

## MENTAL FASTING IN THE STUDY OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY: LIU XIAOGAN VERSUS ESTHER KLEIN\*

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**Abstract.** *Inspired by a dialogue in Zhuangzi, I distinguish three interconnected layers in academic debates. On the top, there is contention in terms of knowledge: facts, theories, hypotheses, etc. Below that level are usually unacknowledged, but nevertheless influential, emotions. On the bottom lies an infinite realm of tenuous reality or unshaped potential. I argue that a more explicit recognition in academia of the two lower levels – the sensitivities that are involved as well as our overwhelming ignorance about the object of study – would benefit research in Chinese philosophy. As an illustration of this three-layered approach I analyse in detail the response of Liu Xiaogan to a paper by Esther Klein on the Zhuangzi. The real target of my interest is not these two specific scholars, but a very common phenomenon in academia that they illustrate.*

**Keywords:** *Zhuangzi, Inner Chapters, active ignorance, Liu Xiaogan, Esther Klein*

Some people find occasional fasting a hard but rewarding exercise, which makes them more aware of the subtle nuances in taste when they resume their normal diet. The same holds, I argue, for “fasting with the mind”. The occasional and temporary attempt to avoid concepts and jargon that we often consider necessary for interpreting Warring States (453–221 BCE) or Han (206/202 BCE–220 CE) master-texts, makes us more alert in reading these sources. This is not a plea for avoiding foreign or

anachronistic terminology and returning to a supposedly pristine type of Chinese thinking, something that is both impossible and unwanted (Defoort 1999: 4-8). But it is an invitation, inspired by the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, to actively pause.

This paper first proposes a view on interpretation that distinguishes three important levels in scholarly disagreements: of knowledge, emotions, and ignorance. It then applies this to one specific academic debate, incidentally also about the *Zhuangzi*, namely Liu Xiaogan’s response to a paper by Esther Klein. This case study calls attention to the emotional aspects of academic debates that are stranded between proclaimed certainties on the one hand, and an appreciation of ignorance on the other. The *Zhuangzi* thus plays a double role in

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this paper: as inspiration for a methodology and as illustration of its application, but not as a text to which I claim to add any novel interpretation or historical information.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Knowing, Feeling and Emptiness: Hermeneutics of Informed Ignorance

“The World among Humans” (人間世 *Renjianshi*) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* begins with a conversation between Zhongni 仲尼 (Confucius) and his most beloved disciple, Yan Hui 顏回, who wants to set out on a political mission to the state Wei 衛. The master warns him against the dangers of lecturing others, especially brutal rulers such as the king of Wei. Yan Hui should attain a certain attitude himself before trying to influence others. “First preserve it in yourself and only then preserve it in others. If what you preserve in yourself has not been settled yet, how do you have the liberty to manage the actions of a violent man?” 先存諸己而後存諸人。所存於己者未定，何暇至於暴人之所行？ The master also points out that “knowledge emerges from contention” 知出乎爭 and that it should not be heralded. He subsequently advises his disciple to “fast with the heart-mind” 心齋, which he explains as follows: “Do not use your ears when listening to something, but your mind. And do not use your mind when listening to something, but your energy” 無聽之以耳而聽之以心。無聽之以心而聽之以氣。 That energy, he explains, amounts to “being tenuous/receptive and await

what comes” 氣也者虛而待物者也。 And this “tenuousness is fasting with the mind” 虛者心齋也。 Zhongni admits that his advice is not easy to follow, since “he has heard of knowing with knowledge, but never of knowing without knowledge” 聞以有知知者矣，未聞以無知知者也， which is like flying without wings or walking without touching the ground (*Zhuangzi* 4: 8/16-10/14).<sup>2</sup>

This is a tentative abbreviation of a well-known dialogue that has often been translated and discussed.<sup>3</sup> I do not join these discussions, nor do I claim to provide a better interpretation of Confucius’ advice, but I use its structure to distinguish three levels in academic debates: while scholarly contention usually takes place on the level of knowledge (1.1), there exists a deeper dimension, which is hardly appreciated or addressed, namely the emotions (1.2). Without reducing academic debates to mere sensitivities, I try to pay positive attention to their emotional underpinnings. A crucial step for doing this is by acknowledging a yet deeper level of unshaped reality or lack of solid certainty in our relation to the texts (1.3).

### 1.1. Knowing and Contention

Academic discussions are usually about knowledge in a wide sense: facts, interpretations, hypotheses, theories, etc. Opposition

<sup>1</sup> The unity and authenticity of the authorship and editorship of the *Zhuangzi* is the topic of debate in part 2 of this paper, but it is irrelevant to my methodological use of the text.

<sup>2</sup> References to the *Zhuangzi* are from Lau (2000). The chapter number is given first, followed by a colon and then the page number and line number separated by a slash.

