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Me, Myself and I:
The Notion of Self in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子

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*E in mare c'è una fortuna
che viene dall'oriente
che tutti l'han vista,
e nessuno la prende.*

Fabrizio de Andrè

Alla mia famiglia,
colonna portante

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前言

近年来，心身二元论研究已经成为一个非常引人注目的主题。在目前研究中，除了欧美文化以外，其他文化都没有形成与二元论相像的理论。很多学者认为，中国文化属于同一范畴，中国思想是一元论。据我个人的观点，这种说法是不太正确的：中国古代著名的哲学理念之阴阳就是一种二元论。那么，为何说只有欧美文化才形成基于二元论的想法呢？

这篇论文意图研究心身二元论。在这个领域内还有很多资源有待开发，特别是对中国文化而言。因此，我想以《莊子》为案例证明心身二元论也是中国古代哲学得主题之一。虽然《莊子》一书的性质杂糅，语言晦涩，我还是决定以《莊子》为例。这里有三个原因：首先，哲学界里很多学者认为这本书不是由一位作者写成的，所以可能不只有一个人相信这种二元论；其次，《莊子》书中内篇、外篇与杂篇都属于不同的历史时代，这也表示心身二元论是一个比较共同的概念；最后，我特别喜欢这本书。

《莊子》学者们認為《莊子》是集合了莊子（也叫庄周，他是战国时代的思想家、哲學家）及莊子學後人的篇章，分为内篇、外篇與雜篇。庄周是道家学派的代表人物，因此道教中奉《莊子》為經典。

书中跟心身二元论有关系的概念很多，皆属于心靈哲學（philosophy of mind）这个哲學分支。我关注到一些概念，即自我（self），我和别人的对比（the contrast between ‘I’ and others），人體（body），个人（individual）等等。研究《莊子》这本书，我发现这本书的作者们非常重视这些概念，并且确切地谈论它们的意义和含义（这些将在稍后进行探讨）。首先我来介绍一下这篇论文的结构，说明每一章节的内容及研究结果。希望该调查研究在中国古代哲学研究领域的重要性能够得到证实。

第一章中，我将就一些学术界对心身二元论的研究进行文献综述。在欧洲，最著名的二元论者就是勒内·笛卡儿。哲学上，他认为，只有人才有灵魂，人是一种二元的存在物，既会思考，也会占空间。他死了之后在他之后，很多哲学家和科学家在他的思想基础上深思人类二元论。现在，这个哲學的分支叫心靈哲學（philosophy of mind），而很学家（比如，Allport 1943; Burge 1988; Carrithers 等人 1985; Elliot 2010; Harris 1989; Obeyesekere 1990; 等等）对这个领域做出了贡献。本节我将向读者介绍本领域的一些概念。为了让读者们能够更深入地理解之后的内容，本章我也将对之后可能涉及的一些概念作一些解释。

我研究的关键是“self”、“body”。依照這些研究和我個人的想法，我详细制定如下了定义。

一，“自我”意味着個人的形而上學存在，也是一个统一存在的概念。雖然不能触摸，但是每個人都感覺除了人體以外還有自己的想法、感情等等。二，人體就是個人具體存在。在第一章中，除了这些心理学研究，我还将讨论一些跟中国文化关系很密切的研究，例如：Kasulis and Ames 1993；Hall and Ames 1998；Tang Yijie 2007，Xu Keqian 2011等等。根据这些学者的研究，中国文化没有任何与心身二元论相像的概念。依这些学者们看，在所讨论的中国文化中，不管是古代还是当代，一元论都是主导思想。我觉得，这种想法是不科学的。因此，下面的一章中我将通过分析《莊子》这本书，以证明中国古代学者也在考虑心身二元论这个问题。

在第二章中我将从文献角度研究《莊子》的语言和文字。根据《莊子》我发现，古代漢語主要以“己”、“自”這兩個词來表达“自我”這個概念。而关于“body”，则是以“體”、“形”來表達它的含義。最后，這兩個概念與“person”都不一样。我认为“person”指出個人的形而上學和具体存在。而“身”这代表着這个人类的特點。由于篇幅所限，本章主要探讨庄子这本书的内容，而不考虑内篇、外篇和杂篇的历史时代。我个人决定把文献研究作为最初的凭据，是因为目前除了文本本身并没有其他更加详细的讨论。换言之，进行更为深入的考察之后，才可以更好的理解中国古代语言的发展。

第三章中我将根据上面的分析结果，研究《莊子》的作者们怎么讨论这些概念。本章的目的在于一方面证明中国文化同样显示了人类的二元性，另一方面探索人类的二元论有什么特点。读《莊子》的时候，可以找到一些描述“self”、“body”、“person”本质的句子。以“自我”这个概念为例，莊子解釋人們看重物质生活及權力，這是因为人們認為自己能控制所有的東西，包括死亡和命運。根据莊子的理论，人们这样误导自己，是因为物质的丰富不属于人性。因此，他们的自我不是真正的。另一方面，圣人明白人们不能控制生死这种过程。他们的自我才是真的，因为他们接受人类的本性：每个人都终究一死。《莊子》书中还有有别的类似的解釋。如果我們不承認中國文化也包含着二元論的理論，我們就无法把中國古代哲學探究得很准确。

最后我还想讨论一下《莊子》里最有名的句子中之一，即《齐物论》中的“吾丧我”。对于“吾丧我”的解释历来有很多。我没有其他学者的经验，这里介绍的就是本人愚见。

第四章将对以上章节的研究进行概括。虽然说《莊子》里有很跟“自我”有关的考虑，但是不能说这本书完全是关于个人主义的。我的研究表明《莊子》中不仅有一些与个人主义有关系的概念，社会结构和社会因素也在《莊子》讨论的主题之中。我将在本章中向读者介绍庄子对个人主义和社会结构的想法，而且仔细思考跟这两个主题有关的研究，例如Brindely 2010；Fang 1968；Xu Zhouyun 1968 等等。大体而言，我认为《莊子》这样的文本里存在跟儒家完全不一样的价值取向。

他认为，人们应该认识自我，接纳自我，才能进入社会结构。加深对自己的了解不一定意味着推进个人主义，而是推进个人对自己和世界的认识。

当然，我的文章并不会涵盖中国古代所有的哲学，我只会介绍一些《莊子》中与心靈哲學有关系的特征。目前学术界认为中国文化也自己的二元论理的学者极少（Elvin 1985; Goldin 2003; Goldin 2015; Slingerland 2003; Slingerland 2013; Yearly 1980）。本论文是向二元论理深度研究所迈出的小小一步，希望将来西方学者能够对中国文化做出更深入的研究。

Introduction

Back in the 1880s Edward T. C. Werner arrived in Beijing to work as student interpreter for the British consular service. He left service in 1914, and dedicated himself to the study of mythology and legends in China. In one of his works, *Myths and Legends of China*, he depicts some aspects of Chinese mythology. As regards Chinese cosmogony, he states: “it is safe to assume that the dualism which later occupied their philosophical thoughts to so great an extent as almost to see inseparable from them (...) was not only formulating itself during that long period [i.e. the period before 500 BCE], but had gradually reached an advanced state. *We may even go so far as to say that dualism, or its beginnings, existed in the very earliest times, for the belief in the second self or ghost or double of the dead is in reality nothing else*” (Werner, 1922: 83, italics mine). He then refers to the *Yijing* 易經 as the bible of Chinese dualism (*ibidem*: 84). Later on, Chinese dualism as a topic of discussion disappears from the European academia, at least to my knowledge, until it reappears under a new light. With some exceptions (Elvin 1985; Goldin 2003; Slingerland 2004; *et al.*), Anglo-European scholars have been struggling to demonstrate that dualistic conceptions are proper of the Anglo-European culture. Asian, Middle Eastern and African cultures are irremediably holistic in their essence. South America, notably, is entirely left out from the equation.

The present thesis argues against this position. Focusing on human nature, I intend to demonstrate that ancient Chinese philosophy¹ not only conceived it as dualistic, alluding continuously to the self and a related body/mind dualism,² but gave also birth to what we may

1. While defining ‘philosophy’ has been a difficult task for scholars, it is necessary to explain that I refer to Chinese ‘philosophy’ being one of those manifestations of the human intellect born within and developed by a population, part of what we refer as ‘Chinese culture’ or ‘Chinese tradition’. For the sake of convenience, I will use these three terms bearing this general meaning. I leave the discussion to those much more acquainted in the field, yet being aware of the debate around this term as exposed by Defoort 2001.

2. It is important to underline that in my thesis I do not intend ‘dualism’ as indicating two *separated* aspects, which can be considered autonomously. On the contrary, I believe that mind and body influence each other. I refer to ‘dualism’ as a conceptual division between two aspects, both of which concur in defining the human being. I am indebted to prof. Daniele Mainente for his help in clarifying the issue.

refer to as ‘philosophy of mind’.³ Rediscovering one of the Chinese dualistic positions does not necessarily deny the existence of any holistic position. Holism might belong to Chinese culture as a response to dualism. This is a sizable topic in its own, but my aims are limited. What is clear, however, is the current lack of serious engagement with the Chinese notions of dualism. As I will discuss in the following chapter, studies that promote Chinese philosophy as holistic seem to be more committed to looking for confirmation of an allegedly Anglo-European individualistic nature, rather than exploring Chinese culture.

The first chapter is divided into four sections, one of which is further divided into two subsections. I firstly introduce the reader to the topic here under discussion, presenting some scholarly studies that explore the nature of the self. It may be noted, correctly, that this section rely greatly on studies belonging to the Anglo-European academia. There are two main reasons. Firstly, the Chinese academia on the subject is poorly developed, and some studies simply corroborate Anglo-European scholars’ opinion.⁴ Secondly, these studies aim to decode the essence of human nature regardless peoples’ culture. Culture certainly plays a role on personal formation, yet other factors contribute to it, some of which are regarded as inborn. This first chapter continues by discussing those works which argue for a holistic nature of Chinese people. These are distinguished from those studies that do envisage a Chinese notion of self, but describe it as and only as of a relational nature. A further distinction is then drawn to individuate contributions that corroborate the existence of selfhood in term of ‘individualism’. Finally, I present the works of those scholars who stand against this holistic position and address adequate attention to the existence of a notion of self in ancient China.

The second chapter is devoted to an analysis of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, a book attributed to Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (369?–286? BCE), also referred as Zhuangzi. We do not know much about the person, except that he was indeed a unique character among the intellectual world of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). The extant version is based on the work of Guo

3. Silver 2014 addresses the notions of ‘self’ and ‘mind’ in the *Zhuangzi* with relations to *Zhuangzi*’s ontological system. The work presents an interesting approach, but is so stingy in referring to the text that the conclusions seem forced on it. The entire notion of self, for example, is based on the sentence “the sage has no self [*wu ji* 無己]” from chapter one, but this sentence *per se* does not strike me as particularly insightful in telling us *what* the self is.

4. The situation is different with regards to the scholarship on development of self and related issues at a very early age. This particular field addresses educational theories, thus does not strictly relate to my field of interest. It is interesting to note, however, that many studies confirm that the same performances related to cognitive processes carried out by Chinese and Western preschoolers bring to the same results (Ahn and Miller 2012), clearly equating Asian and non-Asian children.

Xiang 郭象 (d. 312), who, around the third century CE, cut off part of the text and organized what remained in 33 chapters, divided in Inner Chapters, *neipian* 內篇 (1–7), Outer Chapters, *waipian* 外篇 (8–22) and Mixed Chapters, *zupian* 雜篇 (23–33). My research focuses on the text itself; to avoid superficiality in treating the authorship, I will refer only to the book, either with “the *Zhuangzi*” or “*Zhuangzi*”.⁵ I chose to analyze this work considering that the *Zhuangzi* results from the work of many authors, belonging to different centuries. As such, if we can trace a notion of self throughout the entire book, we can safely infer that it was not the invention of one person in a specific moment of Chinese philosophy.

My approach operates on a two-fold level. From a philological point of view, I analyzed the following set of characters: *ji* 己, *zi* 自, *ti* 體, *xing* 形, and *shen* 身. I then discuss the content itself. It is my opinion the first two characters express what in English we refer as ‘self’, while the last three indicates the physical body, each individuating specific features. I will examine each passage where these characters refer significantly to the self and the body, to conclude that the authors of the *Zhuangzi* reasoned extensively about the self, considered human nature as dualistic, and developed a proper philosophy of mind. Throughout all the *Zhuangzi*, the language is so detailed that it is difficult to believe Chinese thinkers were not aware of a dualistic nature. Besides, many passages in the *Zhuangzi* can be comprehended only according to this division: ignoring the presence of different characters, or thinking about them as interchangeable in a holistic fashion, brings to a reading that does not respond faithfully to the text. Finally, the final sections of this second chapter are devoted to a study of the character usually translated as ‘mind’, *xin* 心, and to some considerations of the passage “I have lost myself”, *wu sang wo* 吾喪我, from the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. Generally, this chapters is to be intended as valid only within the context it is referred to. I do not hold that the findings here presented should be blindly applied to ever occurrence of these characters in the *Zhuangzi*, let alone the entire corpus of Chinese manuscripts. I aim to prove that Chinese concepts of self and body/mind dualism do exist, and address attention to their investigation.

5. For those interested in the figure of Zhuangzi, his philosophy (if any) and the authorship of the text, see: Eno 2010; cf. Graham 1981: 3–40; cf. Graham 1989; cf. Hansen 1992; cf. Klein 2011; cf. Liu 1994; cf. Liu 2015; cf. Møllaagard, 2007; cf. Rand 1983; cf. Roth 1991/2003.

In the third chapter, I will recap and discuss the features of the Zhuangzian self, considering the constraints to which the self -and therefore a person- is subject. I argue that *Zhuangzi* promoted some individualistic instances, without for this reason denying human beings' social structures. According to my understanding, *Zhuangzi* considered society and sociality as a source of distress for the individual, and yet some advantages could be gained by the necessity of being part of a social structure. In the famous story of the oak acting as a shire, for instance, it is clear that the possibility for the oak to guard its life by pretending to be a local shrine works exactly because society's credo in local shrines.

Two brief notes of qualification are in order here. The first is the omission of considerations upon the different historical times during which the *Zhuangzi*'s chapters were crafted. I analyze different characters considering the semantic sentence into which they are used, and yet neglect the nature and timing of the chapter itself. This is indeed a flaw in my work, which could not be addressed because of space constraints and limitations of time and abilities. The picture is complicated by the fact that we do not know to what extent Guo Xiang modified the *Zhuangzi*. These difficulties notwithstanding, I devote my studies to a better understanding of the extant text. The second annotation is that my analysis does not take into account the frequency of recurrence of a word within the *Zhuangzi*; verbs and prepositions with which the characters I analyze form a unit are also very often neglected. This type of study requires proper time and space to be fully exploited; this was neither their time nor space.

Conventions

The reference for the English translation is Watson, 2013, thereafter indicated with W followed directly by the page.⁶ Annotations to personal names and names of places can be found in Watson footnotes along the text and Mair 1994. Comparisons with different interpretations by Angus C. Graham 1981 and Brook Ziporyn 2009 are sometimes made.⁷ Among the Chinese scholarship, I selected the modern annotated edition *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子

6. The other major reference is the translation by Victor H. Mair, 1998. indicated with M followed directly by the page. When I do not quote Watson's translation, I explicitly state the reasons.

7. The translation by Thomas Merton 1965, albeit interesting, is not taken into consideration, being it partial and based on an interpretative reading by the Trappist monk.

集釋 by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 1961, and the *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 by Chen Guying 陳鼓應 1983. When useful, I also quote the commentary by Guo Xiang 郭象, as reported in Guo Qingfan's edition.⁸ Quotations from the *Zhuangzi* are done accordingly to the concordance *Zhuangzi zhuzi suoyin* 莊子逐字索引, *A Concordance to the Zhuangzi* (hereafter as ZZS, followed by chapter/page/line) part of the Institute of Chinese Studies Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series.

Since in more than one case I make use of Edward Slingerland's studies to show my point, I will briefly explain his approach to provide the reader all the tools for a better understanding.

In his researches, Slingerland widely relies on the cognitive linguistics theory, as explained by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson 1980 (Slingerland 2003a: 21–39; cf. 2004: 324–328; cf. 2008: 21–23), according to which we talk about human experience through metaphors which deal with the physical realm. One of the tenets of the cognitive-linguistic approach, and a premise on which Slingerland relies, is that this reasoning on the human experience in concrete terms is independent from languages, being part of the cognitive process proper to human beings. Thus, it is valid for peoples from whatever culture and time. Without realizing it, we make use of conceptual metaphors to reason about ourselves and the world (Slingerland 2004: 324). For instance, sentences like “he reached his destination”, or “I met nice people along the way”, are used to describe life as a ‘journey’, a clear example of how the conceptual metaphors help us in mapping the metaphysical realm (Slingerland 2003a: 23–25; cf. 2004: 326). The same happens when we experience ourselves: we think about ourselves as subjects which deal with selves, and reason about them thanks to different schemata. The subject is a person-like entity who acts, and the self is something else, different every time, according to the conceptual metaphor in use. We have, for example, the schema ‘the self as object’, where the subject treats the self as it were a concrete object. E.g.: “I let myself go”, the subject releases the self. Differently, in the ‘self as container’ schema, the

8. Guo Xiang's commentary can be misleading, since he himself sometimes saw in the text what was convenient for his own purpose: he was committed to “harmonize ‘Ruism’ and ‘Taoism’, social norma and spontaneity (...)” (Ziporyn 2003: 18), so that sometimes Guo Xiang was willing to “totally twist the apparent meaning of *Zhuangzi* and defend his interpretation with outrageous sophism for the sake of his polemic” (*ibidem.*, 30). Yet, I will often quote it, since it does provide significative reading.

subject perceives the self as a container for qualities, thoughts, and emotions. E.g.: “I did not think I have this strength in myself” (see Slingerland 2003a: 27–29; cf. 2004: 328 ff.).

We will encounter many of these conceptual metaphors in the *Zhuangzi*. This kind of analysis will be valuable firstly to show that the authors of the *Zhuangzi* were indeed capable of formulating a dichotomy between the mind and the body, and secondly, to bring us closer to the meaning of the text itself. This kind of approach, despite the criticism that could attract,⁹ aims to correct the mainstream approach in the studies of humanities in the last decades, preventing generalizations and easy conclusions about Chinese culture. To show that we share the same mental conceptualizations about existence and ourselves paves the way for a new and more genuine way of understanding early Chinese thinkers’ heritage.

9. See Fraser 2007.

1. State of the Field

Le moi est haïssable.

Blaise Pascal

1.1 What we talk about when we talk about self

Confronting with the notion of ‘self’ and human nature is like dealing with Pandora’s box. The fleeting impression of actually understanding what the term refers to is almost immediately replaced by some discomfort, as the complex entanglement of physical and metaphysical elements complicates the picture. The framework becomes even more puzzling with the inclusion of many and different perspectives from which the self can be analyzed (Harris 1989: 600). For sake of clarity, in what follows I distinguish two groups. To the first group belong those studies that demonstrate how the self and different related aspects of a human being (one’s personality, one’s mind) result from social processes (Mead 1934; Mauss 1985); in the second, I group those works that explore self’s nature and features. Because of space constrains and personal inadequacy, I limit myself to presenting Marcel Mauss’ point of view, since it led to many more interesting debates (Carrithers *et al.* 1985), and some seminal works belonging to the second group. This section, along with introducing the reader into the field of study I address, will provide the terminology I use through the following chapters of my thesis.

I am not concerned with a detailed account of the historical development of the notion of self; suffice it to say that the its European roots lies into Greek philosophy (Morris 1994: 18), and that different formulations succeeded one another according to different eras (Baumeister 1987). Since Descartes’ formulation of a dualistic reading of human nature is often taken as benchmark to investigate how the idea of self –if any– is articulated in cultures different from the European one, I need to enter a caveat.

Descartes’ conception of dualism derives from his conceiving the body as a machine, following the mechanistic conception of the world spread among the philosophers of the seventeenth– and eighteenth– century, who were in turn influenced by the scientific revolution of that period. The non-material element which enables a human being to think is, Descartes argues, made of a different type of substance. This results in a dichotomy between body and

mind (Morris 1991: 10). Despite Descartes' formulation was not as straightforward as it is generally considered to be,¹⁰ this is considered *the dualism par excellence*, and it still has considerable influence in the field.¹¹ Recently, though, this dualism has been called into question by new formulations;¹² yet here I will be content in using 'body-mind dualism' to refer the most simple dualistic reading of human nature: the acknowledgment that human beings are more than the body itself.

Another turning point was marked by Marcel Mauss' short yet dense sketch of the history of the self in 1938. Arguing that different social structures bring about different notions of self, he starts from ancient Greek philosophy, travels through Australia, the American North-West Indians; he addresses India and China, going back then to the Roman empire, with the birth of the notion of 'person' as the basis of the modern political, legal and social institutions (Mauss 1985: 1–25). It is beyond my scope to investigate whether or not his findings are correct;¹³ what I find interesting is Mauss' statement that there has never been a human being unaware of their body and of their spiritual presence as well (*ibid.*: 3). The point is clear: every human being experience their existence as something more than mere physical presence. This idea that the self is inborn to the human being was further developed (Allport 1943; Strawson 2005), yet for some reasons the debate on the existence of the self, its nature and features, addressed mainly, when not exclusively, the Anglo-European intellectual discourse.

10. Morris underlines, correctly I believe, that Descartes proposed "a dualism of the body and the mind", the latter being "entirely independent of the body" (Morris 1991: 10–11), but in following his reasoning he concluded with what Morris defines "two distinct lines of thought. On the one hand, Descartes emphasizes a deep cleavage, a real distinction between the body and the mind (...). On the other hand, he is reluctant to see the soul or the mind as simply lodged in the body" (*loc. cit.*).

11. See Morris, 1991: 17 for a list of the main philosophers and thinkers which were highly influenced by Descartes' assumptions.

12. See Hodge, who argues that "[t]he claim that humans are *intuitive* Cartesian substance dualists", once put under scrutiny, "does not fit the evidence nor answer questions about how humans think as it has been taken to do" (Hodge 2008: 411; cf. Slingerland and Chudek 2011: 998). Slingerland and Chudek's paper expresses also a third theory, that of the 'mind–body holism' as expressed by A. Wierzbicka (2006). Interpretations run the gamut from mathematical (Gao Chao and Zhao Yifan 2012) to mechanic (Gao and Xiong 2012) bases. These aspects are far too rich arguments to paraphrase here, neither it is my intention to do so.

13. Carrithers argues that Mauss' speech is controversially presented (Carrithers 1985: 234–5), and indeed at a certain point it seems that 'self' and 'person' are used as synonymous with lack of clarity. Other remarks can be followed throughout the entire volume edited by Carrithers, Collins and Lukes 1985.

We will see later the consequences of this sided-debate. Here I ought to present some key terms according to which I conduct my examination. Anthropologically speaking, the self is regarded as the locus of experience (Harris 1989: 601), characterized by reflexivity and agency (Sökefeld 1999: 417). As such, it becomes a metaphysical place which collects emotions, experiences, thoughts and intentions (Harland *et al.* 2004). Its content, therefore, differs from person to person; what equals us all is the fact of having a self. The self can also be considered as composed by different selves (Markus and Nurius 1986), each of them representing different states of being or emotions, which we may sometime reject (e.g. “I was not myself that day”).¹⁴ It is generally believed that the self is not continuous: while we sleep, we are not self-conscious.¹⁵ What knows no interruption and gives continuity to a human being is the ‘identity’, a notion I do not discuss closely in my dissertation (Ellemers *et al.* 2002; cf. Rorty 1976; cf. Sökefeld 1999).

