

Vávra, Dušan

## Heaven and man in the Zhuangzi: reading a heterogeneous text

*Religio*. 2016, vol. 24, iss. 2, pp. [167]-188

ISSN 1210-3640 (print); ISSN 2336-4475 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/136401>

Access Date: 27. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

## *Heaven and Man in the Zhuangzi: Reading a Heterogeneous Text*

DUŠAN VÁVRA\*

The *Zhuangzi*<sup>1</sup> is traditionally regarded as one of the two principle works of so-called Daoism (the other is the *Laozi*). The prevalent assumption is that the *Zhuangzi* as a whole is not an authorial work and not one which is entirely coherent – it contains parts of diverse origin and intention. Most of the previous approaches to the *Zhuangzi* attempt to divide it into several parts according to the text's supposed authorship.<sup>2</sup> These attempts thus try to overcome the incongruity of the *Zhuangzi* as a whole by identifying partial wholes that themselves are supposedly coherent. In addition, they typically try to elevate one of these partial wholes to the position of the core text – the “true” *Zhuangzi*, the textual layer identified with Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou) as the author, or at least considered the most “authentic” layer identifiable with Zhuang's intellectual heritage. There is

---

\* This text was completed with the generous support of the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), project no. GP14-24730P, “Cosmology and Self-cultivation in the Zhuangzi: Meaning Construction in Early Chinese Texts”.

- 1 The received *Zhuangzi* consists of 33 chapters, traditionally divided into “Inner Chapters” (1-7, *nei pian*), “Outer Chapters” (8-22, *wai pian*), and “Miscellaneous Chapters” (23-33, *za pian*). The text's title refers to the hypothetical author of the text – Zhuang Zhou or Zhuangzi, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The *Zhuangzi* is an anthology of texts and was probably fixed during the Western Han (206 BC–9 CE) at the court of Liu An, the king of Huainan. The received text of the *Zhuangzi* was edited and commented by Guo Xiang at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. For more details see Harold D. Roth, “Chuang-tzu”, in: Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, New Haven: The Society for the Study of Early China 1993, 56-66.
- 2 The most influential concepts of the origin, authorship, and textual history of the *Zhuangzi* are the analyses by Angus C. Graham, “How Much of the *Chuang Tzu* did Chuang Tzu Write?”, in: id., *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, Singapore: National University of Singapore, Institute of East Asian Philosophies 1986, 283-321; Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies 1994, and newly Liu Xiaogan, “Textual Issues in the *Zhuangzi*”, in: id. (ed.), *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer 2014, 129-158. Both scholars try to prove that “Inner Chapters” are a philosophically coherent text and can be ascribed to one author, i.e. Zhuang Zhou. Graham and Liu partially disagree as far as the nature of the “Outer Chapters” and “Miscellaneous Chapters” is concerned, but they still follow a similar basic approach: both try to separate parts of the text which they ascribe to different authors (or groups of authors), i.e. to Zhuang Zhou himself, or to various groups of his disciples or followers. They read these parts as philosophically coherent, turning the *Zhuangzi* into several books written by several authors (or groups of authors).

a general consensus that the “Inner Chapters” (*nei pian*) as well as some of the “Outer Chapters” (*wai pian*) constitute the “core text”.

The scholars who question this commonly shared approach to the *Zhuangzi* are rather few and their approaches differ widely.<sup>3</sup> Among these, a recent paper by Esther Klein<sup>4</sup> questions the validity of the “core text” approach to the *Zhuangzi* in principle (Klein does not suggest a different definition of what the “core text” is but rejects the notion altogether). In her paper, Klein shows that in the early sources (late Warring States and Western Han dynasty) nothing suggests the privileged position of the “Inner Chapters” in the early stage of reading and transmitting the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>5</sup> Besides discussing in detail the situation of the *Zhuangzi* text as attested in other ancient texts up to the *Huainanzi*, which is the focus of Klein’s paper, she also formulates certain basic assumptions about the reading strategies invited by the text, based on her understanding of the text’s origins. Klein understands the Warring States proto-*Zhuangzi* (the text prior to its editing during Western Han) as a collection of heterogeneous material, unlikely to be structured as a whole, perhaps even without chapter divisions of most of the material.<sup>6</sup> Klein then proposes “that the most appropriate textual unit to use in analysing the *Zhuangzi* is not ‘inner/outer’ or even whole chapters, but rather some subset of a chapter”.<sup>7</sup> This paper follows and develops this reading strategy – reading the text as composed of individual textual units (sections) and, in the first step, constructing meaning from the individual sections alone. Any further step of establishing meaning for a larger part of the text or a set of textual units is checked against the methodology explained below.

3 For example, Ren Jiyu, “Zhuangzi tanyuan – cong weiwu zhuyi de Zhuang Zhou dao weixin zhuyi de houqi Zhuang xue”, *Zhexue yanjiu* 2, 1961, 23-39; Wang Baoxuan, *LaoZhuang xue xintan*, Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe 2002, 214-225; Jean François Billeter, *Études sur le Tchouang-tseu*, Paris: Éditions Allia 2008, 259-266. For an overview of the history of views on the *Zhuangzi* authorship, see David Chai, *Early Zhuangzi Commentaries: On the Sounds and Meanings of the Inner Chapters*, Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag 2008, 15-24.

4 Esther Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States? A New Examination of the Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*”, *T’oung Pao* 96/4, 2010, 299-369.

5 Klein discusses a number of Warring States and early Han texts and concludes that the earliest text with clear quotations from or parallels with the “Inner Chapters” is the *Huainanzi*. “Whoever the editors [of the *Zhuangzi*] were – Liu An’s scholars or someone else – I conclude that they produced a version that was known at Huainan but unattested in the *Shiji*” (E. Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’...”, 361).

6 *Ibid.*, 316-317.

7 *Ibid.*, 317.

More generally, this paper follows recent trends in early Chinese textuality scholarship,<sup>8</sup> which view most ancient Chinese texts as composite works consisting of relatively short textual units. The presence and sequence of these units in the received texts is a consequence of specific decisions of particular persons – the editors responsible for the final editing of the texts. This approach to early Chinese texts implies that it is relatively uncomplicated to read and interpret one textual unit,<sup>9</sup> but it becomes methodologically quite difficult to interpret larger textual wholes, especially transmitted texts as wholes (like the *Zhuangzi*).