<sup>3</sup> As for the translations, see e.g. Huang (1983: 81-83, 87-90), Graham (1986: 66-69), Mair (1994: 29-33), and Chen (1995: 107-121). As for studies, see e.g. Billeter (2004), Graziani (2009: 446-50), Coutinho (2013: 107), and Kohn (2014: 125-126).

and contention make them thrive. In the field of Chinese philosophy, for instance, Zhuangzi's supposed relativism, scepticism, primitivism, naturalism, or mysticism have given rise to a wealth of scholarly studies. Even though disagreement may sometimes be sharp, the academic exchange is usually meaningful and relatively satisfying because the opponents belong to the same discipline and share a number of assumptions and concepts. Philosophers can also interact with other disciplines, as in discussions on the dates and provenance of a book's authors or the person to whom it is named, such as Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (c. 370–290 BCE) in the case of the *Zhuangzi*. As long as history remains in a subordinate role – as *ancilla philosophiae* – tracing information about the masters who supposedly invented a philosophy, debated with others, and founded a school or (sub-)lineage, the contention still focuses on facts and interpretations that are generally considered meaningful. Despite disagreements, the discussion is largely supported by a relatively shared basis.

But as soon as a discipline outside philosophy takes up a role as equal partner rather than merely its servant, it risks to undermine philosophical constructions and change the nature of the contention. The knowledge produced in history or archaeology departments sometimes reminds us of how extremely little we know with certainty about the Warring States period. Recently acquired information on the basis of manuscript studies, for instance, confirms earlier claims that often presumed entities such as “books”, “authors”, “schools”, “titles”, and “philosophies” may have been unclear, non-existent, or slowly emerging entities in that age. This knowledge, in turn, suggests that much of our current portrayals are historically contingent

and shaped by various layers of interpretive frames, which have all contributed over time to the current object of philosophical research. Because this type of historical research may question the assumptions on which the philosophical interpretation of early master-texts generally thrives, it is often considered a threat. Even though research on the upper level, discussing hypotheses and checking data, is undeniably an important and dominant part of scholarly research, this paper turns to the lower levels which easily risk being overlooked.

## 1.2. *The Level of Emotions*

Undermining views are less easy to handle than clear oppositions regarding a commonly shared set of academic items. They are met with a wide array of possible reactions among which I distinguish three types.

First, there has been a variety of attempts by philosophers to address or even incorporate the views of historians, archaeologists, linguists, and sinologists. These attempts have sometimes resulted in robust methodological reflections concerning the type of consistency that one can attribute to mostly multi-authored, heavily edited, age-old, transmitted or excavated, possibly very corrupt texts. While sometimes adapting their interpretations, these scholars have also pointed out that a philosophical reading of such texts remains legitimate even if there are uncertainties about the authorship, growth, editorial history, and intellectual affiliation of (parts of) the various master-texts. They argue that, at different stages in Chinese history, each of these texts has in its totality spoken to an audience, and that all these conversations together constitute the large dialogue in which we still take part. This

philosophical response to non-philosophical information is indeed both legitimate and fruitful. But it does not consider these possibly undermining data as philosophically relevant in themselves; they are merely acknowledged and accepted as hurdles to be cleared – often in an introduction or the footnotes – before moving to the real business of constructing a philosophical interpretation of the texts. In contrast to these responses, I try to evoke, in the third layer of the methodology presented here, the very awareness of the enormous extent of our ignorance as a source in itself of philosophical inspiration.

A second way to handle information that seems to undermine one's philosophical research is to disregard challenges from alien disciplines, and to hold separate conferences where "the others" are denounced in the exclusive presence of insiders. Even though this attitude may seem to sin against the scientific aspirations of our academic endeavour, a measure of intellectual stubbornness in academia is normal and even legitimate. This phenomenon has been discussed in the decades following Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962): due to some degree of dependence on a paradigm or a fundamental set of assumptions, researchers will not lightly sacrifice their basic narrative because of apparently disturbing facts, but rather establish *ad hoc* hypotheses to protect the paradigm. They might even, more or less consciously, accept some degree of "theory-induced blindness".<sup>4</sup> As for the master-texts

more specifically, scholars in the past, as well as modern academics, have inevitably constructed various narratives in order to make sense of some textual fragments and heavily edited sources. Aside from the regional and temporal variety of such endeavours, individual scholars also have their own style, hobby-horses, ways of thinking through the material, and attachment to academic role models. On top of all that, the existence and social aura of the various academic disciplines provides us with a stable income, a network, chances to see the world, intellectual satisfaction, and personal self-respect. All these epistemological, social, and emotional reasons may contribute to a certain extent of intellectual bias. Even though such biases may sometimes invite correction, I believe that we would also gain from self-reflectively seeing, admitting, describing, and perhaps even exploiting the specificity of our own approach. The double advantage of such an acknowledgment could be a growing tolerance toward other scholars' idiosyncrasies on the one hand, and a diminished rigidity of some of one's own assumptions on the other.