Prentice 1962 considers another possibility. Taking a very scientific perspective, Prentice states that the organism, not the self, makes the experience: the brain is the organ that allows us to experience our being as selves. Self, then, carries the same notion of ‘person’, being the latter a concept totally separated from the body (Prentice 1962: 788). This argument is similar to some reflection by Bernard Williams 1990. To entirely discuss the validity of these positions is beyond my abilities and intentions. Yet, I am not sure that the body can be dismissed entirely from the equation. It would be hard to deny that two–meters tall persons experience different things from somebody who is one meter fifty, precisely because of their body. In some occasion, the body makes a difference, which affects one’s experience, which in turn shapes the self.

The notion of ‘person’ too often lacks a clear-cut definition (Dennet 1976: 175–196). In the sketch above mentioned, Mauss seems to equate it to the self by using these two terms interchangeably; Harris considers ‘person’ a term indicating the agent in a society (Harris 1989: 692 ff.).¹⁶ Morris equates ‘person’ with ‘individual’ (Morris 1994: 13), but I prefer to

14. The term ‘self’ refers either to a metaphysical entity which generally summarizes one’s being or to a precise state of being, one of the many selves a person can be.

15. See Prentice 1962: 786–787 for an incredibly interesting question on the experience of self while dreaming.

16 Cf. Morris 1994: 196, who argues that there are four domains which determine the conceptualization of the human person: a material dimension, a social aspect, how the conceptualization of the individual is articulated, and a spiritual dimension. This considerations derives from comparison between different cross-cultural data, thus are part of a wider research. Here, I will indeed taking into consideration the social aspects, but limitedly. Such an articulated definition might result too broad for

treat these two concepts separate for sake of clarity. Differently, Bernard Williams considers ‘person’ as something subject to the continuous changes of selves (Williams 1976: 201).

Frankfurt 1971 consistently argued that the criteria for being a ‘person’ are not sufficient to isolate human beings from other creatures in the wider realm of biological species.¹⁷ Taking the will as quintessential for the notion of person, he stresses that this feature can be identified in other animal species. What really makes the difference is what he calls ‘second order desires’: to want to have a certain desire, or to want to be moved by a certain feeling. Animals too can experience to want X, but only human beings may want to want X (Frankfurt 1971: 6–7). According to this interpretation, the notion of ‘person’ should be rephrased entirely. Considering, though, that the category I am taking into analysis is not that of every biological species, but that of human beings, in my research I will use this term with specific reference to human species, hoping that this lack of precision will not disturb the reader.

What is crystal clear to me is that the difference between notions of ‘self’ and ‘person’ is very subtle. We use sentences like “I am not the same person as before” to indicate an intellectual growth, which may have nothing to do with the body. One could say “I am a different self” to convey the same meaning. Yet, I ask the reader to give the following reasoning a chance. Consider, hypothetically, the possibility of transplanting your self into person A’s body, while you are asleep, without warning. When you wake up and look in the mirror, it is not probable that you will say “I am not my self”, for indeed, you are so much yourself that you are able to find your memory of having another body. The experiences you have done thus far do not alter. It is also not likely that you will say “I am not the same body”, for your identity goes further. The first thing I think I would say if I were the victim of this experiment is: “I am not the same person. I recognize I am myself, but this body does not belong to me”. As hypothetical as it is, this reasoning still allows me to picture ‘person’ as indicating a natural human being defined by cognitive processes *and* a physical body. This is the interpretation I give to ‘person’. ‘Person’ indicates an agent who performs acts (cf. Harris 1982: 602 ff.), one’s being given by character, a body and its complexion. The concept is not necessarily related to a social context; a person in a social context becomes an ‘individual’. I apply to ‘person’ Smith’s definition for ‘selfhood’: “[it] involves being *self-aware* or

my purpose here. Those interested might refer to Morris’ bibliography, 1994.

17. There are two more conceptions. One equates person to the natural human being (on this I relied upon to give my interpretation); the second one is the conception of person as cultural category (Morris 1994: 10–12).

reflective; being or having a body (a large debate here); somehow taking into account the *boundaries of selfhood* at birth and death and feeling a *continuity of identity* in between; (...) being in partial *communication and communion with other contemporary selves* while experiencing an irreducible *separateness of experience and identity* (...)” (Smith 1985: 60–61).

To conclude, I concur with Allport that “the existence of one’s own self is the one fact of which every mortal person (...) is perfectly convinced” (Allport 1943: 451), yet definitions of the self are still ambiguous. For my purposes here, the definitions I provide in this section are enough. I forego further debates, focusing instead on those studies which discuss the concept of self—or lack thereof—in Chinese culture, along with some considerations upon them.

1.2 Chinese thought: the Holistic position

Despite the above-mentioned attempts to stress the universality of the problem, the major trend has been to state time and again that the existence of a self, and a correlated explanation of human beings in dualistic terms, are true only within the Anglo-European culture. Other traditions are addressed as ‘holistic’: self and body know no distinctions.¹⁸ Chinese culture made no exception to this rule. Under this light, a research like mine, which investigates how the notions of self, person and body/mind dualism were depicted in pre-imperial China, would be pointless. In what follow, I will unpack the ‘Chinese as selfless’ claim by analyzing the previous scholarship to break with the opinion that Chinese are a “different order of humanity” (Ames 1993: 149), a generalization followed in many disciplines (Nisbett 2003). The present section is necessary for two reasons. First, it will clarify the wider context into which my study fits; secondly, it will provide some insight on how the Chinese terminology has been considered so far.

I start again from Marcel Mauss’ considerations. Despite his arguing of a metaphysical presence as universal in human beings, he ends up denying a notion of ‘individuality’ as European knows it in Chinese culture (Mauss 1985: 13–14). True enough, Mauss was not a sinologist, and we should also recall the state of the field on Chinese subject at the time he delivered his speech.

18. Betty Stafford promoted a reconsideration of holism in Indian culture, but the general trend remains that of including Indian thought among the holistic traditions. See B. Stafford, 1976, ‘A Death-Blow to Śākara’s Non-Dualism? A Dualist Refutation’, *Religious Studies*, 12: 281-290.

His statements brought different reactions. Some of these are collected in a volume, edited by M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes. Specifically concerned with Chinese culture, the paper by Mark Elvin (1985: 156–189) aims to demonstrate the development of the notion of self in China. Elvin starts referring to ancient Chinese poetry, and continues through the centuries, ending the discussion with Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 (1982 – 1978) reflections on self-realization. Albeit having the faultiness of being rather generic, as any study regarding more than two thousand years of cultural development is, Mark Elvin's paper is surely convincing. If any, it should have brought into academia at least the possibility of considering Chinese culture as portraying human beings as dualistic.¹⁹

Apparently, Elvin's work went unacknowledged. Introducing the volume *Anthropology of the Self*, Brian Morris recalls Marcel Mauss' definitions (Morris 1994: 13), yet the following chapter on Chinese culture (*ibid.*: 96–117) somehow denies the existence of the self as an autonomous notion: it was an embodied type for the Daoists (*ibidem*: 109), or meaningless when considered outside the social context for the Confucian tradition (*ibidem*: 115 ff.). In developing his position, Morris does not present references to Chinese texts, but only to other studies that promote Chinese culture as holistic. This is one of the four recurrent trends that I have identified in these studies: poor and inconsistent reference to Chinese sources.

This is true of some studies by Roger Ames. In his notable career, Ames' contribution to the scholarship on Asian Studies –specifically regarding Chinese Culture– has been, and still is, substantial. *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (1993), is the second book of a trilogy edited by T. Kasulis, with R. Ames and W. Dissanayake,²⁰ that aims to examine various notions of self in a both cross-culturally and cross-disciplinary way. This book is rich in content and provides material for the present debate.

Both the introduction by Kasulis and the contribution by Ames clarify the position of the authors regarding the notion of body in Chinese philosophy: “Asian traditions (...) do not

19. Cf. J. J. M. De Groot, whose research concerning cosmology brought him to discuss what he calls the ‘soul’ as a separate entity from the body, which is in the end a dualism; he also clearly refers to notions of ‘mind’ and ‘mental faculties’ (De Groot 1964: 14). Cf. Livia Kohn: with reference to mysticism and practices of meditation, she also tried to underline the common mistake regarding Chinese tradition as not able to “radically distinguish between body and mind” (Kohn 1992: 169). Again, her appeal was largely ignored.

20. The first and the third being *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice* (1994) and *Self and Image in Asian Theory and Practice*, 1998.

assume the sharp distinction between body and mind” (Kasulis 1993: xv) or, for those “Asian philosophers” –not better specified– who did conceive a dichotomy, the disconnection between the body and the mind is “a practical dysfunction” (*ibidem*: xx). As regards Ames’ analysis of the body, we are told that Chinese can be the hypothetical counterpart of Pythagoras’ definition of the human being as “a disembodied souls”, for in classical China the fashion was to configure “one’s entire person” (Ames 1993: 150).²¹ There is no dichotomy involved, and Ames states a few lines later the “absence of a substance ontology in early China” (*ibid.*: 162). Truth to be told, Ames refers to a sort of Chinese notion of dualism: at page 163 we read that “Chinese thinkers were able to ‘reconcile’ this dichotomy; rather, it did not arise”. Shall we interpret this to say that in early China a dichotomy did exist, but then, since Chinese thinkers²² managed somehow to reconcile this tradition, an extensive and wide debate upon the subject did not arise?

A second imprecision commonly found in those studies that promote holism is to consider Confucianism and/or some notions belonging to this school of thought valid for the entire Chinese culture – a peril Elvin had brought to the attention of the reader (Elvin 1985: 157), equally ignored as his paper.²³ The assumption that Confucian tradition, representative for Chinese culture as a whole, developed no idea of any dualism whatsoever represents a sort of red thread in Ames’ writings, for in *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: a Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing* 孝經 we read: “[f]or Confucius and for generations of Chinese to come, the basic unit of humanity is this person in this family (...) [F]or Confucius, there is no individual—no “self” or “soul”—that remains once the layers of social relations are peeled away” (Romesemont and Ames 2009: 11). Doubts arise whether this is the right approach to take: the book concerns one of the Confucian classics, yet the notion of selflessness is applied to Chinese intellectual culture in general (cf. Yao 2008; cf. Tang 2007).

21. Note, incidentally, how an entire culture is compared with one single philosopher, as if the Chinese culture did not present other thinkers.

22. Again, it is not clear to whom Ames refers with this sentence. Even considering that Ames’ analysis regards the Confucian tradition, this is taken as a whole without going into deep analysis of the main representative figures of Confucianism.

23. Cf. Fingarette’s 1979 discussion of the notion of ‘self’ in the *Lunyu* 論語, usually translated as *Analects*, a collection of Confucius and his disciples’ saying. To Fingarette, the self has to be eventually brought into accord with others, but he never denies the existence of it. For a recent English translation of the *Lunyu*, see Slingerland 2003b.

The same is true in Thomé Fang's contribution to the seminal volume *The Status of the Individual in the East and the West*, edited by Charles Moore in 1968. In discussing the individual in Chinese metaphysics, Fang defines the Confucian "a system of philosophical anthropology", whose consequence is that "the Chinese (...) takes no pride in being a type of individual" (Fang 1968: 43). While this assumption might be true if referred to a specific context, I do not see solid ground for inferring such a definitive statement regarding the Chinese considering just one philosopher, no matter how influencing his thought might have been. Such an approach has two implications: Chinese culture seems to be reduced to Confucianism as the only school of thought, which in turn seems to be considered as a uniform unchanging philosophy. Chinese scholarship follows this approach to corroborate the holistic nature of Chinese people considering mainly, when not only, Confucianism.

Thinking from the Han is part of another trilogy co-written by Roger Ames with David Hall, in which the authors stress that notions like 'self', 'truth' and 'transcendence' "are not helpful in understanding China" (Van Norden 2000: 288). Hall and Ames' commitment is "to indicate the irrelevance of the philosophic inventory rehearsed above to Chinese understanding of self" (Hall and Ames 1998: 21). In conclusion, Chinese are "selfless", "at least from a Western perspective" (*ibidem*: 23–24). It strikes how the comparison is always based on 'Western' values, as if there is no real understanding of the Chinese values in their native tradition, but rather a search for something that cannot possibly be there, being part of the 'Western' tradition. Besides, 'self' as a word can provide a correct translation linguistically speaking, without implying all that has been said about the *concept* of self in the European tradition. This sort of twisting other cultures for the sake of better defining one's own is often witnessed (cf. Ames 1998: 226 ff.; cf. Ames 2010; cf. Hall and Ames 1998: 23 ff.), and is nothing but a reaffirmation of the 'orientalistic' approach explained by Edward Said in 1978. That of the Chinese being completely dependent from social environment and incapable of thinking about themselves as individuals is, be it noted, a position according to which other scholars defined the absence of any dualistic concept, and a consequent holistic nature of Chinese people. Do the two aspects necessarily be mingled together? Is not possible to conceive one's being as dualistic, while feeling the need to belong to a social group? I believe it is.

A third faulty approach is the attempt to avoid the discussion regarding the notion of self by a skillful use of words. For example, Joachim's paper (1998; cf. Wierzbicka 2006) makes use of *Zhuangzi's wuji* 無己 to demonstrate that 'no self' or 'selfless' as translation for *wuji* are incorrect. 'Self', he argues, is a term proper to European culture. Furthermore, its use is incorrect, since *Zhuangzi* did not think in term of a "true self" in contrast with a false one, but he conceived a pluralistic nature: "Zhuang's conception of personhood [is that of] something without a unitary self behind the thoughts, habits, actions, feelings and so forth of which we are made" (*ibidem*: 56–67). 'Person', he suggests, better expresses human beings' pluralistic nature. Yet there is no explanation why the concept of self would be inadequate to include all the multiple sides of the human being (cf. Goldin 2000).

Fourth, the research is misled by considering the Cartesian formulation of body/mind dualism as the only possible one: since no equivalent to Descartes' formulation is found in Chinese thought, be it ancient, modern or contemporary, the conclusion is that Chinese are selfless. This approach does not take into account that Cartesio was not the only one who discussed what we today call the body/mind problem in the European tradition, and Chinese culture is given by many different schools of thought.

I take *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives* (1985), edited by Marsella, Hsu and DeVos, as illustrative (cf. Ning Yu 2007). The volume aims to readdress scholarship attention to the subject of self both in Asia and in the "West", as the title suggests, not without good reasons. One of the premises is to consider the self "apart from one's social role", since it is culture, not society, the main influence on how persons perceive their selves (Marsella *et al.* 1985: 6). Despite these intentions, many authors take society as *the* framework into which analyze the notion of self, as we will see shortly. This remains, however, a detailed and thought provoking book.

Addressed to China,²⁴ Francis Hsu's paper, 'The self in Cross-Cultural Perspective' argues that, in order to understand the Chinese notion of self, it is necessary to "forget about the term 'personality', being an "expression of Western ideal of individualism" (Hsu 1985: 24–33). Only after this it will be possible to clearly see that "the Chinese conception of man is

24. Wei-ming Tu contributed with a study on the self in Confucian thought (1985). As best as I can understand, however, the discussion concerns mainly the idea of self as a *spiritual* development (Tu 1985: 231; cf. *ibidem*: 245), giving no real insight to the concept of selfhood *per se*. Therefore, my decision to not discuss it extensively.

based on the individual's transactions with his fellows human being" (*loc. cit.*). He then takes the man, *ren* 人, as "a basis for understanding human behavior with reference to social and cultural stability" (Hsu 1985: 33), and provides a concentric diagram divided into seven layers of human existence: the most inner layer is unconsciousness, while to the outer ones are society and culture. Outside them there is the world. This to illustrate that Chinese people relate themselves only according to the most exterior layers, those of society and culture, yet they are not inclined to step outside these to relate to the world itself. Therefore, they are not likely to "develop a few secondary groups outside their kinship boundary" (Hsu 1985: 28–35) nor they fancy to gain more insight about the world, that is why China had no relevant travelers or conquerers (*ibidem*: 35).

The problematics with this position are self-evident. Firstly, the decision not to use the term 'personality' since it is a 'Western' expression could lead to ask why we have to set our minds on a certain concept without engaging a genuine approach. Secondly, Hsu takes as benchmark a concept with a strong Confucian flavor to discuss the nature "Confucian society", even though many conclusions—some of these really hazardous—are then referred to Chinese culture as a whole. Thirdly, it is implied that Chinese have no idea of personality, nor any capacity to self-reflection nor consciousness, since they are situated in the layers of society and culture.

In reviewing above quoted volume *Culture and the Self: Asian and Western Perspectives*, Obeyesekere makes some interesting points. Despite Hall and Ames' statements of 'self' as a uselessness term, Obeyesekere reminds us that "some insights could be gained by using this terminology" (Obeyesekere 1990: 243), even though he is not completely convinced whether or not the self as main analytical term is of true help to understand the Chinese personality and culture (*loc. cit.*). Another observation made by Obeyesekere is worth being quoted in full. He recalls Goodwin Chu's belief, based on the studies by Mead, that a Chinese man or woman cannot be him- or herself, being trapped in their social role. Thus, a male Chinese who consider himself a brother, or son, cannot be 'himself' (Obeyesekere 1990: 243–246). At this point Obeyesekere recalls Tu Wei-ming's affirmation that

"Chinese can be themselves *in their own terms* (...). One can simply say that for me to be myself in traditional China is to introject the ego

ideal of my father, as Tu says. I can still continue to have a conception of myself as a person, quite distinct from my father's bodily and internal self, but it (my personhood) is *constituted* (it is a crystallization) of the values of my society introjected by identification with, and submission to, my father." (Obeyeskere 1990: 245)

According to my understanding, the general conclusion is the caution required when using the concept and the word 'self'. I could not agree more. Indeed, my point is neither to apply a 'self-centered' reading, nor to prove that there is a Chinese equivalent of the European notion of self in China. In my analysis, I use 'self' as a term, and devote my research to understanding the Chinese native concept of self. I hope that this cautious approach will help me in avoiding miscomprehension.

1.3 The Notion of Self in China: counterarguments

1.3.1 The relational self

The current scholarship has developed another position²⁵ on whether or not the self can be a debatable topic in cultures different from the Anglo-European one (cf. Raphals 2009). Taking advantages on studies which promote a relational reading of the self,²⁶ some scholars believe that every culture has developed a native notion of self, but only the European and American notions are considered of an autonomous character. The Asian self is relational in its essence. To prove this, Hazel R. Markus and Shinobu Kitayama (1991) antagonize the American notion of self to the Japanese one. Far from being an expert on Japanese culture,²⁷ I can still trace some inconsistency: there is no clear historical framework for many of the statements; the American and Japanese notions of self are in the end referred to the Western and the Eastern notions, a generalization that weaken considerably the argument.

25. Some studies even tried to investigate the Chinese notion of self not to understand it *per se*, but as a possible solution to the postmodern crisis of the self as we know it in Europe (see e.g. Hall 1994). I forego the discussion of these positions, which seem to me the result of preconceived aims than of honest investigation.

26. See Anderson and Chen 2002 for an overview on the matter and detailed bibliography.

27. However, it seems to me that Japanese literature provides accounts on the capability of autonomous self-introspection by Japanese (Mishima 2009). With regard to Japanese culture as holistic, see Yasuo Yuasa, with K. P. Kasulis, *The Body: Towards an Eastern Body-Mind Theory*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

With regard to the Chinese culture, An-Bang Yu 1996 explains that the Chinese achievement motivation lies an understanding of the self as moral and family oriented. Chinese strive for success for the sake of family glorification, and we do not find the Western ideals of understanding and controlling the self (Yu 1996: 233 ff.). Even considering this moral-self to be so overwhelming, it does not sufficiently prove that the Chinese lack any idea of controlling and understanding the self.²⁸ We are not born with moral ideals (whatever these are). Children are thought what right and wrong supposedly are. Besides, ‘Western’ culture is still highly influenced by religious belief in the sacrality of the family as explained by Catholicism. The moral obligations of serving one’s parents and not bringing disgrace on the family as thought by Catholics is not very different from the moral obligations attached to Chinese people.

There is more to be said, but I confine myself to recalling Baumeister’s historical review of the notion of self within European culture (1987). During the Medieval times, selfhood did not constitute a problematic topic, since its knowledge was inferred Christian religion. There was no antagonization, Baumeister continues, between the self and society as we know it in modern times: hierarchy was established by God, one’s place in society was not questionable, and persons were defined by their social roles. It is only after Christianity loses power over people’s mentality that we witness attempts to redefine selfhood (Baumeister 1987: 160–170). This description of the social nature of the self concedes with the one used to portrait Asian notions of self. The European self has not always been of an independent type; scholars continuously use the modern notion of selfhood (from 18th Century onwards) because it is what they need to stress the European independent character in contrast with the Asian interdependent one.

To conclude, I do not deny that European peoples may display an independent feature. What I argue is that these studies should better contextualize the historical framework they refer to, and be careful in talking of “the Asian” and “the European” as fixed entities.

28. On the contrary, we may say that a Chinese person is far more acquainted with a control of their self, so much so that they neglect intimate desires and hopes to follow what can most satisfy their family.

1.2.2 Selfhood as Individualism

Some scholars of Chinese culture discussed a third possibility, namely to understand the Chinese notion of ‘selfhood’ in terms of ‘individualism’, with some resemblances to the European one.²⁹ In what follows, I will try to consider the findings of some of these studies. I want to clearly state beforehand that I do not deny the existence of individualistic instances in Chinese thought. On the contrary: I am convinced that individualism represents one of the topics of ancient Chinese philosophy and in the *Zhuangzi*.³⁰ What I argue, however, is that these studies are not grasping the essential features of it. They constitute, however, a valuable starting point to further discussion on the subject.

Munro’s volume *Individualism and Holism: studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* is very rich in content. In a nutshell, its many essays conclude that, while there are instances of individualism in Early China, Chinese did not exalt the self *per se*: the ultimate goal is the harmony with the whole (Overmyer 1987: 324). Even for those thinkers usually acknowledged as being promoters of individualistic issues,³¹ “some holistic entity generally plays a crucial role in their account if a good life” (Munro 1985: 22). Thus, it is somehow incorrect to talk about individualism in the Chinese tradition, at least the kind of individualism we have in Europe. Specifically referred to the *Zhuangzi*, Berling’s essay shows that there are no instances of individualism in the *Zhuangzi*, but only “a shift of attention (...) to another dimension of life” (Berling 1985: 101), even though is not really clear which one. Berling’s essay opens with the statement that “a central concern [in the *Zhuangzi*] is freedom”, and after having identified social labels as of a false nature, being these based on the social reality, it concludes that “the perfected self does not exist in the order of reality characterized by labels (...). Chuang Tzu appeals to imagination, the ability to transcend the

29. The reader will immediately note that there is no clear reference to what kind of European individualism the authors refer. It is obvious to the point of being banal that individualism was interpreted differently in Europe. See e.g. Simmel 2007, who reflects on the German individualism vs the Italian individualism.

30. Another legendary figure linked to the doctrine of a radical individualism or egoism is that of Yang Zhu 楊朱, about whom very little is known. For those interested, see Attilio Andreini, 2000, *Il Pensiero di Yang Zhu (IV secolo a.C.) attraverso un esame delle fonti cinesi classiche*, Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste; cf. Graham 1989: 53–59; cf. Hansen 1992: 157 ff.; cf. Slingerland 2003a: 120–124.

31. *Id est*, what Munro calls “the Taoists”. As happens for Zhuangzi as a real person and the problems with the authorship of the book, the term Daoism is nowadays being called into question. Again, this does not concern my research, so I will not deal with it. For readings about it, see Kirkland 1992 and 2004, Sivin 1978 and Thompson 1993 as a start.

boundaries of past experience and even of common sense” (*ibidem*: 109). I would rather suggest that in the *Zhuangzi* there is more appealing for an understanding of those boundaries and the “limitations of humanness” (*loc. cit.*) –and, eventually, transcend them– instead of a run away from them through imagination.