In the *Zhuangzi*, the sections of the text are usually structured by internal criteria – continuous narrative or dialogue, or continuous exposition on a given topic. I do not regard (any of) the textual units as “original” parts of the text (core texts in miniature). I suppose that even the units themselves underwent a complicated process of circulating in various contexts, being reshaped in this process, and, in the end, attaining a fixed form in the received text. I regard the units as products of the same process of editing and re-editing used in the text as a whole.<sup>10</sup> This nature of the textual units is corroborated by the comparison of received texts and their excavated

8 See, for example, William Boltz, “The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts”, in: Martin Kern (ed.), *Text and Ritual in Early China*, Washington: University of Washington Press 2005, 50-78; Paul Fischer, “Authentication Studies Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm”, *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 1-43; Dirk Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China*, Leiden: Brill 2011; Matthias Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts*, Leiden: Brill 2013.

9 As far as the section is intelligible, linguistically and conceptually. A larger part of the text, however, may be composed of a set of perfectly intelligible units but still obscure as a whole (the units may not form a coherent pattern, making it difficult to construct any meaning for the whole).

10 It is difficult to define the “unit” precisely. In most texts, we can only rely on rather vague internal criteria – like a continuous dialogue or exposition with beginning and end. Of course, there are many cases where it is simply unclear whether a part of a text is one unit, or more. The “unit”, however, should be taken as a working tool, not the reality of the texts. In my view, what the composite nature of these texts invites us to do, is identifying patterns of congruity on the level of textual units (anything between paragraph and chapter). Whenever we find such a pattern, we have a “unit”. We cannot, however, expect the texts to be neatly arranged into clearly defined “units”. For interesting attempts to read individual *Zhuangzi* chapters as structured wholes, see Wim De Reu, “A Ragbag of Odds and Ends? Argument Structure and Philosophical Coherence in *Zhuangzi* 26”, in: Joachim Gentz – Dirk Meyer (eds.), *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*, Leiden: Brill 2015, 243-296, and Dirk Mayer, “Truth Claim with no Claim to Truth: Text and Performance of the ‘Qiushui’ Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*”, in: Joachim Gentz – Dirk Meyer (eds.), *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China*, Leiden: Brill 2015, 297-340. For the concept and examples of “argument-based texts”, i.e. early Chinese texts that are not of composite nature, but structured wholes, see D. Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo...*

counterparts. When we have more textual versions of a text (of a textual unit/s), we can usually identify the individual units across different texts, while the texts as wholes (the sequences of textual units) are widely different. The units themselves, although identifiable, also display a considerable level of textual variation. In the case of the *Zhuangzi*, we have thus far no significant excavated material.<sup>11</sup> There is, however, a great deal of material (textual units) in other received texts.<sup>12</sup> A comparison between these texts reveals a similar situation.

Everything said above points to a simple but crucial problem that must be dealt with by any reader of a text like the *Zhuangzi* – the text is obviously not structured as a whole (including the “Inner Chapters”), the material is extremely variable in genre and content, contains many odd parts difficult to fit in, and is full of incongruities and contradictions. And yet, many parts of the text fit together very well, create the image of a distinctive worldview, and invite philosophical reading (i.e. one coherent philosophical vision is constructed out of the text).<sup>13</sup> The majority of *Zhuangzi* readers (whether scholars or not) accept this invitation and construct the meaning of the *Zhuangzi* as philosophy, mostly based on “Inner Chapters”. This approach, however, always means adopting a sort of “bird’s eye view” of the text. Consciously or not, the reader selects some parts of the text to construct its meaning, while other parts are neglected and excluded from the picture. The result is necessarily reductionist – a coherent vision is created at the cost of leaving many parts of the text aside and distorting others to fit in.

On the other hand, the *Zhuangzi* as a whole is not a random mess. It cannot be denied that it forms a distinctive picture (or pictures). If we read the *Zhuangzi* as a disconnected collection of sayings, we would miss the point again. In this paper I suggest an alternative reading strategy which takes the heterogeneous nature of the text as its irreducible feature and methodically avoids the kind of reductionism described above. Simul-

11 For information on the excavated *Zhuangzi* fragments we have, see Li Xueqin, “Zhuangzi zapiian zhujian ji youguan wenti”, *Shaanxi lishi bowukuan guankan*, 1998, 126-131, and also E. Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’...”, 349-351.

12 There are *Zhuangzi* counterparts in several pre-Han and Han texts. Many parts of the *Liezi* can be identified as *Zhuangzi* counterparts. They can also be found in *Xunzi*, *Hanfeizi*, *Lüshi chungqiu*, *Huainanzi* and several other texts. See E. Klein, “Were there ‘Inner Chapters’...”, 327-354, for a comprehensive evaluation of this problem.

13 Two recent attempts at reading the *Zhuangzi* as philosophy (philosophies – “core text” vs. other parts of the text taken as wholes, see note 2 above) are Liu Xiaogan, “Zhuangzi’s Philosophy: A Three Dimensional Reconstruction”, in: id. (ed.), *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer 2014, 193-220, and Eske Møllgaard, *An Introduction to Daoist Thought: Action, Language, and Ethics in Zhuangzi*, London – New York: Routledge 2007.

taneously, it tries to isolate those textual features that create the sense of the text having a distinctive identity. Both identity and difference are taken as integral aspects of the reading implied by the text and a proper place for both is established in the proposed reading strategy.<sup>14</sup>

There are many textual features shared across the text of the *Zhuangzi* (and many of them across other texts too) – shared vocabulary and terminology, literary *topoi*, narrative structures and topics, and ideas. Naturally, these shared features form the basis of any attempt to read the *Zhuangzi* as a meaningful whole or wholes (as a philosophical work or works). In this paper, however, I would like to argue that these shared features *do not construct the meaning of the text directly*. Instead, I take them as a repertoire of literary tools available to the text’s authors, who used them to *form arguments*. I regard this as the actual content of the text – *common literary devices used to form specific arguments*. The tools are used repeatedly but the purposes for which they are used may differ sharply. I believe that we must study the arguments themselves as they are set in individual sections in order to capture the meaning of the text. The shared features (terms, narratives) are always set in a particular context – and it is the context that matters.<sup>15</sup>

The analysis of selected sections of the *Zhuangzi* in this paper is based on the distinction between “conceptual framework” and “argument”. By “conceptual framework” I mean all the literary devices (shared terms, concepts, theories, narrative schemes) that inform the text but are not – in my reading – the actual topic. Instead, I take the “conceptual frameworks” as being *concretized* by the text in the form of specific arguments. The arguments represent the actual import of the text.

The key point I want to stress here is the following: When reading the text, we should not mistake the framework for the argument. If we ask a question like “What is the relation between heaven (*tian*) and man (*ren*) in the *Zhuangzi*?”,<sup>16</sup> we address the framework, not the arguments the text actually makes. I believe the question is misplaced: the framework is seldom explicitly addressed<sup>17</sup> in the *Zhuangzi*; it is the background against which actual questions are asked and answers given. The omnipresence of some of the conceptual frameworks in the text shows that they must have

14 The reading strategy proposed in this paper is considered to be *implied by the text*. It is argued that the crucial textual features of the *Zhuangzi* invite exactly this reading.