As opposed to the above two acceptable types of philosophers' reaction to what they might consider undermining claims from other disciplines, the third one is less promising because it is driven by unrecognized emotions. For the full mix of reasons mentioned above, it is normal that philosophers experience some emotions when historians, archaeologists, or palaeographers undermine the major stepping stones on which their work relies, by throwing doubt on the historical portrayals of the masters, the consistency of their thought, the unity of the books named after them, the affiliations associated with them, the reliability of chap-

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<sup>4</sup> Kahneman (2001: 277) explains such blindness as follows: "once you have accepted a theory and used it as a tool in your thinking, it is extraordinarily difficult to notice its flaws. [...] You give the theory the benefit of the doubt, trusting the community of experts who have accepted it."

ter titles, the meaning of some characters, etc. A lack of reflection upon these emotions, however, can have some pernicious consequences. The first is a tendency to reformulate the opponent's expressions of uncertainty into claims of utmost certainty, which is the default attitude at the upper level, namely of contending knowledge. Informed doubt about the existence of a master, a school, a book, an author, or the dating of a text is then turned into confident claims about their non-existence. But pointing out the mere gaps of evidence for the entities that populate our philosophical interpretations does not necessarily amount to asserting with absolute confidence that there were no such entities. A second and related unfortunate result of unrecognized emotions is that complex opinions risk to be reduced to simple dichotomies – “in favour” or “against” a specific view, “believing” (*xin* 信) or “doubting” (*yi* 疑) antiquity (*gu* 古), sometimes even presented in terms of “respect” versus “disrespect” for the early masters and the whole Chinese intellectual heritage. In the most extreme cases, any expression of doubt is perceived as an iconoclastic attack on the Chinese tradition. Conversely, the archaeological discovery of some scraps of text is then positively used to strut the full existence of a certain book (e.g. the *Laozi*) including the current narrative surrounding it, without any further questions. By immediately framing new information in terms of such dichotomies, one leaves little space for the discovery of disturbing facts, subtle nuances, and lingering uncertainty. Even attempts to “explain” (*shi* 釋) the past often end up in this default template, not only because philosophers project historians' remarks into that light,

but sometimes also because the latter fall for such certainties.<sup>5</sup> What forces debates into this recurrent mould is, in my eyes, a combination of unrecognized emotions with, on a deeper level, the lack of appreciation for ignorance.

### 1.3. *Unshaped Potential*

An awareness of the slippery stones on which one steps can come in flashes, causing exhilaration, and temporarily undermining certainties rather than adding any to them. Where do you find one who “knows how we rely on what our knowledge does not know in order to know” 知恃其知之所不知而後知? It is like crossing a river and having to step on rocks that are not all as stable as one had thought. When being aware of this, one still relies on them for crossing the water, while encountering occasional moments of shock, vertigo, caution, and uncertainty. “Enough! Enough! There is no place you can escape it” 已乎。已乎。且無所逃。(25: 75/17-18). The authors of the *Zhuangzi* seem to enjoy this destabilizing experience. And by giving voice to it, they find some sort of stability where there is none. Readers who recognize this experience admire the book for expressing it. The awareness of an ultimately unfounded foundation shows that the orderly world in which we live could have been shaped (*xing* 形) differently, and that underneath there always remains a threatening as well as liberating level of unshaped reality, the empty, tenuous, receptive, or unshaped

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<sup>5</sup> Makeham (2008: 208-233) gives a detailed account of the cultural reconstruction and identity building going on in contemporary China under the label of “explaining antiquity.”

(*xu* 虛), never solid enough to draw final conclusions.

Knowledge that undermines dominant narratives about early Chinese philosophy reminds us that there is much that we do not know for certain about the Warring States era, and that consecutive interpreters throughout history have inevitably restored the picture by filling the gaps. The ideal of a full-blown philosophical picture, more specifically, dates from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While intellectual attempts to defend and solidify such narratives are legitimate, occasional attention for the unshaped reality underlying them can also be philosophically exciting. Thinking, according to Hannah Arendt, is like a wind that manages “to undo, unfreeze, as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thought-words (concepts, sentences, definitions, doctrines)”. She acknowledges that it “inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect” on the “frozen thoughts” (Arendt 1978: 174-75). This type of thinking, unfreezing, or un-knowing is no lazy unwillingness to know, but intellectually challenging. “Disbelieving is hard work”, says Kahneman when describing resistance against the luring power of theory-induced blindness (Kahneman 2011: 277; see also Kohn 2015: 175-76). Rather than only looking at the philosophical construction ahead, one occasionally looks back into the indiscriminate fog by questioning the basic concepts on which it relies. This very exercise, I believe, is philosophically exciting. It is not merely the “imaginative back and forth” level of articulation that Shun Kwong-loi locates between textual analysis and philosophical construction (Shun 2009: 459), but an attempt to make (some of) the manifold layers of our interpretation more

visible. Fasting with the mind in academia can be such an active cultivation of un-knowing, calling into question one’s own basic narratives.

