

# Zhuangzian Literary Hermeneutic from Perspective of “Words of Three Kinds 三言”

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## Abstract

*Words of Three Kinds* depict both the writing style of the *Zhuangzi* and an especially useful way to interpret it. *Yuyan* shows the instability of meanings expressed; *Zhongyan* shows the truth revealed is no definite truth; *Zhiyan* justifies every interpretation. The analysis of words of three kinds implies *Zhuangzi's* writing mode might be speaking reckless words, forgetting the words but continuing to speak, urging readers to listen recklessly, embrace all the interpretations, perspectives and values, living a life beyond dichotomy and creating new meanings in their lives.

## Keywords

*Zhuangzi*, Literary Hermeneutic, Perspectivism, *Words of Three Kinds*

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## 1. Introduction

Imagine that you are dreaming of being a butterfly, suddenly you wake up and find yourself not a butterfly ... Imagine that you are a butterfly dreaming of being someone dreaming of being a butterfly, you suddenly “wake up” and find yourself not a flesh and blood human, but also not a butterfly ... Either way, your personal identity is uncertain. You feel frustrated, trying to figure out the ultimate truth. The harder you try, the more frustrated you become. You go from uncertainty to certainty, but each certainty reveals itself to also be uncertain, to require further justification. It's like an endless circle that will always make you return to the starting point.

At this point, there are three possibilities: 1) You stop trying; 2) you start to doubt the meaning of doing so, but still keep trying; 3) You start to doubt, to relinquish the end you were trying to achieve (the ultimate truth), and somehow you finally get free from the “endless circle” unconsciously.

The story will end if you choose 1), while you will be in the hermeneutic process of interpreting and generating new meanings if you choose 2) and 3), which are both part of the Zhuangzian hermeneutic. The book of *Zhuangzi* has fascinated the readers of all times, not only because of its imaginative metaphorical stories, but also due to the ambiguity of the text and the unconventional philosophical thoughts revealed between the lines. How shall we deal with that ambiguity, how shall we read or understand the *Zhuangzi* and how shall we respond to the world accordingly? It's necessary to go back to the *Zhuangzi* itself to try to find his suggestions.

Chapter 27 “Words Lodged Elsewhere” (*Yuyan*) and Chapter 33 “The World under Heaven” (*Tianxia*) have been long considered “the prologue of the whole book,” (Qian, 1998) especially the former. In those two chapters, *Zhuangzi* himself or his later followers depict the language style of the book as “words lodged elsewhere” *Yuyan*, “citations of weighty authorities” *Zhongyan*, and “spillover-goblet words” *Zhiyan*. The *Yuyan* Chapter offers a definition of words of three kinds, while the *Tianxia* Chapter gives a further supplement to these definitions. Let us take a closer look.

## 2. *Yuyan* 寓言: The Instability of Meanings Expressed

“Almost all of my words are presented as coming from the mouths of other people.” (Ziporyn, 2009) *Zhuangzi* defined the concept of *Yuyan* in the first sentence of Chapter 27. Before penetrating into the concept of *Yuyan*, we should take a look at the character of “Lodged” *Yu* since only this character, not the word *Yuyan*, appears in the Inner Chapters which are predominantly seen as the most authentic work of *Zhuangzi* himself.

Most Chinese commentators in ancient times assert that the character *Yu* 寓 means “send/entrust 寄”, which is defined as the original meaning of *Yu* in *Shuowen* 说文. However, the difference between *Yu* and *Ji* has been seldom discussed in China. “Jin Jiayi 金嘉锡, however, has paid special attention to this issue in detail, noting that the ancient pronunciation of *Yu* is the same as ‘say/talk/speak 语’, ‘fish 鱼’ and so on which are related closely to Dao. Although it’s still uncertain whether the language in *Zhuangzi*’s time had already stabilized enough to draw this conclusion confidently, Jin’s phonological interpretation provides another perspective for understanding *Yu*,” (Guo, 2015; Jin, 1986) and suggests a way forward in understanding the relation between “words lodged elsewhere” *Yuyan*, “citations of weighty authorities” *Zhongyan*, and “spillover-goblet words” *Zhiyan* all belong to Dao.

There are overlapping meanings for the words *Yu* 寓 and *Ji* 寄: the sending of A to B. Yet *Yu* is different from *Ji*: from the character itself, 1) *Yu* could also mean “lodge/lodging,” which emphasizes the state/condition of living or staying in another place/situation, while *Ji* stresses the action of someone sending something to a receiver. 2) The range of A, the thing being lodged, is more extensive in *Yu* than the thing that being sent in *Ji*.

