursues his own peace of mind, never considering the effects his actions have in reality. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, knows very well that pouring water will not help: he can keep his water for himself. Zhuangzi is detached, even cold to the point of having "no feelings" (ch. 4). Comparing the two, the Confucians are eager, heatedly involved, unable to let go, constantly pursuing the good for themselves and others.

Compared with Mozi 墨子 and the Mohists, however, Confucian ardor looks rather tepid. Confucians tend to think dominantly of themselves, making distinctions between relatives and strangers, near and far; Mohists, on the other hand, demand that we see ourselves and others with equal benevolence. The key Mohist doctrine of universal love requires goodwill toward all without distinctions, which is completely different from the Confucian teaching of graded care. "Regard another's state like you would your own; regard another's family like you would your own; regard another's body like you would your own" (*Mozi*, Uni-

versal Love I; trl. Johnston 2010). Treating another as one would oneself also means treating oneself like another. One can extend deep love to another because the other is oneself; one can also treat oneself with harshness because one is the other. The *Zhuangzi* has, “Many Mohist followers wear furs and rough cloth, walk about in wooden clogs or hemp sandals, never resting day or night, undertaking extreme self-mortification. ‘If we cannot do the same,’ they say, ‘then we are not following the way of the Great Yu 大禹, and are unworthy to be called Mohists’” (ch. 33). Engaging in self-inflicted suffering to pursue their ideals, such as dipping into boiling water and walking over fire, they reject the value of life.

While this thinking is thus full of ardor, seen from another angle, it is also rather unfeeling. Maybe Mozi and some of his disciples could reach this high level, but how about ordinary people? As the *Zhuangzi* says, “I’m afraid they cannot be regarded as following the way of the sage. They go against common sensitivity, and the empire can barely handle them. Although Mozi may be able to handle it, how can others do likewise?” (ch. 33). For Zhuangzi, Mozi’s way was thus too lofty and impractical, too extreme to be appreciated by ordinary folk. Seen from this angle, the Mohists were far more idealistic than the Confucians. The more idealistic a school of thought, moreover, and the farther removed from reality, the less its potential impact on ordinary people. It may well be for this reason that Zhuangzi only rarely takes the trouble to specifically criticize Mozi and his school.

This, on the other hand, is a job taken on enthusiastically by Yang Zhu 楊朱. The Mohist doctrine of universal love, especially when advocated to an extreme, provides an excellent historical example of “valuing things and disregarding life.” Yang Zhu’s position is diametrically opposite. Where Mozi proposes universal love, he emphasizes self-preservation. Thus, unlike Mozi who would risk his life for the sake of righteousness, Yang Zhu keeps himself whole at all cost. “Although he might save the world by plucking out a single hair, he would not do so” (*Mengzi* 7A26). This commonly cited trope, showing the importance of individual life, could not be more different from Mozi’s expression for valiant effort: “No down left on the calves, no hair left on the shins” (*Zhuangzi* 33).

In the history of philosophy, Yang Zhu was the first to flesh out the opposition between individual life and outside things, making him Zhuangzi’s forerunner. His situation was not the same as Zhuangzi’s, however. Yang Zhu was a wandering knight and, like Mozi who proposed universal love, he offered “valuing oneself” as a potential policy to

local rulers. Zhuangzi, on the contrary, gave up completely on any ideas of ruling a country. This most fundamental difference appears in the story of a certain Yang Ziju 陽子居 who approaches Lao Dan with questions about enlightened government (ch. 7). In texts of this period, the two characters for *yang* were interchangeable, and most scholars believe that Yang Ziju is actually Yang Zhu. In any case, the position voiced—that the enlightened king should let all develop in their own manner—is appropriate for a wandering knight. While this stance is obviously unacceptable to Zhuangzi, Yang's emphasis on valuing oneself resonates well with him. He exerted a clear influence on Zhuangzi's demand that one should free oneself from any control by outside things.

