

## Chapter One.

### Making Classical Chinese Literature Contemporary: Translation 'between centre and absence'

#### Introduction

The question of translational (in)visibility relates to a few significant issues in the translation of Chinese literature, which this chapter considers in detail. Although the translation of modern and contemporary Chinese literature – especially into English – has enjoyed a boom after the 1970s, this chapter focuses on the case of translating classical Chinese literature because it not only presents a broader range of translational problems but also draws connections and comparisons between the pre-modern and modern, between receptions across time as well as across cultures and space.<sup>i</sup> The specific text chosen as example is the 莊子 *Zhuangzi* (c. 4th-3rdC BCE), a philosophical and poetic text written mainly in classical Chinese prose (古文 *guwen*), posthumously canonised as one of the four Daoist foundational classics.<sup>ii</sup>

More specifically, the translation of classical Chinese literature is not only a sinological concern for pre-modern specialists but offers much food for thought on translation in the Chinese context broadly speaking. Firstly, for modern readers, classical Chinese literature needs to be translated not only into languages such as English and German but also into modern Chinese, which raises questions about intralingual translation across time and space. As mentioned in the general introduction, classical Chinese is a literary written form that consolidated its style and status in early China and was then artificially maintained as the high variety of written language by Chinese scholarly and courtly elites (later called 文言文 *wenyanwen* rather than *guwen*) until the twentieth century. Translating classical Chinese into modern Chinese – a standardised language based on spoken Mandarin – inevitably deals with significant linguistic and historical differences despite that both are considered Sinitic languages. Moreover, classical Chinese is remote to the modern reader because of its antiquity and different cultural context, the past being 'a foreign country' (Lowenthal 1985). Intralingual translation between classical and modern Chinese – though so far an understudied topic<sup>iii</sup> – can make more visible the questions and constraints of translating across time and how modern translations of ancient texts deal with historical differences. Secondly, the history of translating Chinese literature is very much the history of translating *classical* Chinese literature. Besides the exceptional *Daodejing*, translated into Sanskrit as early as the seventh century and eventually becoming the most translated text in the world after the bible, before the postwar era, Chinese classics were the texts of choice to be translated into English and other European languages.<sup>iv</sup> Before the twentieth century, Chinese classics – especially Confucian and Buddhist canons, and poetry – also formed a commonly shared textual corpus in the Chinese script world including Japan, Korea, and parts of Southeast Asia, where readers typically read the original Chinese texts with the help of commentaries and reading aids (e.g. Korean *gugyeol* and Japanese *kundoku*) with some translational function.<sup>v</sup> The twentieth-century turn to focus more on modern and contemporary Chinese literature and its English translations should not obscure the fact that classical Chinese literature has been highly visible in pre-twentieth-century East Asia and Southeast Asia, and formed a paradigm of literature-in-circulation. Thirdly, the translation of classical Chinese literature reveals important shifts in Chinese literary history. In particular, the changing readership of classical Chinese literature from pre-modern to modern periods has significantly transformed the landscape of readerly and interpretive practices. Up until the early twentieth century in East Asia, there was an absence of extensive translations of Chinese classics into a language contemporary to the reader; instead we find the tradition of writing commentaries to explain

and present arguments about canonical texts such as the *Analects* and the *Zhuangzi*, practised almost exclusively by and for the scholarly elite. After 1950, however, commentarial scholarship declined significantly whereas full-length modern Chinese and modern Japanese translations of Chinese classics aiming at general readers started to appear. The shift from commentary to translation therefore raises questions about their inter-relation, as well as whether modernity in East Asia, – not least Chinese modernity – was a fundamentally *self-translational* enterprise, besides being translational and 'translingual' (Liu 1995) towards the West. As this chapter's discussion will show, modern Chinese translations of classical texts are also *modernising* translations, forming one crucial aspect of Chinese self-translation that seeks to re-interpret and contemporise Chinese antiquity for Chinese readers today.

The *Zhuangzi* and its modern translations provide an incisive perspective into the above issues. The reason for choosing the *Zhuangzi* among all possible classical Chinese texts is not least because it is, besides its philosophical and even religious aspects, an undisputedly *literary* work, befitting this book's focus on literary translation. Moreover, the *Zhuangzi* holds a paradigmatic and exceptional place in Chinese literature, which the Belgian-French poet Henri Michaux's (1936) expression 'entre centre et absence' ('between centre and absence') perfectly captures. Being both a canonical text since the Western Han (206 BCE-9 CE) that amassed a formidable volume of commentaries throughout the centuries *and* a 'persistent form of marginality' (Saussy 2017: 97) due to its eccentric and anti-orthodox ideas, the text has always posed extreme challenges to its commentators and interpreters. Written mostly in late archaic Chinese typical of 4th-3rdC BCE texts (apart from possible syncretist sections written later than the 3rdC BCE),<sup>vi</sup> the *Zhuangzi*'s language is remote enough from modern Chinese to offer a good example of translation across time. In addition, the text's style is notoriously difficult, abstruse, and imaginative, stretching not only the limits of translatability but also of intelligibility itself. Finally, since the late nineteenth century, the *Zhuangzi* has been translated again and again into various languages, particularly into English, modern standard Chinese, French, and Japanese. This rich and diverse translation history offers the possibility for comparisons between different translations that may show what different aspects and understandings of the *Zhuangzi* are revealed and obscured by different translational approaches and constraints.

The following discussion first considers the *Zhuangzi*'s visibility in terms of its global circulation and translation, then comparatively reads several different translations to explore specific problems in translating the text, particularly how intralingual translation into modern Chinese contrasts with interlingual translation into English and French. Reflections on intralingual translation and the distance between classical and modern Chinese lead to an examination of the Chinese commentarial tradition in relation to translation. Special attention will be paid to questions about whether commentaries served a translational function before the age of modern translations, and how modern translations differ from the commentarial tradition. The chapter ends by arguing that instead of translation loss, we may think of translation as a practice that reformulates meaning oscillating between different degrees of visibility and invisibility.

### **The *Zhuangzi*'s visibility: The text, its circulation and translation**

As a brief introduction to the *Zhuangzi*, the text is one of the pre-Qin Masters-Texts (*zishu*) alleged written by 莊周 Zhuang Zhou, a contemporary of Mencius, after whom the text is named, since 莊子 Zhuangzi literally means 'Master Zhuang'. Little is known about Master Zhuang apart from stories about him in the *Zhuangzi* itself and the Grand Historian 司馬遷

Sima Qian's record of him as an extremely erudite writer from the state of 蒙 Meng.<sup>vii</sup> The authorship of the text, however, is multiple and some parts are later additions by Master Zhuang's followers. 郭象 Guo Xiang (252-312), a distinguished scholar in the Six Dynasties, edited the *Zhuangzi* into the form of the text as we know today, reducing the text from its then fifty-two chapters to thirty-three chapters divided in sequence of their perceived authenticity as the 內篇 Inner chapters (1-7), 外篇 Outer Chapters (8-22), and 雜篇 Miscellaneous chapters (23-33).<sup>viii</sup> Guo expunged parts he considered spurious and rearranged certain sections into new combinations, though we do not know exactly what changes Guo made. Moreover, Guo also wrote the most influential commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, which set the standards for later commentators and entrenched the associations of neo-Daoist concepts such as 自然 *ziran* 'self-so' with the text. The *Zhuangzi*'s textual history therefore tells us that its authorship is multiple and uncertain, its style is inconsistent, its composition dates over a few centuries and is a syncretist compilation with possible apocryphal sections. These facts about the text already pose a different set of problems as compared to translating a single-authored book in definite form with precise information about the author and her historical background.

As concerns the *Zhuangzi*'s visibility in terms of its literary status and posthumous influence in China, since the Han, the *Zhuangzi* has been the subject of study and of numerous commentaries, the inspiration for eremitic culture, aesthetic ideas, literary composition, the key reference to which pre-modern Chinese literati as well as contemporary writers always return.<sup>ix</sup> Moreover, the *Zhuangzi* has functioned as an important 'textual sponsor' for translating and reconfiguring foreign literature and ideas into China since the arrival of Buddhism to the introduction of French *poètes maudits*, as Saussy (2017: 96) has demonstrated. In recent decades, after Chen Guying's first modern Chinese translation and commentarial edition of the *Zhuangzi* (莊子今注今譯) in 1974, many more modern Chinese translations have appeared. This connects with the fact that since the 1980s when interest in traditional culture revived in China, especially in the background of the 國學熱 'National Studies Craze', there has been much desire to re-interpret ancient Chinese texts and translate them for the general public.<sup>x</sup> In this context, the *Zhuangzi* is promoted as part of China's national literary heritage and some passages from the text are included in the national curriculum for secondary schools. Chinese scholars have also undertaken big research and editorial projects – supported by much government funding – on classical Chinese texts, e.g. the 《需藏》 Confucian Canon project led by Peking University since 2002, and 《子藏》 Masters-texts Canon initiated in 2010 at East China Normal University, starting with the *Zhuangzi* as its first text for research and editorial work. In brief, the *Zhuangzi* has enjoyed very high visibility as a canonical text of exceptional aesthetic and intellectual value in China both past and present. Paradoxically, nonetheless, the *Zhuangzi* remains an obscure text throughout Chinese history: perused carefully by only a handful of scholars; never 'required reading' for the civil service exams as the Confucian classics were (Childs and Hope 2015: 42); having no concrete influence on Chinese political life (except inspiring the literati's withdrawal from politics); more known about than read; much studied but little understood. As Møllgaard (2007: 12) observes, 'anybody who seriously engages Zhuangzi must begin with the claim that Zhuangzi is as yet not understood.' This invisibility of the *Zhuangzi* – in clear contrast to the visibility of the Confucian canon that has become representative of core values of the Chinese tradition – is not only due to its baffling language and general strangeness peppered with monstrous animals, mad and deformed characters, hair-splitting argumentation, and surreal topsy-turvy scenarios, but to its marginal cultural status and being un-usable by power (Billeter 2006). In this way, the *Zhuangzi* has remained paradoxically visible and invisible in China, as a canon of anti-canoncity.