### *Un-knowing and knowledge*

This type of un-knowing is not mere ignorance but, on the contrary, related to knowledge in a variety of ways. First, there is a positive correlation between mental fasting and the appreciation of what, for the time being, we think we do know about manuscripts, chapter titles, events, master figures, and the pre-Han versions of extant texts: excavated materials do not come in books and often lack titles or explicit references to masters or schools. An increasing awareness of the un-shaped nature of the original data is itself in-formed by current, admittedly tentative, knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Second, this awareness of fragmented knowledge about the oldest facts concerning the master-texts increases interest in the consecutive paradigms that have shaped their portrayal, such as Han sources presenting masters as authors (Kern 2015), and early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars turning them into philosophers (Makeham 2012). More specifically, studying the *Zhuangzi* arouses interest in those scholars who may have contributed to shaping the book and the major lines of interpretation, such as Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 CE), Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 663 CE), and A.C. Graham (1919-91). Historical knowledge is hence both the cause and the result of active un-knowing.

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<sup>6</sup> For titles, see e.g. work of Lin (2004: 7-9, 48-50). For manuscripts, see e.g. Boltz (2005), Richter (2013: 1-16, 171-187), and Giele (2003). For lineages, see e.g. Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan (2003).

This wealth of non-philosophical information, thirdly, becomes philosophically interesting when we focus on the contingency of our own narrative. Like Arendt's historically informed reflection on the nature of Western philosophy, research of a Warring States master is also a never ending search for the foundations of one's own way of thinking. A fourth result of felling some mental trees, is that new information bursts forth like saplings in a cleared forest.<sup>7</sup> Novel readings can emerge by even slightly diminishing the rigidity of all the entities that generally populate our philosophical narratives. For example, the fact that the *Zhuangzi's* seven *Inner Chapters* (*Neipian*) might perhaps not be the oldest or most authentic part of the book – Klein's claim to which we turn in the second part of this paper – provides an occasion to read the book backward and with a fresh mind-set.<sup>8</sup> Hence, self-knowledge on the one hand, and unexpected insights in the material on the other hand, are the two philosophical rewards of an exercise in actively un-knowing.

### *Un-knowing and attitude*

Another result from the positive acceptance of un-knowing, and perhaps more important than these four types of knowledge, is a possible influence on one's academic attitude, which can also be characterized

in four ways. The first is wonder. The idea that the *Inner Chapters* of the *Zhuangzi* might constitute the book's youngest part may be uncomfortable and disturbing, but it is also exhilarating and liberating. An intellectual joy pops up when one discovers well-informed reasons not to remain stuck within a relatively fixed narrative. Philosophy is the discipline that should most cherish this intellectual experience of wonder since it not only trains scholars to play well according to the rules, but also to occasionally challenge these very rules – its jargon, assumptions, or concepts. A second characteristic of this attitude is humility (also a meaning of *xu* 虛), resulting from the awareness of uncertainty. Tentativeness is then appreciated, and doubt is not merely considered a temporary disturbance of intellectual certainty. A third aspect of this attitude is mildness. The doubts that one expresses should retain some degree of tenuousness, remain soft and flexible, and not necessarily grow into a certainty of the opposite claim. Well-informed doubts come in flashes of awareness, influence our knowledge about a topic, but do not necessarily replace it. The fourth characteristic of this scholarly attitude is self-reflection: Whatever topic we study – be it Socrates, Zhuangzi, or Nagarjuna – we are also questioning ourselves. And self-knowledge is a field in which expertise is always far from complete.

By thus reflecting not just on conceptual presuppositions but also on one's attitude, I think that studying the master-texts also changes us a bit, making us somewhat more attentive and mild toward colleagues and students, and perhaps even family and friends. This is not because of the deep or

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<sup>7</sup> "Felling trees" is how Wieger (1984: 36) explains the meaning of the character *wu* 無 (lack, vanish). However inspiring as an image, this etymology is probably not correct. See <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/lexi-mf/search.php?word=%E7%84%A1> [accessed on November 30, 2016].

<sup>8</sup> This experience has actually guided most of my recent research on the *Mozi*. See e.g. Defoort (2015; 2017).

supposedly moral content that is imparted in these texts, but because of the methodological acceptance of some degree of un-knowing. Such a changed attitude, however, is not exclusively generated by a theoretical acceptance of doubt, not even by a firm determination to turn this acceptance into an attitude. The conviction that I have tried to defend here and the scholarly attitude accompanying it, are to some extent, I believe, the result of something else, a physical state, a bodily experience that resonates in Zhongni's advice to "first preserve it in yourself before preserving it in others." But considering the academic constraints of this paper, I will not further elaborate on this point.