In a recent publication, Erica Brindley wants to prove that it is possible to speak about ‘individualism’ as it is conceived in European terms during the Enlightenment in the Chinese context. Analyzing texts from the 4th Century to the 2nd Century BCE, Brindley discusses individualism “*in term of holism*” (Brindley 2010: 139 no.6). Sarkissian correctly, I think, pointed out that this study is still conceived about a person’s fulfillment in the context of relationships (Sarkissian 2012: 410). Besides, Brindley’s analysis is strictly connected to the political realm, and does not go deeply into the many Chinese sources she takes into account: she raises a few concepts and passages which corroborate her idea, without considering other passages from the same sources which can be read as against it.

Brindley’s book and Munro’s volume appear similar in content. As best as I can understand, the difference between Munro’s volume and Brindley’s work is that, for the former, even though some Chinese concepts are close to the European idea of individualism, these are nonetheless secondary to a more important holistic vision. Brindley, instead, argues that there were indeed forms of ‘individualism’ –even though convenient ones³²–, and the individual was endowed with a certain power; this, as I already stressed, in relation with the community. The difference seems to me a subtle one: holism still plays a crucial point, but if for Munro the whole is the ultimate real concern of Chinese intellectuals, for Brindley it is the bigger context into which to find forms of individualism.

Finally, Keqian Xu’s paper refers specifically to the *Zhuangzi* and considers the notion of individualism the book portrays: it is an ‘inward’ individualism, focused “on individual spirit rather than material interests and rights in social reality” (Xu 2011: 445). Xu’s study is interesting, yet the starting point is “a kind of individualism” (*ibid.*: 448), *i.e.* certain features that the scholar Steven Lukes 1971 considers as core values of the many concepts of ‘individualism’ developed within European culture. Besides, Xu does not develop the subject

32. “(...) various forms of individualism –defined *conveniently* now as ideals that value certain inborn alienable prerogatives and powers of the individual– (...)” (Brindley 2010: xi, *my italics*).

further, investigating whether this type of individualism influences, or what kind of connections there are with, the outward world.

Each of these works made a genuine contribution to the ongoing effort to understand Chinese culture and its features, and extensively review each of them is beyond my scope. Nonetheless, I will spend few words about their usage of the term ‘individualism’, strictly related to my choice of not using it.

In Munro’s volume, ‘individualism’ refers primary to European standards in the 18th and 19th Century: uniqueness, privacy, autonomy, and dignity. Authors then read into many texts to prove that we cannot find a similar theory in Early Chinese philosophy. One could reasonably ask if stating that there is no concept in the Early Chinese philosophy of ‘individualism’ close to the European one is equivalent to say that the Chinese had no reflection about one’s uniqueness, privacy, autonomy, or dignity. That Chinese did not develop a coherent system of thought like the one developed in Europe *in the 18th and 19th Century* is not enough to state the absence of the topic. The comparison here is not between traditions, but between some features of a concept *part of* a tradition (i.e. the European one) as defined in a certain time and place, and the Chinese tradition, taken as a whole.

In her introduction, Erica Brindley refers to ‘Euro-American individualism’ as an individualism which “focuses on an individual’s possessive claims to uniqueness and autonomy from one’s surroundings”, and quotes C. B. Macpherson’s definition of “possessive individualism” in the England of the 17th Century. This definition, she goes on, “differs significantly from early Chinese conceptions of individualism (...). In early China, the individual is always situated in a larger familial, social and cosmic whole”³³ (Brindley 2010: xi). The same criticism moved to Munro fits here. Moreover, the impression is that she is looking for something in the Chinese tradition that does not even exist (cf. Major 2011).

Xu’s paper presents the same contradiction. The author refers to some core values that Lukes identifies as basic elements in the many definitions of ‘individualism’. But note: Lukes makes it crystal clear that “in seeking to identify its various distinct traditions of use, [he]

33. The same is reiterated in an online contribution: “Western tradition tends to view the individual in an atomized, disconnected manner”, while “Chinese tradition focuses on the individual as a vitally integrated with a larger familiar, social, political and cosmic whole”. And again: “... Western forms of *possessive individualism*, which arouses specifically in seventeenth-century English contexts. [These forms] focus on an individual’s possessive claims to uniqueness, and autonomy from surrounding. See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ind-chin/>, accessed on 27/03/2015.

shall concentrate on its nineteenth-century history” (Lukes 1971: 45), being ‘individualism’ a 19th Century expression (*loc. cit.*; cf. Major 2011: 330). Once again, then, the conclusion is marred by a unbalanced comparison.

In order to avoid falling into the trap of Chinese ‘individualism’ as a distortion of the European concept, I will use the term self as explained above. Furthermore, I intend the term ‘individual’ as indicating the single person in contrast others (Harris 1989: 600 ff.), thus is somehow subject to one’s self. It is only by having a self, and by being aware of its nature, that people distinguish themselves as human beings, and of a nature different from others. All these propositions do not constitute a cogent case on the subject of the early Chinese notion of self, lacking concrete references to primary sources, their contextualisation, and a serious engagement with the texts which constitute, along with the “Confucian” classics, the Chinese philosophical heritage. The argument that holism is the main (when not only) way of thinking in early China is inadequately proven. However, all these studies remain pivotal to my research on a two-fold level: while constituting themselves a reason why such a research should be done, they also provide insight on the terminology (Despeux 1996; Wu Kuang-ming 2012).

1.4 The Chinese self regaining authority

Not all the studies on the Chinese notion of self belong to one of the above-mentioned groups. Along with Mark Elvin, other scholars assert the possibility to talk about a Chinese notion of self, as well as a body/mind dualism. Among them, Lee Yearley 1980 discussed the conception of mind in the *Xunzi* 荀子. His paper does not specifically address the issue of a body/mind dichotomy, yet his considerations prompt the reader to think about it. More recently, Edward Slingerland has partially considered the concept of self analyzing early Chinese texts through the ‘metaphor theory’ by Lakoff and Johnson 1980. His *Effortless Action* (2003) is indeed seminal towards more specific studies, yet it aims at better defining the notion of *wuwei* 無為 (non-action). The exploration of the notion of self and of a body/mind dualism is raised in passing only. However, Slingerland makes a deeper contribution to reconsidering the holistic position (Slingerland 2004 and 2013; cf. Slingerland and Chudek 2011).

Paul R. Goldin has enriched the field further. He first considered the possibility of talking about a body/mind dualism in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and other texts of the period (2003). Recently, he has discussed the issue from another point of view. By studying the Chinese belief in the consciousness of the dead (Goldin 2015), he argues that the only way to explain this consciousness is to consider a person as made by a body and a metaphysical substance, which survives after death.³⁴ I found some of the conclusions Goldin reaches are methodologically useful for those passages where *Zhuangzi* deals with death. These research works constitute the main tenants for investigating the issue of the self in early Chinese philosophy.

Conclusion

This overview should prove one point, if any: we ought to be very careful in inferring too much from one single notion or one single philosopher's thought, whatever the culture we approach. Studying the concept of 'self' with the assumption that every notions should respond to the Cartesian one brings to a compromised investigation (cf. Slingerland 2004: 322–323). When nothing is found, the conclusion is that others are 'different'. It seems obvious that this method is of no real insight, and that there are different philosophical conceptions of the self, which “grow out and make use of a deeper metaphysical grammar that has its roots in a common human embodied experience” (Slingerland 2004: 323). Those metaphoric schemas “emerge from common human embodied experience and are conceptual in nature” (*loc. cit.*): different grammatical structures, therefore, do not hinder us in using the method of cognitive linguistics.³⁵ If it is true that all human beings share metaphoric schemes for the representation of the self, logical consequence is that peoples reflect on the self in order to crete those schemas. Thus, I see no particular problem in applying this term with regard to the *Zhuangzi*, as long as it is clear that there is no commitment to find an equivalent to the Cartesian concept of the self.

It is not my intention to deny that different cultures develop different concepts of the same entity (Zhang Zailin 2015). Richard Nisbett tried to corroborate his theories on Western

34. On the belief of survival *post mortem*, see also Andreini 2014.

35. Chand Hansen, above many, had argued that is not possible to talk about 'individualism' in China since the language is based on a part-whole structure, thus there was no language that could have brought to the concept of individual. I am not entirely convinced by his statements, yet these will have to be discussed elsewhere. See Hansen 1985.

and Eastern cognitive differences as of scientific nature by stating: “[My theory] is nevertheless a scientific one because it leads to predictions that can be tested, and tested moreover in the psychological laboratory” (Nisbett 2003: 42). I believe this sentence unwillingly explains the method with which I disagree: create some generalizations based on vague ideas, rather than a genuine exploration of cultures, and then look for those data which confirm them.

2. The Notion of self in the *Zhuangzi*: a linguistic analysis

*But I do feel the kinds of interpretive skills
(...) should be aspired to by all of us who are
struggling with the complex problems of ancient
Chinese philology, especially when it comes to
philosophical texts.*

Harbsmeier 1997: 217

As discussed, some studies have already paved the way to prove that Early Chinese thinkers were aware of a dualism between the mind and the body. This chapter aims to back this position, taking the *Zhuangzi* as case study. So far, the general trend has been to have a certain belief about Chinese philosophy and look for those passages to support it.³⁶ To avoid forcing on the *Zhuangzi* preconceived ideas which lead to misinterpretation, I will analyze some of the Chinese terms which convey the idea of ‘self’ (*ji* 己, *zi* 自) and ‘body’ (*ti* 體, *xing* 形 and *shen* 身) considering the passages into which they are used. In this sense, my research regards one specific Chinese text and does not analyze the single word *per se*.³⁷ Along with the analysis, I drop some related considerations about the features of the self and its relations with the social world. Some of these considerations will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter, to threaten the idea of the *Zhuangzi* as a mere anarchist or individualistic book.

For the sake of convenience, I will divide my analysis accordingly to the term I take into consideration: for *ji* 己, for example, I quote the passages I consider most relevant for my purpose. Then, when considering *zi* 自, I group those passages where *zi* conveys the idea of

36. It is not rare to see scholars already having a certain assumption look only for proofs that will support that assumption, ending with quite problematic generalizations about Chinese culture. For instance, Budriūnaitė 2013 proposes to survey the notion of joy in Jean Paul Satre and Albert Camus, using the *Zhuangzi* to show where these two thinkers meet. Then the author analyzes the theistic notion of joy according to Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, to conclude with Heidegger (Budriūnaitė 2013: 132). Comments to such a work are obvious.

37. Cf. Deborah Sommer 2012. Her work is limited to the character *ji*, whose frequency is calculated within a range of ancient texts. Some of the conclusion she reaches are insightful, yet the work is somehow wakened by the general nature of the work, probably due to the limited length of the paper. She come to define the self as a metaphorical storage for people’s qualities (Sommer 2012: 45). Surprisingly, she does not mention Slingerland’s use of conceptual metaphors to analyze Chinese language.

self, and so on. Needless to say, to quote *every* passage where the considered character appears is beyond my project and abilities, not to mention the fact that it could be misleading: in Chinese language, the same character conveys a great deals of different meanings: *zi*, for instance, can be used as a preposition ‘from, since’.³⁸ This is the result of a careful selection.

2.1 Analysis of *ji* ‘己’ and *zi* ‘自’ as the self

Ji 己

Grammatically speaking, *ji* 己 is reflexive pronoun, usually translated as “self” (Pulleyblank 1995: 83),³⁹ conveying the concept of the human being formed by something else than the simple physical body. This section proves that *ji* represents the concept of self in a human being, providing solid ground for further considerations on the self’s nature.⁴⁰ Firstly, a set of three occurrences presents *ji* as the self as ‘container’, metaphorical place where the person puts metaphorical objects (Slingerland 2003: 27–34). The second line I quote within this set of three, namely ZZS 4/9/2, has another aspect worth noticing: the contrast between self vs other people, *ren* 人. I then go through occurrences which elaborate the concept of *ji* as ‘false self’ or ‘true self’. Finally, a few quotations show *Zhuangz*’s pieces of advice on how to deal with these selves.

The first occurrence I quote to discuss *ji* as a locative space is from the second chapter, ‘Discussion on Making all Things Equal’, *Qiwulun* 齊物論, where Nie Que 齧缺 and Wang Ni 王倪⁴¹ talking about the “ultimate man”, *zhiren* 至人, who is so much beyond things that he is not touched by sensations like feeling hot among fire or cold among ice. At the end of the dialogue, it is stated that either death or life “have no effect on him [*si sheng wu bian yu ji* 死生无變於己]” (W15; ZZS 2/6/19). Mair renders *yuji* 於己 as “upon him” (M21), so that *ji* could be here indicating the person who is untouched by events like dying, without specific

38. See, e.g., ZZS 2/5/23; cf. ZZS 5/13/13–14.

39. According to *Le Grand Dictionnaire Ricci*, it can also indicate a person’s feelings or used as generic noun for ‘somebody’.

40. See, e.g., ZZS 4/11/17, where *ji* works as pronoun referring to a tiger; cf. ZZS 5/14/14, where *ji* is a possessive determiner, like in ZZS 12/29/24.

41. Two of the many figures introduced in the *Zhuangzi*.

reference to a self.⁴² Nonetheless, we should not ignore the presence of *yu* 於: one of its uses is to “provide a locative complement that defines the destination or locus of action” (Pulleyblank 1995: 54). If we use the ‘self as container’ schema to conceive the relationship between the self and the Subject (Slingerland 2003a: 33–34), this sentence can be structured with the ultimate man as the subject, the self as the container and the changes as the objects in the container—in this case, the lack thereof.⁴³ Therefore, I believe here we can think about *ji* as expressing the concept of a self as ‘something’ part of a person but other than the physical body. If this explanation is not sufficient, we might go back to the sentence: death and life alter nothing in the ultimate man. These changes, i.e. going from being alive to being dead and vice versa, cannot possibly be without effects on the physical realm: being dead *does* bring a change in the physical status of a person. Hence *ji* is conceived as something metaphysical with no relation with the physical world.⁴⁴

The second occurrence where *ji* stands for a locative space in the human being is in the fourth chapter, ‘In the World of Men’, *Renjianshi* 人間世. At the very beginning, *Zhuangzi* tells us of Yan Hui 顏回⁴⁵, who wants to travel to the state of Wey 衛 and try to end to the chaos and the suffering caused by its lord’s bad government: “I have heard that the ruler of Wei is very young” explains Yan Hui to Confucius 孔子, “He acts in an independent manner, thinks little of how he rules his state, and fails to see his faults. (...) His people have nowhere to turn. I have heard you say, Master, ‘Leave the state that is well ordered and go to the state in chaos! At the doctor’s gate are many sick men.’ I want to use these words as my standard, in hopes that I can restore his state to health” (W22). Confucius is not convinced that Yan Hui will succeed:

42. Graham, instead, renders the phrase with “death and life alter nothing in himself” (Graham 1981: 58). Ziporyn simply translates as “Even death and life can do nothing to change him” (Ziporyn 2009: 18), deciding not to express the preposition *yu* 於. Cf. the modern language version by Chen Guying, we read: “生死的變化都對他沒有影響” (Chen 1983: 94).

43. We will encounter again the expression *yuji* 於己 with the meaning of ‘in himself’; only once we find *yushen* 於身. In almost all of these cases, we can apply the schema of ‘self as container’ and read in those expressions an idea of an inner world, related to the physical body but also clearly separated from it.

44. Cf. ZZS 21/59/22: *si sheng yi fa yi, er wu bian yuji* 死生亦大矣, 而無變乎己. *Hu* 乎 as coverb occurs as variant of *yu* 於 in forming locative complements (Pulleyblank 1995: 53–55) so that both *huji* 乎己 and *yuji* 於己 can be read as a locative complements.

45. Widely known to be the favourite disciple of Confucius. In the *Zhuangzi* we find him as spokesman for the Confucian thought and Confucius speaking like a spokesman for Daoism (Mair 1994: 6).

“you will probably go and get yourself executed, that’s all. The Way doesn’t want things mixed in with it. When it becomes a mixture, it becomes many ways; with many ways, there is a lot of bustle; and where there is a lot of bustle, there is trouble—trouble that has no remedy! The Perfect Man of ancient times made sure that he had it in himself [*cun zhu ji* 存諸己] before he tried to give it to others [*cun zhu ren* 存諸人]. When you’re not even sure what you’ve got in yourself [*yi ji* 於己], how do you have time to bother about what some tyrant is doing?” (W22)

「禱！若殆往而刑耳！夫道不欲雜，雜則多，多則擾，擾則憂，憂而不救。古之至人，先存諸己，而後存諸人。所存於己者未定，何暇至於暴人之所行！」(ZZS 4/9/2)

According to Guo Qingfan, the point Confucius is making is that, to freely wander in the world and get in touch with others, one needs first to establish the Way, *dao* 道, in oneself (Guo 1961: 134);⁴⁶ Chen Guying’s version carries the same idea.⁴⁷

To understand this passage, it is first necessary to analyze the sentence grammatically. In Classical Chinese language, *zhu* 諸 is contraction for *zhi yu* 之於 (Pulleyblank 1995: 59), so that *cun zhu ji* 存諸己 is actually equivalent to *cun yu zhi ji* 存之於己 (the same goes for *cun*

46. Note, incidentally, that Guo Qingfan links this state of being stable and fine with oneself as a state to be reached *before* before facing the world itself. Only after having reached stability in oneself, one can “wander in the world” (*youshijian* 遊世間) (Guo 1961: 143). This to deny that there are no concern about the social world in the *Zhuangzi*.

47. “The ultimate men of the past first enriched themselves, and only after went to assist other people. For if one is not fulfilled, how can he correct the behavior of the violent?” (古时候的至人，先求充實自己然後才去扶助別人。如果自己都還立不穩，怎能去糾正暴人的行為呢？ Chen 1983: 124). Note that here Chen, with the idea of correcting other’s behaviour, is giving a Confucian-like flavor to this passage. Yet the choice of *chongshi ziji* 充實自己 (“to enrich, to strengthen oneself”) confirms the idea that this passage is about some kind of process related to one’s inner world, made of intentions, feelings, reflections, etc. All things that one has to master before dealing with others, especially with violent men. Cf. other translations in English language, which convey the idea of having ‘it’ in oneself (cf. M30; cf. Graham 1981: 67; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 24).

zhu ren 存諸人). Therefore, we have again *yuji* 於己 as locative complement, which gives already ground for a reading of *ji* as a representation of an inner world. Furthermore, the context makes it even more explicit: ‘to preserve the Way’ cannot possibly be read as taking care of a concrete object in somebody’s existence.

To reinforce this statement, we might note that the Chinese text presents a parallelism between “preserve it in themselves”, *cun zhu ji* 存諸己, and “preserve it in others”, *cun zhu ren* 存諸人. One could reasonably object that *ji* 己 is used here to contrast with *ren* 人,⁴⁸ so that the point of this passage is to stress the dichotomy “self vs others”, and not the existence of an inner being. I agree with this view, nonetheless I wonder why one reading rules out the other. To explain this, I invite the reader to consider Slingerland’s analysis of “*cun zhu ji* 存諸己” as an example of the ‘self as container’ schema. This conceptual metaphor allows to think about the subject as a person who put metaphorical objects into a metaphorical place, i.e. the self. In this case, *ji* is the “metaphorical container” into which the subject can place the metaphorical object ‘the Way’ (Slingerland 2004: 329). Likewise, *ren* 人 should be therefore taken as metaphorical container as well, for the Way, after being preserved *in* oneself, can then be preserved *in* other people.⁴⁹ It is true that *ren* is not a reflexive pronoun, but the context clearly clarifies that we are not dealing with the physical body. Similarly, the statement “I am putting too much faith in that man” runs perfectly even without making clear that “that man” is thought as a dualism between the physical body and a metaphysical self, and that the latter is conceived as a metaphorical place, where I am putting my faith in. Therefore, in the sentence quoted above from chapter four, I think *ji* represents both an inner

48. I thank prof. Van Els for bringing this contrast to my attention. Cf. Sommer 2012.

49. A similar structure to this passage is found in chapter twenty-three, where the old master Laozi (see footnote no. 50) formulates a few rules in form of questions to make his interlocutor understand how to ‘preserve life’, *wei sheng* 衛生: “Can you embrace unit [*bao yi* 抱一]? (...) Can you give up looking for it in others and seek for it in yourself? [*neng she zhuren er qiu zhuji hu* 能舍諸人而求諸己乎]” (M230; ZZS 23/65/15; cf. W192). Here again both *ji* 己 and *ren* 人 can be read as metaphorical container where the unit can be found or not. As for the passage in chapter four, there is also a contrast between oneself and the others, for being able to embrace the unity is a process one has to undergo alone, by himself. Finally, it is worth noticing in passing that Cheng Guying, in his translation into modern Chinese, renders “give up looking it into others [*she zhuren* 舍諸人]” as “give up searching it outside [*sheqi wai qiu* 捨棄外求]” (Chen 1983: 647). *Ren* 人 is then considered as everything which is outside a person, not only other people. Chen gives not this interpretation, though, for *ren* 人 of the passage in chapter four.

world, something which has nothing to do with the physical realm, *and* works in the contrast between self and others. I do not see reasons why, if I can think about my person as a body and a self, others cannot do the same.

The third occurrence that back my discussion of *ji* as a locative space in the human being is in chapter twenty-five, namely ‘Zeyang’, *Zeyang* 則陽, composed of a sequence of dialogues and considerations about different topics which drop a lot of hints. In one of these, the reader encounters Bo Ju 柏矩, one of the disciples of Lao Dan 老聃⁵⁰ (Mair 1994: 48; cf. W220). Bo Ju decides to wander through all the world, starting from Qi 齊. Once arrived, he sees the corpse of a criminal who was executed. Moved by this sight, he addresses Heaven and complains, for what brings people end up like the criminal is the world itself:

“We are told: ‘Do not be a robber! Do not be a murder!’ But when glory and disgrace are established, we subsequently witness the abuses that arise; when goods and wealth are accumulated, we subsequently witness the conflicts that arise. (...) Even if we wished that they wouldn’t end up like this, how could it be achieved?” (M260–1)

Bo Ju goes back with his mind to old times, when the “superior man”, *junzi* 君子:

“attributed his success to people and his failure to himself [*yi de wei zai min, yi shi wei zai ji* 以得為在民，以失為在己]; he attributed what was correct to the people and what was erroneous to himself [*yi zheng wei zai min, yi wang wei zai ji* 以正為在民，以枉為在己]. Therefore, if a single physical form were lost, he would withdraw and blame himself. Now, however, it is not so. Rulers are excessive in the things

50. Another name for Laozi 老子, the alleged author of the *Daodejing* 道德經, considered with the *Zhuangzi* among the major works in the Daoist tradition. For an introduction upon the subject, see Kohn in Pregadio 2008: 611–616; cf. Feng Yu Lan 1952: 170–191.

they want done and rebuke those who are unaware of them.” (M261;
ZZS 25/75/11)⁵¹

Besides the presence of the verb *zai* 在, “to be in, to exist at”, which confirms the reading of *ji* as a locative complement (making use of Slingerland’s terminology, we are dealing with a conceptual metaphor thanks to which the subject thinks about the self as a container),⁵² we might also point out that, in attributing the failure to himself, a person is criticizing his own intentions, actions and deeds which brought to that failure. By considering the self as the metaphorical place where these intentions and actions are to be found, we are consequently saying considering a dualistic reading of human nature; otherwise, we should think about intentions as something to be found on the physical body. Be it noted, in passing, the contrast is made between *ji* and, this time, *min* 民, “the people” that, from the point of view of the “superior man”, sums up “all others who are not me”. Again, this does not rule out the possibility to think about all those people as made by bodies *and* selves to which attribute the reasons of success, when success it is.