Beyond China in East Asia, the *Zhuangzi* reached pre-modern Japan and Korea and was read and studied as a Daoist classic by the scholarly classes who could read and write literary Chinese. The text was introduced into Japan during the fifth to seventh centuries, and was read by courtly elite who held discussions and sometimes even court lectures about it (Zhang 2005: 12). 林希逸 Lin Xiyi's (1193-1270?) Buddhist-influenced commentary of the *Zhuangzi* also had much influence on haikai poetry schools, esp Bashō, as Qiu's study (2005) demonstrates. Japanese readership of the Chinese classic was very limited, however, and only until the Edo period (1603-1867) was the *Zhuangzi* circulated more widely outside courtly circles (Kame and Sautreuil 2013: 74). Nevertheless, Japanese commentaries and sinological scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* are substantial and reach back to at least the **sixteenth century**, as enumerated in detail by Yan Lingfeng (1993). In the past century, full-length translations in modern Japanese have been made by prominent scholars such as Fukunaga Mitsuji (1956), Kanaya Osamu (1971), and Akatsuka Kiyoshi (1974).<sup>\*</sup> In Korea, the *Zhuangzi* was known at least since the Koryo period (918-1392) (Pratt and Rutt 2013: 94), often under the title of *Namhwa-jin'gyong* in Korean editions, which refers to the text's honorific title 南華真經 *Nanhua zhenjing*. Although Daoist texts and Daoism were for a long time marginalised in Korea due to the dominant Confucian ideology, the *Zhuangzi* was studied as a philosophical and literary text among intellectual circles. As Jung remarks (in Kohn 2000: 800), 'Choson intellectuals were [...] deeply interested in Lao-Zhuang studies' [i.e. studies on the *Daodejing* (also known as *Laozi*) and *Zhuangzi*]. Scholars such as Park Saedang (1629-1703) and Han Wonjin (1682-1751) wrote commentaries for the *Zhuangzi* and discussed its philosophical ideas. Full modern Korean translations also appeared in the twentieth century, e.g. Kim Tong-song (1963) and Kim Tal-chin (1968). In sum, the *Zhuangzi* has enjoyed high visibility in East Asia, not because it was widely translated (which only started happening in the postwar era) but because East Asian scholarly circles could read classical Chinese and engaged with canonical Chinese literature in their originals. Simultaneously, having never been a state-sponsored text like Confucian and Buddhist classics, the text has remained highly invisible outside its largely specialist readership. The *Zhuangzi*'s visibility in East Asia is therefore not primarily a *translational* visibility but a *lingua franca*-dependent visibility that is unevenly concentrated though geographically wide-spread.

Beyond East Asia, special attention should be paid to translations and studies of the *Zhuangzi* in Europe and North America since the late nineteenth century, which have much increased the text's international fame. Unlike in East Asia, translation is a pre-condition for the *Zhuangzi*'s circulation among Anglo-European readers, so we are definitely talking about translational visibility here. The earliest translation of the *Zhuangzi* in Europe was Frederic Balfour's *The Divine Classic of Nan-hua* (1881). Herbert Giles's (1889) and James Legge's (1891) English translations followed quickly, resulting in the Chinese text achieving 'an early place of prominence within the "Victorian invention of Daoism"' (Komjathy 2004: 3), attracting readers such as Oscar Wilde (who reviewed Giles's translation in 1890).<sup>xii</sup> Since the early twentieth century, about twenty English translations (both full and selected) have been published, including one Penguin classics version by Martin Palmer et al. (1996) and several remarkable translations made by prominent scholars: Feng Youlan (1931), Burton Watson (1968), Angus Graham (1981), Victor Mair (1994), and Brook Ziporyn (2009).<sup>xiii</sup> In other European languages, the *Zhuangzi* has been most translated into French and German, besides its Dutch, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Spanish translations. A few notable ones to cite are: in French: Léon Wieger's *Les Pères du système taoïste* (vol.2, 1913), Liou Kia-hway (1969) – retranslated into Italian by Laurenti and Leverd (1992), Jean Lévi (2006/2010); in German (all selected translations): Martin Buber (1910), Richard Wilhelm (1912), and Hans Stange's 1954 *Tschuang-tse, Dichtung und Weisheit*; and several recent Italian translations by Leonardo

Arena (2009), P. Nutrizio (2011), and A. Sabbadini (2012). This huge array of different translations shows that the *Zhuangzi* has been widely and repeatedly translated in different languages, reaching a broader readership beyond the sinological circle. Besides translations, scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* has also increased markedly in the past few decades. Since Wu's (1982) dubbing of Zhuangzi as a 'world philosopher', several monographs and numerous articles in different languages on Zhuangzi studies are produced each year by international publishers. Currently, the *Zhuangzi* is probably the most discussed text from early China in academic literature, and from all kinds of perspectives.<sup>xiv</sup> On the other hand, it has not been as translated or popularised as the *Daodejing* or the *Analects*,<sup>xv</sup> and its readership remains mostly within an audience who are already interested in classical Chinese literature or Daoism. The recent boom of Chinese studies in Europe and North America also focuses on modern and contemporary China without raising significantly the visibility and importance of pre-modern Chinese studies (or 'sinology' in its older sense). Like in East Asia, in Anglophone and European spheres the *Zhuangzi* also oscillates between its visibility as a foundational Chinese classic and invisibility as a highbrow and specialist work.

From this overview of the *Zhuangzi*'s circulation and translation in East Asia and the West, we understand that a text's visibility in the sense of 'the degree [of] public awareness' (as in the Oxford English Dictionary) and its prominence can be multiple and uneven. Relating the *Zhuangzi* to issues of translation shows not only how much its translation has increased its circulation and readership but also how, notably in pre-modern East Asia, it was scarcely translated since translation was neither a pre-condition for its circulation nor needed by readers who could not engage with the original text. This relation between translation and its target audience is transformative of the reception of classical Chinese literature and will be further examined. Now the discussion turns to some specific problems in translating the *Zhuangzi* through comparing different translations.

### **Specific translational problems: A comparative reading of *Zhuangzi* translations**

The comparative reading of multiple translations is, not only 'important for the study of classical Chinese texts' but also enriches our understanding of the original text as 'potentially plural' (Li 2015: 128). This is particularly true when thinking of the *Zhuangzi*, the different translations of which may show us how, for instance, a modern Chinese translation obscures an aspect that a French translation otherwise highlights, and vice versa. The following detailed examination considers several important translations, listed below with brief descriptions. Besides being representative in style and approach, these translations are not limited to the perceived most authentic seven Inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. Since interesting examples for discussion about translation occur across the whole text (including possibly corrupted sections), referring to more complete rather than partial translations is necessary.<sup>xvi</sup>

List of translations considered:

- Chen Guying's 莊子今注今譯 *Zhuangzi jinzhujinyi* (1974/2009 revised edition): the first modern Chinese translation and one of the most successful, includes the original text with a comprehensive collection of different commentaries, printed in traditional Chinese characters;
- Fang Yong's 庄子今译 *Zhuangzi jinyi* (2010): modern Chinese translation, scarce on commentary and targeted at general readers, includes the original text, printed in simplified Chinese characters;
- 興膳宏 Kōzen Hiroshi's modern Japanese translation 莊子 *Sōshi* (2013): based on Fukunaga's 1956 translation and interpretation, emphasises the playfulness and

literary quality of the text; includes the original text in traditional Chinese characters, a *kakikudashibun* version,<sup>xvii</sup> and some commentaries;