## 2. A Case Study: Liu Xiaogan's Response to Esther Klein

Leaving behind the methodological reflections, we now turn to one specific case-study as a recent example of academic exchange among two *Zhuangzi* specialists: Esther Klein and Liu Xiaogan. The former is a young scholar who wrote a substantive *T'oung Pao* article 'Were there "Inner Chapters" in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*' (2010). In this paper she questions the chronological priority of the *Inner Chapters* in the book *Zhuangzi*, along with some related assumptions concerning their internal coherence, their authorship, and their existence or status during the Warring States period. These claims can be disturbing since many philosophical studies of the *Zhuangzi* attribute at least this part of the book to one original philosopher, which is more than the mere author-function that

Klein ascribes to the voice perceived in the text.<sup>9</sup>

The latter scholar, Liu Xiaogan, has since his doctorate (Liu 1988) been one of the major *Zhuangzi* authorities of our generation and has, most recently, edited the *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy* (2015), with a substantial part on the *Zhuangzi* containing his own research. Without joining the debate or merely repeating it, I use Liu's response to Klein as an illustration of the methodological reflections presented above. While contention of knowledge catches the eye, it relies on an emotional attachment to deeper convictions shaping it (2.1), and to a specific attitude toward the unknown (2.2). The incapacity to communicate in academia is often due to these unacknowledged lower levels.

### 2.1. From Facts to Emotions

On the level of knowledge – factual information and hypotheses – Liu and Klein are both impressively well informed, not only concerning the *Zhuangzi* and its textual history, but also on related scholarship, archaeological finds, and the surrounding intellectual history. Klein's evidence for doubting the chronological priority of the *Inner Chapters* is that they, as opposed to some Outer or Mixed chapters, are never explicitly quoted or mentioned in received or excavated sources before the late Western Han dynasty. The historical existence

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<sup>9</sup> The "creation of an author-function is a nearly inevitable consequence of 'our way of handling texts' (where 'our' may be expanded to include traditional Chinese authors as well as modern Western ones)" (Klein 2010: 308). For reflections on authorship in general and in relation to early Chinese texts, see also Harbsmeier (1999) and Schwermann (2014: 37-42).



of Master Zhuang is also little attested in early sources except for the book named after him. And other transmitted or excavated contemporary texts do not explicitly confirm the existence or importance of the *Inner Chapters*. All this suggests that the *Inner Chapters* may perhaps not constitute the earliest stratum of the *Zhuangzi*, and may not have been one coherent set in the Warring States, let alone a canon of Daoist philosophy (Klein 2010: 306-07, 356-57, 360-61). But considering our overwhelming lack of knowledge concerning the Warring States period, all these doubts do not necessarily amount to a confident denial of the dominant portrayal. In other words, it is not inconceivable that older references to the *Inner Chapters* have all been lost, or that textual overlap with them in other early sources (e.g. *Lü shi chunqiu*) are in fact cases of implicit borrowings from the *Zhuangzi*. While “the absence of evidence does not equal the evidence of absence”, Klein’s major contribution is to make us “rethink the traditional beliefs about the authorship and structure of the early *Zhuangzi* text” (Klein 2010: 299, 354). At least in my reading of her work, Klein’s research offers us well-informed doubt rather than alternative certainties.

Liu Xiaogan’s recent *Dao Companion* contains 550 pages of scholarship concerning Daoist philosophy, with Part II dedicated to the *Zhuangzi* (Liu 2015: 129-237). That part consists of four chapters, two of which are authored and one co-authored by Liu himself. Exactly one footnote is explicitly dedicated to a presentation and discussion Klein’s work (Liu 2015: 131 n1). Considering the undermining potential of her findings, I believe that one possible

reason for this scant treatment is theory-induced blindness and emotional rejection. Liu’s insistence on theories and naked facts only strengthen this suspicion.

### *The “fifth theory”*

An important task at the level of knowledge is the formulation of hypotheses. The context in which Liu briefly discusses Klein’s paper is one of contending theories. Having organized previous *Zhuangzi* research into four theories, Liu describes a recently emerged “fifth theory.” It differs from all the others in that it does not share “a common assumption that the *Zhuangzi* must include the work of an author, Zhuangzi, and that the *Zhuangzi* was a distinct work, a book”. Liu speculates that “this theory seems to be supported by Esther Klein, who suggests that the conventional position, that the *Inner Chapters* comprise the core and earliest section of the *Zhuangzi* book, might be totally wrong; those chapters could have been selected by a Han dynasty editor”. Hence, “if the *Zhuangzi* was originally a mere collection of scrolls instead of a book, it suggests that the book as we have it today may have nothing to do with the person Zhuangzi” (Liu 2015: 131). Thus far the presentation of Klein’s tentative views is accurate.