I selected three occurrences where *ji* embodies the idea of the self as something different from the physical realm. This would already be enough to cast serious doubts on the belief that early Chinese thinkers had no idea of any dualism whatsoever between the mind and the body. *Zhuangzi*, however, knowing full well this dichotomy, not only disclosed it, but widely and deeply. The following quotations prove exactly this.

I will now discuss those passages that present the idea of a self as something made up by external influences, not proper to the primordial nature of the human being. These passages are contrasted by others where *ji* stands, instead, for the idea of a ‘true self’, i.e. the essence of human beings’ natural features. Finally, a few more quotations will help to understand how we should treat this ‘inner something’.

To see that the self can be made by a set of external influences, I start from the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, namely ‘Free and Easy Wandering’, *Xiaoyaoyou*, 逍遙遊. Almost at the beginning, we are told of men skilled enough to govern one district or one state: for these

51. I quote here Mair’s translation, being more straightforward. Besides, Watson himself expresses doubts on his own interpretation (W221 no.18).

52. Cf. ZZS 33/99/29, same recurrence of *zaiji* 在己.

abilities they are kept by people—and they keep themselves—in estimation. For *Zhuangzi* this is a failure in being free: they are chained to other people’s recognition in order to affirm their skills and qualities. *Zhuangzi* does not confine his judgement only to governors, but extends it to people outside the court. Song Rongzi 宋榮子,⁵³ for example, was not oppressed by worldly affairs, and Liezi 列子⁵⁴ could ride upon the wind and go wherever he liked. They did reach noteworthy achievements, yet they were not able to wander carefree: the former was not completely free from the human world, the latter had still to rely on the wind in order to fly. Thus, we are told: “the Perfect Man has no self [*zhiren wu ji* 至人無己]; the Holy Man has no merit [*shenren wu gong* 神人無功]; the Sage has no fame [*shengren wu ming* 聖人無名].” (W3; ZZS 1/2/2).⁵⁵

Wang describes this chapter as a free realm of unrestrainedness and easiness (“自由自在无拘无束的洒脱境界” Wang 2013: 153). See from this perspective, the self seems to be something which impedes a person to be ultimately free, that is why the sage has none. To consider the self as a nuisance could be a possible reading of the passage, but this is true if we consider ‘the self’ as a single coherent unity, while I think that in the *Zhuangzi* the concept of the self includes both a self to discard and a self to care about. I will discuss this in more detail on due time; here, however, two annotations are necessary.

The first is based on Slingerland’s reading of self (*ji* 己) in this passage as correlated with achievement (*gong* 功) and fame (*ming* 名), so that “it [is] quite clear that the instance of the self that is to be eliminated from the Subject is the self constituted by social renown, social recognition, and similar extraneous concerns” (Slingerland 2003a: 187).⁵⁶ But note:

53. According to the *Zhuangzi*, he is a teacher of social harmony, frugality and pacifism (W3 no.6; cf. Mair, 1994, 1).

54. Lie Yukou 列禦寇, or Liezi 列子, is one of the masters of the Daoist tradition. He was believed to have lived around the 4000 BCE, and gave the name to the *Liezi*, a book recorded as part of the Daoist tradition (Barrett 1993: 298–299). In the *Zhuangzi*, he is referred to as one of the sages, even though he was still not able to become an ultimate man (cf. W3 no.7).

55. Mair and Graham’s translations give the same idea of ‘having no self’ (M5; cf. Graham 1981: 45); Ziporyn writes that “the Consummate Person has no fixed identity” (Ziporyn 2009: 6), probably following Guo Xiang’s comment (having no self, one can go along with the real of things, *shun wu* 順物, thus reach the state of being an ‘ultimate person’). See W59 and Guo 1961: 21 on the Zhuangzian idea of being like a mirror (see e.g. ZZS 4/11/12). Cf. Wenzel 2003: 120–121 on the limits of this metaphor of the mirror.

56. Being able to leave the such-constituted self is part of that process in becoming what I call the Zhuangzian self-conscious person: according to my understanding in the *Zhuangzi* there is no such a thing like an invitation to dismiss the world. On the

considering self (*ji* 己), achievement (*gong* 功) and fame (*ming* 名) to be on the same conceptual line implies that we should do the same for the ultimate man (*zhiren* 至人), the spiritual person (*shenren* 神人) and the sage (*shengren* 聖人).⁵⁷ We should be careful, for what differs between these three kind of men is not clearly stated in the *Zhuangzi*; they seem to be different ways to refer to the perfect man (Shen 2003: 211), yet we are not necessarily allowed to safely put them on the same line. Nonetheless, I concur with Slingerland in reading this *ji* as a self made by externalities, for there is indeed a parallel between the three things one has to be empty of. To reinforce this idea, we should note that Song Rongzi, even though he was not *completely* free, still was chained to nothing, and able to laugh at those who strive for social approval. He simply did not care if “the whole world condemn him” because “he drew a clear line between the internal and the external and recognized the boundaries of true glory and disgrace [*ding hu nei wai zhi fen* 定乎内外之分]” (W3; cf. M5). Which is to say, what come from the outside –like social reward and approval– should be escaped, for they chain a person to a world which is nothing but a blend of conventions. The second annotation is that, consequently, this ‘self-less’ state of being, does not mean to be void of those features which are inborn in a person. Judgment like ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are part of everyday life experience without even requiring us too much consideration about it.⁵⁸

To conclude, I think that in this passage *ji* represents a non-physical ‘something’, the amount of external recognitions which confers an identity to somebody, and impedes to

contrary, it seems to me that the point is exactly to live in it, but with an awareness that gives us the possibility to do so at best. Once a person has gone through the process, value like social recognition can be part of oneself, but *only* for the moment into which the value plays its part. To keep it for too long or make too much of it is misleading.

57. A definition for each one of these figures is given in the last chapter, ‘All under Heaven’, *Tianxia* 天下 (M334; cf. W287; cf. Ziporyn 2009: 117–8; ZYS 33/97/13–14).

58. In seeing a man ‘A’ beating another man ‘B’ I *feel* such an action is not according to my being, thus ‘wrong’ for me (man A probably feels it ‘right’). To feel so I do not need to undertake studies about the concept of right and wrong, nor to be told by somebody that beating a man is wrong. I just feel it in myself. Of course, this does not justify a reading of the *Zhuangzi* as a book which allows us to follow our instincts without any real consideration. On the contrary: in other passages of the text, we learn that we should control ourselves, in a state of quietude. There seems then to be a twofold action to take: leave out external influences *and* learn about what could be seen as the real self. Once this is done, you can live freely in the world, since firstly you know what is external and internal, and secondly you reach a self-consciousness which allows you to respond at best to the environment you are living in. Therefore, we do not find *a* self as something which can be defined once and for all, but rather a conceptualization of the self as something clearly different from the physical realm. This ‘inner world’ then contains so much more: feelings, thoughts, intentions, etc. Contradictions and inconsistencies are exactly, I believe, what make the book so vivid as so close to life itself.

wander carefree. We might refer to it as a ‘false self’ to be contrasted with a ‘true self’. However we read it, it carries along the concept of something part of the human being but different from the body: even having no self, the sage is still there physically.

We might pair this definition of the ultimate man as a self-less person with a passage in the *Zhuangzi* describing the same self-less condition, but this time the subject is the great man, *daren* 大人, in the ‘Autumn Floods’ chapter, *Qiushui* 秋水. Here the Lord of the River 河伯 and the Ruo of the North Sea 北海若 are discussing many issues, one of these the possibility to define what is extremely small or big once for all. Ruo of the North Sea explains that there is no standard which can be applied a priori, since “it is merely a matter of circumstances” (W129). Moreover, “we can use words to talk about the coarseness of things, and we can use our minds to visualize the fineness of things. But what words cannot describe and the mind cannot succeed in visualizing—this has nothing to do with coarseness or fineness” (*loc. cit.*). “This” which cannot be described nor visualized is the Way 道 itself, the infinite to which we apply no pattern. Whoever understands what this means is a Great Man. To clearly get this, it is better to quote the description in full length:

“Therefore, the Great Man, in his actions will not harm others, but he makes no show of benevolence or charity. He will not move for the sake of profit, but he does not despise the porter at the gate. He will not wrangle for goods or wealth, but he makes no show of refusing or relinquishing them. He will not enlist the help of others in his work, but he makes no show of being self-supporting, and he does not despise the greedy and base. His actions differ from those of the mob, but he makes no show of uniqueness or eccentricity. He is content to stay behind with the crowd, but he does not despise those who run forward to flatter and fawn. All the titles and stipends of the age are not enough to stir him to exertion; all its penalties and censures are not enough to make him feel shame. He knows that no line can be drawn between right and wrong, no border can be fixed between great and small. I have heard it said: The Man of the Way wins no fame [*dao ren bu wen* 道人

不聞], the highest virtue wins no gain [*zhi de bu de* 至德不得], the Great Man has no self [*daren wuji* 大人無己].” (W129; ZZS 17/44/16–19)

This sentence is a clear echo of the statement in the first chapter.⁵⁹ We might also note, in passing, that both Song Rongzi and the Great Man are described as persons who are *in* the society and yet *above* it and all the rewards which derived from a social context.⁶⁰ Therefore, I believe *ji* is here conveying the idea of what we might call a ‘social self’, which shapes itself on what is shared by the mob: ‘benevolence’ is what it is only upon convention. This is the self of which one has to get rid. Not by chance, Guo Xiang’s comment refers again to the idea of letting things coming along (*ren qu er yi* 任物而已; Guo 1961: 577 no.18), and to welcome them requires being empty.

At this point, having understood that the self influenced by externalities should be left apart, we might have a look at those passages where *ji* represents the ‘true self’.

In the fourth chapter, in the same dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui quoted above, Yan Hui insists on how he can rectify himself in order to succeed with the Lord of Wei. After asking Confucius if being inwardly direct, *neizhi* 內置, could work, he says:

59. Both Graham (1981: 150) and Ziporyn (2009: 71) give to *wuji* 無己 the same translation they provided for the passage in the first chapter.

It is not by chance that Graham groups the ‘Autumn Floods’ chapter with other five, from 18–22, as chapters belonging to what he calls ‘the School of Chuang Tzu’. These chapters closer to the *Inner Chapters* and “pervaded by the thought and phrasing of the *Inner Chapters*” (Graham 1981: 116). Likewise, Liu Xiaogan groups with one of the chapters belonging to the ‘Transmitter School’, expositions of those who lived close in time to Zhuangzi (Liu 1994: 95–99). It is true that my concern here is not at all to date the text, yet the historical analysis carried out by Graham and Liu is a sort of confirmation of the relation between this passage and the line in chapter one.

As for the Great Man having no self, cf. ZZS 11/28/32: the great man “having joined the great commonality (*datong* 大同), has no self (*wuji* 無己).” (M101). Here the ‘great commonality’ is another key factor: according to Guo Qingfan, the sage (i.e. the great man for the *Zhuangzi*) joins the great Way (*dadao hetong* 大道合同) (Guo 1961: 397 no.10). The implication is to see *datong* 大同 as another name for *dadao* 大道 (see Wang 2013: 135: 大同 (...) 也就是道。), which in turn is “the Golden Age of the beginning of humanity” (Robinet 2008: 1044; cf. Wang 2013: 135). Hence, the great man is able to go back to a primordial state of being, where everything was not spoiled and naturally so. In doing so, he has no need to investigate the universe, nor has any ‘self’. This also suggests then the reading of *ji* as something not natural, something we should leave apart in order to go back to the original being.

60. Cf. ZZS 5/14/14: Confucius fails to reach the state of ultimate man since he is still committed to fame and renown, i.e. to recognition from society.

“By being inwardly direct [*neizhi* 內置], I can be the companion of Heaven. Being a companion of Heaven, I know that the Son of Heaven and I are equally the sons of Heaven [*tianzi yu ji* 天子之與己]. Then why would I use my words to try to get men to praise me or to try to get them not to praise me? A man like this, people call The Child. This is what I mean by being a companion of Heaven.” (W24)

「內直者，與天為徒。與天為徒者，知天子之與己皆天之所子，而獨以己言蘄乎而人善之，蘄乎而人不善之邪？若然者，人謂之童子，是之謂與天為徒。」 (ZZS 4/9/18–19)

Grammatically speaking, *ji* is a reflexive pronoun referring to the generic subject *ren* 人 implied in the particle *zhe* 者 (Pulleyblank 1995: 64–67). The context clarifies that *ji* is an ‘inner self’, something proper to the human being, no matter who he is. In fact it is said that someone who is ‘inwardly direct’—whatever this means—is equal to the Son of Heaven, i.e. the Emperor. Certainly it is not because of one’s status; it refers to the fact that having reached the state of being inwardly right, we are all equal in having that status (cf. Fraser 2008: 126).⁶¹

We turn then our attention to the story of the oak, almost at the end of the same chapter, where *Zhuangzi* discusses the idea of knowing oneself and one’s nature. We are told of Shi the carpenter 匠石, who sees an old oak that serves as the local shrine in Crooked Shaft 曲轅. According to Shi’s apprentice, the timber of the oak’s wood is pretty good, but the carpenter defines it as ‘defective’ and goes along. That night, the oak appears to the carpenter in a dream, reminding him that it is precisely for its ‘defective wood’ that it managed to live that

61. Here the comments by Guo Xiang (Guo 1961: 143) and Chen (1983: 128) could be misleading, since they link the idea of push forward one’s nature, *xing* 性, as it is given by Heaven. The prince and Yan Hui are equal since the both of them are human beings, sharing a common nature. This does not necessarily imply that there is a concept of self; on the other hand, it is also true that, as said, we have to be careful in infer too much from Guo Xiang’s commentary. It is undeniable that in this passage there is a connection with the human nature: if I have to consider myself equal to the Queen of England, certainly is not because we have in common the same amount of money—or debts—or the same clothes. Still, sticking to the text, I think is possible to read *ji* in this passage as indicating the self, and not only the nature of a human being. After all, by the time these chapters of the *Zhuangzi* were written, *xing* 性 already conveyed the meaning of ‘what is inborn, nature’ (Schuessler 2006: 541).

long and grow that big. Other trees, being so much more useful, had their branches cut off. That is to say, the oak learned to be useful for itself by being useless for others. The day after, having heard about the dream, one of the carpenter's disciples asks him why the oak lets people use it as the local shrine if the goal is being useless. The carpenter replies:

“Shhh! Say no more! It's only *resting* there. If we carp and criticize, it will merely conclude that we don't understand it. Even if it weren't at the shrine, do you suppose it would be cut down? It protects itself in a different way from ordinary people. If you try to judge it by conventional standards, you'll be way off!” (W31)

「弟子曰：「趣取無用，則為社何邪？」曰：「密！若無言！彼亦直寄焉，以為不知己者詬厲也。不為社者，且幾有翦乎！且也，彼其所保，與眾異，以義譽之，不亦遠乎！」 (ZZS 4/12/5)

This story carries a lot of implications, but, first of all, let focus on what matters in this analysis, i.e. the expression *buzhijizhe* 不知己者.⁶² In the English translations ‘it’ refers to the ability of the oak in “assuming the guise of a shrine”, a trick the tree plays in order to preserve itself. *Buzhijizhe* 不知己者, I believe, stands for people who are not capable of a real understanding of something deeper the simple appearance—the oak, in fact, is pretending to be a shrine for personal purpose (Cf. Sommer 2012: 26–27). *Ji* refers to an ‘inner something’, in this case a inner state of being beyond the appearance.⁶³ Thus, judging a book by its cover prevents a real sympathizing.

62. Mair writes “those who do not understand it” (M38). Graham renders it with ‘people who do not appreciate it’ (1981: 73) and Zipryon with ‘this uncomprehending crowd’ (2009: 30).

63. It is true that here *ji* is referred to the oak, not to a human being. Considering however that the oak's behavior is tantamount to what a person should do, I included this passage into my analysis.

In analyzing the fourth chapter, Wang Bo takes it as some kind of progressing process,⁶⁴ which can be divided into three parts: it begins with people who want to improve the world (to my understanding, these men are Yen Hui, Zigao and Yan He, who talk with their respective interlocutors about how to deal with this or that problem), passes through people who struggle in the world (“在世界中苦苦挣扎的人”) trying to carry out their existence at best, and ends with those who decide to leave the world (Wang 2013: 40).

I think the story of the oak fits in the second section of this process: the tree adopts a way to carry out its existence at best, dealing with the circumstances it finds itself in. If we have to interpret this metaphorically, the message here seems to be a clear one: being put in a certain environment, what we can do is dealing with it so that we can preserve ourselves (Wang 2013: 55–57). The oak is not entirely free from the outer world: it is really subject to the offenses of those who do not understand its being useless, and it needs people believing in shrine to pretend being one. The oak *must* deal with the world, but in a way to protect itself while doing it. As Wu Kuang-ming puts it: “Chuang Tzu wants us to adopt a flexible ‘attitude’ that best fits our dispositions *and* the disposition of the situation in which we are at the moment” (Wu 1982: 19); Wang Bo reaches the same conclusion: only if we reach an understanding of ourselves *and* of the world, we can find the appropriate position from which dealing with it (Wang 2013: 49). Thus this story is strictly related to my point: there is a genuine self, about which we should reflect about to reach a better understanding (*zhiji* 知己). This is the first step we should take. Only in a second moment it is possible to deal with what is outside, and to respond to social demands and constraints.⁶⁵

64. This interpretation is actually part of a wider discussion. In the second chapter of his book, Wang Bo argues that in the *Zhuangzi* there is neither a complete refusal of the world, nor an involvement in it. Like it or not, we have to live in this world, but people might have their own way to do that (Wang 2013: 35–37). So these three different attitudes which Wang Bo connects in series are basically three different ways to live in the world. To read these as a progressing process is Wang Bo’s personal view and there is not the time or the place to open a discussion about its validity. I might not entirely share this explanation, for too little is known about the *Zhuangzi* as text. Yet, it is true that in chapter four we do have expressed different positions toward the mere fact that we find ourselves living in the world.

65. I am indebted to Edward L. R. Slingerland for bringing my attention to the social constraints and the possible relation with the Zhuangzian self-conscious man.

Having seen that *ji* is considered as something else than the physical body, a ‘false self’ and the quintessential nature of a human being, here a few pieces of advice *Zhuangzi* gives the reader on how to deal with this ‘false self’ and ‘true self’.

To begin with, I quote a passage from the twelfth chapter, ‘Heaven and Heart’, *Tiandi* 天地, usually considered being a piece of propaganda for Confucian agenda with a Daoist flavor (M102).⁶⁶ Towards the end, Confucius and Laozi are discussing those who believe they can master the Way and live in the world by making distinctions. These are usually regarded highly by the common people, for they appear to know how to govern. Yet, according to Laozi, these are not sages. On the contrary, they believe to be able to control those things they talk about, but in fact they are bound to them: “People who have heads and feet but no minds and no ears—there are mobs of them. To think that beings with bodies can all go on existing along with that which is bodiless and formless—it can never happen! A man’s stops and starts, his life and death, his rises and falls—none of these can he do anything about” (W89; cf. M109).⁶⁷

What is formless and shapeless is the Dao itself, and those who are linked to the physical realm and cannot go further will never be able to grasp the real essence of the Dao. This kind of people believe they can control “their movement and cessation, life and death, rise and fall” (W89), while in reality men can do nothing about these events. What a man should do is “to forget things and to forget heaven [*wang hu wu, wang hu tian* 忘乎物, 忘乎天]”, this “is called forgetting the self [*qi ming wei wangji* 其名為忘己]. The man who forgets himself may be said to have entered heaven [*wang ji zhi ren ru tian* 忘己之人入天]” (M109; ZS 12/31/19).⁶⁸

66. According to both Graham and Liu, the twelfth chapter is indeed one of those which merge together Confucian, Daoist and Legalist ideas. Graham calls these authors the Syncretists (Graham 1981: 258), while Liu refers to them as ‘the Huang Lao School’ (Liu 1994: 88). Same considerations as in footnote no. 24.

67. Be it noted, incidentally, the description of people having a head, *shou* 首, but no mind, *xin* 心, which still explicates a dualism between what is physical and what is not.

68. Watson provides a slightly different translation: “Forget things, forget Heaven, and be called a forgetter of self. The man who has forgotten self may be said to have entered Heaven” (W89). This translation could be rather problematic, since it seems that the self which has to be forgotten is made up by the things and Heaven, while I believe these three concepts are to be kept separated.

Cf. W106, ZS 13/34/16: the Perfect Man can put earth and Heaven outside him, and dismiss the ten thousand things.

This is one of the guidelines that *Zhuangzi* offers, with his nicely tricky style which forces the reader to reflect. As best as I can understand it, the heart of the matter is to underline that to forget the self has not simply to do with the human being, it involves Heaven and the outer world as well.⁶⁹ To forget things means to let them be whatever they might be, and to forget about Heaven is to no longer try to define what is so and what is not, is to no longer try to control what cannot be controlled. That being the case, in forgetting the self to let things come along and receive them without any preconceived imposition, it is also required to forget that things will come over, sooner or later. The self seems here related to, and partly made by, the will of control over the outer world and Heaven. To forget this self means then to enter Heaven, for there is no forced intention, no imposition, nothing whatsoever, only one's openness.

A similar hint is given in chapter twenty, 'The Mountain Tree', *Shanmu* 山木. This chapter presents a series of stories about how to follow the Way and live accordingly. One of these has for protagonist Yiliao 宜僚 and the Marquis of Lu 魯侯.⁷⁰ The Marquis of Lu is pretty worried, for, despite he took great pains to learn how to govern, he had apparently failed. Yiliao therefore suggests him to travel to a city in Nanyue 南越, where people "are foolish and naive (...). They do not know what accords with right; they do not know what conforms to ritual. Uncouth, uncaring, they move recklessly—and in this way they tread the path of the Great Method. Their birth brings rejoicing, their death a fine funeral" (W158; cf. M188). In short, they are not spoiled by any social system. They just live in accord with nature, which in turn means they are closer to the Dao. The sage king Yao 堯⁷¹ was so skilled in ruling people because he "neither possessed men nor allowed himself to be possessed by them" (W158; cf. M189). Following his example, the Marquise should rid himself of his worries and wander alone. To illustrate his point a bit further, Yiliao makes an example:

69. Cf. Guo Xiang's comment: both Heaven and the thousand things must be forgotten, not only the self (*tian wu jie wang, fei du wang ji* 天物皆忘，非獨忘己, see Guo 1961: 429 no.7).

70. According to Watson, Yiliao is one of the figure in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, a sort of narrative history which publication dates back in time to the 4th century BCE. Marquise of Lu is probably the Duke of the Lu state (W157 no. 2; cf. Mair 1994: 48).

71. One of the sage king of ancient times. He is used as comparison to show how rulers do no longer understand real government.

“If a man, having lashed two hulls together, is crossing a river, and an empty boat [*xu chuan* 虛船] happens along and bumps into him, no matter how hot tempered the man may be, he will not get angry. But if there should be someone in the other boat, then he will shout out to haul this way or veer that. (...) In the first instance, he wasn’t angry; now in the second, he is. Earlier he faced emptiness, now he faces occupancy. If a man could succeed in making himself empty [*xu ji* 虛己] and, in that way, wander through the world, then who could do him harm?” (W159; cf. M190)

「方舟而濟於河，有虛船來觸舟，雖有憍心之人不怒；有一人在其上，則呼張歛之(...)。向也不怒而今也怒，向也虛而今也實。人能虛己以遊世，其孰能害之！」(ZZS 20/54/6)

This tricky passage requires a careful consideration. If I understand this correctly, the boat is a metaphor for the body, and the man on the boat is the self. Hence, the boat with the man on it represents a man who has not forget his self. This already implies a dualism between the body and something else. Besides, the last sentence’s subject, man *ren* 人, allows us to think about *ji* as an inner world in the human being. In this case, we have the idea of a self as an interference in dealing with the world. Emptying oneself to wander in the world means that you are physically there, but void of anything which could bother your wandering. It means being void of those conventions and rules which make a person driving the boat correctly.