- Angus C. Graham's *Chuang-tzu: Inner Chapters* (1981/2001 reprint): selective translation into English prioritising the Inner chapters but including many parts from other chapters; philologically oriented, heavily footnoted, and unsuitable for general readers; unique in its rearrangement of the *Zhuangzi* sections according to thematic coherence and Graham's assessment of their authorship;
- Burton Watson's *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (1968): full translation into English and one of the most readable; Watson also referred to Fukunaga's and other Japanese translations while doing his English translation;
- Victor Mair's *Wandering on the Way* (1998): full English translation highlighting the *Zhuangzi*'s creative and playful style;
- Brook Ziporyn's *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings* (2009): selective English translation but including a range of Outer and Miscellaneous chapters, avoids 'standard renderings' and suggests new interpretations (Norden 2009: p148), also has the unique feature of including some traditional commentaries (in translation);
- Liou Kia-Hway's *Tchouang-tseu: Œuvre complète* (1969): the first complete French translation, with extensive endnotes, but sometimes lacking in philological explanation;
- Jean Levi's *Les Œuvres de Maître Tchouang* (2006/2010 revised edition): the second complete French translation, preserves much of the imaginative force but sometimes over-translates (as Billeter comments in the appendices); no footnotes or commentaries;

An initial observation is that all the translators above are prominent sinologists and scholars. Though not all *Zhuangzi* translations are by academic translators, the sinologist-translator is the norm. This is also true of translators of classical Chinese literature in general. Besides the specialisation of this particular area of translation, the sinologist-translator also shows a different facet of the translator's visibility. Contrary to the much bemoaned fact that translators are not duly credited for their work (especially in Anglophone publishing), sinologist-translators are well recognised for translating difficult classical Chinese texts such as the *Zhuangzi*. Their names are visibly printed on the book cover, and their translational work is seen as a proof of their philological mastery and scholarly credentials. Chen and Watson, for instance, are known primarily for their translational work of the *Zhuangzi* and other classical Chinese literature. This recognition of sinologist-translators is also due to the fact that the discipline of (Anglo-European) sinology emerged through translation projects and has always been fundamentally linguistically and culturally translational.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **I. Format and Presentation**

Another aspect about the above translations is the way they are presented. Notably, for modern Chinese and Japanese translations, the original text is included with punctuation added, typically preceding the translation and some commentaries by pre-modern scholars. Unlike English and French translations, modern Chinese and Japanese translations do not replace the original text but keep it fully visible, encouraging readers to have a look at it even if they cannot fully understand it. In China, in particular, although translated literature is published without the original text, classical Chinese literature is the exception to this rule. This is even the case for adapted translations of Chinese classics for children, e.g. Cai Zhizhong's comics. Including the original text also gives an impression of continuity from the ancient text to its modern translation. This continuity is further emphasised in other aspects

such as the consistent use of one Chinese script throughout (either all traditional or simplified characters); printing the text in vertical columns read from right to left,<sup>xix</sup> and including traditional commentaries that follow upon the original text printed in smaller font. Chen's *Zhuangzi* translation, for instance, mimics pre-modern Chinese book formats in this way, with the modern translation printed in the same smaller font as the commentaries, so that translation is presented almost as an extension to commentary, seeming to differ mainly in that the translation explains the original text more comprehensively and in continuously flowing language.

Despite the full visibility of the original text, the presentation of modern Chinese translations for classical literature like the *Zhuangzi* nevertheless deliberately obscures certain issues. For instance, the consistent use of one script for the ancient text and its modern translation makes the reader unaware that the Chinese script has undergone much change and that simplifying Chinese characters was a radical twentieth-century reform that sparked much controversy at its time. For example, Fang's *Zhuangzi* translation prints the original text in simplified characters, which de-foreignises the archaicness of the *Zhuangzi* and the historical context of its writing. Punctuation is also added to the original text, not only obscuring the possibilities for different sentence breaks but also the fact that pre-modern texts were not punctuated since sentence breaks should be self-evident to their readers. This way of rendering the remoteness of ancient texts invisible is unique to modern Chinese translations (especially published in mainland China), but naturally inapplicable to Western language translations, and not practised in modern Japanese translations, which print the original text in unsimplified characters (many of which do not exist in Japanese *kanji*).

## II. Translation of chapter titles and names

To start with the particular problems in translation, we need to consider chapter titles and names in the *Zhuangzi* first. Chapter titles are typically, three-character titles for the Inner chapters, e.g. 逍遙遊 *xiaoyaoyou*, 齊物論 *qiwulun*, 人間世 *renjianshi*, and two-character titles for Outer and Miscellaneous chapters: e.g. 胠篋 *quqie*, 在宥 *zaiyou*, 則陽 *zeyang*, 讓王 *rangwang*, 說劍 *shuojian*, which are often generated from the first two significant characters in the chapter by later commentators. Personal names are often unusual and similar to nicknames, e.g. 齧缺 *Nieque*, 王倪 *Wangni* (2.11); 女偶 *Nüyu*, 卜梁倚 *Buliangyi* (6.4); 狂接輿 *Kuangjieyu* (7.2); 壺子 *Huzi* (7.5); 婀荷甘 *E'hegan* and 舛崗[弔] *Yangang(diao)* (22.7). These chapter titles and personal names are charged with meaning and often highly symbolic, ambiguous, and suggestive. For instance, should we read 齊物/論 *Qiwu-lun* 'Discourse on levelling all things' or 齊/物論 *Qi-wulun* 'Levelling all discourses about things'? Is 卜梁倚 a homophonic pun that, when pronounced in old Chinese, sounds similar to 不兩一 *buliangyi*, 'no-binary-oneness'? There are also rare or now-obsolete characters (e.g. 胠, 舛), and strange combinations of characters that form caricatural names with a humorous touch: e.g. 壺子, literally 'Master Gourd-bottle', for a sage who can physically manifest cosmological changes and perfectly embodies the primordial Dao, while the gourd is a symbol for undifferentiated chaos, the cosmic egg, and self-sufficiency.<sup>xx</sup>

Modern Chinese translations and editions of the *Zhuangzi*, Chen and Fang among others, typically keep chapter titles and personal names as they are without any translation, sometimes with additional commentaries or footnotes discussing their meanings and nuances. Not translating chapter titles and names is also quite common in modern Japanese translations, e.g. Kōzen's and Hara Tomio's (1962) translations, although Kōzen explains what the chapter title means immediately following the title, as an introduction to the main text. For English and French translations, however, the translator is obliged to decide whether, taking a

more conservative approach, s/he should romanise i.e. phonetically transcribe chapter titles and personal names or, taking a more creative approach, s/he translates some or all the titles and names into meaningful terms. Generally, the tendency of various translators from James Legge, Graham, Liou to Ziporyn and Levi is to translate the meaning of chapter titles (unless the titles are personal names) rather than give romanised titles that mean nothing to the reader. E.g. Graham's 'Rifling Trunks' for 祛篋, Liou's 'Laisser faire et tolérer' for 在宥, Ziporyn's 'Wandering Far and Unfettered' for 逍遙遊. Levi steps up the interpretation of chapter titles by adding, after his translation of the original title, an alternative title he invents to summarise the chapter's central topic, e.g. 'Tsö-yang ou Des influences miraculeuses' for 則陽, 'Randonnées extatiques ou L'envol du cachalot' (Levi, p13) for 逍遙遊, where Levi's addition 'L'envol du cachalot' ('Flight of the whale') refers to the opening story in the chapter of the huge fish Kun that transforms into the huge bird Peng, who flies to the Southern seas. With personal names, however, there is wider divergence between translators. Both Mair and Levi have shown their playful imagination by translating names creatively – in the spirit of the *Zhuangzi* that invents these eccentric and caricatural names: e.g. 婀荷甘 as 'Nénuphar Sucré' (Levi, p185), 'Pretty Lilysweet' (Mair, p218); 'Woman Hunchback' (Mair, p56) for the sage 女偶 Nüyu, whereas in many Chinese translations the possibility that Nüyu is a woman often goes unmentioned, which is not an insignificant detail because the female is particularly valued in Daoism and sagely Daoist figures were often women (unlike exclusively male Confucian scholars). Liou and Ziporyn, however, generally keep to the neutral but uninformative way of romanising names, whereas Graham alternates between romanisation and meaningful translation (p58): 'Gaptooth' [齧缺] put a question to Wang Ni [王倪].

In sum, modern Chinese and Japanese translations leave more untranslated, partly because it is feasible to not translate these special terms by leaving them in Chinese characters – which are legible and at least partially comprehensible to the modern reader (even though the modern understanding of the same character may be substantially different from its ancient meaning); partly because it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to translate these terms and names into modern Chinese without taking them apart in such a way that they become impossibly awkward and long, e.g. how could one translate 婀荷甘 or 狂接輿 into modern Chinese names? In contrast, English and French translations – i.e. translations into radically different languages – better clarify the meaning of chapter titles and personal names, and render more visible their playful and bizarre tone and various nuances.

### III. Special terms

We also need to consider special terms used in the *Zhuangzi*, because they are difficult to interpret and translate but cannot be easily circumvented by being left untranslated or romanised. Some of these Zhuangzian terms have become idiomatic expressions in literary Chinese as well as modern Chinese, albeit often in a different sense when compared to their original use in the *Zhuangzi*. I focus on two representative types of special terminology.