The former could be some-body/thing/state/condition, while the latter usually isn't a human being. In the Inner Chapters, 3) *Ji* only appears once but *Yu* shows up five times in different situations with different usages in Guo Qingfan 郭庆藩's version. Therefore, a careful study of these usages might contribute to our understanding of the code of language operative at that time.

*Yuyan* could be interpreted as an abbreviation of "lodging A into words 寓之于言". Under this circumstance, the object A is uncertain; it could be seen as the meaning injected by the writer/speaker, with the specific word/phrase/sentence or language 言 as the lodging where that meaning will be put (probably for a short time). Considering the nature of "lodging," the meaning injected into the words is somehow different from the meaning the words conventionally/originally expressed. To be exact, there might therefore be four possible readings of "lodging A into words." From the perspective of *Yuyan*, the Zhuangzian hermeneutic model would be:

The Text: Non-conventional

↓

Zhuangzi's Attitude: The Separation of Signifier and Signified

↓

Readers' Interpretation: Always Doubt what the *Zhuangzi* Literally Means and Interpret it in the Exact Context

↓

Readers' Life: Non-conventional; Careful about Words

1) A general characteristic of language is pointed out here. When a word/character was "invented," the signifier had to describe the main characteristic of the signified. However, once there's a focus, there will be meanings omitted. So the signifier may not express the completeness of the signified per se. The aura of additional meanings could make it hard to fully understand the totality of the signified simply by means of words.

2) Back to the text itself, it reveals not only *Zhuangzi's* view of the language, but also a suggestion about how to read and understand the book. The *Zhuangzi* uses common and simple words to express uncommon and complicated ideas, during which "new meanings" are "lodged" in the characters. Thus, in order to better the understanding of the text, a reader has to be competent enough to break the conventional thinking mode and embrace radical thoughts through the seemingly simple texts.

3) The most important part of *Yuyan* should be the meaning, A. *Zhuangzi* deliberately put the meaning A into word(s) or character(s), which raises the following questions: what is A exactly? Why did *Zhuangzi* want to put A into the words/characters? How could a reader best figure it out? Therefore, reading through the lines and getting what's expressed by the seemingly conventional or simple ideas is the most essential way to get to *Zhuangzi* itself as closely as possible.

4) When readers accept the inefficiency of language in description, expression and communication, they will be extremely careful about words, about speaking.

Furthermore, they will question established concepts, which have been considered the Truth and open themselves to a more unconventional life.

Now let's go back to the descriptions of *Yuyan* in Chapter 27 and Chapter 33:

Almost all of my words are presented as coming from the mouths of the other people ... The nine-tenths or so attributed to others discuss a topic by borrowing an outside viewpoint. A father does not serve as matchmaker for his own son, for the praises of the father are no equal to those from the mouth of another—and the blame too then goes not to me, but to someone else! [In any case], those who agree will be responsive, while those who do not will object. For people call right whatever agrees with them and call wrong whatever differs from them.

He considered the world sunken in the mire, incapable of conversing seriously with himself, so he used spillover-goblet words for unbroken extension of his meanings, citations of weighty authorities for verification, words put into the mouths of others for broad acceptance. (Ziporyn, 2008)

There are three layers of meanings in the paragraphs above: 1) Most of the sentences in *Zhuangzi* belong to *Yuyan*. 2) What is *Yuyan*, why did *Zhuangzi* use it and/or what was the background that informs it? In short, WHAT is *Yuyan*, HOW and WHY did *Zhuangzi* use it? 3) How could the readers interpret the text of *Zhuangzi* through *Yuyan*?

If we consider the sentence of “A father does not serve as matchmaker for his own son ...” as a description of the case, the range of *Yuyan* could be downsized: only the words presented by another character except *Zhuangzi* or the authorial voice could be in the category of *Yuyan*. In that sense, the story of the money keeper, the story of the butterfly and many other stories narrated by *Zhuangzi* himself could not be treated as *Yuyan*. However, this is contradictory to the description of “Almost all of my words are presented as coming from the mouths of the other people”.

