

Zhuangzi: A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted by Guo Xiang. Trans. Richard John Lynn. Translations from the Asian Classics Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. Pp. lxxxix +712. \$140.00 hardcover, \$35.00 paperback.

Richard John Lynn has, in the course of a distinguished career, given us magisterial translations of the *Book of Changes* and the *Laozi*. Now he crowns these achievements with an equally impressive translation of the *Zhuangzi*. As with his earlier translations, this new translation of the *Zhuangzi* includes complete translations of the most important early commentaries.

Lynn's book comprises a hyper-direct literal and almost *mot-à-mot* translation of the complete text of the *Zhuangzi* and the whole of Guo Xiang's 郭象 (252?–312) philosophical commentary on this text. In addition, there is a wealth of footnotes with hyper-direct literal translations of the old sub-commentary by Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (608–669) as well as the old commentaries preserved by Lu Deming 陸德明 (550?–630) in his *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (c. 583). Together, these help us to make a crucial first step towards an understanding of the immense significance of Guo Xiang for Chinese intellectual history as a whole.

What we still need—and, thanks to Richard Lynn, are now much better equipped to work towards—is a detailed exploration of the philosophical significance of each paragraph, not only of the commentary itself, but also of the main text of the *Zhuangzi* as Guo Xiang appears to have understood it.

It is doubtful, as we shall see presently, that Guo Xiang actually understood, or even wished to understand, the poetic ironies and fictional flourishes of the book that bears Zhuangzi's name. But Guo certainly speaks as if he regarded the *Zhuangzi* literally as the work of the historical Zhuang Zhou 莊周 and thus, it would seem, basically concurs with Richard Lynn's description of the *Zhuangzi* as coming from Master Zhuang's ipsissima vox. The heading, "The Sayings of Master Zhuang: The Inner Chapters / The Outer Chapters / The Miscellaneous Chapters" occurs at the top of every single page of this new translation. All the chapters taken by Guo Xiang to be written in His Master's Voice, as it were, Richard Lynn dubs as "The Sayings of Master Zhuang," much as if the Chinese title had been *Zhuangzi jiyu* 莊子集語, along the same lines as *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子集語 (The Collected Sayings of Master Kong).

At this point it may be helpful to remind oneself that the sayings attributed to Zhuang Zhou are remarkably few, and that very little of the book is actually presented in the form of quotations from Zhuang Zhou. This being so, one wonders whether Guo Xiang could really be inviting us to read expressions like "Zhuangzi" as meaning "I, Master Zhuang": that would make Zhuangzi appear to be referring to himself as a "Master." Confucius, when referring to himself by name, did not call himself "Master Kong." Again, one wonders whether, in Chapter 33, where "Master Zhuang" does

come in for rather harsh personal invective, whether his name can plausibly be taken as self-referential. Furthermore, can Guo Xiang really have imagined that Zhuangzi ultimately took such a radically dim view of himself in that last chapter of the collection of his own writings? Might one not want to consider the possibility not only of misunderstandings but also of a certain thoughtlessness on the part of Guo Xiang?

Guo Xiang may have made mistakes, but they are nowhere called mistakes in Lynn's book, nor does Lynn mention the issue of misunderstanding. But one might be excused for thinking that failure to get the point and misconstructions of certain points are in fact widespread in commentaries both ancient and modern. Some of these misunderstandings can be profoundly revealing, it seems to me, as in the following example:

“It changes into a bird, whose name is the Peng.”

On this line, Guo Xiang comments:

“Whether the Kun and the Peng really exist I really don't know.” (Chap. 1, Beginning, p. 3)

Here—as elsewhere—it would help readers if the publisher had allowed the inclusion of the Chinese characters of the original text of the Guo Xiang commentary: 鵬鯤之實，吾所未詳也， which I would prefer to translate like this: “Of the reality of the Peng and the Kun, I am not quite sure.”