But an infelicitous mechanism takes over when Liu starts labelling her expressions of doubt as the “No Specific Author theory” and the “Any Time Collection theory”, depending on the focus of the claim: the author or the formation of the book (Liu 2015: 131-32). Klein did not propose any new theory but expressed informed doubts about a relatively dominant portrayal and

approach to the book *Zhuangzi*. The fact that Sima Qian (or any other earlier known source) never mentions nor quotes the *Inner Chapters* gave her reasons to pause. But Liu reformulates her doubt into a confident claim that things unmentioned in extant early sources cannot possibly have existed,<sup>10</sup> a view that she explicitly rejects more than once (Klein 2010: 299, 354-55, 360).

The attribution of a theory to a scholar entails other steps such as demanding conclusive evidence for that supposed theory and also identifying allies. As to the evidence, Liu concludes that for the full-blown theory which he ascribes to Klein, evidence is still lacking: “It is clear that we are unable to carry out serious discussion from this position since no definite evidence has so far been provided” (Liu 2015: 132). As for the allies of this so-called fifth theory, Liu mentions Chris Fraser, David McCraw (2010), and Herbert Giles. One third of the footnote dedicated to Klein’s work actually concerns some apparently wrongheaded claims made by Giles in an unspecified publication. Liu’s refutation of Giles is thus supposed to entail a rejection of Klein’s ideas. This collection of scholarly allies for the “fifth theory” is all the more remarkable because Klein herself does not associate her views with those of Giles or McCraw. The only proclaimed ally to whom she positively refers is Fraser, more specifically his 1997 review of Liu’s 1994 masterpiece of

*Zhuangzi* research.<sup>11</sup> Klein’s reference to Fraser indicates indeed an agreement on a deeper level in this matter.

### *The importance of facts*

Aside from theories, facts also populate the level of contending knowledge. In an attempt to “satisfactorily answer our questions on the textual issues”, Liu points out the importance of “historical documentation”, mainly coming from the following sources: the received *Zhuangzi*, Sima Qian’s account of Zhuang Zhou in the *Shiji*, references to him in pre-Han and early Han sources, ancient bibliographies and textual recensions, and excavated material. “None of them should be neglected in a faithful academic investigation” (Liu 2015: 232-33). Since Liu discusses all these types of evidence in general and without reference to Klein, it is not clear in which respect he finds her research lacking. The evidence that he has repeated ever since his doctorate mostly concerns the absence of some binomes in the *Inner Chapters*, in his eyes a proof of these chapters’ early date and authorial unity.<sup>12</sup> To Liu’s credit, his

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<sup>11</sup> I have found three references to Fraser’s review (Liu 2015: 131, 142, 147). Liu estimates that his chapter on “Textual Issues in the *Zhuangzi*” addresses “the key points of the questions he [Fraser] raised” (Liu 2015: 155).

<sup>12</sup> The binomes are *daode* 道德, *xingming* 形名 and *jingshen* 精神. Fraser (1997: 156-57) argued that (1) this absence has no bearing on the unity of authorship, let alone their attribution to a specific historical figure; (2) that these binomes are also absent from 13 out of the remaining 26 chapters; (3) that other reasons than chronology may influence the absence of some terms, such as content, style, interest, etc.; (4) and that textual parallels in other texts are not all necessarily simply “borrowings” from a fully established *Zhuangzi*.

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<sup>10</sup> The “three presuppositions” that Liu (2015: 131 n. 1) attributes to Klein are: (1) all ancient books should be cited in or mentioned by other books; (2) all other books should have survived over two millennia to be available to us today; (3) as long as we cannot see X, we have grounds to suppose that it never existed. Only a cautious statement of the last claim, which in my eyes is correct, can be attributed to Klein.

respect for facts leads him to an acceptance of various doubts about such matters as the problem of “affixing definite authorship and dates to these heterogeneous writings [i.e. the whole book]”, which makes him admit that various types of historical documentation “are still insufficient to definitely resolve our doubts”, that it “is certainly possible that the *Inner Chapters* may not be perfectly intact”, and that “we cannot firmly conclude that every word and sentence of the *Inner Chapters* was written by one person, Zhuangzi” (Liu 2015: 130, 133, 138, 137). All these concessions are, however, followed by counter-claims that are discussed below (see 2.2).