In Brook Ziporyn's translation above, he translated the character of 外 of 借外论之 as “an outside viewpoint,” but since in Chinese character 外 could mean anything that is outside oneself, so it's not limited to “viewpoints.” We may assume the sentence of “A father does not serve as matchmaker for his own son ...” as a metaphorical statement, which means if *Zhuangzi* used “this 此” to express “that 彼” or vice versa, that could be an example of *Yuyan*. “This” and “that” could be anything differing either sharply or mildly. Even if *Zhuangzi* tells a story about *Zhuangzi*, allegedly himself, as long as he considered himself as the other, or alienated himself, this could also be considered an example of *Yuyan*. *Yuyan* was used possibly to make the words “seem authentic” in an ironic way, because the background was and still is that people are more accepting for things/viewpoints similar to themselves.

Then comes the final question in this section—how can a contemporary reader understand and interpret all the words that belong to *Zhuangzi's Yuyan* in the text?

*Zhuangzi* used *Yuyan* to express A by B. In any case a reader may keep suspicious to what *Zhuangzi* was talking about all the time due to the characteristic of the separation of the signifier and the signified with changeable meanings. There are several possibilities here. For example, *Zhuangzi* might change meanings using similar words or talking the similar thing. There are two cases related to “Mastery of skill” in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3: Masters of specific fields’ sons were getting nowhere (Chapter 2) and the butcher Ding mastered cutting up the ox (Chapter 3).

When *Zhuangzi* discusses those masters who are frequently not good teachers, the whole context is:

When rights and wrongs waxed bright, the Course began to wane. What set the Course to waning was exactly what brought the cherishing of one thing over another to its fullest ... Zhao Wen’s zither playing, Master Kuang’s baton waving, Huizi’s desk slumping—the understanding these three had of their arts flourished richly. This was what they flourished in, and thus they pursued these arts to the end of their days. They delighted in them, and observing that this delight of theirs was not shared, they wanted to make it obvious to them, and thus some ended their days debating about the obscurities of “hardness” and “whiteness,” and Zhao Wen’s son ended his day still grappling with his father’s zither strings. Can this be called success, being accomplished at something ... Thus, the Radiance of Drift and Doubt is the sage’s only map. He makes no definition of what is right but instead entrusts it to the everyday function of each thing. This is what I call the Illumination of the Obvious. (Ziporyn, 2008)

The descriptions above serve to illustrate the concepts of the Radiance of Drift and Doubt and the Illumination of the obvious, but they also imply that those masters try to make their accomplishment obvious. Those masters belong to a “point” on the circle of Dao, but do not stand in the Course-Axis 道枢, which is the state of the Illumination of the Obvious that also embraces all the “points” of accomplishments and fragmentations. If those masters really tried to realize “the point,” they are standing in to its full extent; it would lead them to the opposite, namely, another point in the circle of Dao.

Butcher Ding is different from those masters above. He’s not just a “point” in the circle of Dao, but already at the Course-Axis. *Zhuangzi* uses Butcher Ding’s cutting up the ox to reveal how to nourish the “spirit”, to nourish life. He’s no longer holding onto one specific standpoint like those masters, but just trying to act or respond to the ox by his non-purposive awareness. When he laid the knife onto the ox, he seemed to have a specific standpoint but he went through which led him to a totally different standpoint, which was not planned before in his mind, but randomly decided by the configuration of the ox. Comparing with Butcher Ding, those so-called masters in Chapter 2 are still limited to the category of skill, while Ding’s response is “beyond skill”.

### 3. *Zhongyan* 重言: The Truth Revealed Is No-Definite Truth

*Zhongyan*, the citations of weighty authorities, takes up a large amount in the text of *Zhuangzi*. In Chapter 27 and Chapter 33, it says:

The seven-tenths or so that are presented as citations from weighty ancient authorities are meant to defuse garrulous faultfinding, eliciting agreement with the words of these “venerable elders” instead. [But in Fact], some of those who come before us in years, if they have not gone through the warp and the woof of things, from the root to the tip, in a way befitting their age, do not have any real priority over us. A man [of advanced years] with nothing to give him priority over others has not fulfilled the course of a human being, and a human being devoid of a human being should really just be called a stale, obsolete oldster ... He used citations of weighty authorities for verification. (Ziporyn, 2008)

There are two main interpretations of *Zhongyan*: Guo Xiang 郭象 commented that it should be *Zhongyan*, “the weighty authorities of the time 世之所重” while Guo Qingfan mentioned, “my father says 重 should be Chong, which means ‘repetition,’ as explained in the book of *Guang Yun* 广韵.” (Guo, 1985) 1) From Guo Xiang’s viewpoint, all the words “cited” by the weighty authorities of the time could be *Zhongyan*. Thus, *Zhongyan* could belong to *Yuyan* because it is lodging meanings into the other’s mouth. 2) From Guo Songtao 郭嵩焘, Guo Qingfan’s father’s viewpoint, it’s *Chongyan*, instead of *Zhongyan*, is the repetition of words. Thus, there would be an overlap between *Yuyan* and *Zhongyan*: *Yuyan* could be adduced repeatedly and *Zhongyan* could be depicted by the method of *Yuyan*.