#### a) *Zhuangzi*-specific terms, or so-called 'untranslatables'

These are terms that only appear in the *Zhuangzi*, possibly coined by the *Zhuangzi* authors, and hardly used in other early Chinese texts. Thus, we cannot rely on contemporaneous early Chinese texts to figure out a consensual meaning or conventional use of these terms and only have the *Zhuangzi* as reference point. Sometimes these special terms become posthumously an idiomatic trope or allusion (典故 *diangu*) used only in reference to the *Zhuangzi*. We may consider these terms 'untranslatables' that pose 'limits' to conceptual and cultural 'commensurability' (Apter 2013: 590). Nevertheless, as Li observes (2017: 203), the misleading term 'untranslatable' does not really mean impossible to translate and understand



in another language, but particularly challenging and '*infelicitous* to translate', especially if these terms need to be explained at length instead of being approximated by a manageable single word or expression.

Example. 弔詭 *diaogui*, literally 弔 *diao* means 'hanging', 'in suspense', 'condole', and 詭 *gui* means 'weird', 'mysterious', 'swindling', or 'paradoxical'. *Diaogui* appears in a passage where the sage Changwuzi says that everything, including his own words, are a dream:

'且有大覺而後知此其大夢也, [...] 予謂女夢, 亦夢也。是其言也, 其名為弔詭。' (2.12, my italics)

Burton Watson's translation goes:

'And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. [...] And when I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. Words like these will be labelled the *Supreme Swindle*.' [my italics for the translation of *diaogui*]

To show how the translation of *diaogui* can differ wildly, compare with Ziporyn's translation (p19) for the last sentence '是其言也, 其名為弔詭: 'So if you were to "agree" with these words as right, I would name that nothing more than a way of offering condolences for the demise of their strangeness'. The difference lies in whether 是 is taken as a demonstrative pronoun 'this'/'these', or as a verb 'affirm'/'agree', and whether 弔 is understood adjectivally or adverbially ('hanging' words, even 'upside down' words), or as a verb 'mourn', 'condole'. Since the *Zhuangzi* text clearly signals that *diaogui* is a coined term describing 言 by giving the definitional structure '...也, 其名為...', 'these words, their name is [*diaogui*]', Ziporyn's translation seems less preferable than Watson's, which is also the consensus among the vast majority of translators and commentators (Liou, Chen, Levi, etc.). Nevertheless, the difficulty of translating *diaogui* remains. For instance, Levi's translation reads well but adds phrases that do not exist in the original text:

Ce n'est qu'à l'issue du Grand Réveil que nous réaliserons que nous nous éveillons d'un long sommeil *traversé de cauchemars*. [...] Et moi qui *vaticine* ainsi sur le rêve, *qui sait si* je ne suis pas tout simplement en train de rêver, à moins que je ne sois le rêve d'un autre. Toutes mes paroles sont des énigmes...' (p28-29, italics showing additions)

Levi's rendering has a deliberately Borgesian fictionality (e.g. 'The Circular Ruins') about the infinite regression of dream states (which can be considered 'overtranslation', as Billeter remarks (in Levi 2010, p343ff), but the translation of *diaogui* as 'énigmes' feels flat and inadequate. Graham captures the sense of movement in *diao* in his 'a flight into the extraordinary' (p60), but the nuances of trickery and mystery in *gui* remain unaddressed. Chen's modern Chinese translation '奇異的言談' ('strange and wondrous discourses' p98) only preserves the sense of bizarreness, whereas Fang simply leaves *diaogui* as it is. Owing to the neologism of *diaogui* and perhaps the fact that the *Zhuangzi* presents it as a special term, *diaogui* has survived in the Chinese language as a Zhuangzian idiom,<sup>xxi</sup> – although it is very rarely used now and cannot be readily understood – denoting something (usually language) that is bizarre, paradoxical, uncertain, incomprehensible, deceptive, riddle-like, and surreal. Being ungraspable itself, *diaogui* has become the very figure of obscurity and ineffability.

The various translations cited above show that for *Zhuangzi*-specific terms like *diaogui*, there is no single comprehensive and faithful translation because the terms themselves stretch

the limits of language and our understanding. One might suggest the alternative of leaving terms untranslated, thus using their strangeness to emphasise their unique idiomaticness, though footnotes giving detailed explanation would then be necessary. This technique of preserving special terminology through a phonetic transcription is often practised in studies of non-European literatures and cultures, e.g. the Persian *ghazal*, *rasa* in Sanskrit, *dao* (道) in Chinese, *iki* (粋) in Japanese. But there are too many such 'untranslatables' in the *Zhuangzi* to take this approach. Rather than find every translation inadequate or lapse into the simplest but most uninformative phonetic transcription, we may recognise that these 'untranslatables' are in fact infinitely translatable and rich in its potentiality to produce multiple translations. Each translation may then show alternative facets of interpretations that gives a fuller picture of the special term.

b) Faux amis: terms that keep their form and continue to be used in modern Chinese, but their meanings and nuances are different from their original use in the *Zhuangzi*.

I take the idiomatic expression 朝三暮四 *zhaosanmusi* as example, which literally means 'three in the morning and four in the evening', and originates from the passage 2.6 about a monkey keeper switching from feeding his monkeys three nuts in the morning and four nuts in the evening to four nuts in the morning and three in the evening. In modern usage *zhaosanmusi* is an idiom for 'being fickle' (particularly having multiple love affairs), and is a negative epithet used to accuse someone of disloyalty and wishy-washiness. In the *Zhuangzi*, however, it is a positive metaphor for the sage's (analogous to the flexible monkey keeper) capacity to 'walk both paths' (兩行), i.e. balance odds and ends, right and wrong to settle things in harmony. The immediate connotations of *zhaosanmusi* for the contemporary Chinese reader are completely irrelevant to the *Zhuangzi*, whereas the reader who knows no Chinese can benefit from her ignorance by not having any preconceptions. For modern Chinese translations, therefore, what do translators do to highlight such a faux ami to avoid confusion? Although Chen points out (p39) that *zhaosanmusi* in modern Chinese comes from this *Zhuangzi* passage, disappointingly he ignores the problem of different ancient and modern understandings of the idiom, and simply gives a plain translation without further contextualisation (p74-75): '養猴的人 [...]說: "早上給你們三升而晚上給你們四升。"' The addition of the unit measurement 升 *sheng* (one Chinese litre) is also unexplained. Similarly, Fang translates almost identically as Chen ('早上給三升, 晚上給四升', p28) and gives no further explanation and contextualisation of *zhaosanmusi*. It is impossible for Chen and Fang to not know the modern meaning of *zhaosanmusi*, therefore they have simply deemed it unnecessary to draw readers' attention to this faux ami.

There are other notable faux amis originating from the *Zhuangzi*: e.g. 小說 *xiaoshuo*, which is the standard and neutral modern Chinese term for the literary genre of 'fiction'/'novel', whereas in the *Zhuangzi* it appears to mockingly refer to 'petty gossip' which people fabricate and spread in the hope of becoming famous and gaining some reward (26.3). And 志怪/誌怪 *zhiguai*, which from the late Han (ca. 200 CE) onwards became a common term denoting the literary genre of 'tales of the strange' or 'anomaly records' featuring ghosts, immortals, monsters, supernatural and bizarre phenomena. In the *Zhuangzi*, however, *zhiguai* appears in chapter one (1.1) as a phrase meaning 'recording and collecting unusual and wondrous things', referring to someone or some book called 齊諧 *Qixie* that records such things, including the story of the mythical Peng bird who ascends ninety thousands miles into the sky and journeys to the Southern Seas. We may observe that the modern meanings of *xiaoshuo* and *zhiguai* are not completely unrelated to their meanings in the *Zhuangzi*. Indeed the *Zhuangzian* uses of these terms can inform us about the conceptual evolution of these terms: only until the twentieth century when the status of *xiaoshuo* rose phenomenally, there

was always something trivial and unimportant about *xiaoshuo* in Chinese literary history, particularly when compared to historiography and poetry, the two supreme genres of writing; and *zhiguai* in the *Zhuangzi*, although not a literary genre, already indicates writing that takes particular interest in wonderful, fantastic, and monstrous creatures and things (i.e. the gargantuan Peng bird that was a leviathan fish to start with).

How to translate these faux amis for modern readers is certainly a tricky problem, and more so for translations into modern Chinese and even modern Japanese than translations into English, French, German, and other languages that are radically different from classical Chinese and do not use the Chinese script. On the one hand, modern Chinese and Japanese (to some extent) have formally preserved these terms as they are, and the translator needs to make the reader aware that the Zhuangzian use of these terms do not conform to modern understandings. On the other hand, these faux amis often show a certain continuity from the Zhuangzian's use to the modern Chinese uses (as with *xiaoshuo* and *zhiguai*), so a modern Chinese translation that completely ignores this connection (e.g. Chen and Fang) obscures the linguistic and conceptual evolution that these faux amis embody. This creates a sort of invisible visibility for these special terms. As for translations into radically different languages, although they automatically avoid the confusion between ancient and modern meanings of faux amis because they cannot preserve the terms formally (e.g. Mair translates *xiaoshuo* as 'petty persuasions' (p270)), they almost always render invisible the idiomaticness and dimension of conceptual evolution and connection (unless they add lengthy footnotes),<sup>xxii</sup> thus creating an invisible visibility again in the opposite way as Chinese translations do.