It emerges that Guo Xiang does not recognise fictional discourse when he sees it. Now the explicit display of an inability to distinguish the factual from the fictional might seem to be a disadvantage for someone who sets out to explain a creative work of literature that persistently and crucially plays on the rhetoric of fiction. For all his evident brilliance, if Guo Xiang is genuinely uncertain about the reality of the existence of the Peng and the Kun, then he is not in a good position to explain what is going on in this opening passage of the book. It would have helped if he had proved able to recognise at least some cases of the dominant literary device of fictionality in the text he has set out to explain.

In Guo Xiang one finds, perhaps not the most consistent of philologists, but a delightfully philosophical mind that is intermittently tempted to take off on a tangent from the text he is supposed to be explaining, sometimes on even more tangents than one. Jumping off from the text, he goes on to raise issues of great interest in his time—and of perennial interest in philosophical thinking. Fortunately for us, he never reins himself in with such phrases as “But I digress” or “*Revenons aux moutons.*” He has no reason to ask himself “Where was I?” because his commentary is neither merely the philological annotation of words nor merely the faithful philosophical *explication de texte*: his is, in fact, the business of *qing tan* 清談, “philosophical free speech.” There is, in his commentary, a non-derivative, philosophically playful, and analytically

ambitious activity that quite shamelessly takes off from the perspectives of the Zhuangzi texts. It is at these moments, when Guo Xiang enters a metaphysical realm—often problematic—of his own devising, that his text vibrates with intellectual life and excitement. One even finds oneself suspecting that such purely philological glosses as we do find in Guo Xiang might all just as well have been taken from other sources. At these moments, when Guo Xiang, inspired by Zhuangzi, finds his own philosophical voice, his text rises to become one of the most important monuments in Chinese intellectual history. Richard Lynn's new book makes a monumental contribution by sharing with us the results of decades of dedicated reflection on Guo Xiang's commentary and how it can be tackled in an uncompromisingly literal way to enable a deeper and more thoroughgoing exploration of the lines of thought and arguments that underlie Guo Xiang's discourse.

Getting to the ideological underpinnings of these lines of thought and philosophical arguments requires in-depth familiarity with the social, cultural and literary context of Guo Xiang's text. The eighty-nine page-long introduction, replete with 203 learned footnotes, is an eloquent testament to Richard Lynn's devoted effort to go beyond mere textual learning. A stimulating contribution to the historical ethnography of early mediaeval Chinese intellectual history, it includes a fine survey of Japanese, Chinese and anglophone scholarship on the life and times of Guo Xiang.

Guo Xiang is one of the great thinkers of ancient China, but to say this is not necessarily to say that he was the greatest commentator to have lived in ancient China. The essential point is that, like Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), he was an intellectual of a high order. Isabelle Robinet has drawn our attention to Guo Xiang's philosophy, but her work, written in French, has not received the attention it fully deserves. This gives us all the more reason to welcome Richard Lynn's thoughtful and well-informed account of the life and works of the commentator Guo Xiang: it is one of the major contributions of his book.

In addition to his rare insights into Guo Xiang's commentary, Richard Lynn offers us a rich and judicious selection from Cheng Xuanying's subcommentary to Guo Xiang. Not only is this an immense contribution to Zhuāngzǐ studies; I am convinced that, for a long time to come, students of *Zhuangzi* will recognise this book also as a fine study of Cheng Xuanying, who deserves—and to some extent gets in this book—serious philosophical attention in his own right.

Lynn's translation is based on Guo Qingfan's 郭慶藩 *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961). This authoritative edition, punctuated and edited by Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚, has long been the delight of all serious students of the Zhuangzi.¹

¹ Lynn usefully recommends a translation of the *Zhuangzi* by the Guizhou University linguist Zhang Gengguang 張耿光, published as *Zhuangzi quanyi* 莊子全譯 (Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1991).