Due to the description of Chapter 27, here Guo Xiang’s definition is more persuasive, but it must be applied metaphorically, meaning there might be several varying possibilities of *Zhongyan* in the text of *Zhuangzi*: the words “cited” 1) by the characters in the legend like the Yellow Emperor 黄帝 and Shennong 神农; 2) by the characters in history like Yao 尧, and Shun 舜; 3) by some important characters about in *Zhuangzi*’s time like Confucius and Laozi; 4) by imaginary characters who sound or should be weighty according to the context like Wang Ni 王倪 and Nu Ju/Lady Ju 女偶; 5) by the books or records, real or imaginary, such as the Equalizing Jokebook 齐谐. In almost all of them, *Zhuangzi* simply uses those characters or records, especially uses those authentic philosophers like Confucius and Laozi to express his own ideas, instead of the thoughts and speeches of those real individuals.

The depiction of *Kun* and *Peng*, quite unique and complicated in structure, involving the citations from both speaking characters and a written record, also using the method of repetition, which enfolds the other viewpoint of the definition of *Zhongyan*. Let us look at this example in detail.

At the beginning of Chapter 1, *Zhuangzi* presents a vivid picture of a big fish called *Kun* transformed into a big bird called *Peng*. This story is so unbelievable,

beyond our reason and imagination, but then *Zhuangzi* tells us this story is also recorded in a book, the Equalizing Jokebook. It's supposed to be more plausible because it's cited from an ancient book, which should be weighty. And the tone *Zhuangzi* uses there is quite serious, as if citing from an ancient Classic. However, the name of book is quite ironic—"Jokebook"—and the content it tells of is more like a fantasy than a reality. *Zhuangzi* seems to make a joke, probably satirizing for a) the trend of using the ancient books or records as historical realities as is done in Confucian works and b) the common assumption that things written in ancient times are more authentic. In doing so, *Zhuangzi* provides readers with a questioning eye for everything already written. In another extended perspective, the text of *Zhuangzi* is also a written book by an authority—Zhuangzi, though Zhuangzi himself probably didn't consider himself as an authority. Zhuangzi seems to deconstruct the author's authority and imply readers should not trust what he has said in the book.

After adding the cicada and the fledgling dove laughing at *Peng*, the story of *Kun* transforming into *Peng*, together with the jeering cicada and fledgling dove shows up again in the dialogue between Tang 汤 and Ji 棘, or more exactly in Ji's answering to Tang's question. There are several possible interpretations of two characters Tang and Ji here: 1) Both Tang and Ji are imaginary, perhaps metaphorical characters—Tang means Vastness while Ji means narrowness, according to the commentary from Jianwen 简文; 2) Tang was an empire in Shang dynasty while Ji was a gentleman in Tang's time. Since Ji 棘 and Ge 革 have the same pronunciation in ancient times, Ji probably was Ge Zicheng 革子成 in *the Book of Han Dynasty* 汉书, also Ji Zicheng 棘子成 in *the Analects* according to Guo Qingfan's commentary (Fang, 2012). If explanation 1) is right, the irony of *Zhuangzi* is obvious—a fantasy depicted at the beginning of the book is cited again through the mouths of imaginary characters, which emphasizes the fictitiousness of that story. However, every time *Zhuangzi* talks about that story, he added more details in a serious tone to make it believable. If explanation 2) is right, the story is cited again through the mouths of real people in history, which usually implies the story should be true. However, no matter how detailed the story is, it still cannot be real in the human world. By doing so, *Zhuangzi* seems to satirize those people who prefer quoting the ancient people to make their argument seem more credible and authentic. At the same time, it gives a hint that readers should not trust what ancient people have said.