#### IV. Particularly ambiguous passages, and possible text corruption

Due to posthumous editing and textual loss, there are instances of textual corruption, possible missing sections, and arbitrarily patched-up fragments in the *Zhuangzi*'s text. This means that, apart from deciphering the meaning and intention of the text when it is intact, the translator sometimes needs to supplement information, reconstruct the text where there are suspected corruptions and omissions, speculate upon the original wording and re-punctuate sections, to find the most appropriate interpretation.

Example. Possible textual corruption?

是故滑疑之耀，聖人之所圖也。(2.7)

The problem with this sentence lies in the ambiguity of 圖 *tu*, which can lead to two completely different interpretations. According to commentators like Shi Deqing and Billeter, 圖 should be taken in its conventional sense as a verb to mean 'seek', 'desire', so the sentence would literally mean 'Therefore the radiance of the slimy and doubtful is what the sage seeks'. Kōzen's Japanese translation keeps to this interpretation, remaining faithful to the text as it is transcribed (vol. 1, p60): 'かくして暗く定かならぬ光を、聖人は自己のものとしようと図るのである。' According to other commentators who are the majority, including Guo Xiang, Jiang Xichang, and Wen Yiduo, 圖 is a textual corruption for its ancient variant 𠄎 (pronounced *tu* or *bi*), which in turn is a variant for 鄙 *bi*, 'despise', 'discard'. In this case, the sentence would mean 'Therefore the sage despises the glitter of glibness and doubt'. Given the passage in which this sentence appears, particularly the emphasis that the sage uses 明 *ming*, 'illumination', 'clarity' to guide himself/herself, the second interpretation that proposes textual alteration seems more suitable, for why would the sage pursue slimy darkness and doubt? This explains why many modern translators have agreed with the second interpretation: e.g. Mair's 'The sage endeavors to get rid of bewildering flamboyance' (p18), Levi's 'Le saint se méfie de tout éclat

louche et trouble' (p24), and Graham, Chen, Fang, etc. Nevertheless, we may also remember that the Zhuangzian sage is indeed, often depicted in a state of confusion and undifferentiation (e.g. 混沌 Hundun, 'Undifferentiation' in chapter 7 who has no sensory organs), mindlessness and ambiguity (e.g. the personality 象罔 Xiangwang, 'Amorphous' or 'Ignorant Image' in 12.4), and in dark watery places (e.g. 玄水 *xuanshui*, 'black waters', 22.1; 北冥 *beiming*, 'the dark Northern Sea', 1.1). Given the typical Zhuangzian penchant for paradox, it is not unthinkable that the sage is simultaneously driftingly dim (滑疑) and pristinely illuminated (明). After all, it is the shapeless and ignorant Xiangwang who succeeds in finding the lost Dark Pearl (玄珠, 12.4), not 知 'Knowledge' or 離朱 'Piercing Eyesight'.<sup>xxiii</sup> Taking account of this, then the interpretation and translation of 圖 as 'seek', without making textual changes, are also plausible.

The question this example raises is: if translators of possible corrupted ancient texts are confronted with expressions and sentences that seem out of place or outlandish, should translators question the original text and alter it to find an interpretation that suits? In some cases, particularly when the sentence or passage appears to be forcefully inserted (e.g. chapter 6 lines 11-14),<sup>xxiv</sup> or upon comparison of different historical editions, some characters are shown to be lacking or superfluous in a sentence (e.g. notes 14 and 18 in Chen (p859) for chapter 30.1), or when the grammar is clearly wrong, such textual alterations are more plausible and may restore the text to a more correct form. In other cases, such as the example above, there is nothing clearly amiss in the text and the character variant is more far-stretched. The decision then comes down to the translator's consideration of various semantic contexts including, as Vávra points out (2017: p66), 'lexical and syntactic context, the immediate textual context, the edited textual context, and the discursive context'. This consideration not only involves a comparative weighting of the importance of these different contexts, – e.g. the overall discursive context may be more important than the immediate textual context – but also differing understandings of what each context means, e.g. 'immediate textual context' is seen by some translators as the sentence and passage in which an expression occurs, but by others as the whole chapter where this expression is located and even the entire text of the *Zhuangzi*. Therefore, in the example above, for both translators who alter 圖 to 鄙 and those who keep the existing 圖, different decisions about whether the existing text should be changed stem from the same concern about faithfully reflecting the most important and appropriate semantic context. These decisions are, however, often invisible to the reader, although they have very real effects on how the translation reads. Moreover, this means that sometimes changing the existing text achieves higher translational fidelity, and that this 'fidelity' is not directed towards a single definite 'original' text, since that is impossible for a syncretist and partially apocryphal text like the *Zhuangzi*.

## V. Style and emotional response

The translational challenges of the *Zhuangzi* also include its different linguistic styles that convey varying emotional responses: ranging from conversations to formal prose, mythic fable-like anecdotes to extremely abstract argumentation. I pick one example of dialogue with particular emotional force:

惠子相梁，莊子往見之。或謂惠子曰：'莊子來，欲代子相。'於是惠子恐，搜於國中三日三夜。莊子往見之，曰：'南方有鳥，其名為宛鷗，子知之乎？夫宛鷗發於南海而飛於北海，非梧桐不止，非練實不食，非醴泉不飲。於是鸚得腐鼠，宛鷗過之，仰而視之曰："嚇！"今子欲以子之梁國而嚇我邪？' (17.12)

Mair's translation goes (164-65):

When Master Hui<sup>xxv</sup> [i.e. Zhuangzi's best friend] was serving as the prime minister of Liang, Master Chuang set off to visit him. Somebody said to Master Hui, 'Master Chuang is coming and he wants to replace you as prime minister.' Whereupon Master Hui became afraid and had the kingdom searched for three days and three nights. After Master Chuang arrived, he went to see Master Hui and said, 'In the south there is a bird. Its name is Yellow Phoenix. Have you ever heard of it? It takes off from the Southern Sea and flies to the Northern Sea. It won't stop on any other tree but the kolanut; won't eat anything but bamboo seeds; won't drink anything but sweet spring water. There was once an owl that, having got hold of a putrid rat, looked up at the Yellow Phoenix as it was passing by and shouted "shoo!" Now, sir, do you wish to shoo me away from your kingdom of Liang?'

One certainly cannot miss Zhuangzi's biting sarcasm here, not only because he turns the normal analogical relation between equally valued things upside down by equating a rotten rat with the state of Liang, and the erudite and powerful Hui with a stupid aggressive bird, but also because of his vivid and humorous way of contrasting Hui's petty-mindedness with his own superior vision (i.e. that of the Phoenix). Besides the special nouns 宛鶻 *yuanchu*, 鷗 *chi*, and 梧桐 *wutong* that are difficult to translate without providing footnotes explaining their symbolism,<sup>xxvi</sup> the emotional force in the final sentences also requires the translator's attention: the onomatopoeic interjection imitating the owl's hissing and screeching sound (嚇!); and the scornful repetition of 子 ('you') in '今子欲以子之梁國而嚇我邪?', i.e. 'now you want to shoo me away from *that* state of Liang *of yours*?'. These important stylistics are not always shown in translation. Mair's translation of 'Now, sir, you...' chooses a respectful register, whereas Chen (p476) simply leaves terms untranslated (see italics): '貓頭鷹仰起頭來叫喊一聲："嚇！" 現在你想用你的梁國來嚇我嗎？', which is particularly confusing because 嚇 in modern Chinese is rarely used as an injection (which was its primary use in classical Chinese) and now means 'to frighten', 'threaten'. Chen's use of the conventional 'you' 你 *ni* in modern Chinese is also quite neutral, since *ni* could be used in both polite and insulting language. Both Liou's and Levi's translations are emotionally bland and sound too rationalised: e.g. '[L]hibou [...] lui jeta un cri menaçant. N'as-tu pas cherché comme le hibou à protéger ton poste en voulant m'effrayer?' (Levi, p142). Kōzen's translation, however, is more emotionally dramatic: Zhuangzi addresses Hui by 君 *kimi* (vol.2, p351), a 'you' suggesting intimacy and seniority on Zhuangzi's side – which is not factually true since Hui is both older and higher in social hierarchy than Zhuangzi, but appropriate in this passage where Zhuangzi is asserting his superiority over Hui. Kōzen also translates the neutral 視 'see' in the original text '仰而視之' as にらみつけ (vol.2, p351) 'stare', 'glare', adding more hostility to the owl's screech. What the Japanese translation can do to change the emotional nuances (through different pronouns for 'you' that show intimacy, informality, or formal respect), the English translation cannot do, and therefore the linguistic register inevitably varies across different translations.

