

Li, Yancang 李延倉, *The Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the Dao: From the Zhuangzi to GUO Xiang's Commentary to CHENG Xuanying's Sub-commentary* 道體的失落與重建：從《莊子》、郭《註》到成《疏》

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This book is an ambitious attempt to analyze and compare what the author refers to as the three benchmark texts of the Zhuangzi tradition: the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, GUO Xiang's *Commentary* (*zhu* 註), and CHENG Xuanying's 成玄英 *Sub-commentary* (*shu* 疏). Its core thesis is that the philosophical progression from the *Zhuangzi* to the *Commentary* to the *Sub-commentary* is best understood as an introduction, deconstruction, and subsequent reconstruction of the concept of *daoti* 道體 (the body of the *dao* 道). The book can be divided into four principal segments.

Chapter One is an extensive discussion of the status and scholarly appraisal of the *Zhuangzi* up to the Tang 唐, including its reception in religious Daoism and Buddhism. Chapter Two offers an overview of the evolution of the concept of *daoti* 道體 from its emergence in early Daoism to its radical rethinking in the Profound Learning (Xuanxue 玄學) and the Twofold Mystery School (Chongxuanxue 重玄學). Chapter Three provides an analysis of this concept as found in the *Zhuangzi*, GUO Xiang's *Commentary*, and CHENG Xuanying's *Sub-commentary*, and develops the core thesis of the book. Chapters Four through Seven compare the three texts in light of their treatment of four philosophically relevant themes: *ziran* 自然 (self-so), *qiwu* 齊物 (making things equal), *xiaoyao* 逍遙 (unrestraint), and *mingyun* 命運 (fate). Apart from the main bulk, the book includes three short appendices which discuss the relationship between the dark pearl motif (*xuanzhu* 玄珠) found in Chapter Twelve of the *Zhuangzi* and religious Daoism; the potential

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connection between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Book of Change* (*Zhou Yi* 周易); and the presence of the thought of the *Book of Change* in CHENG Xuanying's *Sub-commentary*.

As can be gathered from the above summary, the scope and complexity of the task taken up by the author is immense, which is reflected in an impressive bibliography of primary and secondary literature. Each of the book's several chapters could easily be extended into an independent work of at least equal volume. The sheer fact that this much substance has been presented in an orderly and systematic fashion and with an interesting and clear central thesis deserves praise. Another distinctly positive feature of the book is its approach to comparison which seeks not only to point to the similarities and differences between the compared texts but also to reconstruct the broader conceptual trajectory that helped to bring them about. The author's approach to the original material is multifaceted and sensitive to the historical and philosophical context. However, paradoxically or not, what I have just cited as the book's merit is also what makes it problematic. Important as it no doubt is to bring the *Zhuangzi*, GUO Xiang's *Commentary*, and CHENG Xuanying's *Sub-commentary* into comprehensive dialogue, the price the book pays for such breadth is depth and nuance, which is particularly pronounced in the case of the *Zhuangzi*.

Given the centrality of the *Zhuangzi* and its conception of the *dao* 道 as *daoti* 道體 to the author's thesis, the reader may rightly expect an extensive and nuanced treatment of this particular problematic. Yet the discussion of the concept in the context of early Daoism found in Chapter Two is based almost entirely on the *Laozi* 老子 (85–95), supplemented by one passage from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (89). The analysis of the concept of the *dao* as developed in the *Zhuangzi* takes up less than three pages and works with the total of six quotations from the text, only one of which contains the term (95–97). An equal share of space and attention is given to secondary literature, including XU Fuguan 徐復觀 with two citations and MOU Zongsan 牟宗三 with three. To be fair, the stated goal of the chapter is to sketch the background for the core argument of the book. However, no systematic account of the *dao* as developed in the *Zhuangzi* is offered anywhere else in the work. Chapter Three provides an extremely cursory treatment of the problem practically limited to the claim that the concept is inherited from the *Laozi* (140 and 146). More discussion of the issue is offered in Chapters Four and Five which are devoted primarily to the comparative analysis of the themes of *ziran* and *qiwu* in the analyzed corpus (174–177). However, even there the scope of the original material cited by the author in support of his reading of the *Zhuangzi* is considerably narrow.