From the example above, *Zhuangzi* may imply four layers of meanings, which could be seen as a hermeneutic model from the perspective of *Zhongyan*:

The Text: Non-conventional; Ironic

↓

Zhuangzi's Attitude/Truth Revealed: Doubting Authority and Truth Sense of Limitation

↓

Readers' Interpretation: Doubting what Zhuangzi Literally Means Aware that

## the Real Truth is Non-Truth



Readers' Life: Non-conventional; Doubting the Authority and the Truth Sense of Limitation

In Chapter 33, *Zhuangzi* states, “he used citations of weighty authorities for verification” But from the text of *Zhuangzi*, it could be seen that “for verification” is mostly in an ironic tone. The usage of *Zhongyan* is thus a language style, an uncommon way to express *Zhuangzi* himself. He seems to suggest that we shouldn't trust what's written down or what's said already in historical records or through the mouths of weighty figures. But why? What truth has been revealed by *Zhongyan*? For an answer, let's go back to the context of *Zhuangzi*: after the story of *Kun* transforming into *Peng* shows up twice, it's cited for the third time in a dialogue between Tang and Ji: Tang's asking Ji a question: “Do up, down, and the four directions have a limit?” Ji replied, “Beyond their limitlessness there exist another limitlessness”.

The two lines depict the reason why Ji cites the story of *Kun* and *Peng*. “up, down, and the four directions” are all the nouns of locality for basic orientations. So Tang actually asked a question whether there exists a limit, and Ji's answer is there's no limit according to our perception. The limitlessness of up, down and the four directions are all the feelings perceived by ourselves. However, our perceptions are not reliable due to the restrictions of our body and its perceptual apparatus. So, when it's considered “limitless,” the perspective of the speaker is restricted in the space of a certain area. But beyond the “limitless,” there's also a larger “limitless” out there. To see the larger “limitless,” the speaker has to break through his own perspective and see a bigger picture. But is the larger “limitless” the real “limitless”? The answer is no. Under these circumstances, written records and the words spoken by weighty figures can all only be partially true. The incidents in history were seen by someone who limited to a certain perspective and written or said from that certain perspective. The truth revealed by that certain perspective is thus also partial. Once there's a focus (truth), there will be an aura area circumscribing it, which cannot be covered, including but not limited to the changing social conditions in the past, present and future. The common truth we believe is usually non-truth. Radically speaking, “truth” is non-truth.

The story of *Kun* and *Peng* also emphasizes that claim. The cicada and the fledgling dove laugh at Peng, thinking they have already been soaring high in the sky 翱翔 “between the bushes and branches” and that “is the utmost form of flying.” In the perspective of the little birds, the utmost form of flying is fluttering around between the bushes and branches, and in doing so, they can get the feeling of “wandering far and unfettered 逍遥游,” so they do tell a “truth” about themselves. But this truth for the little birds is not true for the big bird *Peng*. However, is *Peng* already really wandering far and unfettered without any limit? The answer is still no. When *Peng* is soaring and flying high in the sky, people on the land may raise their heads and sigh, “The blue on the blue of the sky—is



that the sky's true color? Or is it just the vast distance, going on and on without end, that looks that way?" But "when *Peng*," who is wandering far and unfetters right in the sky, "looks down, he too sees only this and nothing more." But what's the difference between *Peng* and the little birds? *Peng* has been aware of the limits on himself, while the little birds think they are without limit.

After readers get all the signals in the text, they will question the truth of what *Zhuangzi* said here and there—does *Zhuangzi* really mean this in this context, does *Zhuangzi* really mean the same thing by saying the similar words in another context, is *Zhuangzi* already dwelling in "the center of the Course-Axis" and thus speaking ceaseless truth? Readers will probably start to scrutinize every line of *Zhuangzi*, trying to figure out what *Zhuangzi* really means in the exact context. When they start to talk, they will feel the danger of speaking immediately because of the sense of limit. Also, they will question all the so-called "common sense" and start to realize the only definite truth in the world is that there's no definite truth.

#### 4. Zhiyan 卮言: Every Interpretation Gets Justified

Chapter 27 says, "But all such words are actually spillover-goblet words, giving forth [new meanings] constantly, harmonizing them all through their Heavenly Transitions 卮言日出，和以天倪." So, *Yuyan* and *Zhongyan* all belong to *Zhiyan*, the spillover-goblet words.

*Zhuangzi* describes *Zhiyan* as follows:

When nothing is said, everything is equal. But words and this original equality are then not equal to each other. Thus it is that I speak only nonspeech. When you speech nonspeech, you can talk all your life without ever having said a word, or never utter a sound without ever failing to say something." Here comes a key word—"nonspeech".

So what kind of speech could be counted as "nonspeech"?