Zhuangzi's most important friend and philosophical dialogue partner was Huizi 惠子 (Hui Shi 惠施), both ridiculed without mercy and genuinely mourned in the text. While several passages in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the story when Zhuangzi passes Huizi's grave contains genuine emotion: "Since you died, Master Hui, I have had no material to work on. There's no one I can talk to any more" (ch. 24). This clarifies their close relationship. Some scholars think that the entire Inner Chapters were written in dialogue with Huizi. While this diminishes the unique vision and character of Zhuangzi's thought, it reminds us that Huizi's influence permeates his work.

Huizi appears in chapters 1, 2, and 5, but not in his own right. In one case, he is merely one among several figures, e.g., "Zhao Wen 昭文 played the zither; Master Kuang 師曠 waved his baton; Huizi leaned on his desk" (ch. 2). In the other two instances, he engages in a dialogue with Zhuangzi, raising an issue to incite the latter's response. This, of course, is a literary technique, used to belittle Huizi. Merely a questioner, he has no chance to express his own views and plays a rather passive role. Scholars have further pointed out that these dialogues are placed at the very end of the chapters, agreeing that this puts them in a special position, but disagreeing about what exactly this might mean. Like other dialogues in the *Zhuangzi*, they might just function as parables. Still, we should note that Huizi is the only dialogue partner of Zhuangzi in the Inner Chapters. This makes these stories different and deserving of special attention.

Huizi was an important representative of the Dialecticians or School of Names (*mingjia* 名家). The *Zhuangzi* criticizes him while acknowledging his learned nature: "Huizi was a man of many devices and his writings would fill five carriages" (ch. 33). He took great pleasure in disputa-

tion and congregated with others fond of disputes. His main line involved fundamental concepts, such as the nature of “things,” “great oneness,” and “little oneness,” as well as number of classical paradoxes. “The largest thing has nothing beyond it; it is called the One of largeness. The smallest thing has nothing within it; it is called the One of smallness. That which has no thickness cannot be piled up; yet it is a thousand miles high” (ch. 33). Since they fail to engage with key questions of human life, Zhuangzi criticizes them as “weak in inner virtue, strong in concern for external things” and Huizi as “chasing after the ten thousand things, never turning back” (ch. 33). A later note suggests that he was like the mythical Kuafu 夸父 who kept chasing after the sun and died of thirst. Zhuangzi’s followers thus suggest that Huizi’s mind was inextricably immersed in outside things. Zhuangzi is different—in his world, outside things are forever secondary while human life is primary. “Treat things as things but do not be treated as a thing by others” (ch. 20) is his central credo. This reveals the most essential difference between the two thinkers.

Still, Huizi was not always merely a passive target for Zhuangzi. Though not spelled out explicitly in the text, Zhuangzi seems to have greatly enjoyed his sparring with Huizi and made use of the disputers’ particular style. Some scholars even see chapter 2 as a document of dispute, Wu Feibai 伍非白 for example placing it among the Dialecticians. While this may not be entirely unreasonable, Zhuangzi was always keenly aware of the limits of disputation. “Suppose you and I have an argument. If you beat me instead of my beating you, are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I beat you instead of your beating me, am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong?” (ch. 2)

Like the ancient hermits Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊 criticizing King Wu’s campaign against the tyrant Zhou 紂 as “fighting violence with violence,” so Zhuangzi here essentially scolds the disputers for trying to “stop argument with arguments.”⁵ Yet if we take his position of “dispute does not provide solutions” to its logical conclusion, how can he ever put

⁵ Shao Yaofu 邵堯夫 says, “Zhuang Zhou was a vibrant disputer, unique in over a thousand years.” See *Zangyun shanfang Nanhua dayi jieji* 藏雲山房南華大義解忌 (Yan 1972, vol. 15).

an end to disputers' desire to determine right and wrong, victory and defeat through dispute while yet using this method himself?⁶