There are other tensions underlying this passage using vivid analogy and language that only the cultural context of early Chinese rhetoric and disputation can bring into full force, not to mention an understanding of social hierarchy and friendship at Zhuangzi and Hui's time. After all, Zhuangzi, who holds no political office, is fiercely criticising the powerful Hui, even though they are close friends. What was his tone and facial expression when speaking? - Maybe some disappointment besides the sarcasm, i.e. 'as my friend, Hui, shouldn't you know better'? What would Hui's reaction to Zhuangzi's criticism be – shame, anger, rebuttal, amusement, relief? Finally, how shocking does this story sound to its author's contemporary audience? What might be obvious or at least easier for the author's contemporary readers to

understand and infer is impossibly remote and concealed for readers today, who can directly access neither classical Chinese nor the early Chinese cultural context. Translators of such passages therefore need to exercise their imagination to better grasp the underlying tensions and emotions in the depicted situation.

To summarise, the above comparative discussion clarifies a few points about translational invisibilities and visibilities in the *Zhuangzi*. Firstly, translating ancient and syncretist Chinese texts like the *Zhuangzi* is often a reconstructive, strongly interpretive, and imaginative practice. By altering and re-imagining the original text, the binary between the single original text and multiple translations breaks down (which is already a truism in translation studies). But more importantly, this translational process does not mean the original text is not important, rather that it is not limited to an externally given and definite form and can be partially formulated by the translator. Moreover, translators still adhere to notions of translational fidelity and philological accuracy and are not creative in the sense of inventing something that takes no account of the original text's historicity from one's subjectivity. Without referring to the original text, however, often there is no way for readers to know what decisions are made in the translational process, which then remain invisible inevitably rather than be deliberately obscured through some translational ideology about 'fluency' or 'domestication' (Venuti 1995). Secondly, the comparison between different translations brings out more forcefully the questions raised by translation across time and intralingual translation. Whether it is the emotional force of language, Zhuangzian neologisms, or faux amis, the historical and linguistic contingency of contemporary readers is highlighted in different degrees by translating the ancient text. In particular, precisely because modern Chinese (and modern Japanese to an extent) formally preserve many characters and terms used in classical Chinese, it is more difficult to differentiate between the ancient and contemporary meanings and nuances whereas they are typically better clarified in English and French translations. Nevertheless, Western language translations also obscure the terminological continuity and conceptual history inherent in Chinese idioms used both past and present. This suggests that translation between East Asian languages (more similar languages) is weaker and less intervening than translation from classical Chinese or any East Asian language to radically different languages like English and French. Although more elements of the original text are visually displayed (i.e. visible) in modern Chinese translations, this in fact sometimes makes the foreignness of classical Chinese to modern readers less *noticeable* (i.e. invisible).

The invisibilities shown by intralingual translation from classical Chinese to modern standard Chinese confirm that there is no seamless continuity between the two but a wide distance that is often unnoticed or downplayed. Besides being 'divorced from spoken language for no less than two millenia' and 'a language that may [have...] lived only partially in the mouths of priests, seers, and bards' (Mair 1998: iv), classical Chinese differs from modern Chinese in a wide range of aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, logical features and rhetorical construction, discursive context, and extremely condensed elliptic style. Linguistic studies by Pulleyblank (1994), Harbsmeier (2012), Zádrapa (2011) and Peyraube (2016) have demonstrated many important grammatical points in classical Chinese that differ from modern Chinese, e.g. subjectlessness, monosyllabic vocabulary, the absence of measure words, word-class flexibility. The pronunciation of old Chinese (c. 13thC BCE-3rdC CE, including late archaic Chinese in which the Masters-texts like the *Zhuangzi* are written) is also uncertain and has been the subject of speculative and complex reconstructions, constituting a highly specialised area known as Old Chinese phonology.<sup>xxvii</sup> We still know little for certain about the pronunciation of old Chinese, although it possibly was toneless before 500 BCE and definitely

sounded very different from modern Mandarin. In addition to these linguistic and historical differences, the style and frequent intertextual allusions in classical Chinese texts like the *Zhuangzi* multiply their difficulty, which means that they are indeed very far removed from Chinese readers today, who need some mediating explanation to make sense of these ancient texts. Modern Chinese translations, therefore, meet this need for mediating explanation, which is also necessarily a translation across time where translation *is* the meaning, as Jakobson (1959/2004) asserts. In extension, for an ancient 'book language' like classical Chinese, translation *is* understanding, for nobody can understand it without undergoing a translational process (in the way that monolingual native speakers can understand their mother tongue).

Given the huge historical and linguistic gap that separates classical Chinese literature from Chinese readers today, it is all the more intriguing that the translating classical texts to modern Chinese is under-appreciated among Chinese speakers and ill recognised as a subject of study in the Chinese-speaking scholarly community. This may be partially due to the fact that, for centuries and even today in China, translation has never been paid much attention unless it is translation of a *perceived distinctly foreign* language. As Alleton observes (2004: 36), since the earliest imperial times, state-sponsored language standardisation efforts have tried to unify 'Chinese space' through a single written language, so that any 'inter-Chinese' translation is not perceived as translation proper. The widespread and enduring belief that Chinese characters serve as vehicle for linguistic continuity and cultural unity – despite the simplification of characters in mainland China – further downplays the difference between classical Chinese and modern Sinitic languages. Chou (2007), for example, argues for the strong continuity from ancient to modern Sinitic languages and asserts that modern Chinese is the best language to teach classical Chinese, re-iterating Yuanren Zhao's (1980) views about teaching classical Chinese like a living language and reading it aloud in standard Mandarin. Although recitation is a long-established practice in the instruction of classical Chinese literature and we can only read ancient texts aloud in a modern spoken Chinese language, Chou's and Zhao's views gloss over the separation of literary Chinese and spoken vernaculars and the fact that spoken Mandarin is phonetically very different from classical Chinese. Certain other scholars who better recognise the immense distance between classical and modern Chinese tend to, however, argue against modern Chinese translations because they often contain mistakes and misleadingly vague expressions. For instance, Liu (2011: 67) argues that translating classical Chinese into modern Chinese should be an exercise for 'self-learning' only, not to be published for other readers; the prominent indologist and translator Ji Xianlin also famously expressed the view that '古文今译是毁灭中华文化的方式, 必须读原文, 加注释即可' 'modern translations of classical texts is the way to destroy Chinese culture, people must read the original text, referring to traditional commentaries would suffice' (2009).<sup>xxviii</sup> This argument for reading classical texts with their commentaries, without relying on translations, is itself very revealing because firstly, it implies that commentaries can better explain classical texts to contemporary readers than modern translations; and secondly, it in fact points to another important reason for the under-recognition of modern translations: the fact that before the 1950s, classical Chinese texts were never fully translated and instead, commentaries served as the mediating explanation.

What, therefore, are commentaries, if they are not only superior to translations (or are they?) but also function as a substitute for the latter? And what explains the existence of the commentarial tradition instead of full translations for classical Chinese texts before the twentieth century? Many later pre-modern readers of early Chinese literature such as the *Zhuangzi* would, as modern readers today, also find the texts remote, but no translations emerged to fill this hermeneutic gap and commentaries seemed to suffice. Simultaneously, we

also observe that the rise of modern Chinese translations in the past century went hand-in-hand with the substantial decline of the commentarial tradition. Do these imply that commentary and translation are in fact very similar and even share the same hermeneutic function, and therefore one's gains means the other's loss? But if commentary and translation are interchangeable, or if commentary is a superior hermeneutic method, why did modern Chinese translations emerge in the first place and why do Chinese scholars today not continue writing commentary as their pre-modern predecessors did? To answer these questions we need to consider the relation between commentary and translation.

### **Commentary and Translation: An invisible relation**

To start with, we need to briefly consider commentary in the Chinese context by addressing the following questions: what is commentary's style and format? Its purpose and function? Who writes it and who reads it?