Then *Zhuangzi* goes further:

Thus, all things are right; all things are acceptable. So what words other than spillover-goblet words, harmonizing through their Heavenly Transitions, could remain in force for very long? All beings are seeds of one another, yielding back and forth their different forms, beginning and ending like a circle, so that no fixed groupings apply. This is called Heaven the Potter's Wheel. It is Heaven the Potter's Wheel that we see in their Heavenly Transitions." (Ziporyn, 2008)

Basically, there are a couple of questions to solve here. In solving them, the following structure of interpretation reveals itself:

The Text: Non-conventional; Nonspeech Speech

↓

*Zhuangzi*'s Attitude: The Ideal of Perspectivism; Non-dichotomy

↓

Readers' Interpretation of *Zhuangzi*: The Method of Non-dichotomy;

## Understanding Zhuangzi through Zhiyan



Attitude toward Interpretation itself: All the Interpretations Accepted; Misreading Gets Justified



Readers' Life: Non-conventional; Perspective

The character *Zhi* 卮 in *Zhiyan* can be seen as a goblet or a vessel. The less there is in the goblet/vessel, the more it can receive. If the goblet/vessel has the ability to keep emptying itself, keeping to the state of “not being full,” then it will keep having room for the new to come in, finally keep itself in a state of “becoming full” at all times. This process of constantly emptying itself and filling itself is reminiscent of “I lost myself 吾丧我” in Chapter 2. Actually, in *Zhuangzi* and other Daoist texts, the metaphor of “vesselization” is often used. In “I lost myself”, “I” and “myself” are both a signal of subject and the Self. But “I” is a vessel” and only when “I” keep emptying “myself”, can it achieve the effect of “a waiting for the presence of beings 虚而待物”. Therefore, *Zhiyan* could be seen as an ideal of Zhuangzi.

Though the concept of *Zhiyan*, *Zhuangzi* brings out a paradox of speech and non-speech, and emphasizes what he uses is non-speech speech. There is speech and non-speech in the daily life. Non-speech speech could be seen as an overturning of both speech and non-speech, like “I lost myself” is an overturn of I and Myself. So the non-speech speech could be understood as the “I” who has already lost “myself.” Once the body is formed and starts to contact the outside world, there’s something fully formed and completed in our minds 成心 or so called “pre-determined mind.” When I “lose myself”, I actually lose those mental habits shaped by a certain perspective. Non-speech speech is similar. In most conditions, when someone makes a speech, the purpose is to make a point, to let others accept his or her viewpoint. This kind of speech is determined by its origin in a certain limited perspective, so it is necessarily just a partial truth.

However, if someone could stand in the center of Heaven the Potter’s Wheel or Course-Axis where all the perspectives, all the standpoints, no matter how contradictory they are, are all accepted, the speech s/he makes will be out of every perspective, every standpoint, or to be exact, inside and beyond every perspective and standpoint. That explains why “when you speak nonspeech, you can talk all your life without ever having said a word, or never utter a sound without ever failing to say something.” Thus, when “you” stand in the center of the Heaven the Potter’s Wheel or Course-Axis, “you” accept all the standpoints, all the viewpoints and all the possibilities, like *Zhuangzi*, “When this axis finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none,” because it’s the perspective from which each thing is right and acceptable.

Also, when we speak from our own, our personal perspective, not only do we ignore the other possible perspectives, but also lack possible better knowledge

about our own perspective. How so? “You cannot know what Mount Lu really looks like since you are standing on Mount Lu,” said the poet Su Shi 苏轼 in the Song Dynasty. We can treat Mount Lu as a metaphor for the Self, and the outside world as the Other. If we stand out of ourselves, or beyond ourselves, we can see ourselves in a new perspective, see the advantages and disadvantages of our own perspective and gain a better understanding about our own perspectives.

*Zhuangzi* is not absolute about dichotomies such as that between the Self and the Other, this and that, “‘THAT’ posits a ‘this’ and a ‘that’—a right and a wrong—of its own. But ‘THIS’ also posits a ‘This’ and a ‘That’—a right and a wrong—of its own ... it has an endless supply of ‘rights,’ and an endless supply of ‘wrongs.’ Thus we have a circle, a Course-Axis.” (Ziporyn, 2008)

So basically, all the rights and wrongs, all the perspectives, belong to Dao, belong to the course. They might just be a point in the circle, revealing partial truth, but that partial truth might be the real truth in a certain perspective. Thus, all the interpretations, all the readings of *Zhuangzi* are reasonable in a certain angle, and those interpretations reveal partial truth in a certain perspective. That is to say, in a certain condition, the interpretation in a certain perspective can be true. Misreading is inevitable and all the interpretations are misreading in a way. Every interpretation gets justified.