15 By “context” I do not mean a hypothetical social context in which the textual units originated but the textual context in the received *Zhuangzi*.

16 See below; Graham and Møllgaard ask exactly this question and answer it with a unified philosophical concept they ascribe to the *Zhuangzi* (Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, Chicago – La Salle: Open Court Publishing 1989, 195-199; E. Møllgaard, *An Introduction to Daoist Thought...*, 57-61).

17 If occasionally it is, the answers given still vary. See the sections analysed below.

been widely shared by the text's authors. Nevertheless, they used them for specific purposes in specific contexts. They did not formulate the conceptual frameworks as well-articulated theories.

In the following, I will trace one specific "conceptual framework" in the text, the dichotomy *tian* ("heaven")<sup>18</sup> – *ren* ("man"), in order to show the diverse ways it is concretized in various contexts and the diverse arguments it can accommodate.<sup>19</sup>

The word "heaven" (*tian*) is often used in the *Zhuangzi* in the sense of the sum of cosmic cycles and processes as opposed to human society with its institutions, norms and values. According to the text (in all instances),<sup>20</sup> "heaven" is to be adopted by human beings (*ren*) so that the human can fulfil his/her natural potential and live better (or more effectively, in some instances) than within the confines of human society. "Heaven" is thus viewed as the alternative setting of human life with an (implied) alternative set of values. The following section is a simple example of the dichotomy "heaven" – "man".

### 1. *Zhuangzi* 3

When Lao Dan died, Qin Shi went to mourn for him; but after giving three cries, he left the room.

"Were you not a friend of the Master?" asked Laozi's disciples.

"Yes."

"And you think it is all right to mourn him this way?"

"At first I took him for Perfect Man, but now I know he was not. A little while ago, when I went in to mourn, I found old men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a son, and young men weeping for him as though they were weeping for a mother. To have gathered a group like that, he must have done something to make them talk about him, though he did not ask them to talk, or make them weep for him, though he did not ask them to weep. This is to hide from heaven (*tian*), turn your back on your natural inclinations, and forget what you were born with. In the old days, this was called being guilty of hiding from heaven (*tian*). Your master happened to come because it was his time, and he happened to leave because things follow along. If you

18 The meaning of the word *tian* ranges between "heaven" as the deity or cosmic power and "nature" as the sum of natural cycles and processes. In the *Zhuangzi* it very often means the latter, especially in passages that are subject to our analysis below (sections where *tian* is opposed to *ren* – "man"). However, I still decided to translate *tian* as "heaven" (heavenly, heaven-like, etc.) in all instances because I find the translation "nature" strangely ambiguous, among other reasons because "nature" is the standard translation for *xing* which also appears frequently in the *Zhuangzi*.

19 Cf. Dušan Vávra, "Cripples and Sages in the *Zhuangzi*: Contextualizing the Narratives", *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 15/2, 2016, in press. In this article, two of the passages concerning the dichotomy *tian* – *ren* are contextualized within a chapter. A chapter is understood as a meaningful whole and the diverse ways the dichotomy is concretized are interpreted as motivated by the chapter's content.

20 There is one possible exception, *Zhuangzi* 23 (section 7 below).

are content with the time and willing to follow along, then grief and joy have no place to enter in.”<sup>21</sup>

In this section, a crucial social custom – mourning for the dead – is questioned and discussed from the point of view of “heaven”. “Heaven” means two things here: (1) the natural course of things itself (the natural sequence of life and death is stressed); (2) the proper human response to the fact of death, which requires reconciliation and the acceptance of death (it is nothing more than a natural result of things’ “following along”). The people who gathered in order to mourn for the dead behave perfectly normally – from the point of view of conventional social customs. From the point of view of “heaven”, however, their behaviour is condemned by the visitor, Qin Shi,<sup>22</sup> because it is unnatural (“turning backs on natural inclinations”). Moreover, the integrity of the dead is questioned too – it must be his fault, as their teacher, if his followers behave like this.

In summary, two major characteristics of “heaven” in the *Zhuangzi* are expressed in this section – “heaven” as the natural course of things and “heaven” as the quality of human personality, as expressed in its attitudes toward the world and in its behaviour (marked by reconciliation with anything that happens to the human).

The latter of these two key features of “heaven” is repeated in the next section, but the overall setting is different.

## 2. *Zhuangzi* 19

Woodworker Qing carved a piece of wood and made a bell stand, and when it was finished, everyone who saw it marvelled, for it seemed to be the work of gods or spirits. When the marquis of Lu saw it, he asked: “What art is it you have?”

Qing replied: „I am only a craftsman – how would I have any art? There is one thing, however. When I am going to make a bell stand, I never let it wear out my energy. I always fast in order to still my mind. When I have fasted for three days, I no longer have any thought of congratulations or rewards, of titles or stipends. When I have fasted for five days, I no longer have any thought of praise or blame, of skill or clumsiness. And when I have fasted for seven days, I am so still that I forget I have four limbs and a form and body. By that time, the ruler and his court no longer exist for me. My skill is concentrated and all outside distractions fade away. After that, I go into the mountain forest and examine the heavenly nature [of the trees]. If I find one of superlative form, and I can see a bell stand there, I put my hand to the job of carving; if not, I let it go. This way I am simply matching up heaven with heaven. That is probably the reason that people wonder if the results were not made by spirits.”<sup>23</sup>

---

21 *Zhuangzi* 3, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1985, 127-128. Translation adapted from Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, New York – London: Columbia University Press 1970, 52-53.

22 Qin Shi also came in to mourn, in fact, but obviously in a different manner (we are not told how).

23 *Zhuangzi* 19, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi*..., 658-659. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works*..., 205-206.



This section is an example of the stories of perfect craftsmen, repeated in variations many times in the *Zhuangzi*. In this case, the woodworker Qing's skill is said to be no ordinary skill, because Qing's ability is rooted in a specific process of self-cultivation. This self-cultivation process is described as "fasting", during which one gradually rids oneself of all contents of the mind concerned with common human experience, primarily all social bonds. In the end, the mind is utterly concentrated, because all distracting thoughts are gone. In this state, Qing can finally go to the mountains to examine trees and select a suitable one. Here, the word "heaven" is employed – the woodworker Qing examines the *heavenly* nature (*tianxing*) of the trees, which he can do thanks to the previous emptying of his mind. With his empty, undisturbed mind he can directly see the bell stand (the product he is going to make) in the tree. This extrasensory experience is further described as "matching up heaven with heaven (*yi tian he tian*)". Apparently, the meditation process results in igniting woodworker Qing's own "heavenly nature", which enables him to get into productive contact with the "heavenly nature" of the outer world. The result is the superhuman perfection of woodworker Qing's craftsmanship (and his products as well).