Whether to dispute or not is actually not the most important issue here. The key question is the object or content of the dispute. For most Warring States philosophers, dispute was not a matter of enjoyment but an inevitable reality of life. Thus the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Book of Mencius; trl. Lau 1984) records a disciple saying, "The people outside of our school all speak of you as fond of disputing." To which Mencius replies, "Why would I be fond of disputing? I just can't avoid it" (3B14). There are many instances of disputes in this text, such as his discussion of inner nature, righteousness, and benevolence with Gaozi 告子 (6A) and his dispute on rulers and ministers with Xu Xing's 許行 disciple Chen Xiang 陳相 (3A). The *Xunzi* 荀子 (Book of Master Xun; trl. Knoblock 1988; 1994) similarly insists that "the gentleman must engage in disputation," then makes a distinction among the arguments of small men, gentlemen, and sages. "Small men dispute by confrontation, gentlemen dispute with benevolence. Words spoken without benevolence better remain unsaid; such a dispute had better be left alone." This is not an overall rejection of all debating, rather it is a warning against "useless disputes and irrelevant analyses" (5.11).

For Zhuangzi, the most important goal of disputes is to show that disputation tends not only to be undertaken for its own sake, but also mires people in naming and arguing, bogs them down in sounds and sights, estranges them from life, and makes them forget about reality. For this reason, while going through the motions of debating, he shows just how useless it really is, to what degree all those many words really say nothing. "Great Dao has no name; great words do not argue" (ch. 2). Zhuangzi tends to describe perfect knowledge with phrases like "not know" and "no words." For him, the perfected look at each other and laugh in tacit understanding (ch. 6), reflecting the reality of their minds—not unlike the Chan story of the Buddha holding up the flower to Kasyapa with a smile. Life goes far beyond names and words—anything that goes beyond names and disputation has the greatest potential to express the content Zhuangzi is getting at.

Another early thinker in Zhuangzi's environment is Liezi 列子. A philosopher of the state of Zheng during the early Warring States, he

⁶ Shao Yaofu 邵堯夫 says, "Zhuang Zhou was a vibrant disputer, unique in over a thousand years." See *Zangyun shanfang Nanhua dayi jieji* 藏雲山房南華大義解忌 (Yan 1972, vol. 15).

supposedly was a disciple of Guan Yin 關尹. His ideas were very influential throughout the three Jin states. Thus, the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Warring States Strategies; trl. Crump 1970) notes that his central doctrine was “valuing rectification,” which places him close to early Legalism (ch 26), while the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü; trl. Knoblock and Riegel 2000) describes his central concept as “valuing emptiness” (ch. 99; 17/7). These two positions do not necessarily stand in contradiction, but represent the integration of different aspects of Daoist thought.⁷

In the Inner Chapters, Liezi receives limited approval: “Liezi could ride the wind and go soaring around with cool and breezy skill, but after fifteen days he came back to earth. As far as the search for good fortune went, he didn’t fret and worry. He dispensed with walking, but he still had to depend on something to get around” (ch. 1). Expressions like “ride the wind” and “dispense with walking” suggest that he was getting close to the state of the immortals, providing a glimpse of a world beyond mundane life. Although Liezi pursued a life of independence and freedom, his transcendence did not reach it fully—even riding the wind he still had to depend on something. The wind here constitutes an object of dependence. While this is not the same as depending on worldly values and represents some progress, it is yet the same in that it is still a form of dependence. Zhuangzi’s note that “he still had to depend on something” is at the core of his dissatisfaction with Liezi’s attainment.

The other major story that features Liezi is the parable of the Gourd Master (Huzi 壺子) and the shaman (Jixian 季咸) (ch. 7). Liezi, taken in easily by the shaman’s trickery, comes out looking like a little clown. Then, however, under the Gourd Master’s instruction, he discovers access to true Dao and not just lesser techniques like riding on the wind. Thus, “he got rid of the carving and polishing and returned to plainness, letting his body stand alone like a clod” (ch. 7). He recovered simplicity and stood unencumbered by ordinary knowledge and emotions. This reflects a form of behavior Zhuangzi approves.

From the perspective of philosophical connection, Liezi’s “valuing emptiness” may well have exerted a strong influence on Zhuangzi. In ancient Daoism, already Laozi paid close attention to the question of

⁷Sima Tan 司馬 倓, in his discussion of the six schools, says that the Daoists “made emptiness and nonbeing their foundation and following and order their application” (*Shiji*, Preface). “Emptiness and nonbeing” reflects the idea of honoring emptiness, while “following and order” means a concrete application in forms and names.