If we look at the passage as a whole, there is another consideration worth making. The first meeting then is between a man who did not empty himself and a man who was successful in leaving the self apart, *xuji* 虛己: not by chance, the boat is ‘empty’, *xu* 虛. This seems to imply that being empty not only protects you from difficulties you might encounter, but also has an influence, albeit indirect, on other people’s behavior as well.⁷² I would go as far as to say that this passage implies social consequences related to the achievement of being empty, for the point of view of the story is that of the person with a self. If the only point here were to

72. Sommer (2012: 43) reads this passage as *Zhuangzi*’s explanation of emptiness as a state of being that allows people to wander carefree. I think there is more to say about this passage.

show that being empty does *only* concern the person who emptied himself, in all likelihood the shouting man would have yelled in the first encounter as well, swearing about what just happened.⁷³ The man, instead, shouts only when he sees that the boat is not empty: from this it seems that being empty is a state of being that affects other people as well. Of course, this is not to say that *Zhuangzi*'s ultimate concern is to benefit others, yet this story implies that the benefits in being self-empty do not entirely pertain only to the person who manages to reach this state of being. Thus, this passage offers arguments to say that in the *Zhuangzi* there *is* a clear concern for the social aspects and relationships between men, *pace* all those who consider the *Zhuangzi* a pamphlet about mere individualism void of any reflection on sociality.

So far, thus, we have seen what the *Zhuangzi* suggests us to do with this self made up by externalities: to forget it (*wang ji* 忘己) and to be empty of those (*xu ji* 虛己).⁷⁴ These two guidelines might be pared with other two, where *Zhuangzi* brings to the attention the 'true self'. These two passages will also link us to the final considerations about the relationship between self and things, *wu* 物.

We might start from chapter six, 'The Great Ancestral Teacher', *Dazongshi* 大宗師, there is another passage concerning the 'true man', *zhenren* 真人,⁷⁵ and his features:

“He received something and took pleasure in it; he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to help out Heaven. This is what I call the True Man. (...) He goes along with what is right for things, and no one knows his limit. Therefore, when the sage calls out the troops, he may

73. To exempt every possibility, the man on the boat could be angry with whoever left the boat roaming freely. I will discuss this in the third chapter.

74. Cf. ZYS 33/99/15: *Zhuangzi* suggests to follow Shen Dao's 慎到 approach, being he one of the few who learned the practices of the Way (W293; cf. M339; for the figure of Shend Dao, see W293 footnote no. 12; cf. Mair, 1994, xiii and 107). We learn that “Shen Dao discarded knowledge [*qi zhi* 棄知], did away with self [*qu ji* 去己], (...) taking this to be the principle of the Way [*yi wei dao li* 以為道理]” (W293; ZYS 33/99/15). By the context, which the interested reader is invited to refer to, I believe *ji* represents the 'false self'. To 'do away with the self', *qu ji* 去己, is then another way to deal with it.

75. See Saso 1983: 147 ff. for a reading of the *zhen ren* figure based on religious Daoism.

overthrow nations, but he will not lose the hearts of the people. His bounty enriches ten thousand ages, but he has no love for men.” (W43)

This superior man is put in contrast with people who attach themselves to the common world and its values: those who clear the way for things are not real sages (*fei shenreng ye* 非聖人也), for they are linked to things; those who care about profits are not real gentlemen (*fei junzi ye* 非君子也), those who forget themselves in pursuing fame cannot be considered noblemen (*xing ming shi ji, fei shi ye* 行名失己, 非士也) and, finally, those who lose their beings and is without truth (*wang shen bu zhen* 亡身不真) are “no user of men” (W43; ZZS 6/16/10).⁷⁶ Interestingly, in explicating the passage, Guo Xiang makes the sentence becomes affirmative: the good noblemen are those who forget about fame and are self-satisfied (Guo 1961: 233). Now, Guo Xiang believed “beings ‘spontaneously obtain’ (*zide* 自得) their true nature in a continuous and obscure process” (Robinet 2008: 462–463). This process of obtaining is spontaneous since “beings do not issue from anything but themselves” (*loc. cit.*). Having already made due considerations about Guo Xiang’s commentary, we can still benefit from it to consider that the *Zhuangzi* is here conveying the idea of an ‘inner self’: what I lose in pursuing fame—i.e. externalities which values only upon convention and agreement among people—is something more genuine, more real. Since here the subject is a person, there is little room to think that *ji* refers to something else than the self.⁷⁷

76. Graham reads *shiji* 失己 as “mislead himself”, giving the idea of deceiving one’s self for the sake of fame (Graham 1981: 76), while Chen Guying’s version into modern Chinese is literally ‘to lose oneself’, *mishi ziji* 迷失自己 (Chen 1983: 191). Ziporyn decides to neglect the grammatical structure to give a better translation according to the chapter’s meaning and the *Zhuangzi* taken as a whole (see Ziporyn 2009: 41 n.10); Mair (1998: 52) skips the passage.

77. Cf. chapter twenty-six, ‘External Things’ *Wai Wu* 外物, where the idea of losing oneself is connected to the the concept of wandering, *you* 遊: the Perfect Man, *zhi ren* 至人, “can wander in the world without taking sides, can follow along with men without losing himself [*shun ren er bu shi ji* 順人而不失己]” (W232; ZZS 26/78/29). Which is to say, the Perfect Man, being a perfect man, is able to perfectly fit the moment, does not fix himself on the way things are, since he knows they will change. Insofar as I understand this sentence, the perfect man interacts with others without being influenced by them (I might recall to the reader that Yao ruled men but was not possessed by them, see above and W43: “his [of the sage man] bounty enriches ten thousand ages, but he has no love for men [*bu wei ai ren* 不為愛人 ZZS 6/16/9]”) since he is able to preserve *ji* 己, i.e. his self, his real being.

Seeing the passage in the light of cognitive linguistic, Slingerland read *shiji* 失己 as metaphor for the self as object, which gets lost: “[*Zhuangzi*] seems to feel that most of our ordinary instances of self are harmful to the Subject, and therefore makes use of the SELF-CONTROL AS OBJECT POSSESSION metaphor primarily to transvalue it, giving us the new metaphor: SUBJECT ESCAPES CONTROL OF FALSE SELF BY ELIMINATING OBJECT POSSESSION” (Slingerland 2003a: 185). I do not agree completely with this reading. What Slingerland points out is indeed one of the messages in the *Zhuangzi*, but, I think, is not the case of this *shiji* 失己: considering the context, what is at stake here is that we should *not* lose what we really are for the sake of external recognition and praise. I might recall the sentence in chapter twenty-six quoted above: “you may be one time a ruler, another time a subject. Striving to be praised today, knowing that tomorrow things change, is worth losing one’s most genuine self?” (W231) According to the *Zhuangzi*, it is not.

At the beginning of chapter twenty five ‘Zeyang’, *Zhuangzi* drops another hint on how to interact with people and externalities. Zeyang is trying to take advantage of Wang Guo 王果 to be introduced to the king.⁷⁸ Wang Guo did not talk with the king, since he is not the kind of man appropriate for that task: “the king of Chu is the kind of man who is majestic and stern in bearing, and if offended, he is as unforgiving as a tiger” (W216). Who can succeed in talking with such a king is a true sage, someone like Gong Yuexiu 公閱休.⁷⁹ He is the one who can

“make kings and dukes forget their titles and stipends and humble themselves before him. His approach to things is to go along with them and be merry [*qi yu wu ye, yu zhi wei yu yi* 其於物也，與之為娛矣]; his approach to men is to take pleasure in the progress of others and to hold on to what is his own [*qi yu ren ye, le qu zhi tong er bao ji yan* 其於人也，樂物之通而保己焉]” (W215–6; ZZS 25/73/14)

78. Zeyang is identified as someone who lived in Lu; nothing else is known about him (W216 n.1. Cf. Mair 1994: 48).

79. According to Mair, both Wang Guo and Gong Yuexiu are fictional characters (Mair 1994: 48).

Our attention here must be focused on the last sentence.⁸⁰ Guo Xiang's comment is noteworthy for he changes the sentence into a negative one: "do not get lost in communicating with others" (*tong bi ren er bu sang wo* 通彼人而不喪我, Guo 1961: 879 no.4). Guo Qingfan even talks of mixing oneself among men without impediment, and of taking pleasure in things without losing one's self (*loc. cit.*).

The assumption that *ji* represents the self as something different from the body is confirmed by the meaning of the sentence itself. If no dichotomy between the body and the mind were conceived, we should imagine that the perfect man is the one who knows how to be protected *physically* when dealing with the world. Things and people can indeed harm somebody physically, but the physical realm is not what is at stake here: think about the deformed characters introduced through the text. *Zhuangzi* tells us about perfect men who knows how to live, how to deal with tyrants, how to wander freely, without being metaphorically harmed by externalities. That is to say, *Zhuangzi* is presenting us a way of life quite different from that of other Chinese thinkers: instead of blindly following others, hold to your self. Hence, this passage, besides being another piece of evidence against those who believe that there is no concern for sociality in the *Zhuangzi*, informs the reader that dealing with other people and things in general could be dangerous for one's true self.

Finally, to illustrate a bit further how things can be a peril to the self, I quote two more passages, where the contrast between what is outside (*wu* 物 or *shi* 事, according to the lines), and the self, *ji* 己, is even more clear.

The sixteenth chapter in the received *Zhuangzi*, 'Mending the Inborn Nature', *Shanxing* 繕性, deals with the idea of preserving one's nature. The comparison is, how it often happens, with ancient times. In the past, people cultivated purity and spontaneity, without too many conceptualizations or theoretical structure. Stressing the achievement of the past is a way for *Zhuangzi* to criticize his peers: "Those in ancient times who wished to keep themselves alive did not use eloquence to ornament their knowledge" (W124). Things have changed, and people started to attach themselves to external things, but this is an illusionary way to control things. *Zhuangzi* believes that people "should find the same joy in one condition as in the

80. Mair translates more literally: "regarding people, he enjoys communicating with them, but protects himself while doing so" (M155).

other and thereby be free of care, that is all. (...) Those who destroy themselves in things [*sang ji yu wu* 喪己於物] and lose their inborn nature in the vulgar [*shi xing yu su* 失性於俗] may be called the upside-down people [*dao zhen zhi min* 倒真之民]” (W125; cf. M151; ZZS 16/43/14). One could not wish for a more clear statement which contrasts the self with the external things, while connecting it with the ‘inborn nature’ (*xing* 性), in a quite explicit way. People who modify what is internal for the sake of what is external (Chen 1983: 438 no.11), and lose what is more real, *sang ji* 喪己, for externalities. These are the same people who lose their real nature, the self we should protect (see *baoji* 保己, ZZS 25/73/14), and we might as well note that *Zhuangzi* defines them *dao zhen* 倒真, which literally means ‘the reversal of real, genuine’. Which in turn implies that what is genuine is the opposite, i.e. not to modify what is internal because of what is external.⁸¹

Similarly, in chapter twenty-nine, ‘Robber Zhi’, *Zhi Dao* 盜跖, *Zhuangzi* invites us to guard against externalities, here represented by the world affairs, *shi* 事. At the end of the chapter, Never-Enough 無足 proudly talks about his way of living, made of richness and honor. Sense-of-Harmony 知和 does not share his point of view and kindly reproaches Never-Enough 無足:

“You and your type look at those who were born at the same time and who dwell in the same community, and you decide that you are gentlemen who are far removed from the common lot, who are superior to the times. This shows that you have no guiding principle by which to survey the ages of past and present, the distinctions between right and wrong. (...) You know you are doing what there is to do, but you don’t

81. Another passage which present this contrast is ZZS 24/71/6, in another description for the Great Man: “He who understands what it means to possess greatness (...) does not change himself for the sake of things [*bu yi wu yi ji ye* 不以物易己也]. He returns to himself [*fan ji* 反己] and finds the inexhaustible; he follows antiquity and discovers the imperishable—this is the sincerity of the Great Man [*da ren zhi cheng* 大人之誠]” (W209; ZZS 24/71/6). Here the imperative is not to change for the sake of things—here, I believe, *yi* 易 should be considered as a coercive action—for these externalities is to give them much more credit than what they have. Since this passage is again about the true self (*ji* 己) vs external things (*wu* 物), I confine myself to this brief explanation here.

know why there should be things to do. This way, you might possess all the honor of the Son of Heaven, all the wealth of the empire, and yet never escape from disaster.” (W262–3; cf. M309)

Needless to say, the wise man (*zhizhe* 知者) knows how to do things: “He calculates the risk, thinks of what may be contrary and harmful to his inborn nature. Therefore he may decline what is offered him, but not because he hopes for reputation and praise” (W264). He is like Shan Quan 善卷 and Xu You 許由:⁸²

“[they] had the opportunity to become emperors and declined, but not because they wished to make an empty gesture of refusal; they would not have let such matters bring harm to themselves [*bu yi shi hai ji* 不以事害己]. All these men sought what was to their advantage and declined what was harmful. The world praises them as worthies, and it is all right if they enjoy such repute—but they were not striving for any reputation or praise.” (W264)

「善卷、許由得帝而不受，非虛辭讓也，不以事害己。此皆就其利，辭其害，而天下稱賢焉，則可以有之，彼非以興名譽也。」
(ZZS 29/90/17)

“Such matters”, *shi* 事, are the worldly affairs, those externalities (fame, honor, government) which do not pertain to a person naturally, and, thus, harm the self, *hai ji* 害己, for “pursu[ing] worldly ambitions involves us in anxieties about external things” (Graham 1981: 181).⁸³

82. Shan Quan appears in chapter twenty eight, ‘Giving Away a Throne’ (*ragn wang* 讓王), as one of those men who refuses to govern when the empire is offered to him: being at ease with the world, he has no benefit in governing the empire (see W239). Xu You is another character who refused the throne when it was offered to him (W3), one of the true men we find in the *Zhuangzi*.

83. Cf. Chen Guying, ‘不以政事損害自己’ (Chen 1983: 854).

A brief recap will be useful to understand this first section on the Zhuangzian self as expressed by *ji* 己. First of all, *ji* frames the concept of a self as something proper to the human being, an inner world considered as a locative space, very often in contrast with other persons' locative spaces, designated by *ren* 人.⁸⁴ *Ji* is also quintessential for the idea of 'false self', which is influenced by and/or shaped on externalities which are not proper to the human nature. This, however, does not run out all the aspects that *ji* represents in the *Zhuangzi*. It represents also something inborn in the human being, a sort of genuine self which equates the Emperor with a common man (see ZZS 4/9/18). People should get a deep understanding of this 'true self' (see ZZS 4/12/5) and should not be chained by externalities. After having explained all these aspects of the self, *Zhuangzi* suggests us to forget about and empty one's self of all those externalities which are somehow an obstacle to a free wandering in the world. In particular, a line in chapter twenty (ZZS 20/54/6) represents the idea that being self-emptied does not strictly regard only to the man who achieves that status, but touches other people as well. Finally, *ji* constitutes something we ought not lost for the sake of worldly affairs or external things. This does not mean that we should entirely reject the world outside our selves. A communion with other people is stated, but with that much of awareness which allows us to guard against externalities.

Zi 自

The oracle bones inscriptions present a first trace of *zi* 自 as 'self', among other meanings it bears⁸⁵ (Schuessler 2006: 634). Grammatically, it is a 'direct reflexive': it is either the object of the transitive verb in front of which it is used, directly referred to the subject of the

84. Cf. Sommer 2012.

85. It is also used as a preposition or as adverb with the idea of being naturally so, spontaneous. In the *Zhuangzi* these uses recur as well. See, e.g., ZZS 2/4/16, ZZS 5/13/13–14, ZZS 7/20/16 etc. where *zi* 自 has the grammatical role of a preposition. See, e.g. ZZS 12/31/29, ZZS 14/38/11, ZZS 14/38/21 etc. where it has the meaning of spontaneity. Needless to say, these quotations will not be part of my analysis.

sentence, or an adverb which emphasizes the direct involvement of the subject in the action the verb expresses (Pulleyblank 1995: 136).⁸⁶

In the passage I selected from the *Zhuangzi*, *zi* has the grammatical function of a ‘direct reflexive’. This section aims to show that *zi* is symbolic for ‘self’. After introducing some examples to show that *zi* refers to a person as a whole made by a body and a self, I analyze closely four more others, worth of deeper consideration.⁸⁷

A few examples immediately show what a ‘direct reflexive’ is. Yao the ruler wants to abdicate, saying: ‘I consider myself inadequate to the task’, *wu zishi queran* 吾自視缺然 (ZZS 1/2/6),⁸⁸ where his inadequateness concerns his personal being; in the sentence ‘the fool consider he himself as awake’, “*yuzhe ziyi wei jue* 愚者自以為覺” (ZZS 2/7/2)⁸⁹, the body is awake, in its way, even while sleeping, whereas one feels himself as fully awake when conscious of himself. Finally, in the famous passage about Zhuangzi’s dream, Zhuangzi is happily enjoying himself in being a butterfly (if we read Zhuangzi as the subject) or the butterfly is happily enjoying itself (if we read the butterfly as the subject which *zi* refers to⁹⁰), “*ziyu shizhi yu!* 自喻適志與!” (ZZS 2/7/21). In all these passages where *zi* is a direct reflexive,⁹¹ we could read the most basic Subject-self relationship (Slingerland 2003a: 28), where the subject is the physical person (a man who consider himself, the fool, Zhuang Zhou)

86. This it true not only when the subject is a person. E.g. in the case of *Zhuangzi*: ZZS 4/11/29 and ZZS 4/13/1 where the subject is a plant; ZZS 11/27/24 and 33/99/29 where *zi* 自 refers to *xing* 形; ZZS 11/27/27 and ZZS 11/28/19 where it refers to *wu* 物 and so on. These cases where *zi* 自 is used as direct reflexive to a subject which is not a person will not be discussed here, since my interest is in analyzing those occurrences where the self of a person is stated, either explicitly or implicitly.

87. I shall anticipate that in two of these passages, I go as far as interpreting *zi* as symbolic for a ‘false self’ and for a ‘true self’, as I did before for some passages on *ji* 己. This interpretation in terms of ‘true’ and ‘false’ must be always applied. I aim to prove the existence of a concept of self, regardless its nature. Yet, considering the context, these two passages allow to speculate about the nature of this self.

88. Note *wu* 吾 followed immediately by *zi*, where the last one is the object of the verb referring to the subject, as for ZZS 5/15/9, ZZS 13/36/25, ZZS 17/46/14.

89. *Ziyiwei* 自以為 is another recurrent structure, as expression of a consideration made by the subject upon oneself (as for ZZS 14/40/26; ZZS 29/90/13–14, ZZS 7/21/18, ZZS 11/28/13 etc.), but sometimes it also refers to animals, as in the case of the lice on a pig, ZZS 24/72/1, W211. I quote just this example in chapter two to give the idea, and move on to more interesting passages regarding my research.

90. For this reading of the passage, where Zhuang Zhou is not the narrator of the story but an entity which is no longer there while there is the butterfly, see Moeller 1999.

91. See also ZZS 6/17/31; ZZS 6/19/4; ZZS 11/26/15 and so on. Here it is useless to quote every passage; suffice it to mention these examples as a proof of this use of *zi* (among other uses as well, as stated above).

who experiences his self as a metaphorical representation, a reflexion of the subject—who perceive himself *also* as a physical body. This implies a notion of self. When I say something like “I will confine myself to this explanation” I am, although unconsciously, referring to my entire person who is talking (and can do so exactly because I have a tongue, vocal folds and physical attributes that allow me to produce sounds), and, at the same time, to an abstract entity, ‘myself’, i.e. the amount of intentions to say something more.

The following passage I present here where *zi* is quintessential for self is worth more extensive consideration. In the above mentioned dialogue between Confucius and Yan Hui, in the fourth chapter,⁹² Yan Hui finds no more strategies to deal with the terrible Lord of Wey. Therefore, he asks Confucius what he can possibly do, and the answer is—apparently—pretty simply: all he needs to do is ‘fasting the mind’, *xinzhai* 心齋 (W25). After few more questions, Yan Hui comprehend what this is, and declares: “Before I heard this, I was certain that I was Hui [*shi zihui ye* 實自回也]. But now that I have heard it, there is no more Hui [*wei shi you hui ye* 未始有回也]. Can this be called emptiness?” To which Confucius replies: “That’s all there is to it.” (W25; ZZS 4/10/3).⁹³ At a first glance, one immediately gets the sense of this passage. But what does ‘I was certain that I was Hui’ mean?

92. One may note at this point that I did not quote the passage in the second chapter where both *zi* 自 and *ji* 己 render together the idea of self-so “夫吹萬不同，而使其自己也” (ZZS 2/3/24). As for other passages left out, my decision is taken accordingly to my purpose, i.e. figure out the concept of self in a person in the *Zhuangzi*. Here the reference is not to the human being, but to the “ten thousand differences” (Ziporyn 2009: 9), as if everything has in itself something by which it is naturally so. This is indeed one of the concepts stored in the *Zhuangzi*, but not the subject of my discussion. Thus, the decision to leave out this passage (cf. footnote no. 49).

93. Mair translates *shi zihui ye* 實自回也 with “I truly have an identity” (M32), Ziporyn as “it is myself that is full and real” (Ziporyn 2009: 27). Graham reads this sentence as “a deed derives from Hui”, where *zi* 自 would then be the preposition of the locative complement *zihui* 自回 (Graham 1981: 68). Considering the context, do not particularly agree on this interpretation.

Guo Xiang links the fasting of the mind to something physical, commenting ‘I was certain that I was Hui’ with “since [Yan Hui] had not yet started the fasting of the mind, he still has a being [*you qi shen* 有其身]” (Guo 1961: 148 n.1). Following this reading, other commentators interpret this passage as saying that Yan Hui is still there physically, not able yet to “destroy his body in order to forget his being [不能隳一忘其身]” (*ivi*). This reading requires a long discussion about the difference between *shen* 身 and *ti* 體 according to Guo Xiang’s philosophy, but this is hardly the place to engage such a study. Therefore, I limit myself to the considerations above made. The interested reader might start from the bibliography in Ziporyn 2003.

Grammatically, the phrase *shi zihui ye* 實自回也 is a verbless noun predication (Pulleyblank 1995: 16), which states a process of identification between *zi* 自 and *hui* 回. But this identification is made by a subject, namely Yan Hui, who is considering his being: *zi* would then refer to features by which Yan Hui is what he is. If it is true that our body's features are part of our identity, it is also unlikely that, after fasting, Yan Hui loses his body or changes it so much that he cannot recognize himself physically. *Zi* carries a conception of the self as an inner world made by ideas, memories, feelings, which identifies one's nature and makes a person different from others. After fasting, non physical aspects are gone. *Zi* is then the self as those features one has to get rid of to come in contact with the essential self. After fasting, Yan Hui is no longer Yan Hui, that is to say, he has no longer the same inner world who made him behaving in a certain way and having certain ideas on how to deal with the Lord of Wey.

One last consideration is worth here. The fasting of the mind, *xinzhai* 心齋, and the state of being it leads to is indeed a desirable one: emptiness is necessary to accept whatever is going to come and respond to it in the most natural way. Accordingly, Slingerland, focusing on '*wei shi you Hui ye* 未始有回也', which he translates as "my self has never existed" (Slingerland 2003a: 183), applies to this passages the same considerations for '*shiji* 失己' (ZZS 6/10/16): the instances of the self are harmful to the Subject, therefore the Subject has to get rid of this "false self" (*ibidem*: 185). While I did not completely agree with this reading of *shiji* 失己 (see ZZS 6/16/10 above), I concur with him on this *zi* as 'false self'. Here Yan Hui is fasting, i.e. "releasing the mind of all cognitive thought and desire, and maintaining an empty mind, a condition of non-self" (Miura 2008: 1110), so that everything which obstruct the mind ceases to be present. It may be not the same falsity which can be applied to *ji* 己 in ZZS 1/2/2 and ZZS 17/44/16 (see above), yet there is a kind of negative connotation about the inner world that obstructs the emptiness of the mind.