What is most important here is that sections 1 and 2 share the general conceptual framework (ordinary human experience vs. superior human experience, the latter rooted in "heaven" and implying disregard for, or the erasing of the most fundamental constituents of ordinary human experience) but employ the framework for different purposes. The actual arguments in the sections differ a great deal – to the point of being unrelated to each other. In section 1, man is required (continuously during his whole life) not to "hide from heaven", i.e. to accept and embrace all events including death, because everything is a part of the natural course of things. In section 2, "heavenly" experience is reached through a process of meditation (it is temporary) and consists of the attunement of the human mind to the heavenly nature of other things (trees). The result is a perfect and most effective action (woodwork), impossible to achieve by ordinary training. Therefore, there appears to be nothing that these two sections share besides the conceptual framework.

More examples can be given to demonstrate the plausibility of this approach to the *Zhuangzi*, such as the one in the next section.

### 3. *Zhuangzi* 5

Mr. Lame-Hunchback-No-Lips was persuading Duke Ling of Wei and the Duke was so pleased with him that when he looked at other men, he thought their necks looked too lean and skinny. Mr. Pitcher-Sized-Wen talked to Duke Huan of Qi, and Duke

Huan was so pleased with him that when he looked at normal men he thought their necks looked too lean and skinny.

Therefore, [their] virtue had something outstanding and [their] body had something for which it was overlooked. If people do not overlook what can be overlooked and overlook what cannot be overlooked – that can be called true overlooking.

So the sage has his wanderings. For him, knowledge is an offshoot, agreements are glue, favours are a patching up, and skill is a peddler. The sage plans no schemes, so what use has he for knowledge? He does no carving, so what use has he for glue? He suffers no loss, so what use has he for favours? He sells no goods, so what use has he for peddling? These four are called heavenly gruel. Heavenly gruel is the food of heaven, what use does he have for men? He has the form of man but not the natural inclinations of man. Since he has the form of man, he is grouped together with other men. Since he does not have the natural inclinations of man, right and wrong cannot get at him. Puny and small, he belongs among other men. Massive and great, depending on nothing he perfects his heaven.<sup>24</sup>

In the first two parts of this unit, two short and similar parallel statements are made about crippled persons who, nevertheless, impressed famous dukes by their persuasive skills (and probably their whole personalities). As a consequence, the dukes both came to overlook (forget) the two crippled persons' bodily deficiency, to the point of getting accustomed to it and taking it as a norm. The second part, beginning with "therefore" (*gu*), explains the previous statements. It formulates the dichotomy of "body" (*xing*) and "virtue" (*de*), thus making explicit why the two cripples were valued – their virtue was so conspicuous that it overshadowed their defects, which otherwise could hardly be overlooked.

In the third part of the unit, we find an account of the sage's (*shengren*) actions and overall attitude toward the world. It shares a basic conceptual framework with sections 1 and 2, i.e. one based on the relation between heaven and man. It stresses the key feature attributed to many model personalities (various masters and perfect persons) across the whole *Zhuangzi*: human beings are viewed as pertaining to both the human (*ren*) world and the world of nature ("heaven", *tian*), while the human world and its norms, values, etc., is debased. "Heaven", in contrast, is introduced as the realm where human beings can realize their true potential. In this case, the dichotomy "heaven" – "man" is made explicit and the text formulates a specific mode of the dichotomy.

At the beginning of the third part, four terms are discussed – two of them are concerned with the potential of human beings with regard to the world (knowledge and skill), the other two are important components of human social relations (agreements and favours). The section states that the sage has no use for these values and consequently has no use for other

---

24 *Zhuangzi* 5, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi*..., 217. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works*..., 75.

men in general. Instead, the term “heaven” is introduced, in the form of the peculiar expression “heavenly gruel” (*tianzhou*), which is said to feed the sage instead of anything the sage could obtain from interacting with human society. In the latter part of the section, the relation between “man” and “heaven” in the personality of the sage is discussed. Both meet in the person of the sage but their presence in him is explained in terms of “form” (the human part) and “natural inclinations (*qing*)” (the heavenly part). Having the form of a human being, the sage is still grouped with other men. Lacking natural human inclinations, the sage is free from establishing values like “right” and “wrong” in any situation he encounters and is thus (probably, but not explicitly here) free of all kinds of attachments to the social world. The last sentence makes clear that the human part of the sage is “puny and small”, while “heaven” represents the “massive and great” in him. In this section, it is obvious that the “man” in the sage is considered unimportant (the “form” seems to be merely a remnant of being human), while “heaven” actually forms the personality of the sage. No balance between “human” and “heaven” is sought in this section.

Compared to sections 1 and 2, we can see that the dichotomy “heaven” – “man” is used differently again. The disengagement from social norms and values is repeated (this seems to be the constant component of every instance of the dichotomy in the *Zhuangzi*). The connection with “heaven”, however, serves a different purpose. It describes the perfect person of the sage, who – due to “perfecting his heaven” – attains complete detachment from the human world, except for his bodily form. The detachment is presented as permanent and as the aim in itself – contrary to section 2 – and the “perfection of heaven” refers to the inner self of the sage, not the natural course of things (or reconciliation with things that happen) – contrary to section 1.

When reading section 3 we can ask the following question: Why exactly is the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy interpreted in this way? As we shall see in a moment, in other parts of the *Zhuangzi*, the personality of the sage can be understood as a *balance* between “heaven” and “man”. So, why here do we have the exclusive elevation of the heavenly? I believe this question can be answered by contextualizing the third part (the “sage” part) of unit 3 into the whole unit. When read in isolation, the “sage” part could be read as a “definition” of the sage in the *Zhuangzi*, and perhaps compared to other “definitions”. It is, however, a part of a larger unit, consisting of three parts, clearly linked by the connecting “*gu*” (“therefore”).

In the context of the whole unit, the dichotomy of “heaven” and “man” is clearly paralleled to the distinction of “virtue” (*de*) and “body” (*xing*) in the previous parts of the unit. In the light of this parallel, we can say that

the sage's being a man is as insignificant to him as is the mutilated body for the crippled person. It is of no consequence to his true nature or to his functioning in the world (of which, however, we learn nothing in this section, except that it has nothing to do with the social reality). Both the "cripple" and "sage" parts of the unit are constructed so that they make the same argument: the outside appearance means nothing; everything important is the inside, the inner virtue of the personality.