When readers penetrate into the text of *Zhuangzi*, they may not trust the literal meaning of every line as it first appears to them. All the language *Zhuangzi* uses is *Zhiyan*, while *Zhiyan* contains all the different, opposite viewpoints. So readers have to find “the center of Course-Axis” in the text to figure out what *Zhuangzi* really means. Again, the context of each line becomes essential through the meaning-finding process. When readers encounter different interpretations of *Zhuangzi*, they may start to use the Zhuangzian way— not denying other interpretations that are different or even contradictory to the viewpoints they hold themselves, but trying to understand them with sympathy, finding out why others interpret in this way, what are their pre-understandings and their background of interpretation. Readers break their established perspectives and gain a better understanding of both other standpoints and the viewpoints they themselves held before, thus gaining the capability of seeing the issue in a new perspective, getting close to what the original text may try to show. The circle of interpretation is a process: after having a viewpoint of one’s own, accept all the other interpretations, try to understand their standpoints and pre-understandings, then read the text and think about the earlier viewpoints again to better understand one’s own viewpoint in a new perspective.

## 5. The Implications: Reckless Speaking/Listening 妄言/听, Forgetting the Words 忘言 but Going on Speaking 言

From the analysis above, the way of interpreting *Zhuangzi* through three kinds of words can be summed up as follows:

- 1) The text is non-conventional, and cannot be read literally. *Zhuangzi* ques-

tions a) established concepts, b) the ultimate or complete truth, c) the effectiveness of language and d) the dichotomy of the seemingly contradicting pairs such as this and that, right and wrong, self and the other...

2) Every line should be scrutinized in the exact context. *Zhuangzi* may a) use similar words to express different meanings, and use real characters to express his own ideas through *Yuyan*; b) pretend to quote the historical records and weighty figures' words to tell his own stories; c) stand in the center of the Course-Axis, embrace all the viewpoints, whether contradicting his or not, so it seems like he's changing his standpoint here and there literally until readers find out his real intentions, the center he's standing at instead of the points in the circumference.

3) The style of *Zhuangzi* is demanding for competent readers. But when readers start to read *Zhuangzi* in terms of the way the *Zhuangzi* is written, accepting the questioning spirit and the perspectivism that the *Zhuangzi* embraces, s/he will a) accept all the other interpretations with a questioning eye, digging out how and why other interpreters understand things the way they do, and bettering her/his understandings in light of a new perspective, b) respond to life accordingly—aware of the limit of the perception, standpoints, understanding with sympathy other values, embracing the diversity of the world. *Zhuangzi's* meaning keeps on being created again and again through that process.

The three descriptions lead to a continuous process of reckless speaking/listening 妄言/听, forgetting the words 忘言 and still speaking 言.

### 5.1. Reckless Speaking/Listening

In Chapter 2, when Ju Quezi asks Chang Wuzi a question about the sage, and Chang Wuzi replies with “I’m going to try speaking some reckless words. How about listening just as recklessly?” Then Chang tells the famous paragraph of the great awakening, “When I say you are dreaming, I’m dreaming too”. (Ziporyn, 2008)

*Zhuangzi* here gives us a simple model for interpreting his text. He’s trying to speak reckless words, and readers should listen recklessly. “Try 尝,” “speak,” “listen” and “reckless 妄” are the key words here.

The word “try” shows *Zhuangzi's* attitude toward language, truth and his “standpoint”—his perspectivism, which is to say, his feeling of limit, like the feelings of *Peng* when he flies high in the sky and looks down “seeing only this and nothing more,” like an outsider’s feeling when s/he heard the little birds soaring up and high 翱翔 “between the bushes and branches” satirically, as that is taken to be “the utmost form of flying.” At the same time, “try” also means the “action” is probably hard to accomplish.

By “speaking reckless words” and “listening recklessly,” *Zhuangzi* makes a definition for his words and announces his expectations for his readers. In the text it is Chang Wuzi telling Ju Quezi a paragraph of *Zhiyan* about dreaming; but it might be seen as *Zhuangzi* speaking the paragraph to his readers through the

mouth of Chang Wuzi. Who uses “reckless” to describe his own words? It will be the person who feels the danger of speaking, the danger of trying to speak from a fixed perspective, the danger of trying to express oneself. So the reckless words may sound absurd, casual or even self-contradictory or total nonsense, but it comes from close, serious and thoughtful considerations. When readers listen to those words, they should not take them too seriously—not 1) using the scientific, logical and linear mode of thought, or 2) using the fixed, well-accepted, conventional concepts to understand.