Going back to the origins of commentarial practice in early China, as Puett demonstrates (2017), literary production and commentary intertwined via strategies of citing and rereading earlier texts and were in fact co-emergent with each other. Many early Chinese texts 'were in part commentaries to earlier materials, and were in turn shaped into what we have come to know as texts by the commentarial tradition' (Puett, 2017: 113). Towards the end of the Western Han, however, the categories of the Masters-texts and Five Confucian classics emerged, which also set the task of later scholars as understanding and explicating these texts of antiquity (古書 *gushu*) by earlier sages, rather than trying to compete with or even supersede them.<sup>xxix</sup> The kind of commentary as a practice of textual exegesis clarifying earlier texts and in a position of subservience (at least in appearance) thus emerged in the Eastern Han (25-220). Since then, few canonical classical texts were read without their commentaries and this commentarial corpus grew as later commentators added their own commentaries to the existing corpus. Inversely, commentaries also canonised the texts that were commentated upon, for commentaries themselves affirmed that these texts were worthy of extensive critical engagement. Over time the texts that were commentated on (i.e. the canon of classical Chinese literature in a broad sense) also expanded, later including, for instance, Buddhist texts, medieval poetry, and Ming Qing fiction.<sup>xxx</sup>

Chinese terms for commentary tell us much about its forms and hermeneutic nature: 注 *zhu*, 'annotations' (often used in the expression 注釋 *zhushi*, 'annotations and explanations'), also glossed as 傳 *zhuān*, 'transmit', which is notably a synonym for 譯 *yì* 'translation'; 訓詁 *xungu*, 'glossing, using contemporary language that is easily understood to explain ancient expressions'; and 疏 *shu*, 'sub-commentary', a later developed form of commentary that reinterpreted the classical text and its primary (i.e. earlier) commentaries.<sup>xxxi</sup> These various commentaries give glosses, identify allusions and citations, paraphrase in plainer language, interpret difficult parts of the primary classical text, as well as provide critical assessment of previous commentaries. The presentation of commentaries is interlinear, i.e. immediately following the primary text and inserted between sentences and breaks. In post-Tang (from 907) printed editions of classical texts, commentaries were also printed in smaller characters than the primary text to show deference to and differentiate from it. To return to the *Zhuangzi* as example, figure 1 shows one page with text and commentary from a reproduced *Zhuangzi* edition with sub-commentary (疏) by 成玄英 Cheng Xuanying (c. 608-699).

[insert figure 1]

As in figure 1, the way commentary is written and presented is fragmented. It disrupts the



flow of text and obliges the reader to oscillate between the main text and a variety of explanations that often present different commentators' views, including the later commentator's response to earlier commentators (e.g. in figure 1's edition Cheng responds to Guo Xiang). Reading commentaries is therefore an extreme form of close reading as well as slow reading, layered, studious, and effort-requiring.

Although this 'critical genre' of interlinear commentary grew out of the need of Han literati to elucidate ancient texts, which had become 'difficult and problematic' for them after 'changes over the centuries [...] in language' (Gardner 1998: 401), the purpose and function of commentary were never merely to explain ancient texts and what they originally meant. Despite the apparent fragmented and discontinuous format of commentary, commentary in fact presents arguments about the primary text, striving to establish a 'consistent' meaning (Wagner 2016: 498) for the primary text through the commentator's systematic interpretation. This explains why, since the Han, commentators have, through writing commentary, engaged with scholastic wrangling with their contemporaries and predecessors (Makeham 2003; and Wagner 2000), for what is at stake is not word-by-word glosses or annotations for archaic terms but rivalling interpretations of the canon. Moreover, commentary explained ancient texts in a contemporary language understood by the commentator and his audience, catering to their contemporary intellectual context and needs, sometimes at the cost of misreading the primary text.<sup>xxxii</sup> Guo Xiang's commentary of the *Zhuangzi*, for instance, is known for its highly distorting interpretation that goes against the grain of the *Zhuangzi* at some points to fit Guo's neo-Daoist agenda.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Finally, commentary not only asserts the authority and value of the commented text, thus fundamentally shaping its reception and formation as a canon, commentary also gives value to the commentator and his scholarly community. Commentaries accumulated over time become inseparable from the primary text and constitute an exegetical tradition on which later commentators would like to leave their own imprint. It must be noted that in pre-modern China, literary activities – especially the engagement with canonical ancient texts – were dominated by the literati class. The commentator enjoyed high visibility (literally, in the way commentaries are presented) and much recognition for his exegetical work. Writing commentary thus not only asserted one's credentials and status as literatus (Gardner 1998: 404), but also addressed one's own peers and scholarly group. In other words, commentary was written by and for the literati, who were well versed in extant literature and skilled in writing classical Chinese.

Given the above overview of commentary, how does commentary then relate to translation? There are many similarities and shared features between the two: both have an explanatory and interpretive function; both reword the primary text (or 'original text') in a language that differs from that of the primary text; both serve as a mediation across time and transfer meaning into a new semantic and historical context. Not only does commentary provide calques and paraphrases that linguistically provide matching terms for ancient expressions, like translation, commentary can produce a systematic and particular interpretation of the primary text that influences its readers' perception and plays an important role in the primary text's reception. Important commentaries in Chinese literary history – Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi*, Cheng Xuanying's on the *Zhuangzi*, Zhu Xi's on the *Analects* – are known for their style, interpretive approach, and underlying intellectual orientations, the same kind of aspects for which remarkable translations are remembered. Moreover, commentary sometimes directly involved translational activities: annotative (注 *zhu*) commentary in the early medieval period – also the time of massive translation of Buddhist literature – 'approximate[d] dictionaries or encyclopedias as they strive[d] to encompass different ways of understanding the text' (Cheng 2017: 130-31), and dictionaries

are by nature a (self-)translational reference; sub-commentary (疏 *shu*), in addition, possibly emerged through records about debates about Buddhist sutras as they were translated, as Makeham (2003: 88) observes after Jorgensen. If we think of Chinese terms denoting 'translation', they also partially overlap with terms for commentary, such as 傳 *zhuan* mentioned above; and 翻譯 *fanyi*, – the standard modern term of 'translation' and 'interpretation' that started appearing in medieval Buddhist texts, the 隋書 *Suishu*, and 舊唐書 *Jiu Tangshu* (Alleton 2004: 17), – instead of denoting creating in another language a full equivalent to the original text, emphasises 're-arranging', 'changing back and forth' and 'selecting' (as mentioned in general introduction) existing textual materials, which are precisely what commentarial practices involve. If we accept that 'one representation is a translation of another if (and only if) it both refers to and paraphrases the other' (Hanks 2014: 23), then we may affirm that commentary is a readerly and writerly practice of a translational nature.

We may now understand why some Chinese scholars like Ji believe that reading commentary allows readers to understand ancient texts without taking recourse to modern Chinese translations. Although this view cannot be endorsed because, as described above, commentary does not provide straightforward explanations of the primary text and the ability to read commentaries skilfully, discern their arguments and assess their nuances also needs much study and cultivation. Reading ancient texts with only their commentaries gives the false impression of having more 'direct' access to ancient texts when this access still relies on the translational mediation of commentaries. In regard to the translational nature of commentary, therefore, commentary is not less intralingually translational than modern Chinese translations. Zethsen (2009: 809) points out that intralingual translation 'is generally motivated by one or more of the key parameters; knowledge, time, culture, and space'. All these parameters underlie the creation of both commentary and modern Chinese translations, to the effect that they not only bridge the linguistic and historical gap but also 'draw a border' (Brems, 2018: 510) between the ancient and contemporary, making visible the alterity of antiquity, which is why such intralingual translation is necessary in the first place. In this sense, modern Chinese translations are to an extent commentarial just as commentary is translational.

But what, then, is the difference between translation and commentary? – For they must differ in some aspects to explain the decline of commentary and rise of modern Chinese translations in the twentieth century. To clarify this question, referring to aspects of commentary other than explaining and rewording gives us good clues to its distinction from modern translations. Firstly, in terms of format and presentation, commentary and translation diverge widely and frame the reading experience differently. Translation – especially in its published format – is a continuous and complete text, whereas commentary is interrupting and fragmentary. Translation aims to deliver a flow of consistent meaning even in the absence of the original text, whereas commentary not only makes the primary text visibly larger but also deliberately disrupts the reading process to oblige the reader to dwell on particular words and interpretive ambiguities. Commentary is also inter-commentarial – often including other commentaries one responds to and compiling different annotations into one collection (e.g. 集解 *jijie*/集釋 *jishi* 'Collected commentaries' editions of ancient texts), – therefore constituting a dialogical and comparative way of reading. In contrast, although translators refer to other translations and interpretations when producing their own translation, the final product does not simultaneously print those referenced translations for the reader to see. This format of translation models after the format of the 'book' as shaped by modern publishing industry, to which modern readers are also accustomed. But the format and modern notion of

'book' (a written work giving a coherent narrative or argument and with a beginning and end) differ significantly from the material form and generic categories of much classical Chinese literature like the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Modern Chinese translations therefore dress up ancient texts in the book format, thus making the ancient more contemporary and relatable to modern readers and rendering their foreignness more invisible. This also means that translation reflects the adaptation to a new literary format and mode of literary production that are different from those that suited commentary. Secondly, the target readers of commentary and translation are very different. Translation is meant to be, or at least can be, a replacement for the original text. Modern Chinese translations, in particular, target readers who cannot read the original text, with the aim of widening access to the ancient literature that was jealously guarded by scholar-officials in the past. But commentary cannot be read without the primary text, and was never meant to replace the latter since commentary was written for literati readers who could engage with the most sophisticated exegeses on the primary text. In brief, commentary is exclusive and for the scholarly elite; whereas translation is potentially for general, even uninformed readers who lack linguistic and historical background knowledge. Lastly, the motives and intellectual contexts of commentators and translators also differ. The modern translator's motive is no longer to establish herself within an elite social class, nor (primarily) to argue with a limited circle of highly knowledgeable peers. The scholastic culture and style of scholarship that supported commentary have changed and become diffuse: two motives for writing commentary, – to explain the primary text, and to respond to and argue with one's peers' interpretations – may be understood as having split into the two areas of academic studies (more specifically, sinology) and translation.