The basic idea of the unit<sup>25</sup> – the dominance of the internal over the external, virtue over the bodily form – is highly ironic and subversive in the social context of early China. It is eminently anti-ritualistic (and anti-Confucian), by which it undermines the fundamental values of early Chinese society. Note that both of these images (a sage ignoring human society and a cripple as a paragon of virtue) subvert the established social order. It is, however, a specific *interpretation* of the image of the sage, and it is conceptualised by the specific rendering of the "heaven" – "man" dichotomy in this section.

Just one passage later (though already in Chapter 6) we find another section dealing with the same problem discussed in section 3 – the relation between "heaven" and "man" in the perfect person (here *zhenren*). The section is long but deserves to be quoted at length here (about two thirds of the section). The quotation is divided into two parts.

#### 4.1. *Zhuangzi* 6

What do I mean by the True Man? The True Man of ancient times did not rebel against want, did not grow proud in plenty, and did not plan his affairs. A man like this could commit an error and not regret it, could meet with success and not make a show. A man like this could climb the high places and not be frightened, could enter the water and not get wet, could enter the fire and not get burned. His knowledge was able to climb all the way up to the Way like this.

The True Man of ancient times slept without dreaming and woke without care; he ate without savouring and his breath came from deep inside. The True Man breathes with his heels; the mass of men breathe with their throats. Crushed and bound down, they gasp out their words as though they were retching. Their passions and desires are deep, their heavenly mechanism is shallow.

The True Man of ancient times knew nothing of loving life, knew nothing of hating death. He emerged without delight; he went back in without a fuss. He came briskly, he went briskly, and that was all. He did not forget where he began; he did not try to find out where he would end. He received something and took pleasure in it; he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the mind

---

25 And probably of the whole chapter 5 – of which this unit makes part – where the parallel of the sage and the cripple seems to be a constantly repeated theme. Cf. Hans-Georg Moeller, "Paradoxes of Health and Power in the *Zhuangzi*", in: Livia Kohn (ed.), *New Visions of the Zhuangzi*, St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press 2015, 70-81.

to repel the Way (*dao*), not using man to assist heaven (*tian*). This is what I call the True Man.<sup>26</sup>

This section summarizes many characteristics of the perfected person we find in many other sections in the *Zhuangzi*. In the first part of section 4.1, the True Man is described as indifferent to the things that normally elicit likes and dislikes in men and impervious to harm from water, fire, or heights. These are common descriptions of the perfect person in the *Zhuangzi*. In the second part, hints at specific self-cultivation techniques are added (“the True Man breathes with his heels”) and the term “heaven” is first introduced. The “mass of men” (*zhongren*) not only breathe shallowly, everything they do is shallow. As the text puts it, their “heavenly mechanism” is shallow (*qi tianji jian*). The expression *tianji* (“heavenly mechanism”)<sup>27</sup> occurs several times in the *Zhuangzi* and it refers to the “heavenly” (natural) source of power every human has inside and can have work through him/her, opposed to human scheming and planning. The third part further specifies that the True Man does not show a preference for life over death and accepts both as they are encountered (another well-known topic found in several places in the *Zhuangzi*, like section 1). This attitude (taking things as they come without showing a preference or dislike for any of them) is further put into the cosmological context of *Dao* and heaven, both opposed to man: “This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to assist heaven. This is what I call the True Man.” *Dao* is contrasted to the human mind (*xin*), heaven to man (*ren*). What is human must not be used to “assist” heaven – heaven is the true source of the True Man’s perfected action.

So far, the picture is not different from that presented in section 3. The perfect man must rely on what is “heavenly” in him (the “heavenly mechanism”) and not on human deliberate thinking (planning and scheming). “Heaven” seems to be given precedence over “man”, as in section 3. However, the last part of section 4 introduces a new set of ideas that change the picture substantively.

#### 4.2. *Zhuangzi* 6

He regarded punishments as the body, rites as the wings, intellectual capacity as what is timely, virtue as acting according to situation. Because he regarded punishments as the body, he was benign in his killing. Because he regarded rites as the wings, he got along with the world. Because he regarded intellectual capacity as what is timely, there were things that he could not keep from doing. He regarded virtue as acting

26 *Zhuangzi* 6, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi...*, 226-229. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works...*, 77-78.

27 Or “heavenly engine”, “natural engine” – it is the unconscious mover within a living being.

according to situation – that means he gets to the top of the hill together with someone who has legs; and yet people really believe that he worked hard to get there. What he liked he treated without discrimination. What he did not like he also treated without discrimination. What he treated without discrimination, he treated without discrimination. What he did not treat without discrimination, he [nevertheless] treated without discrimination [too]. In what he treated without discrimination, he followed the heaven. In what he did not treat without discrimination, he followed the men. When heaven and man do not overcome each other, that is called the True Man.<sup>28</sup>

In light of section 3, the last part of section 4 should immediately attract the reader's attention. It deals with the same problem (the relation between "heaven" and "man"), but reaches a different conclusion. Here, the conclusion does not prefer "heaven" to "man". On the contrary, it explicitly states that a state of balance is required, in which "heaven and man do not overcome each other". Apparently, both are regarded as equally important constituents of the perfect person; only together can they form perfection.

Four terms are mentioned that in early Chinese thought represent the standard tools for ordering human society: punishments, rites, intellectual capacity, and virtue. In the first sentence of section 4.2, these terms are downplayed, as can be expected in the given conceptual framework:<sup>29</sup> "He regarded punishments as the body, rites as the wings, intellectual capacity as what is timely, virtue as acting according to situation." The downplaying is not as radical as in many other parts of the *Zhuangzi* – the terms are not rejected, just reinterpreted. This is further elaborated in the following sentences. In this section, it is made clear that the True Man actually becomes engaged in the world and its social norms and institutions (although the text is not clear in some details): The way the True Man treats the punishments leads to his being "benign in his killing";<sup>30</sup> his treatment of the rites leads to his being able to "get along with the world"; he regards intellectual capacity as what is timely,<sup>31</sup> which results in his having things that "he could not keep from doing"; he regards virtue as acting according to the situation, which means, as the text puts it, "he gets to the top of the hill together with someone who has legs; and yet people really believe that he worked hard to get there".<sup>32</sup>

In my reading of the section, these statements all refer to a very specific mode of perfect action – the True Man accepts the world as it is and

28 *Zhuangzi* 6, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi...*, 234-235. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works...*, 79-80.

29 In this framework everything belonging to the realm of "man" is downplayed, as opposed to the realm of "heaven".

30 Because he follows along the penal law and does not kill arbitrarily?

31 In my reading, he does not plan or scheme, but is able to discern the opportune moment for effective action.

32 Because he got there by supernatural means and only by coincidence was he accompanied by a normal walker (to whom he adapted his pace)?