To one type of evidence, namely excavated material, Klein’s paper dedicates three pages with tables and detailed listings of possible *Zhuangzi* strips discovered at Fuyang 阜陽 (c. 165 BCE) and Zhangjiashan 張家山 (c. 179-157 BCE) (Klein 2010: 349-351). Fragmentary and inconclusive as they are, these strips contain lines that are similar to some sentences in chapters 25, 26, 28 and 29 of the transmitted *Zhuangzi* and thus may give support to their existence in the Han dynasty. If such unearthed manuscripts would contain references to or similarities with the first seven chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, they would indeed contain valuable information to support at least the possibility of some sort of existence of the *Inner Chapters* in the Former Han dynasty. Liu claims, however, that “archeologists have found bamboo slip versions of the *Zhuangzi* and from the evidence of those fragments believe they have proof that the *Inner Chapters* of *Zhuangzi* were plausibly written by Zhuangzi himself”. Without going further into the matter, he

refers to an article of Li Xueqin, concluding that “because the bamboo slip versions are fragmentary, they may not convince all academics” (Liu 2015: 145-46).

Considering the enormous potential of such a discovery, it is surprising that Liu spends no more than ten lines on this topic – much less than Klein. Even the most fragmentary material would give food for thought and provide some possible indication of the existence of the *Inner Chapters* in the Han. Why does Liu not share with his readers this highly relevant and potentially explosive evidence in support of his own view? Why does he not quote the excavated strips? Why does he not discuss those various academic opinions? The sole paper of Li Xueqin to which he refers, does not mention any excavated material from the *Inner Chapters*, nor does it refer to any debate in this regard. Li’s paper ends with expressing support for the old claim that Outer and Mixed Chapters must have relied upon the *Inner Chapters* (Li 1998: 131, supporting Cui 1992: 90-95). Such a scant treatment of the excavated material does not tally well with Liu’s own insistence on the exhaustive use of historical documentation.

## 2.2. From Emotions to Tenuousness

Mere data are powerless if not framed within in a theory. And a theory, in turn, also depends on a twofold deeper level – intellectual and emotional – that largely remains implicit: namely the perceived default situation against which evidence is demanded on the one hand, and the emotional threat perceived to come from novel information on the other.

### *Default knowledge*

Underlying the mere data which Liu and Klein both acknowledge lies a fundamental and partly implicit disagreement on the interpretation of these data, more specifically in relation to archaeological finds. Recent scholarship in that field has convinced Klein that the remarkable lack of clear evidence for the existence of such entities as books, authors, titles and affiliations should perhaps make us reconsider standard portrayals and read the material without presupposing them. Short fragments of text, often without title nor author, are therefore to be taken as default for Warring States sources against which counterevidence can be fully appreciated. On that basis, we are for instance well equipped to carefully detect in Chinese history the first appearance of a “book” such as the *Lü shi chunqiu*, explicit claims of “authorship” as in the *Shiji*, or the gradual emergence of intellectual affiliations in e.g. the *Mozi* and the *Mencius* (e.g. Yu 2011: 34-41, 199-215; Brindley 2009: 230-33; Valmisa 2015: 1-5). Based on this default, there is nothing particularly shocking about the possible posteriority of the *Inner Chapters* in relation to the rest of the *Zhuangzi*.

Liu’s default, however, consists of exactly such uncontested entities as books, authors, and lineages, which he finds confirmed by the same archeological findings: “Too many texts that we knew nothing about have been discovered by archeologists in recent decades”, which proves, in his eyes, the existence of a “realm of books” (Liu 2015: 131 n1). For scholars sharing this default, if a title mentioned in the *Hanshu* “Yiwenzhi” resonates with a few unearthed bamboo slips, we can declare

that the early existence of a received book has been confirmed by unearthed material; if fragments of a silk manuscript resemble a transmitted source, its identification and affiliation are thereby settled. Archaeology thus fills the gaps in our age-old knowledge; it is not an occasion to question that very knowledge. Any unwillingness to share this default relies, according to Liu, on unfounded presuppositions and demands supporting evidence.

### *Scholarly emotions and attitude*

The two opposite default positions are not merely intellectual but also emotional. Liu fully admits that there are reasons to doubt the unity and authorship of the *Zhuangzi*, even of the *Inner Chapters*. But for the reconstruction of Chinese philosophy, we have to rely on the best available evidence. Our current lack of certainty “should not affect our general confidence about the *Inner Chapters* as the rightful heart of our comprehensive examination of the book an analysis of the various theories around it, unless we find stronger evidence favoring other theories in the future” (Liu 2015: 155). In other words, for scholarship to move on, we have to keep constructing a narrative, using the best material that we have for the time being, and not question each and every building block. He therefore concludes: “Based on all the above arguments, the Inner Chapter theory evidently gets the strongest support from conventional literary records and objective findings derived from textual and linguistic approaches” (Liu 2015: 154).