According to Li, the *dao* as construed in the *Laozi*, an important precursor to the *Zhuangzi*, is best viewed in terms of an original body (*benti* 本體), which is not to be identified with the notion of substance (*shiti* 實體) or an unchanging substrate (*benzhi* 本質) of Western provenance (87). The *dao* is an ever-existent nonentity which transcends both the definite being and the relative nonbeing of the realm of form (87 and 93). At the same time, it is their source as well as the marker of an ideal subjective realm (87).

Li holds that the *Zhuangzi* inherits this dual framework. On one hand, it identifies the *dao* with the original body of the universe which has, however unintentionally, engendered its myriad beings (174). On the other, it construes the *dao* as an ideal spiritual realm (97) and an embodiment of the highest value (174). The only difference between the view of the *dao* found in the *Laozi* and that present in the *Zhuangzi*, as interpreted by Li, lies in the fact that whereas the first is dominated by the objective

aspect, the latter stresses the subjective. It is thus a matter of emphasis: not a major departure from the *Laozi* on the part of the *Zhuangzi* but an extension of what is already implied in the older text (95). The dual connotation of the original body and source of the world on one hand, and the subjective realm of spiritual attainment on the other, is operational in the *Zhuangzi* as well as the *Laozi*.

Interestingly, this line of reasoning about the *dao* as conceptualized in the *Zhuangzi* brings Li to the idea of an opposition, verging on an unbridgeable gap, between the *dao* and the myriad things where the first is superior to the latter (174). As the *dao* engenders them, things fall (*duohuo* 墮落) from the state of metaphysical unity with it to an existence in the realm of form, whereby they lose the all-roundedness and completeness of the *dao* (188). Li goes so far as to compare the process of generation outlined above to the condition of the Platonic soul which “before the fall is able to observe the perfect ideas yet having connected with the body and been interfered with by the bodily form forgets [them]” (188). The *Zhuangzi*, as interpreted by Li, systematically holds the *dao* to be good (*shan* 善) and things to be bad (*e* 惡), if not morally then “in terms of their value” (188).

I find Li’s interpretation of the status of the myriad things in the *Zhuangzi* rather extreme, especially since it is meant to be representative of the entire text. By Li’s own admission, there are passages in the text which are downright affirmative toward the myriad things, stressing each thing’s distinct beauty and idiosyncratic rightness. However, according to Li, the affirmation of the value of the myriad things in the *Zhuangzi* is limited to the realm of form. When judged from the perspective of the absolute value of the *dao*, the relative value of things is denied rather than affirmed (192). Yet the majority of the few quotations used by Li to back up his view that things are valueless in the *Zhuangzi* problematize not so much things as they do the attitude of busying oneself with them (*yi wu wei shi* 以物爲事) which, at least *prima facie*, do not amount to the same (191). I think that the discussion of the status of the myriad things in the *Zhuangzi* offered in the book would greatly benefit from an extended exploration of the text.

Another theme the author could have treated more extensively is the conception of the *dao* found in the *Zhuangzi*. As Li’s interpretation is by far not the only possible one, it is too bad he does not entertain any alternative view or make his picture of the *dao* more complicated. Even if Li’s reading is uniquely warranted in the context of the few passages he quotes, and I doubt that it is, it can hardly be extended to the entire text. It will not work well where the *dao* is construed as guiding discourse or method, such as in Chapter Thirty-Three, for example. Li’s approach quite unapologetically renders the text of the *Zhuangzi* more cohesive and uniform (and more conducive to his own reading) than it in fact is.

Given the immense scope of the book my criticism may appear exaggerated or misplaced. However, the interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* really is fundamental to Li’s overall argument since the *Zhuangzi* is the force which sets the entire dialectics of the concept of *daoti* 道體 in motion. There is also another more general reason why I would have liked Li to approach the *Zhuangzi* with more scrutiny. Early and complex texts often do not fare well as parts of greater narratives due to an inclination to interpret them retrospectively through the lens of their successors. This may be particularly true in the case of the *Zhuangzi*, which is difficult and diverse and has been read in Guo Xiang’s recension and along with his *Commentary* for almost two millennia. Be that as it may, Li’s work is an endeavor broad and ambitious enough to meet the aim of his mission across historical and intellectual spaces.

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