“designs” his actions according to the situation at hand, including the relevant social institutions, norms and values.<sup>33</sup> This specifies how “heaven” and “man” are interconnected in the person of the True Man (their “not overcoming each other”). Observed from the outside, he engages in the world like other human beings; inside, however, he retains the attitude of disengagement;<sup>34</sup> he is not emotionally attached to anything he is doing. The stillness inside is the perfect virtue that brings about the perfect action manifested outwards, which means perfect handling of the conventional social reality. The perfect man – observed from the outside – acts in accord with social norms and physical laws like any other man (the “man” part). Inside, however, he is still and empty, emotionally detached from anything he is doing and has (possibly) certain supernatural abilities, like walking without effort (the “heaven” part, which is invisible from the outside).

This interpretation of the dichotomy “heaven” – “man” in section 4.2 is hardly compatible with any of the previous sections. In my opinion, however, it finds counterparts in some of the “Outer Chapters”, especially 12-15,<sup>35</sup> as exemplified in the following section.

### 5. *Zhuangzi* 13

Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction are the root of the ten thousand things. To understand this and face south – that is the way Yao became ruler. To understand this and face north – that is the way Shun served as minister. To occupy high position by means of this – that is the virtue of emperors and kings. To occupy low position by means of this – that is the way of the dark sage and the uncrowned king. Retire with this to a life of idle wandering and you will command first place

- 
- 33 The sage regards “punishments as the body” – he takes it as the terrain that is simply there and naturally shapes any action in the social world; “rites as the wings” – he takes the rites as a convenient means to act in the social world; he regards “intellectual capacity as what is timely”, “virtue as acting according to situation” – the sage does not plan or scheme anything, he only makes use of every opportunity.
- 34 Cf. the last part of this section: “What he treated without discrimination, he treated without discrimination. What he did not treat without discrimination, he [nevertheless] treated without discrimination [too]. In what he treated without discrimination, he followed the heaven. In what he did not treat without discrimination, he followed the men.” This passage is not easy but in my opinion understandable in the sense just explained: The True Man is “man” in what he treats with discrimination (like every other man). However, even that is not discriminating (from a different point of view – that of the heaven, of his still inner mind). Thus, he only *seems* to be discriminating; in fact (the reality of his inner state of mind), however, he treats everything without discrimination (acts according to situation, and not according to his own plans).
- 35 These chapters are labelled “Huang-Lao” by Liu Xiaogan in his recent paper on *Zhuangzi* classification; see Liu Xiaogan, “Textual Issues...”, 149-154. The dichotomy of “stillness” – “action” is understood as a typical Huang-Lao concept by some authors; see for example L. K. Chen – Hiu Chuk Winnie Sung, “The Doctrines and Transformations of the Huang-Lao Tradition”, in: Liu Xiaogan (ed.), *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer 2014, 241-264: 255-257.



among the recluses of the rivers and seas, the hills and forests. Come forward with this to succor the age and your success will be great, your name renowned, and the world will be united. In stillness you will be a sage, in action a king. Resting in inaction, you will be honored; of unwrought simplicity, your excellence will be such that no one in the world may vie with you.<sup>36</sup>

This section introduces another conceptual framework – the dichotomy of “stillness” – “action”, which I believe informs section 4.2 as well.<sup>37</sup> Like in section 4.2, the stillness inside is the perfect virtue that brings about the perfect action manifested outwards. In section 5, “emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction” lead to a perfect action of various kinds – it is the basis of the king’s action as well as the minister’s, the retired sage’s as well as the ruler’s. Apparently, the perfected human mind (the stillness) can be implemented in various ways to shape and command the world, or to serve in a subordinate position.

It is important to point out that while section 5 occurs in Chapter 13, which is, by some scholars, taken as a representative of Huang-Lao thought<sup>38</sup> (together with chapters 12, 14, and 15), section 4.2 belongs to the “Inner Chapters”. My reading of section 4.2 shows that it implements the “stillness” – “action” conceptual framework in the same way as in the section 5. Both sections formulate a similar argument<sup>39</sup> (a still and disengaged mind can realize a perfect and effective action, it can bring about perfect handling of the outer world), despite being located in parts of the *Zhuangzi* of supposedly different origin. The argument, moreover, is very different from the politically disengaged vision that the “Inner Chapters” are usually supposed to express.

As for the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy, another section concretizes this conceptual framework differently again. It introduces the famous king Wen, who meets an old fisherman fishing in a special way, not concerned with catching fish but with the fishing itself.

36 *Zhuangzi* 13, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi...*, 457-458. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works...*, 143.

37 The various conceptual frameworks can overlap and intersect to form specific arguments. Moreover, it is possible to trace the conceptual frameworks from an intertextual perspective – the famous phrase employed in many contexts from Guo Xiang to Neo-Confucianism, “sage inside and king outside (*nei sheng wai wang*)”, clearly belongs to the conceptual framework “stillness” – “action” that informs section 5 and 4.2.

38 See note 35 above.

39 It could be argued that even here the argument is in fact slightly different. In section 4.2, the perfect man – observed from the outside – acts in accord with social norms and physical laws like any other man. Inside, however, he is still and empty, emotionally detached from anything he is doing and (possibly) has certain supernatural abilities, like walking without effort. In section 5, the idea of root and branches is employed and the dichotomy of “stillness” – “action” is focused on difference between the inner state of stillness and various modes of outward activity rooted in the stillness.



## 6. *Zhuangzi* 21

King Wen wanted to summon him and hand over the government to him, but he was afraid that the high officials and his uncles and brothers would be uneasy. He thought perhaps he had better forget the matter and let it rest, and yet he could not bear the hundred clans being without “heaven”. ... In the end, therefore, the king had the old man escorted to the capital and handed over the government to him, but the regular precedents and laws remained unchanged, and not a single new order was issued. At the end of three years, the local officials had smashed their gate bars and disbanded their cliques and they had learned to identify with their superiors. The heads of government bureaus achieved no special distinction and they looked on all tasks as being of equal distinction. Persons entering the four borders from other states no longer ventured to bring their own measuring cups and bushels with them and the feudal lords had ceased to have divided loyalties.<sup>40</sup>

The way the word “heaven” is used here is a little surprising. I believe the expression *wu tian* (“being without heaven”, “lacking heaven”) refers to the inner state of human beings (as is common in the *Zhuangzi*), but in this case it refers to common people (*bai xing*), not the perfect person. The perfect man (the fisherman) is portrayed as having the capacity to exert a profound influence upon the people and bring about order in the whole state (to make it “have *tian*”, implicitly). Perfect order is described in the text – the old man attempts to establish order without changing or doing anything, and yet within three years all evils have disappeared from the state.