This approach toward discovered manuscripts is far from exceptional: first identify the loose slips with transmitted chapters

or books, and then infer conclusions about the dates of these texts, attribute an author to them (which the manuscripts fail to do), put them in a lineage (which the manuscripts also fail to do), give them a consistent philosophy (which the texts fail to do), and conclude with a positive statement about Chinese culture. For these scholars, research that merely calls into question the stepping stones on which their consensus relies – especially if turned into a confident opposite theory – is one-sided: “Other theories may contain reasonable insights, but they are one-sided in their consideration or lacking in comprehensiveness and thoroughgoing deliberation, or even run contrary to the historical record and new evidence” (Liu 2015: 154).

Liu not only considers such a critical attitude misguided on the theoretical level; it also attests to a wrong attitude, which, for the sake of simplicity, he associates with “a movement called ‘Doubting Antiquity’ in the early twentieth century” (Liu 2015: 145). In Liu’s eyes, this sort of excessive doubt is not only utterly outdated, but also destructive, nihilistic, iconoclastic, sceptical, and even disrespectful toward China’s intellectual heritage.<sup>13</sup> The academic study of master-text is thus also a much deeper matter, related to the value of a whole culture, which seems to be threatened by the slightest expression of intellectual doubt. Klein, however, insists that she is “not arguing [...] that the inner chapters are garbage and should be abandoned completely, or even that all the material in them

is late” (Klein 2010: 360). Nor do I notice any indication of disrespect in her treatment of the *Zhuangzi*. Inspired by insights as expressed by Klein, one could consider occasional doubts as opening novel perspectives, but for Liu such research can only be destructive: for instance, disagreement with Lu Deming’s 陸德明 (ca. 556-627 CE) views on the *Inner Chapters* indicates a lack of trust toward a “serious scholar”, whose judgment “we have no grounds to doubt” (Liu 2015: 137); or showing interest in what happened to the *Zhuangzi* in the hands of Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 CE) amounts to the claim that he “botched the division of the book” (Liu 2015: 137). Most of all, Zhuangzi himself risks to be denigrated: “If we are not complete nihilists about this work and its author, we should recognize that the *Inner Chapters* are the core of the whole book with their dazzling ideas, astonishing fables, and splendid arguments” (Liu 2015: 154-55). For Liu, appreciation of the book *Zhuangzi* is incompatible with expressing doubts about its nature and curiosity about its historical emergence.

Liu’s repetitive stress on the importance of objective information and clear theories hides a dominant emotion in the field of Chinese philosophy: *horror vacui*, fear of the inevitable abyss on which speculations are built. Since expression of doubt takes away the ground under one’s feet, it has to be avoided at all cost. Serious scholarship is then expected to move ahead or upward without looking back or downward. Therefore, uncertainty is no more than a threat, a problem to be duly acknowledged and then solved as quickly as possible; it is not considered intellectually inspiring. Anything that seems to disturb this construction is therefo-

<sup>13</sup> “Doubting Antiquity” (*yi gu* 疑古) is nowadays used rhetorically as a broad label for all the scholars associated with Gu Jiegang’s *Gushi bian*, a multi-volume set of separate papers.

re first turned into a theory, then associated with a group of allies, given a negative label, and finally rejected for lacking evidence and respect. Were it not for this deep fear, acknowledging reflections such as those expressed by Klein would not necessarily be portrayed as the challenge of an opposite,

compelling theory about the book *Zhuangzi*. It would, on the contrary, diminish the tenacity with which some assumptions are defended, enhance the tolerance toward a variety of new insights, and create a mildness for the inevitable limitations of all scholarship, including our own.

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## PROTO PASNINKAVIMAS KINŲ FILOSOFIJOS TYRIMUOSE: LIU XIAOGAN PRIEŠ ESTHER KLEIN

Carine Defoort

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje remiantis dialogu iš *Zhuangzi* išskiriami trys susiję akademių debatų sluoksniai. Viršutinis yra nesutarimas, išreiškiamas žinojimo terminais: faktai, teorijos, hipotezės ir kt. Žemiau yra retai pripažįstamas, tačiau nepaisant to reikšmingas emocijų sluoksnis. Apačioje glūdi neapibrėžta ir mažai reikšminga realybė, beformio potencialo sritis. Straipsnyje teigiama, jog dviejų žemutinių sluoksnių – jautrumo ir nežaboto nežinojimo – aiškesnis pripažinimas akademinėje terpėje duotų naudos tyrinėjant kinų filosofiją. Šios trisluoksnės prieigos iliustravimui straipsnyje smulkiai analizuojamas Liu Xiaogan atsakymas į Esther Klein straipsnį apie *Zhuangzi*. Tačiau pagrindinis straipsnio taikiny yra ne šie du mokslininkai, o bendras akademinis reiškinys, kurį jie tik iliustruoja.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** *Zhuangzi*, *vidiniai skyriai*, aktyvus nežinojimas, Liu Xiaogan, Esther Klein

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