The following quotation shows that *zi* represents the self, and that confronting with other people is necessary to shape this self. In chapter seven, namely, 'Fit for Emperors and Kings', *Ying diwang* 應帝王, we meet Ji Xian 季咸, a shaman who has paranormal powers

and predicts events in people's lives, like their death. Huzi 壺子, allegedly the master of Liezi (W58 no.9), hears of him through Liezi, and decides to meet him:

“I have already showed you [i.e. Liezi] all the outward forms [*qi wen* 其文], but I haven't yet showed you the substance [*qi shi* 其實]. (...) Try bringing your shaman along next time and letting him get a look at me.” (W57)

The shaman Ji Xian and Huzi meet several times: every time, Huzi deliberately shows himself in a certain state of being (almost dying, recovering from illness), so that he can manipulate the conclusions Ji Xian reaches in seeing him. During the last meeting he manages to show himself as completely empty; Ji Xian, in seeing this, loses himself and runs away [*zishi er zou* 自失而走]⁹⁴ (ZZS 7/21/14–15).⁹⁵

According to my understanding, this passage is about the need for a confrontation in order to identify oneself. Social implications which derived from this and other passages will be discussed in more detail in due time; here I will confine myself to saying that, while this kind of confrontation is valid both for physical features (I confront myself with a girl with blond hair in order to identify myself as a brunette) and, for identification of features of the self (a confrontation with a quick-tempered man brings me to identify myself as a quiet person), this passage discusses the state of being of two person when they confront each other: see what Huzi says to Liezi on showing the substance.⁹⁶ It must be acknowledge that, after having met twice with Huzi, the shaman laments the fact that he is not able to physiognomize, *xiang* 相, Huzi (W58; cf. M70), a practice which involves also the physical

94. The expression ‘*zishi* 自失’ is translated as follow: “lost his composure” for Mair (M70); “lost his head” according to Graham (1981: 97); “lost his wits” in Watson (W58) and “lost control of himself” for Ziporyn (2009: 53). All these translations refer to the fact that in previous meetings, the shaman is calm and composed, and gives general analysis of Huzi's state of being. Once he is no longer able to understand Huzi's state, he lost ‘that something’ which he had the previous times and run away. ‘That something’ is understood differently: as composure, as head, as wits and as control. Whatever the shaman gets lost, it is something *in* his being, surely not a foot or an arm. Hence, once again we can trace in *zi* 自 ‘something’ implies the concept of self.

95. See Defoort 2012 for an anthropological reading of this passage.

96. Schipper describes the passage as an exhibition of “four different aspects of the body”, even though he acknowledges that the last one is about a state of being, that of “the vision of Chaos” (Schipper 1993: 205–208)

appearance.⁹⁷ Huizi is using his physical appearance to manipulate the shaman's opinion in their meetings, and when he is empty, *xu* 虛, the shaman loses his self. Yet, they are both physically present. Thus, here, *zi* expresses the idea of one's composure and calmness and surely not to the physical body that is running away.^{98,99}

In chapter five, 'The Sign of Virtue Complete', *Dechongfu* 德充符, there is a piece which involves both the idea of *zi* as self, and that of the body as something separated. We find two different approaches to life, expressed respectively by Shentu Jia 申徒嘉 and Zichan 子產, both disciples of Bohun Wuren 伯昏無人.¹⁰⁰ The latter one is a minister of the state of Zheng (W35 no.3; cf. Mair 1994: 8), while Shentu Jia is one of those characters who, while physically mutilated (he lost one foot), is internally complete.¹⁰¹ Zichan is advising Shentu Jia on how to conduct: "If I go out first, you stay behind, [*wo xian chu, ze zi zhi* 我先出, 則子止] and if you go out first, I'll stay behind [*zi xian chu, ze wo zhi* 子先出, 則我止]" (W35; cf. M44; ZZS 5/13/29). Apparently, Shentu Jia does not follow his instructions, for the next day Zichan repeats himself and become even more sharp: "Are you going to stay behind, or aren't you? When you see a prime minister, you don't even get out of the way—do you think

97. This practice has to do mainly with the physical appearance of a person. However, in ancient China it did not stop there. This passage is indeed a proof of the fact that the practice of knowing one's being from what can be seen externally involves a sort of empathic understanding as well. Besides, Csikszentmihalyi 2004 illustrates the Chinese belief that inner virtues reflected on the physical body, thus a person's appearance is closely connected to their inner beings. See also Mette Siggstedt 1992 "Forms of Fate: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Formal Portraiture, Especially Ancestral Portraits, and Physiognomy (*Xiangshu*) in China", in *International Colloquium on Chinese Art History*, 1991; *Proceedings: Painting and Calligraphy, Part 2*. Taipei: National Palace Museum: 715–743; cf. Livia Kohn 1986, "A Textbook on Physiognomy: The Tradition of the *Shenxiang quanbian*", *Asian Folklore Studies* 45: 227–254.

98. Slingerland (2004: 334) reads in this passage an example of the schema 'self-control is object possession', where the subject (Ji Xian) loses possess of his self, conceived as an object. Cf. Slingerland 2003a: 185, where he groups this passage with the above discussed ZZS 6/16/10 about the scholar who loses himself for the sake of fame, and ZZS 4/10/3, where Yan Hui is fasting. In this previous analysis, Slingerland considers *zi* as instance for the false self. I do not think, however, that the context gives us solid ground for applying this label to *zi*: it is clear that the shaman is considered a charlatan in contrast with Huizi, yet he loses his self, not the false instances of it.

99. This description might imply that Huizi is able to manipulate his self to the point that he looks as if he had none. And yet, his physical presence is undoubtedly there. Even indirectly, we are dealing with a dualistic reading of human nature.

100. Mair identifies him with two other figure we encounter in chapter twenty one and thirty two (Mair 1994: 98). However, no more information is given (Cf. Guo 1961: 197 no.3). Cf. Chen Guying, who see the master's name as an indication that this passage should be read as a parable (Chen 1983: 166 no.2).

101. Mair (1994: 8) defines him a "wise man".

you're the equal of a prime minister?' ” (W35–36). The one who is not really learning is Zichan himself, for Shentu Jia replies:

“Within the gates of the Master, is there any such thing as a prime minister? You take delight in being a prime minister and pushing people behind you. But I've heard that if the mirror is bright, no dust will settle on it; if dust settles, it isn't really bright. When you live around worthy men a long time, you'll be free of faults. You regard the Master as a great man, and yet you talk like this—it's not right, is it?”

Shentu Jia is making a few points here. Firstly, being a prime minister—what Zichan is—is a social label, something external, about which we should not bother. According to Graham, the mirror is a metaphor for the mind, which should be bright and without dust, i.e. without feelings that obscure them.¹⁰² Zichan's mind is full of egoism, to the extent that he does not really get close to the teachings of the master (Graham 1981: 78). Zichan, however, still does not get it, for all he does is to attack Shentu Jia's physical deformity:

“You, a man like this [i.e. mutilated]—and still you claim to be better than a Yao! Take a look at your virtue and see if it's not enough to give you cause to reflect [*zifan* 自反]!” (W36)

「子既若是矣，猶與堯爭善，計子之德不足以自反邪？」 (ZZS 5/13/30)

The dialogue continues with a long reply by Shentu Jia, who explains that fretting about things is nonsense: “To know what you can't do anything about and to be content with it as you would with fate [*an zhi ruo ming* 安之若命]—only a man of virtue [*de zhe* 德者] can do that” (W36; ZZS 5/14/1). Eventually, he reminds Zichan that his deformity simply concerns appearance: their master, in fact, never noticed his being footless.¹⁰³ The latter is left speechless.

102. Cf. Saso 1983: 152: “The mirror reflects but does not hold onto reality”. Cf. W59.

103. See section on *xing* 形.

This passage is worth two considerations. The first one regards *zi*: it refers here to something proper to a person but not in the physical sense. Albeit Zichan starts attacking Shentu Jia's physical deformity, Zichan's invitation to Shentu Jia is to reflect upon his own behavior, his feeling of being equal to the prime minister. One may well object that *zi* is here a direct reflexive on the same line of those in ZZS 1/2/6 or ZZS 2/7/2 above: 'consider myself' could refer either to a physical or to a non physical evaluation, or both.¹⁰⁴ But here, in this exchange of opinions, Shentu Jia and Zichan refer to virtue. This gives us room to consider *zifan* 自反 as a reflection that should be made about being virtuous, qualities and beliefs, all things that concern the self, and not the body.

The second point worth discussing is Shentu Jia's emphasis on how unimportant is the physical status of a person. He is footless, yet he is clearly superior to his peer Zichan, and his master does not even notice his mutilation. Which is to say, the physical *does* not really mean anything, so that, if we acknowledge Ames's notion that Chinese people have not thought whatsoever about a notion of self (Hall and Ames 1998: 23–25), what is this passage referring to?

Finally, I quote here a line from chapter twenty four, 'Xu Wugui', *Xu Wugui* 徐無鬼, where *zi* functions as direct reflexive; the context makes clear that it does not refer to the physical body. *Zhuangzi* records a dialogue between figures, whether or not fictional, which he uses as spokesmen. Here we meet master Ziai 子綦¹⁰⁵ sitting and looking at the sky, when one of his disciples, Yan Chengzi 顏成子, addresses him a question which starts a short yet thought-provoking dialogue:

104. Cf. the other occurrence of *zifan* 自反, in ZZS 12/32/13. In a nutshell, Zigong 子貢, a disciple of Confucius, bumps into an old man trying to irrigate his fields, with much effort but little result. Therefore, Zigong informs him that the same work could be made by a machine. The old man, in his reply, points out to Zigong that those machines do nothing but what was "was pure and simple, and without the pure and simple, the life of the spirit knows no rest. Where the life of the spirit knows no rest, the Way will cease to buoy you up. It's not that I don't know about your machine—I would be ashamed to use it!" (W91). Hearing this and other considerations made by the old man, Zigong is completely at lost. It takes quite a long walk to put himself together (*zide* 自得) and yet, it takes all day to get back to normal (*zhongri bu zifan* 終日不自反) (W91–92; ZZS 12/32/13). In both the occurrences of *zide* 自得 and *zifan* 自反, indicates the physical status which Zigong regains and his calmness and stillness of emotions, i.e. something more than the mere normal state of being of the body.

105. Guo Qingfan, identifies him as the Ziqi of South Wall that appears in chapter two (Guo 1961: 848 n.1); cf. Watson, who follows the same line (W207 n.14); cf. Mair, who thinks Ziai is another name for Ziqi in chapter two who is then described in chapter six with the name of Nanpo Zikui (Mair 1994: 7).

“Master, you surpass all other things! Can you really make the body like a withered tree [*xing gu ke shi ruo fao hai* 形固可使若槁骸] and the mind like dead ashes [*xin gu ke shi tuo si hui hu* 心固可使若死灰乎]?”

“Once I lived in a mountain cave. At that time, Tian He 田禾 came to pay me one visit, and the people of the state of Qi congratulated him three times. I must have had hold of something in order for him to find out who I was (...). If I had not had hold of something, then how would he have been able to find out who I was? (...) Ah, how I pitied those men who destroy themselves [*wo bei ren zhi zi shang zhe* 我悲人之自喪者!] Then again, I pitied those who pity others, and again, I pitied those who pity those who pity others. But all that was long ago.” (W207; cf. M246; ZZS 24/70/22)

I focus here on that ‘how I pitied those men who destroy themselves’, *wo bei ren zhi zi shang zhe* 我悲人之自喪者.¹⁰⁶ Yet, to get closer to the possible meaning of this sentence, there is

106. This description of the body as a withered tree and the mind as dead ashes has been object of scholarly debate. The comments explain the metaphor as indicating stillness (*wu qing* 無情), a state of being when one is not restrained by any matter and naturalness emerges (Guo 1961: 44 no.2 and 738 no.2; cf. Chen 1981: 605 no.5). Hence, the mind has no activity, and externalities has no influence on it (Wang 2013: 103). “The body like a withered tree”, instead, indicates a complete stableness, as if the body were a container void of those elements, i.e. the emotions, which can destabilize it (Chen 1981: 39–40). This passivity of the body is stressed also by Wang Bo’s interpretation of this sentence, which, moreover, reaffirms the body/mind dualism (“庄子把人去分为心和形两部分。他认为形体是完全被动的领域”, Wang 2013: 225). Wing-tsiist Chan gives a completely different interpretation: referring to the image as expressed in the second chapter, he writes: “The dry wood and dead ashes (...) represent the persistent question whether man is a spirit and whether the mind is alert.” Unfortunately, Chan does not provide further explanations about this statement, which remains somehow lacking solid underpinnings for this theory (Chan 1961: 179–180). Differently, following the religious Taoist tradition, Saso reads the *qi* in the chapter’s title as *zhai* 齋, ‘to abstain’, and interprets the image as a description of the adept’s abstinence (Saso 1983: 143).

In chapter six a woman is said to be quite old, yet she looks like a baby because she has learned the Way (W46). The image of the baby can be found also in the *Daodejing* 道德經, the other text along with the *Zhuangzi* usually considered as pivotal for the Daoist tradition (on the *Daodejing*, refer to Robinet 2008: 311–315 and 464–465; cf. Chan in Kohn 2000: 1–29. See also Xiaogan Liu 2006, *Laozi gu jin* 老子古今 (The Laozi from Ancient to the Modern), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui

need for an examination of the whole passage. According to Ziai’s opinion, living in a cave is doing nothing special. Yet, people did see it as something extra-ordinary, so that even the duke Tian He (Mair 1994: 66), pays him a visit. Albeit unwillingly, Ziai was gaining reputation, that is something external, something the sage does not care about. In realizing all this, he feels sorry for those people who have not realize it yet, and are destroying what they are (*zisang* 自喪): they are those who have lost one’s dao (*sangshi qi dao* 喪失其道, Guo 1961: 845 no.4) and, as a consequence, are holding on externalities instead of on what is natural. Therefore, *zi* works here as a direct reflexive that has nothing to do with the physical body. What is at stake here –not to destroy oneself over externalities– brings us to the idea of *zi* as symbolic for the ‘true self’; something similar to *sangji* 喪己 or *shiji* 失己.¹⁰⁷

To conclude, a recap of the considerations done so far. Among the meanings *zi* holds in the *Zhuangzi*, it recurs as a direct reflexive in sentences where the subject refers to their being: in this sense, *zi* is the quintessential for self as an entity belonging to a person but separated from the physical body. Furthermore, *zi* is conceived as container, or as representation of one’s composure. I also noted that in two occasions, it communicates a true self and a false self, according to the content.

2.2 Analysis of *ti* ‘體’, *xing* ‘形’ and *shen* ‘身’ as the notions of body and person

According to Pregadio, in the Daoist tradition “three main terms define the traditional Chinese views of the human body. One is *xing* 形, or “form,” that mainly refers to the body as the counterpart and residence of spirit. The second, *shen* 身 or “person,” denotes the whole human being, *including its non-material aspects ranging from thinking and feeling to personality and social role*” (Pregadio 2008: 75, emphasis added. Cf. Despeux 1996: 88). Similarly, in an article on the connections between state, body and cosmos in ancient China, Nathan Sivin argues that “*shen* includes the individual personality, and may refer in a general

kexue chubanshe). Here as well there is a close association between being like a baby and the ideal state of being: in chapter twenty four the infant is the quintessential of spontaneity and lack of intentions (Moeller 2007: 50–51); in chapter fifty five, it has close association with sexuality and cultivation (Moeller 2006: 24–26 and 38–39; cf. Blakney 1955: 108; see also Paul R. Goldin 2002, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press). To be like an infant is strictly related to the idea of being natural and spontaneous, stable in one’s being, in harmony with the world.

107. See ZZS 16/43/14 and ZZS 26/78/29 above.

way to the person rather than to the body. (...); *hsing* 形, literally means "shape." It often refers to the body's outline rather than to its physical identity" (Sivin 1995: 14).¹⁰⁸ Obviously, the meanings of these characters should not be taken so narrowly. For instance, in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs), *shen* corresponds to the English "body" (Schuessler 2006: 457). Finally, the third character mentioned by Pregadio is *ti* 體 or "body," that designates the physical frame as an ordered whole made of interdependent parts (Pregadio 2008: 75).¹⁰⁹

All these interpretations can be found in the *Zhuangzi*. What I hold, however, is what we should reevaluate the scope of their meaning. In the following sections, I will argue that the authors of the *Zhuangzi* used *ti* to refer to the body in its most concrete essence. *Xing* and *shen*, on the other hand, present a wider range of meanings. The first can represent (a) the physical body, or (b) the physical body and its appearance, or (c) the mere appearance when coupled with *ti* or *hai* 骸.¹¹⁰ As for *shen*, I am in favor of reading it either as 'body' or conveying the concept of 'person' – a term that, I recall to the reader, I use to indicate a human being as made by a self and a physical body. Therefore, I *do not* propose one consistent translation for the last two characters. I postulate that a single word can convey different meanings, and the key factor to grasp them is the context itself.

108. Be it noted that, despite being pretty able to distinguish such subtle differences of meaning, he then adopts the holistic position and denies the existence in Chinese culture not only of a possible body/mind dualism, but of "other mental habits" as well (Sivin 1995: 14).

109. Cf. Fingarette (1979), who discusses the notion of self in the *Lunyu*. He analyzes *ji* and *shen*; the second adds to the notion of self an association with body (Fingarette 1979: 132). It should be noted however that he interprets the locution *zhong shen* 終身 as "during all that period that I as a *person* exist" (*loc. cit.*, my italics).

Cf. Sommer 2008 and 2013. She takes the component on the right side of the character *ti* 体 demonstrate is associated to plants: the *ti* body is something that can divide itself to multiply, as plants do (Sommer 2008:300). Differently, *xing* regards the outer form, while *shen* represents the body as something social, shared between the members of a family. While I may agree with some of the conclusions she reaches (that *shen*, for example, represents the person capable of self reflection, Sommer 2008: 302), many others are unsupported by textual evidence or clear explanation (such as the connection between *ti* and plants, guaranteed only by considering the simplified version of the character *ti*; or the claim that *shen* are bodies that "overlap contiguously, linearly, segmentally", *loc. cit.*).

110. *Hai* 骸 is another character worth to be mentioned, yet because of space constrains I cannot fully discuss it.

Ti 體

Ti 體 expresses the physical nature of the body.¹¹¹ In the first two passages of the current section, I believe *ti* stands for the physical body. Moreover, in these two *ti* is coupled with *xing* 形. The context allows to understand these two characters as separated, specifically pointing to different features of a human being: the physical body and the bodily appearance respectively. I then close this section by referring to a dialogue where *ti* is contrast with *xin* 心, which I intend here as corresponding to the English ‘mind’.¹¹² This last quotation proves beyond doubts that Chinese thinkers conceived human nature as dualistic.

Without further delay, I start introducing two quotations where *ti* expresses the physical aspect of a human being. In chapter six of the received *Zhuangzi*, Yan Hui tells Confucius about his improvement in sitting down to meditate, *zuo* 坐. At the end, he can forget¹¹³ his presence:

Yan Hui said, “I smash up my limbs and body [*duo zhi ti* 墮肢體], drive out perception and intellect [*chu cong ming* 黜聰明], cast off form [*li xing* 離形], do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare [*da tong* 大通]. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything [*zuo wang* 坐忘].” (W53; cf. M64)

「顏回曰：「墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。」 (ZZS 6/19/21)

111. Not only human body. See, e.g., ZZS 6/17/23 and ZZS 22/63/14, where it refers to death and life forming one body; cf. ZZS 17/43/31 and ZZS 25/76/2 where it refers to the body of a horse, etc. The character *ti* is also used with the grammatical function of a verb, ‘to embody’ (for example: ZZS 15/42/14; cf. ZZS 20/55/28; cf. 22/62/14 etc.). Considering my focus on human nature, all these passages are left out.

112. *Xin* is also the ‘heart’. This word is further discussed in section 2.3.1 of the current chapter.

113. This forgetting is articulated on three levels: he first forgets concepts of benevolence and righteousness, he then forgets about music and rites (cf. Chen Shaoming 2014: 49).

The presence of *zhi* 肢 indicating the limbs of an animal¹¹⁴ implies that *ti* 體 refers to the physical body of a person. The construction of the sentences expresses, I believe, a crescendo of meaning, until the climax of being one with the Great Thoroughfare is reached. Yan Hui detaches from his physical body and takes distances from perceptions (*cong* 聰) and intellect (*ming* 明).¹¹⁵ By doing so, he can discard his appearance (*xing* 形), and abandon understanding (*zhi* 知). It is only by having a human body that one can have the appearance of a human being; it is only by having intellect that one can pursue knowledge.¹¹⁶ Accordingly, *ti* and *xing* point at two different aspects of the human body. Guo Xiang defines ‘*zuowang* 坐忘’ as being detached from everything, without feeling one’s presence nor recognizing the presence of the sky and the earth outside oneself.¹¹⁷ Guo Qingfan further explains the concepts, pointing out that Yan Hui detaches himself both from the body and its appearance, which are external (Guo 1961: 285 n.2; cf. Xu Fuguan’s comment in Chen 1983: 227 no.3). According to this analysis, I believe that these two words should be understood as conveying different meanings.¹¹⁸

An analogous passage comes from chapter eleven, ‘Let it Be, Leave it Alive’, *Zai You* 在宥, in which *Zhuangzi* reiterates the same pattern. Big Concealment 鴻蒙 explains to Cloud Chief 雲將 the process of mind–nourishment, *xin yang* 心養: “rest in inaction [*wuwei* 無為], smash your form and the body [*duo er xing ti* 墮爾形體], spit out hearing and eyesight [*tu er*

114. Cf. Zyporin, who reads *ti* as the ‘torso’ exactly because the presence of *zhi* (Zyporin 2009: 49).

115. Guo Qingfan comment indicates them as the results of two different organs: perceptions come from hearing, intellect derives from seeing (Guo 1961: 285 no.1).

116. I am indebted to prof. Franco Gatti for helping me getting through this passage. Any faultiness in the reading, however, should be addressed to me only.

117. See Kohn: Yan Hui’s experience is, according to her, quintessential of a state of harmony and stability. Only after “cessation of all physical, sensual, and mental functions” to which the state of trance brings, one can attain ecstatic freedom (Kohn 1992: 159).

118. Truth to be told, these combinations may as well be the result of a mere literary choice, to avoid repetitions while conveying the same meaning. In English language, we can use “she has a great body” and “she has a great shape” interchangeably to address a person’s fit body. It is also true that by saying “great body”, we can also imply a notable physical structure, perfect to carry out a certain work, without necessarily mean that the shape is attractive. Going back to the *Zhuangzi*, one of the premises of my reading is my belief that Classical Chinese language very often relies on the context to convey specific meanings. *Xing* 形 *per se* can refer to the physical body (see following section), yet I believe a throughout understanding cannot escape the context.

cong ming 吐爾聰明], forget that you are a thing among other things and you may join in great unity with the deep boundless” (W81; ZZS 11/28/17).¹¹⁹ According to the previous quotation from chapter sixth and scholars’ interpretation, *cong ming* 聰明 are to be taken as referring to different sense organs. If we allow this, to respect the rhythm of the sentence, *xing ti* 形體 should not be considered one single bisyllabic word. *Ti* 體 and *xing* 形 then indicate two different yet related aspects of human beings, namely the physical body and the bodily appearance.¹²⁰

I now discuss *ti* as ‘the body’ in a quotation which explicates a dualistic reading of the human being. In these two sentences from chapter twenty-nine, ‘Robber Zhi’, *ti* 體 is contrasted with *xin* 心; moreover, in one passage these two elements are explicitly referred to a man, *ren* 人. In the aforementioned dialogue between Never-Enough 無足 and Sense-of-Harmony 知和,¹²¹ worth here to be quoted in length, they discuss opposite ways to deal with life. The former believes that reputation and wealth can assure easiness in life. Differently, the latter condemns this approach and reproaches Never Enough:

“You [set] aside what is most valuable, [discard] what is most worthy of honor, (...) but you are far from the mark indeed! The agitation of grief and sorrow, the solace of contentment and joy—these bring no

119. Mair translates *duo er xing ti* 墮爾形體 with “slough off your bodily form” (M99), but the text should then be then *ti xing* 體形.