“emptiness,” recommending that one “attain utmost emptiness and maintain steadfast tranquility” (ch. 16) while lauding the sage for “emptying [the people’s] hearts and filling their stomachs, weakening their ambitions and strengthening their marrow” (ch. 3). Still, this does not mean that he placed particular emphasis on emptiness.

Liezi’s teacher Guan Yin, as noted in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, strongly focused on “valuing clarity,” so that “valuing emptiness” may well have been a development of this. The Huang-Lao 黃老 school, too, as documented in the “Daofa” 道法 (Dao and Laws) section of the *Jingfa* 經法 (Constancy of Laws), a manuscript unearthed from Mawangdui 馬王堆, proposed similar concepts, emphasizing “emptiness and formlessness” as characteristics of Dao (1.1.1; trl. Chang and Feng 1998; Ryden 1997; Yates 1997). On this background it becomes clear that Zhuangzi’s appreciation of emptiness was not his own fabrication but had substantial philosophical antecedents. Going beyond these, he extended its application to the human spirit and supplied concrete methods for its attainment, like mind-fasting and sitting in oblivion. This close philosophical connection furnishes the backdrop of Zhuangzi’s limited approval of Liezi.

Another personage Zhuangzi pays attention to is Song Rongzi 宋榮子, generally understood to be Song Xing 宋鉞 (or 鏗). He says, “The whole empire could praise Song, but that wouldn’t make him exert himself; the whole empire could condemn Song, but that wouldn’t make him mope. He drew a clear line between the internal and the external, and recognized the boundaries of true glory and disgrace. But that was all. As far as the world went, he didn’t fret and worry, but there was still ground he left unturned” (ch. 1).

The text further says that Song’s teachings remained “unencumbered by vulgar ways, without vain show of material things, free from bringing hardship on others, and avoiding any offense to the mob.” It quotes him as saying, “The gentleman does not examine others with too harsh an eye; he does not need material things in which to dress himself” (ch. 33). This suggests that Song Rongzi was a thinker who strongly separated self and outside things and never made himself a mere instrument of outside pursuit. This is why he is said to “draw a clear line between the internal and the external.” In this respect, there seems to be some resemblance to Zhuangzi’s thought. However, Song held on to distinctions between the internal and external and set himself firmly apart from the ordinary world. At the same time, he could not really leave all thoughts of self and world behind. This can be understood as a form of

clinging to the self, which is far removed from Zhuangzi's vision of forgetting both self and things.

So far we have discussed various Warring States thinkers, but have not yet spoken of the one who exerted by far the greatest influence on Zhuangzi's thought: Laozi 老子. In the history of Chinese philosophy, Zhuangzi is commonly recognized as the most important successor and developer of Laozi. This understanding goes back to the early Han, when not only Sima Qian places them in the same lineage but the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Prince of Huainan; trl. Major et al. 2010) first speaks of both in the same sentence, showing how closely connected the two thinkers were in the minds of the time (ch. 21).

This connection is based primarily on the commonality of their thought and also, to a lesser degree, on the way Zhuangzi represents Laozi, featuring him three times in the Inner Chapters, not unlike Plato depicts Socrates—a later thinker standing in awe of the master while using him as his own spokesperson. For example, Laozi voices the following statements: “Why don't you make [Confucius] see that life and death are part of the same whole, that acceptable and unacceptable are aspects of a single reality? Then he could free himself from his fetters?” (ch. 5); “When an enlightened king rules, his achievements pervade the world but he is as if doing nothing. His transforms all things but the people do not realize this. His virtue is not praised, yet he allows all to find their enjoyment. He establishes himself beyond what can be understood and wanders the realm of nonbeing” (ch. 7).

These statements closely reflect Zhuangzi's ideas, but there is also a story that shows a different angle. It is an allegory that tells of Qin Shi who goes to mourn Lao Dan, gives a mere three cries, and leaves. Questioned about why he mourns this way, he replies that he originally thought of Lao Dan as an accomplished person but later realized he wasn't—mainly because others were weeping and wailing at his funeral. “To have gathered a group like that, he must have done something to make them talk about him,” created an impact on the world that did not match the ideal way of flowing along with the times, free from all ties and emotions. “This is to go against Heaven, turn your back on the true state of affairs, and forget what you were born with. In the old days, this was called the crime of turning against Heaven” (ch. 3).