We can now answer the question why pre-modern Chinese readers of the *Zhuangzi* and other classical Chinese literature did not produce translations: because commentary served a translational function and met the needs of a select group of literati readers. As for why modern Chinese translations emerged in the twentieth century while commentary declined, there are certainly many historical reasons to cite. In particular, language reforms, from the anti-classical Chinese discourse of the New Culture Movement to the standardisation of modern written Chinese based on spoken Mandarin in the 1950s,<sup>xxxv</sup> have exponentially raised literacy rates to expand the potential readership of classical Chinese literature to the general public; on the other hand, classical Chinese is no longer a state-sponsored written language and the extensive study of classical literature has become a specialised academic field rather than an obligatory part of one's general education (as was the case for pre-modern educated classes). In this context, translating classical Chinese literature like the *Zhuangzi* into modern standard Chinese fundamentally democratises literature as well as constitutes a distancing from pre-modern commentarial scholarship. Modern Chinese translations are themselves an aspect of Chinese literary modernity that self-translates the tradition of pre-modern China and makes ancient texts contemporary.

### **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, this chapter has discussed how modern translations of classical Chinese literature reveal a field of translational visibilities and invisibilities involving the reception of Chinese classics in East Asia and beyond, processes of intralingual translation and translation across-time, hermeneutic and historical connections between commentary, translation, and Chinese modernity. The *Zhuangzi*, as the example here, shows itself as particularly open to different translational strategies and constraints that bring esoteric language and inexhaustible translatability into play. Multiple and proliferating translations of the *Zhuangzi* render the text both more visible and invisible: visible in the sense of creating more facets of meaning, constantly generating interest, and more widely read; invisible in the sense that the

'original' text of the *Zhuangzi* is increasingly pluralised and becomes more and more inscrutable through its accumulated layers of translations. But this plurality and inscrutability created by a series of translational and interpretive procedures have always already happened for the *Zhuangzi* (as well as for other canonical classical Chinese texts like the *Daodejing* and 楚辭 *Chuci*), through the commentarial tradition. Besides relating to the practice and phenomenon of modern Chinese translations of classical literature through its intralingually translational dimension, pre-modern commentary helps us to rethink the notion of translation in the Chinese context as different degrees of rewordings and selective reconfigurations of existing expressions and texts rather than creating a whole new text that resembles faithfully the original text. Seen in this light, the difference between intralingual and interlingual translation is indeed 'a question of degree than of kind' (Zethsen, 2009: 795). This is why reading multiple translations comparatively is important, – a reading method that takes inspiration from the dialogical and inter-commentarial way in which commentaries were read, – for comparison allows aspects rendered more or less visible and invisible by translation to show against each other. We may then understand (in)visibility in and of translation as multiple and uneven, a question of differentiation, emphasis, and noticeability rather than an opposition between the self and other, presence and absence.

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- i Here, the term 'literature' is used in the broad sense of 'writing' since Western literary genres that separate philosophical, religious, and 'belles lettres' types of literature such as poetry and fiction do not apply well to premodern Chinese categories of writing.
- ii The other three canonical texts given the name of 經 'classic' being the *Daodejing*, the 列子 *Liezi*, and the 文子 *Wenzi*.
- iii Some recent scholarship have noted the under-studiedness of intralingual translation (e.g. workshop and book project on 'Intralingual translation, diglossia, and the rise of vernaculars in East Asian classical and premodern cultures': <https://intraling-asia.sciencesconf.org/resource/page/id/4> [accessed 18 July 2018]), and of cross-temporal translation (e.g. Klein 2017-18: 36).
- iv Pre-1950s English translators' preference for classics is noted by Laughlin 2013. This preference is also true of French and German translations, see Chan 2003.
- v Refer to chapters X and Z for more discussion about classical Chinese learning in Japan and Korea.
- vi For discussions about the *Zhuangzi*'s authorship and possible datation, see Liu 1994 and Klein 2010.
- vii Sima Qian, 史記 *Shiji* chapter 63.
- viii The fifty-two chapter edition of the *Zhuangzi* was defined by the Han imperial librarian 劉向 Liu Xiang (79-8 or 77-6 BCE), and the division of Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters already existed in the Han (although not in the form of Guo's edition).
- ix See Liu 2015 on Zhuangzi's presence in modern writers such as Zhou Zuoren, Han Shaogong and Yan Lianke.
- x See Chen 2011 on the National Studies craze.
- xi Some notable modern Japanese translations accompanied with commentaries are: 福永光司 《庄子译注》(1956)、津四左右吉 《庄子内篇译解》(1966)、《庄子外篇译解》(1966)、阿部吉雄 《庄子译注》(1968)、森三树三郎 《老子·庄子》(译注)(1968)、金谷治 《庄子内篇译注》(1971)和 《庄子译注》(1973)、赤塚忠 《庄子译注》(1974)。
- xii See McCormack 2007.
- xiii See Ng's unpublished thesis (2012) for a comprehensive list of English translations of the *Zhuangzi*.
- xiv A few recent studies that take distinctly new approaches to the *Zhuangzi* include: McGraw 2010, Li 2015a, Moeller and D'Ambrosio 2017.
- xv The *Analects*, for instance, has over forty English translations, while the *Daodejing*'s Western translations is estimated at over 250.
- xvi The references to Zhuangzi chapters and sections follow the digital library Ctext.org (e.g. 12.3 means chapter 12 section 3), and Wang Shumin's edition of the *Zhuangzi* (莊子校註, 2007) is used for original text citations.
- xvii See Sato 2017 for the explanation of *kakikudashibun*.
- xviii See Fuehrer and Wong 2015.
- xix Only pre-modern Chinese texts are printed in traditional script by a few mainland Chinese publishers such as Zhonghua Shuju, Shanghai Guji, and Shangwu Yinshuguan. Vertical printing is only used for classical Chinese texts in mainland China, this applies to Taiwan and Hong Kong too though some other books are printed vertically for a more archaic style. Vertical printing is, however, still very common in Japan.
- xx See Girardot 1988, Lewis 2006.
- xxi *Diaogui* is, however, very rarely used in modern Chinese and appears almost exclusively in literary criticism.
- xxii The most footnoted translation is Graham's, which is still very selective and does not explain the faux amis I mention. Lengthy footnotes are generally not appreciated in translations (e.g. Levi has explicitly denounced it (p10) and kept to zero footnotes), and Graham's translation has been criticised for its clunkiness.
- xxiii See the whole story in 12.4. One might raise the issue that what the sentence in 2.7 means does not need to be, even should not be interpreted by reference to other *Zhuangzi* sections, since there is no necessary relation between different sections. Nevertheless, since I am proposing one possible interpretation that makes plausible the interpretation of 圖 as 'seek', taking into account other parts of the *Zhuangzi* is a legitimate alternative. Billeter (2014) has studied the 象罔 story (12.4) and argued that it coheres with many key concerns in the Inner chapters.
- xxiv See Chen p190, Graham 1982, p23-4 for discussion about the insertion of this passage,
- xxv 惠施 Hui Shi, Zhuangzi's intellectual rival that often appears in the text as a character.
- xxvi 宛鸞 *yuan chu*, a type of male phoenix; 鷂 *chi*, a kind of carnivorous hawkish bird similar to the kite or owl, often cited for its cruelty and arrogance; 梧桐 *wu tong* denotes the Chinese parasol tree, typically characterised as the phoenix's preferred perch and highly valued for its wood.
- xxvii After the pioneering works in Old Chinese phonology by Karlgren 1957, Baxter 1992, and Sagart 1999, more recent studies include Zheng (2003), Schuessler (2009), Baxter and Sagart (2014). Handel (in Wang and Sun 2015) gives a good summary of the findings in the field.
- xxviii Ji in an interview about preserving Chinese traditions and simplified characters, see <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/79457/8816825.html> [accessed July 2018]
- xxix See Denecke 2011 on Master-texts.
- xxx See Rolston 1997 for fiction commentary.
- xxxi These are the most commonly used terms for commentary but not the only ones (others include 解 *jie*, 詮 *quan*, 箋 *jian*, etc.)
- xxxii The 'misreading' character of commentaries has prompted Arthur Waley's (1934: 129) famous depreciation of

them, seconded by other sinologists such as Billeter 2004, who is quite dismissive of pre-modern *Zhuangzi* commentaries.

xxxiii See Ziporyn 2003 on Guo Xiang.

xxxiv For the early Chinese category of 書 *shu*, see Allan 2012.

xxxv See Shang (2014) for the artificial opposition between *baihua* and *wenyamwen*.