120. Other passages where this couple conveys this meaning are ZZS 21/57/21 discussed in the following section; see also ZZS 19/52/6: Woodcarver Qing explains how he feels after seven days of fasting: “I am so still that I forget I have four limbs and a form and a body [*wang wu you si zhi xing ti ye*, 忘吾有四肢形體也]” (W152). Here again I am of the opinion that *xing* and *ti* represents two different aspects of a person which become meaningless after the fasting of the mind; cf. ZZS 12/32/11: “things were born, and as they grew, they developed distinctive shapes; these were called forms [*xing* 形]. The forms and the bodies held within them the spirit [*xing ti bao shen* 形體保神] ‘the forms and the bodies held the spirit’ (W88–89). It is true that in this last one *ti* does not refer to a human being’s body. I still quote it because of Guo Qingfan’s comment: he equates *ti* with *zhi* 質, ‘material substance’ that constitutes things. Which is to say: *ti* was apt to indicate the concrete aspect something, be it a thing, an animal or a human being.

121. See section on *ji* 己. Be it noted, in passing, that at the beginning of the same dialogue Never Enough states that rich people enjoy another advantage: rich have people toiling for them, thus they can guarantee their lives to be long [*chang sheng* 長生] and their bodies to be relieved from effort [*an ti* 安體] (W262; cf. M 308; ZZS 29/90/2). Here again we find *ti* 體 as representing the physical body that gets tired after working.

enlightenment to the body [*bu jin yu ti* 不監於體]. The shock of fear and terror, the elation of happiness and delight—these bring no enlightenment to the mind [*bu jin yu xin* 不監於心]. You know you are doing what there is to do, but you don't know why there should be things to do.” (W262)

「(...) 至重，棄至尊，(...) 不亦遠乎！慘怛之疾，恬愉之安，不監於體；怵惕之恐，欣權之喜，不監於心。知為為而不知所以為。」 (ZZS 29/90/6-7)

To which, Never Enough replies:

“there is no advantage that richness cannot bring to a man—the [most] refined beauty, or real power, things that the Perfect Man cannot obtain, nor the worthy can acquire (...) [The ideas of beautiful] sounds and colors, of flavors and delicacy, of authority and power resides in the man. To appreciate all these, his mind does not have to wait to learn them [*xin bu dai xue er le zhi* 心不待學而樂之], his body can be content with them without having to practice [*ti bu dai xiang er an zhi* 體不待象而安之]. What to desire, what to hate, what to seek, what to avoid—no man needs to wait for a teacher [for these matters]; they are part to the inborn nature of man [*ren zhi xing* 人之性].”¹²²

「夫富之於人，無所不利，窮美究執，至人之所不得逮，賢人之所不能及 (...) 且夫聲色、滋味、權勢之於人，心不待學而樂之，體不待象而安之。夫欲惡避就，固不待師，此人之性也。」 (ZZS 29/90/11)

122. I present here my own translation, since Watson does not respect the structure of the Chinese text (W263). For my purposes, I preferred this faithfulness to the original text to be respected.

Never Enough is making two points. Firstly, rich people can buy whatever they lack, even wisdom or strength. Secondly, there is no need to be taught about wanting what is beautiful and striving for what is powerful. These feelings, typical of the selfish and greedy person are immediately understood, says Sense of Harmony (W262–265). This exchange of opinions clearly mentions how externalities can affect both the mind, *xin* 心, and body, *ti* 體, of a hypothetical person. In Never Enough’s reply, the connection with a human being is explicitly stated by that ‘*ren* 人’, to whom mind and body logically refer.

This section on *ti*, albeit brief, gives some insight on the character: in all the passages I selected from the *Zhuangzi*, it represents the physical body in a very concrete sense. Moreover, the first two passages, the presence of *xing* 形 suggests that the two characters indicate two different aspects of the human being: *ti* indicates the physical nature, *xing* its bodily appearance. Finally, the last quotation casts away any doubts not only on *ti* interpreted as the ‘body’, but also on the presence of body/mind dualism in the *Zhuangzi*.

Xing 形

Xing 形 has a broad range of meaning. As said both in the aforementioned explanation and in the section on *ti*, it usually indicates the human form.¹²³ Of the six quotations I provide here, the first four are brought together by reading *xing* as the body and its appearance, while in the last two *xing* indicates, I think, the mere physical body. Alternatively, these six quotations can be divided between those passages that explicate a dualistic reading of human nature (from third to sixth) and those that do not (first and second passage). Moreover, each quotation brings into the discussion other issues: the first quotation provides a clue to discuss the semantic difference between *xing* and *shen* 身; the third quotation reiterates the contrast between *xing* and *ti*. By these few lines, the reader should understand that I allow myself to interpret *xing* differently according to the context, whose importance I take as pivotal.

123. It can be referred to the body of animals as well (see e.g. ZZS 5/14/27–30); it is used to indicate a feature of the Way, *dao* 道, namely that of being *wuxing* 無形, ‘formless’ (see e.g. ZZS 6/17/1 and footnote no. 81), and so on. In one occasion it is clearly connected with the organs that constitute a human body: “Nanrong Zhu said, “The eyes are part of the body [*yu xing* 與形] (...). The ears are part of the body [*yu xing* 與形] (...). The mind is part of the body [*yu xing* 與形] (...). The body, too, must be part of the body [*yu xing* 與形] (...).” (W190; ZZS 23/64/23–25).

I start here by quoting two examples which strengthen a meaning of *xing* as indicating the physical body *and* its appearance. In chapter four of the received *Zhuangzi*, ‘In the World of Men’, a brief yet detailed description introduces the figure of Shu 疏 the crippled: being physically deformed, he is not actively involved in the world’s affairs, yet he can smoothly manage to support himself:

“With a crippled body [*zhili qi xing* 支離其形], he’s still able to look after himself [*yang qi shen* 養其身] and finish out the years Heaven gave him. How much better, then, if he had crippled virtue!” (W32; cf. M40)

「夫支離其形者，猶足以養其身，終其天年，又況支離其德者乎！」 (ZZS 4/12/21)

Firstly, we should consider the an analogy here expressed between the crippled body, *zhili qi xing* 支離其形, and the crippled virtue, *zhili qi de* 支離其德. Semantically speaking, this analogy corroborates the reading of *xing* as the physical body *and* its appearance, contrasted with a quality that cannot be but metaphysical. Shu is described with “chin stuck down in his navel, shoulders up above his head, pigtail pointing at the sky, his five organs on the top, his two thighs pressing his ribs” (W32). His body is crippled, thus he appears as a crippled. Despite his deformities, Shu conducts a quite living, possibly due also to the fact that society considers him as an outcast and as such, leaves him be. A “crippled virtue”, then, implies a virtue different from what is considered ‘normal’, to the end of being virtuous without a thought on virtue itself (Guo 1961: 182 no.8; cf. Chen 1981: 153 no.8).¹²⁴ This is the authentic way to be virtuous, and, as we have seen, belongs to the sage (“the sage has no fame”).

What about *shen* 身, then? To nourish one’s person, *yangshen* 養身, there is undoubtedly the need to provide the body with the necessary amount of food, or clothes, yet the term does not refer only to that aspect. There are different reasons for this. Firstly, in this

124. Cf. the story of Shushan No-Toes, a footless person. After having met him, Confucius says to his disciples: “Here is No-Toes, a man who has had his foot cut off, and still he’s striving to learn so he can make up for the evil of his former conduct. How much more, then, should men whose virtue is still unimpaired!” (W36–37).

sentence it would be probable that, if the authors were referring to a mere physical nourishment, they would have used a pronoun to refer to *xing* 形 just mentioned before. Secondly, Graham argued that this brief description is part of those episodes within this chapter that proclaim “the advantages of being useless, unemployable, so that the government leaves you alone” (Graham 1981: 66). Shu is crippled, yet he is able not only to have enough to eat (he is said to have enough food to feed ten men, *zu yi si shi ren* 足以食十人), but also to live in the world without being oppressed by it *exactly* because of his deformity. The stress on the fact that despite everything he is “still able to look after himself” should then be taken, I believe, as referring to his physical and non physical existence, with *shen* covering both these aspects.

Finally, the idea of nourishing was so developed within Early Chinese culture that we can trace a set of expressions for it, all with a different meaning: *yangsheng* 養生, “to nourish life”; *yangxing* 養形 “to nourish the body”; *yangxing* 養性 “to nourish one’s nature”, and so on (Despeux 2008: 1148). It is hard then to believe that *shen* was used accidentally.¹²⁵ These arguments, put together, should convince the reader that *xing* 形 refers to the physical body of a person, while *shen* expresses the idea of a person in its wholeness, with physical and non-physical attributes.¹²⁶

Before considering those quotations which express a body/mind dualism, I would like to bring the attention to another passage where *xing* represents the bodily appearance of the body, which is in turn considered as a container within which to wander, *you* 遊. This passage is from *Zhuangzi*’s chapter five, ‘The Sign of Virtue Complete’, at the end of a dialogue I introduced above between Shentu Jia and Zichan. As we have seen, they are both disciples of

125. Catherine Despeux has also argued that the idea of “nourishing life” is first mentioned exactly in the *Zhuangzi*, in chapter three, “The Secret of Caring for Life”, *Yangsheng zhu* 養生主, and that it is also possible to trace in this book a contrast between nourishing one’s body (*yangxing*) and one’s life (*yangshen* 養身) (Despeux 2008: 1148). Yet, considering the difficulties in dating these materials, it would be hard to say which was developed first. However, the appearance of these terms in the *Zhuangzi* is striking.

126. Cf. ZZS 18/47/20–21 on the same line of reasoning. Cf. ZZS 5/15/23–24, where *shen* refers to the person while *xing* indicates the physical appearance of the body (see Guo 1961: 222 no. 1).

I am not, be it noted, arguing that these characters have always this usage, and we will see that in some cases *shen* does refer to the physical body. My point is to underline that Classical Chinese language provides a quite detailed terminology to talk about the self, the body, the idea of person.

master Bohun Wuren, but while Zichan is obsessed with etiquette and appearance, Shentu Jia goes beyond these superficial things: his being footless is problematic only for superficial people:

“There are lots of men with two feet who laugh at me for having only one. It makes me boil with rage, but I come here to the Master’s place, and I feel calmed down again and go home. (...) The Master and I have been friends for nineteen years, and he’s never once let on that he’s aware I’m missing a foot. Now you and I are supposed to be wandering outside the realm of forms and bodies [*yu xinghai zhi nei* 於形骸之內], and you come looking for me inside it [*yu xinghai zhi wai* 於形骸之外]—you’re at fault, aren’t you?” (W36)¹²⁷

「人以其全足笑吾不全足者多矣。我怫然而怒，而適先生之所，則廢然而反。 (...) 吾與夫子遊十九年矣，而未嘗知吾兀者也。今子與我遊於形骸之內，而子索我於形骸之外，不亦過乎！」(ZZS 5/14/4–5)

I argue that in this passage *xing* and *hai* 骸 indicate different aspects of a human body: with its reference to the skeleton of a body, *hai* refers to the Shentu Jia’s physical nature, while *xing* indicates his human appearance.¹²⁸ People notice that Shentu Jia is missing foot, since they are obsessed with appearance, as Zichan is. The master taught him to go beyond these

127. Watson’s translation inverts the position of *nei* 內 and *wai* 外 according to Wang Mohong’s studies (W36 no.4). Cf. Mair, who reads *xinghai* 形骸 as ‘physical body’, yet considering the specific reference to Shentu Jia’s missing a foot, I think the two characters should be considered separately. Missing a foot implies to appear differently from what is consider a ‘normal’ physical body.

128. As it was in the previous passages for *xing* and *ti* 體. *Xinghai* 形骸 appears three other times in the *Zhuangzi*. Only in one, ZZS 1/2/18, it refers to the body. In the other two, namely ZZS 6/18/15 and ZZS 12/32/10 the context allows to read *xing* and *hai* separately. In particular, see chapter twelve: 「汝方將忘汝神氣，墮汝形骸」。Both the fact that in the first sentence *shen* 神 and *qi* 氣 are to be taken separately, and the parallelism between *sui ru xing hai* 墮汝形骸 and the sentence *sui er xing ti* 墮爾形體, discussed in the previous section, allow, I believe, to read *xing* and *hai* separately.

superficial aspects: wandering, *you* 遊, is a intellectual wandering,¹²⁹ that allows you to mentally leave behind the body and anything related to it. Be it noted, in passing, that this idea of wandering “inside the physical body” makes sense only if we consider a person to be something more than the body itself, and is therefore a further confirmation of a dualistic reading of human nature. From outside the physical body, you observe it, as Zichan does. In observing it, he distinguishes among those who have two feet and those who have one; those who observe etiquette and formalism and those who do not. Shentu Jia, instead, has learned from the master to step inside the body, which is to say, to move away from appearances and distinctions. This is why he could wander with his master for years without any thought about his missing foot. While wandering, they were in the realm of feelings, attitude, emotions, everything which pertains to the realm *inside* the physical body. In a word: the self.

I discuss now one passage where *xing* is coupled with *ti* 體, two characters I read as separated as I did in the section on *ti* and in the previous sentence. I present this passage here since it conveys the concept of body/mind dualism, providing me with a link to more quotations where the dualistic reading is creating by contrasting *xing* alone to *xin* 心. In ‘Tian Zifang’, *Tian Zifang* 田子方, chapter twenty-one of the *Zhuangzi*, Confucius goes to see Laozi. While arriving, he has sight of Laozi, who appears not even human to Confucius’ eyes:

“Did my eyes play tricks on me, or was that really true? A moment ago, sir, your form and body [*xing ti* 形體] seemed stiff as an old dead tree [*gao mu* 槁木], as though you had forgotten things, taken leave of men, and were standing in solitude itself!”

Lao Dan said, “I was letting my mind wander [*wu you xin* 吾遊心] in the Beginning of things.” (W169)

「丘也眩與？其信然與？向者先生形體掘若槁木，似遺物離人而立於獨也。」老聃曰：「吾遊心於物之初。」 (ZZS 21/57/21)

129. I will explain why *xin* 心 should be read as ‘mind’ in this and other expressions in the following section 2.3.1 of the present chapter.

Besides what has been said above, I argue that *xing* and *ti* are here to be interpreted as separated considering the obvious fact that once the body assumes the disguise of a withered tree, it then appears as a withered tree. It should be noted that the same passage is echoed in chapter two and twenty-two, where, however, *xing* is used alone.^{130, 131} Although it is quite difficult to infer with certainty what lies behind the choice of a character in spite of another,¹³² it is also true that nothing prevents us to read *xing* as indicating either the mere appearance, or the appearance *and* the body when used alone. And even if in this passage *xing ti* 形體 is the result of the willingness to comply with the rhythm of the sentence,¹³³ are we for this reason justified in reading *xing* and *ti* as conveying the same meaning? The authors of the *Zhuangzi* might have used *zhiti* 肢體 if they just needed a bisyllabic word. Of course, this is my own interpretation based on a contextualization of the passage. Far from knowing with certainty why the authors decided to use *xingti* instead of other words, I believe an explanation in terms of body and its appearance is still reasonable.

With regard to the meaning of the sentence, it is easy to see that it is clearly describing a description of a human being in dualistic terms. The mind, *xin* 心, is wandering, and as one of the results, the body appears lacking vitality. Now, the fact that these two elements are to be considered separate is patent: if there were no division between the body and the mind, the body itself should be wandering around (cf. Guo 1961: 711 no.3). Thus, Laozi would not be present in front of the interlocutor.

I reason now a line where *xing* stands for the body *and* its appearance. In chapter five, the *Zhuangzi* introduces us Wang Tai 王骀, another footless person, with a way of teaching

130. In chapter two, Ziyou of South Wall is meditating (*zuo* 坐), and a certain Yang Cheng Ziyou, looking at him, says: “What is this? Can you really make the body [*xing* 形] like a withered tree [*ru guomu* 如槁木] and the mind [*xin* 心] like dead ashes [*ru si hui* 如死灰]?” (W7; ZS 2/3/15). Cf. chapter twenty-two: Piyi, one of the many figures introduced by the *Zhuangzi*, says: “Body like a withered corpse [*xing ruo gao hai* 形若槁骸], mind like dead ashes [*xin ruo si hui* 心若死灰], true in the realness of knowledge (...) what kind of man is this?” (W179; ZS 22/61/1); cf. Yan Chengzi’s description of his master Ziai, in ZS 24/70/22 discussed in the section on *zi* 自.

131. Cf. chapter twenty three, where *shen* 身 is used instead of *xing* 形. See following section on *shen*.

132. I ought recall that the chapters of the *Zhuangzi* belong to different historical period, and were composed by different hands –aspects my thesis cannot cover for sake of brevity.

133. The sentence is constructed with five elements, all formed by two characters: *xiang zhe* 向者, *xiansheng* 先生, *xing ti* 形體, *jueruo* 掘若, *gaomu* 槁木.

quite different from the standard one, yet lots of people gather around him. Chang Ji 常季, one of Confucius' disciples, is confused:

Chang Ji asked Confucius: “Wang Tai has lost a foot, yet those who follow him and wander with him divide up the State of Lu with you, Master. When standing he does not teach, when seated he does not discuss, [yet] they go to him empty and come back full. What sort of man is he, who has a way of teaching without talking, appears different [wu xing 無形] and yet his mind complete [xin cheng 心成]?”

「常季問於仲尼曰：「王賡，兀者也，從之遊者，與夫子中分魯。立不教，坐不議，虛而往，實而歸。固有不言之教，無形而心成者邪？是何人也？」」(ZZS 5/13/6-7)

I present my own translation as a result of the considerations I have done so far. Wang Tai is footless, therefore his appearance is different from ‘normal’ people. *Zhuangzi* does not clarify why Wang Tai is missing a foot, yet we can examine two possibilities. The first is that he and other footless persons are so by birth. In ancient society, deformed children were usually considered outcast. A second option is to see this deformity as a mutilation, one of the five major penalties (*wu xing* 五刑) in pre-imperial times (Bodde and Morris 1967: 76-77; cf. Csikszentmihalyi 2006: 23).¹³⁴ In either cases, that such a person is still a worthy who competes with Confucius explains the astonishment.¹³⁵ Accordingly, *wu xing* 無形 cannot be read as ‘without a body’, since Wang Tai has a physical presence that stands and sits and talks; it cannot be interpreted as ‘formless’ either, since, unlike the passages I discussed before, we have no clue of a meditation process so deep that one’s appearance is no longer human. I am of the opinion that *xing* here refers to the ‘normal’ human appearance, something

134. The reference for this practice is usually to the *Lü Xing* 呂刑, a text today collected into the *Shang Shu* 尚書 (*The Book Of Documents*), even though the text speaks of mutilation of many parts of the body, not specifically of the feet (see 尚書逐字索引, *A Concordance to the Shang Shu*, 50-51; Cf. Karlgren 1950: 74-78).

135. As for the anecdote on Shentu Jia, *Zhuangzi* implies that not only educated men (such Confucians were) but also common men can become sages, even those who might have committed unlawful acts, exactly because education is only a part of the process to acquire knowledge.

Want Tai does not have since he is missing a foot. But human appearance requires having a human body. Thus, I argue that *xing* is here conveying both meanings: a physical body and its appearance. Wang Bo does not go thus far, yet states that *Zhuangzi* intentionally portrays the figures of Want Tai and other sages as physically deformed (Wang 2013: 81; cf. M42; cf. Guo 1961: 188 no.5). Consequently, I decided to translate *wuxing* 無形 as ‘appears different’. Besides, if we interpret ‘*wu xing er xin cheng zhe ye* 無形而心成者’ as referred to Wang Tai,¹³⁶ this passage provides us with another reference to a body/mind dualism: *xing* 形 and *xin* 心 are two elements belonging to the same person.

I now introduce the reader to the last two passages I present here, where *xing* should be understood simply as ‘the body’. The first quotation comes from chapter six. Yan Hui is talking with Confucius about Mengsun Cai’s 孟孫才 who attended his mother’s funeral without crying or “any look of sorrow” (W51), yet he became famous for his conduct.¹³⁷ For Yan Hui there are no apparent reasons for this reputation: “Is it really possible to gain such a reputation when there are no facts to support it?” (*loc. cit.*). Needless to say, it is. *Zhuangzi* replies through Confucius:

“Mengsun did all there was to do. He was advanced beyond ordinary understanding, (...). You and I [i.e. Yan Hui and Confucius], now—we are dreaming and haven’t waked up yet. But in his case, though something may startle his body [*you hai xing* 有駭形], it won’t injure his mind [*wu sun xin* 無損心]; though something may alarm the house [his spirit lives in], his emotions will suffer no death. Mengsun alone has waked up [*te jue* 特覺].” (W51; cf. M62)

136. Cf. W35: “Does he really have some wordless teaching, some formless way of bringing the mind to completion?”; cf. M42: “Is there a truly doctrine without words, a formless mental accomplishment?”. They both consider ‘*wu xing er xin cheng zhe ye* 無形而心成者邪’ as referred to Chang Ji’s teaching. Despite the possibility to be so, I read the sentence otherwise (see Guo 1961: 188 no.5).

137. According to the tradition, the death of a parent was to be mourned for three years (Shuang 1993: 118. See also Constance Cook, 2006, *Death in Ancient China: the Tale of a One Man’s Journey*, Leiden, Boston: Brill).

「夫孟孫氏盡之矣，進於知矣。（...）吾特與汝其夢未始覺者邪！
且彼有駭形而無損心，有旦宅而無情死。孟孫氏特覺。」（ZZS
6/19/3）

As best as I can understand it, *Zhuangzi* is clearly separating the external and the internal realms in the sentence ‘*you hai xing er wu sun xin, you dan zhai er wu qing si* 有駭形而無損心，有旦宅而無情死’. Mengsun Cai embodies this distinction, thus, death affects the external realm, but the mind is not disturbed by it.¹³⁸ Guo Xiang’s comment corroborates this interpretation, in a cause–effect form: transformations affect the body in a physical sense, but death and life, which are part of a process of transformation, do not weaken one’s mind (Guo 1961: 276 no.9). Mengsun Cai realized that death is simply part of the process of human nature.¹³⁹ These two different realms are respectively indicated with *xing* 形 and *xin* 心, and, accordingly, *xing* is simply pointing at the physical nature, i.e. Mengsun Cai’s body. I am of the opinion that here there is no need to bring the attention to both the body and its appearance: the contrast is between the physical world as detached from the realm of the mind, represented by *xing* and *xin* respectively.

The last passage I present here corroborates this interpretation of *xing* as the mere physical body. The verb of which *xing* is the direct object, and the context where it is used, do not advocate for a sophisticated interpretation. This quotation is from chapter seven, ‘Fit for Emperors and Kings’. Yangzi Ju 陽子居¹⁴⁰ enquires with Laozi if a man who devotes himself to understanding the principles of things and studies incessantly the Way can be called a sage. Laozi’s reply is pretty harsh:

138. I shall recall a passage discussed in the section about *ji* 己 above, where death and life are said to have no effect on the ultimate man.