The contrast between admiration and distancing thus characterizes Zhuangzi's attitude toward Laozi. As Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312) says in his commentary: “I suspect that by giving priority to others and displaying goodness, he deviated from principle and thus inspired this kind of in-

tense devotion.” The pronoun “he” refers to Laozi and the tone of the passage is highly critical of him. However, already in the Tang dynasty, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 adjusts this view. He says,

‘Ask’ means pursue. ‘Others’ refers to the masses. The sage’s [Lao Dan’s] mind was empty of personal caring and remained open to stimulation from others. He felt sympathy for those in mourning and empathy for the common people. Without deliberate effort, he spoke on their behalf. Thus, after his death, the masses came to congregate, weeping and wailing in mourning as if they had lost their mother or son. Clinging to such emotions creates attachments and leads to a false view of life and death, to gratitude for the sage’s grace, and thus to a display of grief. Judging from this, we know that these are not followers of Lord Lao. (Guo 1982, 1:128)

This makes a strong distinction between the sage and ordinary people. The latter cling to emotions and are given to attachments, not at all like Laozi’s followers – Daoist recluses – and vastly different from Laozi himself. Cheng Xuanying’s description of Laozi as free from personal caring is quite different from Guo Xiang’s understanding. This difference reflects their historical circumstances and unique perception. Guo Xiang, matching the culture of the Wei-Jin period, was focused strongly on Zhuangzi and largely disregarded Laozi. Cheng Xuanying, an ordained Daoist under the Tang who deeply venerated Laozi as Lord Lao, found it a great deal harder to criticize the sage.

The Buddhist monk and Zhuangzi exegete Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623) of the late Ming offers a yet different reading, “When I first made friends [with Lao Dan], I saw him as someone who had Dao. Today, after his death, I know that he did not. . . .” On the Zhuangzi passage, “This was called the crime of going against Heaven,” he says,

“Crime” here means principle. It says that Lao Dan as a person was not able to forget his emotions while living in the world. He still harbored love and closeness to others, so people could not forget him, either. This means going against Heaven’s truth, forgetting one’s original being. The ancients called this a violation of Heaven’s truth, which harmed inner nature. Who acts like this is not a sage.

Hanshan here borrows Zhuangzi to criticize Laozi. Considering his position as a monk in a time of Buddhist-Daoist rivalry, this becomes quite

understandable. But if later readers think it to be true and take this to represent the original Zhuangzi, they are quite mistaken.

Leaving aside the parables and returning to the historical facts of the time, the philosophical connection between Laozi and Zhuangzi could not be clearer. Although we can easily list innumerable differences, they tend to be extraneous and secondary, never overshadowing their fundamental commonality. Sima Tan's description of the Daoists as "taking emptiness and nonbeing for their essence, alignment and accordance for their function" applies equally to Laozi and Zhuangzi, despite the fact that the main thrust in Laozi is the way of being a good ruler while Zhuangzi focuses primarily on how best to live in the world.

In concrete terms, during their historical time, Laozi's ideas pervaded many aspects of society—Dao, nonaction, and diminishing knowledge were as ubiquitous as his idea that "being causes it to be profitable, nonbeing makes it useful" (ch. 11) and his profound question of what is more important in life, body or reputation (ch. 44). All these are found everywhere in Zhuangzi who describes both Laozi and Guan Yin as men of encompassing enlightenment and as originally perfected.

Zhuangzi's philosophy is rich and abundant but not disorderly or confused. He is neither Laozi nor Liezi or Confucius, although they all play a role in his world. Zhuangzi is 100 percent Zhuangzi—with his unique and original approach to Dao. He is just like the creative change that, in the hot cauldron of the universe, smelts together elements of world, life, and history (ch. 6). The refined product of this great creation now presents itself in Zhuangzi's work and most potently in the seven Inner Chapters.