However, I think mention should have been made of *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu* 南華真經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), with commentary by Guo Xiang and subcommentary by Cheng Xuanying. This is a sumptuous variorum edition that conveniently registers a number of important textual variants overlooked by Guo Qingfan, while focussing large print attention on some useful variants that are in Guo Qingfan's edition but "hidden away" in the fine print. Textual uncertainties are good to know about in texts as notoriously difficult as these old *Zhuangzi* commentaries.

Consider the following example from the famous passage about partitioning the water buffalo. Lynn translates the beginning: "Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui [King Hui of Liang]." We may leave aside the question of whether Ding was a kitchen minion rather than a cook, as Cheng Xuanying would have it. Nor do we need to discuss whether "water buffalo" may be the best way to identify *niu* 牛, neither necessarily male, nor necessarily gelded. But we do have an extensive commentary by Guo Xiang, which ends as follows: "One's knife remains intact through being deftly used, and similarly one's life remains intact because it is deftly nourished."²

One cannot help wondering how many more such substantial pieces attributed to Guo Xiang, containing important philosophical wisdom, have been overlooked by Richard Lynn because they are missing from the standard edition of Guo Qingfan that he uses as his base text.

For textual criticism of the main text of the *Zhuangzi*, Jiang Menma's 蔣門馬 *Zhuangzi huijiao kaoding* 莊子彙校考訂 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2019) is indispensable. It should surely be added to Lynn's bibliography.

Given the highly commendable amount of attention Lynn pays to Japanese scholarship, it is a little surprising that his bibliography does not include one of the earliest complete translations of the *Zhuangzi*, *Sōshi Sin'yaku* 莊子新釋, by Sakai Kanzō 坂井煥三, in *Shōwa kanbun sōsho* 昭和漢文叢書 (Tokyo: Kōdōkan, 1932). This should perhaps be mentioned for containing these interesting and useful features:

1. *kundoku* 訓讀, a complete hyper-direct and almost *mot-à-mot* translation of the *Zhuangzi*, which makes explicit exactly how the grammar of the ancient Chinese is construed;
2. *tsūyaku* 通訳, a fluent modern Japanese translation;
3. *taii* 大意, a brief summary of the content of each paragraph;

² Fang Yong 方勇, ed., *Zhuangzi zuanyao* 莊子纂要 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2012), p. 429. Though absent from Lynn's otherwise excellent bibliography, Fang quotes from this Guo Xiang commentary extensively. See also Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀, ed., *Nanhua zhenjing yihai zuanwei* 南華真經義海纂微 (Wenyuan ge sikuquanshu edition; photoreprintphoto reprint, Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), vol. 1057, p. 75.

4. *goyaku* 語訳, a profuse commentary on problematic phrases with extensive translations from a range of old and traditional commentaries, all of which are listed in the introduction.

Although Richard Lynn's book contains a direct and sometimes painfully literal translation, he does not often, in my opinion, rise to that crucial level of *tsūyaku*, readable hermeneutic interpretation, achieved by Sakai.

As excellent as this book is, every seasoned reader will inevitably encounter problematic places. Many of Lynn's interpretations are up for discussion. Take, for example, the fearlessly original and congenially lively translation of the following passage:

今之隱几者，非昔之隱几者也。

“He who slumps on his writing table now is not the same as those who hitherto have slumped on writing tables.” (Chap. 2, Beginning)

Whether *ji* 几 was really a table to write on, and not more like a small table or armrest, as we have often seen, merits detailed discussion. Lynn's dramatic vision of *yin* 隱 as “slumping” is already thought-provoking, but the plural of “those who hitherto have slumped” definitely breaks new hermeneutic ground and calls for a grammatical and philosophical discussion that goes well beyond the scope of this introductory review. But right or wrong, this interpretation provides ample grist for a philological discussion of what the text is trying to say.

Indeed, Richard John Lynn invites lively discussion everywhere in his book. There is much to disagree with for lovers of *Zhuangzi*. For this very reason, I trust his book will remain a source of inspiration for many years to come. As the summation of many years of devoted philological research, it prepares the ground for further disciplined, but ultimately always contestable, future sinological research on what is one of the most important books in our Chinese literary tradition.