Thus should we conceive a successful communication between *Zhuangzi* and his readers. “Reckless” seems to be a state easy to achieve, but in *Zhuangzi*’s context, reckless is something we have to “try,” to make efforts to accomplish.

## 5.2. Forgetting the Words

Forgetting is essential to *Zhuangzi*’s thought. Using words of three kinds is somehow a revelation of the forgetting of words. The latter words could be understood in the way of conventional thinking and believing about words—belief in their efficiency for expression and communication. However, when a word becomes a word, when someone names something from a certain perspective, they will necessarily be omitted meanings the word cannot cover. As mentioned above, the signifier cannot describe the signified fully.

Forgetting words becomes important. But what is real forgetting? In Chapter 5, *Zhuangzi* says, “where Virtuosity excels, the physical form is forgotten. But people are unable to forget the forgettable, and instead forget the unforgettable—true forgetfulness!” What are the forgettable and the unforgettable? “There is no being that is not ‘that’. There is no being that is not ‘this.’ But one cannot be seeing these from the perspective of ‘that’: one knows them only from ‘this’ [i.e., from one’s own perspective].” Therefore, people usually forget something that is already in their minds, already accepted and believed in their minds, which is a this for them, while people usually cannot forget something different or contradicting from/to their concepts, which is a that for them.

Therefore, forgetting the words is to 1) forget the fixed role the word already has, 2) forget the literal meaning of the word due to the separation of the signified and the signifier, and most importantly, to 3) be aware of the danger of speaking from within the limits of a fixed perspective and thus to forget the distinctions among different viewpoints in speeches.

Now readers are lost in all kinds of perspectives and the words through which those perspectives are shown. Then, what does *Zhuangzi* do and what should the readers do? Quit speaking?

## 5.3. Go on Speaking

The real forgetting, the true forgetting is not to forget completely, but to forget the unforgettable, which breaks the typical dichotomy. So after forgetting all the disputes among words and embracing all the different standpoints and values in

the world, *Zhuangzi* doesn't quit speaking due to the limitations of the words, but goes on speaking. But this speaking is different from the speaking before he could forget all the disputes among the words and embrace all the different standpoints and values in the world. It has undergone a process, a process of changing the standpoint/perspective when speaking, from a certain fixed standpoint/perspective to a panoramic standpoint/perspective.

Different from *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* keeps speaking in the text, though he realizes the danger of speaking, the danger of setting up a viewpoint, as is said in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5: "only a true Virtuoso can understand what is unavoidable and find peace in it as his own fate." The limitation of words in expression and communication is unavoidable. When someone starts to speak, there's a viewpoint decided by his certain perspective, which cannot be the ultimate truth, which is also the unavoidable.

But *Zhuangzi* finds peace in this. "Finding peace 安" and going on speaking is not an easy work. In the context of speaking, the process of finding peace means that someone recklessly speaks and listens, tries to forget words and go on speaking in a new perspective. There's a tension in "finding peace." It's like Butcher Ding's cutting up the ox: he has "found peace" in the body of the ox, yet he still needs to be very careful when encountering clustered tangles. Therefore, readers keep interpreting the tangles as *Zhuangzi* keeps speaking.

Now, let's go back to the story at the beginning. Imagine you are dreaming of being a butterfly; suddenly you wake up and find yourself not a butterfly ... Imagine you are a butterfly dreaming of being someone dreaming of being a butterfly; you suddenly "wake up" and find yourself not a flesh and blood person, or not a butterfly... Either way, your personal identity is uncertain. But you won't feel frustrated if you find yourself in the butterfly, so that "That' emerges from 'This', and 'This' follows from 'That'." In the process, you accept all the natural distinctions between yourself and a butterfly, start to empty, lose, forget yourself, and you start to see yourself in a butterfly. Whether you are *You* or a butterfly (your personal identity) is not important any more. Then you could see things from a perspective outside of yourself and gain a better understanding about yourself and life itself. This process is not easy, like finding peace in chaos. That is an interpretation of both *Zhuangzi* and your own life. Like *Zhuangzi* says, "All beings are seeds of one another, yielding back and forth their different forms, beginning and ending like a circle, so that no fixed groupings apply".

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