The conceptual framework “heaven” – “man” is implicit in the section. “Heaven” is mentioned directly as the desired inner state of the people (and we can suppose that the fisherman himself has already achieved this inner state). The “man” part of the dichotomy is implied clearly – it is the chaos in the state before the fisherman’s arrival, caused by standard methods of (mis)governance.

Although section 6 implies political engagement as well as section 4.2, the political content of the section is different from section 4.2. In section 6, there is no suggestion of the pragmatic, “Huang-Lao” dimension of political action. The sage in section 6 does not “follow along” the social norms and institutions. By hidden means (by his sheer presence?) he transforms the whole of society into a peaceful state rid of all friction. On the other hand, like in section 4.2, the desired social order is characterized by a state of balance between “heaven” and “man”. Under the beneficial fisherman’s leadership, the people are supposed to “have *tian*”, but the social order remains the same – it becomes harmonized, but not completely

<sup>40</sup> *Zhuangzi* 21, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi...*, 720-723. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works...*, 229-230.

changed (the “heads of government bureaus”, etc., remain in place, but just behave differently).

The final section on the relation between heaven and man brings perhaps the most interesting evidence of the conceptual framework being used in the text to form arguments.

### 7. *Zhuangzi* 23

Archer Yi was skilled at hitting the smallest target but clumsy in not preventing people from praising him for it. The sage is skilled in what pertains to heaven but clumsy in what pertains to man. To be skilled in heavenly affairs and excellent in human ones as well – only the Complete Man can do that. Only bugs can be bugs because only bugs can be heaven-like.<sup>41</sup> The Complete Man hates heaven, and hates the heavenly in man. And how much more [he hates the discussions] about whether we are heaven-like or man-like!<sup>42</sup>

This section is, again, informed by the conceptual framework “heaven” – “man”, which is made explicit. The most striking feature of this section is the fact that it is the only instance in the whole *Zhuangzi* where the heavenly capacity in man is questioned and rejected. Moreover, it is the only instance where two different kinds of perfect persons are distinguished with regard to “heaven”. The sage (*shengren*) is skilled in heaven but “clumsy in what pertains to man”. Only the Complete Man (*quanren*) excels in both.

However, the most important feature of this section is the possibility to read it against those concretizations of the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy seen in the previous sections. It reads almost like a polemical dialogue with them:

- 1) “Archer Yi was skilled at hitting the smallest target but clumsy in not preventing people from praising him for it.” The first sentence introduces the topic of a perfect skill achieved at the cost of being clumsy in other aspects of life, which is central to the section. In section 2 about woodworker Qing, we found a similar situation – a great skill praised by the people. In the present section, however, this situation is used to make a different argument – being praised is a sign of clumsiness, which is not found in section 2. In section 1, on the other hand, we find a dead master who was supposed to be a Perfect Man, but in fact was not – due to the fact that he incited admiration in his followers. Section 1 can thus be read as a parallel to the argument made in the opening sentence of section 7.

---

41 I.e. only bugs can be completely absorbed in nature (heaven). Man, on the other hand, always retains some reflection of the outer world.

42 *Zhuangzi* 23, in: Guo Qingfan (ed.), *Zhuangzi jishi...*, 813. Translation adapted from B. Watson, *The Complete Works...*, 259-260.

- 2) “The sage is skilled in what pertains to heaven but clumsy in what pertains to man.” This is the generalization of the argument made in the previous sentence. Skilfulness, although it is a skill in what is “heavenly” in human beings, still implies clumsiness elsewhere – in “man”. Section 3 introduces the sage whose “heavenly” part is predominant and whose “man” part is disregarded. In section 3, however, this disregard for “man” is not rendered as clumsiness – “heaven” is all that matters. In section 7, a different argument is made and disregard for “man” is considered as “clumsiness”.
- 3) “To be skilled in heavenly affairs and excellent in human ones as well – only the Complete Man can do that.” This sentence presents the answer to the problem of clumsiness. It is possible to avoid clumsiness but only the most perfect person – the Complete Man – can do so. He excels in both realms, like the sages described in sections 4.2 and 5.<sup>43</sup> The term “Complete Man” does not appear anywhere else in the *Zhuangzi*<sup>44</sup> and one suspects it is the invention of this section’s author – he may have needed a novel term to make the distinction between two different kinds of perfect person. The argument does not end here, however. The text has more to say about the problem of “heaven”:
- 4) “Only bugs can be bugs because only bugs can be heaven-like.” It seems that the author of this section needed to put further stress on the fact that “heaven” is not the final guarantee of human perfection. “Only bugs can be heaven-like” – I read this statement as “only bugs can be completely absorbed in nature (‘heaven’); ‘man’, on the other hand, always retains some reflection of the outer world”. A creature that is completely absorbed in “heaven” is an animal – it has lost all conscious reflectivity of the outer world and is driven by unconscious instinct only. No “higher” perception is ascribed to “heaven” in this section. The reflective part of a human being is “man” and it cannot be lost. This explains the last part of the section (which would otherwise be contrary to the above statement of excelling in both realms):
- 5) “The Complete Man hates heaven, and hates the heavenly in man. And how much more [he hates the discussions] about whether we are heaven-like or man-like!” The Complete Man hates “heaven” – he hates being unconscious like a bug. Both “heaven” and “man” must

43 However, we cannot tell if the “completeness” of the Complete Man should be understood in terms of the argument made in section 4.2, or section 5, or still another kind of argument.

44 It appears in Chapter 5 but the meaning there is unrelated to the present section (in Chapter 5, “complete man” is contrasted to crippled man; it thus refers to “normal man”).

work in concert with each other. Thus, the Complete Man also hates the problem “heaven, or man?” addressed in some of the previous sections discussed in this paper.

## Conclusions

The dichotomy “heaven” – “man” was discussed by A. C. Graham in his *Disputers of the Tao*.<sup>45</sup> Graham notices the prevalent priority of “heaven” over “man” in the *Zhuangzi* and starts the discussion with the question: “Am I then on the Way only when as a man I dissolve and let Heaven act through me?”<sup>46</sup> After discussing a number of *Zhuangzi* passages on the topic, Graham arrives at the following conclusion:

There cannot for Zhuangzi be any ultimate discontinuity between the spontaneous and the thinking person. At the centre of himself the sage is spontaneous, belongs wholly to Heaven, does not yet make any distinction between benefit and harm, self and other, even Heaven and man. ... At the periphery he is a thinking man, finding means to the goals towards which Heaven moves him, and collecting the information towards which he is moved to respond. On this periphery he does make distinctions, although only as provisional and relative ... and deliberately pursues what he likes and avoids what he dislikes.<sup>47</sup>

On the basis of the analysis of the dichotomy “heaven” – “man” in this article, I argue that this argument is incorrect because it conforms only to *some* of the “heaven” – “man” sections and not the others. Graham chooses only some of the concretizations of the given conceptual framework and uses them to construct the “philosophy of Zhuangzi”. His favourite concretization is the one based on the intersection of two conceptual frameworks based on two dichotomies: (1) “heaven” – “man” and (2) “stillness” – “action”. We identified this sort of concretization above in section 4.2. In that section we really find the dichotomy “heaven” – “man” paralleled with the connection between the inner state of sageliness and effective action in the outer world: the sageliness inside (heaven) is the reason for the perfect action outside (man).

In the other sections, however, we find different concretizations of the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy. In section 1, for example, human life can be adapted to “heaven”, which is the desired state, but not in the sense of complete inner transformation (becoming the sage) with a direct impact on outward activity. Instead, the adaptation to “heaven” has the simple form of reconciliation with natural cycles and processes, including death. In

---

<sup>45</sup> A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*..., 195-199.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

section 2, there is continuity between “heaven” and “man”, but, again, understood differently. The perfect craftsman can reach a state of “heaven” in meditation and in that state he can get into contact with the “heaven” in other things – in this case, he can choose a suitable tree for carving into a bell stand. However, instead of being the sage in the centre and “the thinking man in the periphery” (as Graham puts it), “heaven” in this section is the tool of “man” – the motivation and the result (the bell stand) is purely human. The craftsman serves well to the social institutions (he is hired, admired, and most likely rewarded). The woodworker makes his decisions and “collects information” (choosing the tree) in the state of “heaven”; his “man” part plays no role in it. He comes back to his “man” state only to fulfil his social obligations; his “heaven” part plays no role in it. Section 3 does not conform to Graham’s statement either, because it is the closest to complete immersion in “heaven” we can find in the above *Zhuangzi* sections. Section 7, finally, may conform to Graham’s statement,<sup>48</sup> but only in the Complete Man part. The Complete Man, however, is contrasted to the sage (*shengren*), which does not conform to Graham’s statement (the sage is “clumsy” in the realm of man).

More recently, Eske Møllgaard in his monograph on the *Zhuangzi* also devotes one chapter to the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy.<sup>49</sup> Like Graham, Møllgaard understands the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy as a philosophical concept advocated by the text with a unified meaning. Like Graham, Møllgaard stresses the idea that “Zhuangzi does not simply negate the moment of man (*ren*) but advocates the perfection of the specifically *human* ability to live *in-between* the two realms of man (*ren*) and Heaven (*tian*)”.<sup>50</sup> While Graham identifies continuity between “man” and “heaven” in the *Zhuangzi*, there is, according to Møllgaard, “a break between Heaven and man”.<sup>51</sup> The general approach of both, however, is the same – both construct the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy as a philosophical concept which the text *is about*. Both choose a certain concretization (or concretizations) of the conceptual framework and neglect the others.<sup>52</sup> In my reading, the “heaven” – “man” dichotomy is, in contrast, analysed as a conceptual framework used to express various arguments. I consider these arguments, not the framework, the actual import of the text.

48 It depends on how we understand “being skilled in heavenly affairs and excellent in human ones as well”. We do not know if “human” is just a function of “heaven”, which is Graham’s understanding of the dichotomy.

49 E. Møllgaard, *An Introduction to Daoist Thought...*, 57-61.

50 *Ibid.*, 57.

51 *Ibid.*

52 For Møllgaard, the key text is our section 7 and its “dialectics” of skilfulness and clumsiness.

This paper proposes a reading strategy for the *Zhuangzi* based on the distinction between “conceptual framework” and “argument”. It argues that one conceptual framework can accommodate various arguments; conceptual frameworks are not the focus of the text – they consist of literary devices (shared vocabulary and terminology, literary *topoi*, narrative structures and topics) that are used to form specific arguments. The paper opposes those approaches to the *Zhuangzi* which present the text (or the “core text”) as a unified philosophical vision, and shows that every attempt to read the *Zhuangzi* as one philosophy (to translate the multi-faceted text into a philosophical treatise) is reductionist; such an approach achieves philosophical coherence at the cost of sacrificing the richness of meaning we find in the text. If we reduce the specific argument to the conceptual framework within which it is set, we lose much of the argumentative power the received text retains. A productive reading of the text must not be based on a reduction of the richness of various modes of argumentation to form a unified “philosophy”, which usually means nothing more than a specific concretization of selected conceptual frameworks by the modern scholar.

The paper argues that a conceptual framework itself cannot establish meaning for any section of the text. More often than not, conceptual frameworks are put to different purposes in different parts of the text. The productive reading of the text, proposed in this paper, consists of two steps: first, establishing meaning for individual sections and identifying individual arguments; and, second, checking affinities between arguments across conceptual frameworks (similar arguments made within different frameworks, like in sections 4.2 and 5). The second step is a way of establishing meanings for the text across the *Zhuangzi* as a whole, without distorting the actual contents of the arguments. However, the proposed reading strategy can produce no unified philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* (of the “core text” or any other part of the text). We can try to identify the arguments and sort them out, which may lead to establishing meanings valid for many sections across the whole text. We cannot, however, expect a unified meaning valid for a textual whole (either the whole *Zhuangzi*, or a part of it).



## SUMMARY

**Heaven and Man in the Zhuangzi: Reading a Heterogeneous Text**

This paper proposes a reading strategy for the *Zhuangzi* based on the distinction between “conceptual framework” and “argument”. It is argued that one conceptual framework can accommodate various arguments; conceptual frameworks are not the focus of the text – they consist of literary devices (shared vocabulary and terminology, literary *topoi*, narrative structures and topics) that are used in the text to form specific arguments. The paper opposes those approaches to the *Zhuangzi* which present the text (or a part of it) as a unified philosophical vision. The paper argues that every attempt to read the *Zhuangzi* as one philosophy (to translate the multi-faceted text into a philosophical treatise) is reductionist; it achieves philosophical coherence at the cost of sacrificing the richness of meaning we find in the text. One specific “conceptual framework” is analysed in this paper – the dichotomy of “heaven” and “man”. “Heaven” represents a cosmic power that can be adopted by human beings so that the human can fulfil his natural potential and live better (or more effectively) than within the confines of human society (“man”). The paper analyses a number of instances of the dichotomy in the *Zhuangzi* and shows that the dichotomy (a conceptual framework) is used differently in various contexts in the *Zhuangzi* and accommodates diverse arguments.

**Keywords:** *Zhuangzi*; early Chinese thought; cosmology; reading strategy; textuality.

Center for Chinese Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Masaryk University  
Arna Nováka 1  
602 00 Brno  
Czech Republic

DUŠAN VÁVRA  
dvavra@mail.muni.cz