139. This passage is also an implicit criticism towards appearances and customs. here are experiences in life which have to be come across accordingly to one’s being: no one can decide how someone else should react to the death of a beloved one, and the reaction differs from person to person. To appear calm does not mean to be calm. The fact that Mengsun did not cry at his mother’s funeral does not mean that he did not put a lot of thought on death and its significance.

140. This might be the pseudonym of the philosopher Yang Zhu 楊朱 (W56 no.6). According to Mair, we should take what he says in the *Zhuangzi* as the reverse of what Yang Zhu believed, as it often happens for Confucius (Mair 1994: 14 no.2). See footnote no.30.

“In comparison with the sage, a man like this is a drudging slave, a craftsman bound to his calling, wearing out his body [*lao xing* 勞形], grieving his mind [*chu xin* 怵心]. (...) A man like this—how could he compare with an enlightened king?” (W57; cf. M68)

「是於聖人也，胥易技係，勞形怵心者也。（...）如是者，可比明王乎？」 (ZZS 7/20/20–21)

The man described by Yangzi Ju is bound to distinctions and to the study of the Way, while the sage is far beyond an education built on books, which exhaust physically, *lao xing* 勞形, and mentally, *chu xin* 怵心.¹⁴¹ It is undeniable that physical exhaustion affect the mind too, yet I believe the point here is to criticize towards a life style which does not provide a real education, and result in stressing human being on a two-fold level: physical, *xing*, and mental *xin*. Moreover, the passage explicates the concept of a body/mind dualism.

Before summarizing this section about *xing* 形, let me point out that I am aware that lack of consistence in the translation might give rise to some perplexity, yet I hope to have shown that changes in meaning are justified by an appropriate understanding of the context. Overall, this section proves that *xing* should be understood as the body or the body *and* its appearance. The first passage shows also how *xing* and *shen* 身 differ: the former is preferred to indicate the physical nature of men and their appearance, the latter is better translated as indicating the concept of ‘person’. While reinforcing the reading of *xing* as the body *and* its appearance, the second quotation shows that, once again, it is possible to apply the conceptual metaphor of the body as container for the self. Finally, in considering the concept of body/mind dualism, *xing* plays a role either as the body and its appearance (third quotation), or points simply at the physicality of a person (last two quotations). The third and the fourth

141. Cf. ZZS 12/31/16 “夫子問於老聃曰：「有人治道若相放，可不可，然不然。（...）若是，則可謂聖人乎？」老聃曰：是胥易技係，勞形怵心者也。” Here the same sentence refers to man who is good at reversing things and drawing distinctions among them (W89; cf. M109). According to *Zhuangzi*, these are superficial means which tire human beings. Cf. chapter eleven, “do not labor you body [*wu lao nü xing* 無勞女形] (...), and you will live a long life” (78; ZZS 11/27/24). Cf. chapter thirty-one, ‘The Old Fisherman’. This time, what “weary the mind [*ku xin* 苦心] and wear out the body [*lao xing* 勞形]” (W272; cf. M318; ZZS 31/92/27) are men’s fait in loyalty and faith, their believes in education and righteousness as main values.

quotations share another common point: the idea that humans with physical deformities can still be regarded as wise. Neither the reason why they are injured nor their physical difference necessarily influence the mind. Deformities primarily target the body, and the mind can be detached from them. The final quotation, then, while corroborating the idea of a body/mind dualism, criticizes a way of living that gives serious importance to rituals and etiquettes. To be bound to mere formalism is a peril both for the body and the mind.

Shen 身

The word *shen* 身 is slightly more complex to analyze. As we have seen, it is usually understood as the character related to the idea of ‘person’, a term I think indicates a human being made by a body and a self. Yet, it also conveys the notion of ‘physical body’, as well as the idea of ‘self’. Indeed, in the *Zhuangzi*, this character covers all these meanings, to which I address this section. After focusing on *shen* as the notion of person, I will then take advantage of some passages where it represents the body in order to discuss those occurrences that present a dualistic description of the human nature. I aim to broaden the scope of the meanings *shen* conveys. By taking into consideration different characters in light of different contexts, I am trying to enrich our comprehension about them.

Firstly, let consider *shen* as representative of the concept of ‘persona’, in terms of a physical body and a self. I argue that the expressions I am going to present the readers implicitly recognize that a human being is something more than the mere physical corpse. I start from chapter four, ‘The Human World’, where Yan He 顏闔 is going to become the tutor of Duke Ling’s 靈公 eldest son, who is a cruel man. He inquires Ju Boyu 蘧伯玉 on the best method to deal with this situation, having no intention either to let this cruel man harm the state with his behavior or to be killed by him. Ju Boyu knows indeed how to be successful in these cases:

“Be careful, be on your guard, and make sure that you yourself are in the right [*zheng rushen ye zai* 正汝身也哉]! In your actions, it is best to follow along with him, and in your mind, it is best to harmonize with him. However, these two courses involve certain dangers. Though you

follow along, you don't want to be pulled into his doings, and though you harmonize, you don't want to be drawn out too far.” (W29; ZZS 4/11/11)¹⁴²

Slingerland applies to this passage the schema according to which the subject controls the self through a forced movement on an object: in this case, the object to be manipulated is the body (Slingerland 2004: 332). So, basically, we are dealing here with a subject as entity that takes control, to use Slingerland's terminology, of an object, *shen*, considered as an instance of the self. According to this schema, we should read *shen* as the physical body (literally, the sentence would be then “straighten your body”, as Slingerland translates at page 333), which would be then in contrast with the idea of *shen* as “ESSENTIAL SELF (...) therefore [to] be translated as “true self”” (*ibidem*: 339 no.19).

I do not concur with this reading. The context, as it often happens in these cases, helps us understand. The issue at stake is how to *behave* when dealing with a difficult man like the son of Duke Ling is. One might well say that in certain situations physical force could be a solution as well, but Ju Boyu explicitly refers to Yan He's actions and mind's disposition. That is why the sentence “make sure that you yourself are in the right”, *zheng rushen ye zai* 正汝身也哉, is not, I believe, merely talking about taking right physical position in a place.¹⁴³ Consequently, *shen* should be seen as indicating Yan He's person, including those dispositions and emotions which belong to the ‘self’. These must be straight in order to face at best what is coming from the outside.¹⁴⁴

142. Both Mair and Ziporyn use a reflexive pronoun for *shen* (“set yourself aright” M36; cf. “rectify yourself”, Ziporyn 2009: 29), while Graham's translation reads ‘person’ (Graham 1981: 72).

143. As prof. van Els rightly suggested, this type of expression can be found in many languages. English native speakers may say “we must stand firm” to say “we must be tough”. In Dutch it is said “je moet he rug recth houden”, which is close to the Italian “serve avere spina dorsale”. To cut a long story short, we commonly use expressions regarding the physical to discuss how we should behave physically and mentally.

144. Cf. chapter twenty-two: “Straighten up your body [*zheng ru xing* 正汝形], unify your vision, and the harmony of Heaven [*tian he* 天和] will come to you.” (W179; ZZS 22/60/31). See also chapter twenty-three: “Keep the body whole [*quan ru xing* 全汝形], cling fast to life!” (W190; ZZS 23/64/22). As I have argued in the section about *xing* 形, this character alone was indeed used to indicate the physical body. This, along with the explanation above given, is another reason why I believe that *shen* can be considered as indicating something more than the physical body itself.

The other quotation I present to examine *shen* as ‘person’ in the *Zhuangzi* is from the fifth chapter, ‘Symbols of Integrity Fulfilled’. We find a description of the sage man, *shengren* 圣人:

“He has the form of a man but not the feelings of a man. Since he has the form of a man, he bands together with other men. Since he doesn’t have the feelings of a man, right and wrong cannot get at him [*yu shen* 於身].” (W40)

「有人之形，無人之情。有人之形，故群於人；無人之情，故是非不得於身。」 (ZZS 5/15/17)

This passage is clearly dealing with the emotional and psychological realm,¹⁴⁵ so that *shen* cannot simply indicate the physical body. In fact, in the locative complement *yushen* 於身, *shen* represents something more than the physical body, namely a metaphysical entity on which judgments like right or wrong have influence: the inner world of a person.

A third reading further proves that *shen* was not simply used as ‘the body’. In chapter eleven, *Zhuangzi* tells that the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, after ruling for nineteenth years, looks for Master Guang Cheng 廣成 to the end of learning from him how to control the yin and the yang, and the essence of Heaven and Earth (W78). Obviously, the Yellow Emperor is following the wrong path: trying to control what cannot be controlled is pointless. Thus, the Yellow Emperor abdicates and retires for three months. After this period of retirement, he goes back to Guang Cheng to apprehend how to govern his person, *zhi shen* 治身 and live a long life. Guang Cheng replies:

“Excellent, this question of yours! Come, I will tell you about the Perfect Way. (...) Be still, be pure, do not labor your body [*wu lao nü*

145. Cf. Watson’s translation, where the sentence’s original structure is slightly changed (cf. Ziporyn 2009: 38); Mair and Graham’s translations stick more to the text and render the idea of *shen* as a locative complement. The first writes that “‘right’ and ‘wrong’ have no effect upon him” (M49); the latter considers *yushen* 於身 as “in his person” (Graham 1981: 82). Be it noted, incidentally, *xing* 形 here as the form, the appearance, of a human being.

xing 無勞女形], do not churn up your essence, and you can live a long life. (...) You have only to carefully guard your own person [*shen shou nü shen* 慎守女身]; (...). As for me, I guard this unity, abide in this harmony, and therefore I have cultivated my person [*wo xiu shen* 我修身] for twelve hundred years, and my body [*wu xing* 吾形] has never suffered any decay.”¹⁴⁶

「善哉問乎！來！吾語女至道。（...）必靜必清，無勞女形，無搖女精，乃可以長生。（...）慎守女身（...）我守其一，以處其和，故我修身千二百歲矣，吾形未嘗衰。」(ZZS 11/27/28)

Here, I am of the opinion that Guang Cheng is using *shen* to indicate the person, while *xing* indicates the physical body. By looking at the entire passage, it seems to me that they refer to two semantically different aspects. Both the practices ‘to govern one’s person’, *zhi shen* 治身’ and ‘to cultivate one’s person alive’, *xiu shen* 修身, are not merely addressed to the physical body. The first refers to a person’s control both their body and their desires and intentions; to cultivate one’s person implies a nourishment which goes beyond the simple consumption of food. On the other hand, considering the reference to the exhaustion, *lao* 勞, and decay, *shuai* 衰, I argue that *xing* indicates in this case the physical nature of a human being. The difference in meaning between these two characters is patent in the last sentence: to cultivate one’s person appropriately slows the physical decay.

The three quotations I analyzed so far support the idea that the semantic field of *shen* goes beyond the meaning of ‘body’.¹⁴⁷ I back this reading by considering the locution *shangshen* 傷身, ‘to harm oneself, to harm one’s person’. While it is undeniable that a person can be physically wounded, in the *Zhuangzi* the expression recurs also referring to the idea of

146. The translation is based on Watson’s one (W78–79), yet I changed the reading of *xing* into ‘body’ and *shen* into ‘person’ for the reasons I explain below.

147. Another locution might be read accordingly: *huoshen* 活身 (see ZZS 18/47/18; cf. ZZS 18/47/25–26; cf. ZZS 18/48/4), translated with ‘to keep somebody alive’. Needless to say, to be alive the body itself needs to be living. Yet, in the most genuine sense, ‘to keep one alive’ refers to the whole person, so that in all likelihood *shen* 身 covers both the body and all other aspects that makes a person alive: feelings, thoughts, emotions, and so on.

harming one's state of mind, and one's state of being.¹⁴⁸ Again, in the above-quoted passage from the sixth chapter (ZZS 6/16/10), the context makes clear that the expression *wangshen* 亡身, 'to lose oneself', is representative of the idea of being metaphorically lost: conceiving life as a journey (see Slingerland 2003a: 23–25; cf. Slingerland 2004: 326), it expresses the sensation to be going the wrong way, and not necessarily being actually moving one's body along the road.¹⁴⁹

Yet, *shen* can also represent the physical body.¹⁵⁰ This is crystal clear in chapter sixteenth, 'Mending the Inborn Nature', where the authors praise the men of ancient times, for they fulfilled their ambition regardless carriages and caps (i.e. externalities). Now, instead, "when men speak of the fulfillment of ambition, they mean fine carriages and caps [*xuan mian* 軒冕]. But carriages and caps affect the body alone [*zai shen* 在身], not the inborn nature and fate [*fei xing ming ye* 非性命也]" (W124; ZZS 16/43/12). Here *shen* clearly refers to the physical body, so much so that we can read one of the recurrent criticisms the *Zhuangzi* direct to his peers: they focus on externalities, caring only about the physical aspects of life, exclusively acknowledging material rewards. Besides, *shen* is contrasted with *xing* 性, the human nature, which is something inborn that we cannot touch, and yet it is present in our being.

148. See, e.g., chapter five. In a dialogue with Huizi, Zhuangzi tries to explain his concept of being *wuqing* 無情, 'without emotions': "When I talk about having no feelings, I mean that a man doesn't allow likes or dislikes to get in and do him harm [*shang qi shen* 傷其身] (...). The Way gave him a face; Heaven gave him a form. He doesn't let likes or dislikes get in and do him harm [*shang qi shen* 傷其身]." (W40–41; cf. M49; ZZS 5/15/22–24). "Likes and dislikes" are disposition of the mind, categories which can affect a person's mind or attitude towards the world.

Cf. chapter thirty-one, where a man vaguely identified as a "stranger" talks with Confucius and says: "These eight faults inflict chaos on others [*wai yi luan ren* 外以亂人] and injury on the possessor [*nei yi shang shen* 內以傷身] (W274; ZZS 31/93/20). The eight faults, *ba ci* 八疵, are behaviors (maliciousness, sycophancy, treachery, etc; see W247) that a man can display towards others, and have a lot to do with the emotional and intentional realm of a person.

149. Cf. chapter twenty-eight, a line which criticise "the men of present age", for the care only about profit and are careless with regard to their lives [*jian li jing wang qi shen* 見利輕亡其身] (W241; cf. M286; ZZS 28/81/28).

150. I selected the most significant one. More examples on *shen* as 'body' are: ZZS 1/2/23 *wenshen* 文身, "tattooed their bodies" (W5; cf. M7); cf. ZZS 5/14/8, where Shushan No-Toes 叔山無趾 says about his having a foot cut of that he has been "careless of my body" (*jing yong wu shen* 輕用吾身 "I have been] careless of my body" (W37; cf. M45); cf ZZS 11/26/25 *gui yi shen* 貴以身 "values his own body" (W75; cf. M92), *et al.*

Two other quotations are of interest for my purposes. In these two, I believe *shen* indicates the physical body, in clear contrast to a non-physical entity part of the human being, represented by *xin* 心.

The first of these sentences which prove the presence of a body/mind dualism is from chapter twenty-eight of the received *Zhuangzi*, namely ‘Giving away a Throne’, *Rang Wang* 讓王. As the title suggests, it presents a series of anecdotes about rulers who want to abdicate and offer the government of the world to somebody else. Usually this somebody is a wise man who refuses, knowing full well that being involved in such affairs is worthless. In one of these anecdotes, we read:

“Prince Mou of Wei, who was living in Zhongshan, said to Zhanzi:
‘My body [*shen* 身] is here beside these rivers and seas, but my mind [*xin* 心] is still back there beside the palace towers of Wei. What should I do about it?’ ‘Attach more importance to life!’ said Zhanzi. ‘He who regards life as important will think lightly of material gain.’” (W246-7)
「中山公子牟謂瞻子曰：「身在江海之上，心居乎魏闕之下，奈何？」瞻子曰：「重生。重生則利輕。」 (ZZS 28/84/7-8)

Eventually, Prince Mou becomes a recluse in order to learn how attach importance to life. Although he did not really learn it, at least he was praised because he tried to.

One cannot ask for a more explicit statement about a body/mind dualism. Here *Zhuangzi* describes of a sensation that almost everybody has experienced at least once: while being physically present in a place, one’s thoughts and feelings are not focused on the present moment; rather, on something else, be it work, the beloved one, one’s family and so on. The sensation is that while the body is there, something else *proper to the person* is not really

present to the moment. Here, *shen* simply represents the body, since the passage is explicating a feeling of mental detachment from the physical presence.¹⁵¹

I quote another passage where the body/mind dualism is expressed in such a sharp way that it is quite difficult to state its absence in Chinese thought. Chapter twenty-three's title, 'Gengsang Chu', *Gengsang Chu* 庚桑楚, is the name of one of Laozi's attendants able to master at least "a portion of the Way of Lao Dan" (W188). Having known that some people want to praise him as a worthy, Gengsang Chu is displeased. His disciples do not understand why. Therefore, Gengsang Chu explains them that the Perfect Man does not care about these officious affairs. Nanrong Zhu 南榮瞿 is not convinced by Gengsang's words, therefore the latter suggests him to go and talk with Laozi himself. Once he arrived to Laozi's place, Nanrong Zhu presents the master his dilemma: how can one live among men without harming either oneself or others? Laozi states that there are different stages: the lowest one is simply following things without really acting upon them; then there is the stage reached by the Perfect Man, who joins with other people but is superior to their affairs. The highest stage, however, is very close to being like a baby:¹⁵²

“The baby acts without knowing what it is doing, moves without knowing where it is going. Its body is like the limb of a withered tree [*shen ruo gao mu zhi zhi* 身若槁木之枝], its mind like dead ashes [*xin ruo si hui* 心若死灰]. Since it is so, no bad fortune will ever touch it, and no good fortune will come to it, either. And if it is free from good

151. If *shen* represented the Concept of person, we should argue that Prince Mou is experiencing his body and self along the river, while his mind is not. Then we should clarify what differs between the mind and the self. This interpretation is possible, but, I think, far from the point the *Zhuangzi* is making here.

152. Cf. the passage from chapter two (Chen 1981: 645 no.31; cf. Graham 1981: 116 no.67; cf. Liu 1994: 95–99), discussed above in the section on *xing*.

and bad fortune, then what human suffering can it undergo?” (W193; cf. M231)

「兒子動不知所為，行不知所之，身若槁木之枝而心若死灰。若是者，禍亦不至，福亦不來。禍福無有，惡有人災也？」(ZZS 23/65/23–24)

Because of the association of with ‘limbs’, *zhi* 枝 (albeit its metaphorical nature) and the contrast with *xin*, I believe here *shen* indicates the physical body. This sentence affirms that all such a high level of detachment involves the human being entirely, both their physical essence, *shen*, and not physical, *xin*.

A recap on this section about the occurrence of *shen* 身 might be useful. In the *Zhuangzi*, it represents the notion of ‘person’, disclosing both the physical and metaphysical aspects. In the first three quotations, the context clarifies this reading of *shen*. The same is true when *shen* is used in expression like *shangshen* 傷身, ‘to harm somebody’. In these cases, it refers not only to the physical body, but also to the dispositions of the mind, the emotions, and all those intangible features which constitute a human being. Then, considering the wider scope of this research, the focus of this analysis moved to two sentences where *shen* indicates the body, put in sharp contrast with the mind, *xin* 心. These sentences constitute an undeniable proof of the presence of a body/mind conception in the *Zhuangzi*, and in all likelihood among early Chinese thinkers as well: this dualism is simply stated, not explained. This gives room to think that it was a concept so obvious and graspable that there was no need for a clarification.

Conclusion

So far, I have discussed some of those characters that concur to the formulation of the concept of ‘body’, ‘self’, and ‘person’. I hope to have proved that the authors of the *Zhuangzi* appropriately used a range of terms to disclose precise features of human nature, a nature that they conceived as dualistic. With such an evidence, it is quite surprising to read that Chinese lack any dualistic conception on the human being. Surely, Chinese thinkers developed different ways to cope with this dualism, or even to describe it, but this is true for many

thinkers within European culture as well. Clearly, we need to address more attention to the subject.

This study is nothing but a first step towards the discovery of these notions, and my method clearly requires some polishing. Many agree on the need of a scrupulous linguistic analysis, and Christoph Harbsmeier already stressed the importance of philological attention for anyone who engages with the intellectual or literary history of China (Harbsmeier 1997: 195–196). I agree completely.

2.3 Further inquiries

I now take the liberty to present some thoughts on the word *xin* 心, and on the passage *wu sang wo* 吾喪我 from the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The following sections fall beyond my discussion of Chinese thought as dualistic. Rather, they are the outcome of some reasoning I did while working on my thesis, and, for obvious reasons of time and space, they are presented here at an early stage of research.

Briefly, I will introduce the idea that *xin* indicates, among other meanings, that of ‘mind’ as the cognitive organ. It goes without saying that ‘mind’ has already been used to translate ‘*xin*’, yet what I put under scrutiny here is the possibility that in some passages *xin* clearly refers to cognitive faculties proper to the mind. With regard to *wu sang wo*, then, I analyze it as the first step in a meditation process of gradual detachment from one’s being. The scope of this thesis does not allow to engage into an extensive discussion on these topics. However, if they prompt the reader into further studies, either to confirm or to contradict my theories, they will still have served their purpose.

2.3.1 On the character *xin* 心 as ‘mind’

Through the entire linguistic analysis I present in this chapter, I referred to *xin* as playing a part in the notion of body/mind dualism, regardless both of the fact that some have argued against this translation (Oshima 1983, Fraser 2008), and of the fact that I describe the human being as a dichotomy of self and body, or alternatively, of body and of mind. Some may

object I should talk about ‘trialism’,¹⁵³ and their objection would not be senseless. Modern psychology explains the self as a projection of the mind, so the dualism is respected: on the physical side we find the body, on the metaphysical the self or the mind, depending on the specific subject in question. What about Classical Chinese? Do *ji* 己 and *zi* 自 differ from *xin* 心? My opinion is that they do: *xin* conveys, among other meanings, that of ‘mind’ understood as the cognitive organ in the human being.¹⁵⁴ This meaning is not proper of *ji* and/or *zi*. Very often, its meaning overlaps with that of ‘heart’, but in some passages it clearly takes distance from it.

Oshima (1983) proposes to take distance from rendering *xin* as ‘mind’, a word too close to the Greek notion to be used elsewhere. He suggests to take *xin* literally, as the center of the body, and to analyze other meanings as part of its metaphorical imagery. Although I am in favor of a careful use of words, I should also notice that *xin* cannot be seen merely as a muscle, and the use of *xin* as ‘mind’ is not always metaphorical. We understand this if we have a look at two passages I quoted above.

First, when prince Mou 公子牟 is walking along the river, he feels his *xin* is back at his palace (ZZS 28/84/7-8). It would be hard to argue that prince Mou feels his heart is not with him. It is true that we may express the difficulty of a situation using the heart metaphorically (“this situation is burden on my heart”), but if we do not consider *xin* as representing some cognitive aspects, prince Mou's saying suffers in meaning. Following Oshima, we may argue that prince Mou uses ‘*xin*-heart’ to metaphorically indicate his ‘mind’, but in doing so we are implicitly admitting that whoever wrote this passage did not assess *xin* only as a bodily organ (cf. Kjellberg 2001: 209 no.15). Why the need of taking it metaphorically? There is little danger in translating it as ‘mind’, once we agree on the use of this term.

Second, I have presented a passage from chapter five where Wang Tai is described as a person whose appearance is different, and yet “his mind is complete”, *cheng xin* 成心 (ZZS

153. Without for this implying any connection whatsoever with John Cottingham’s interpretation of human nature as made by mind, body and sensation (Cottingham 1985). I use the term to simply indicate a system that takes into account three parts instead of two.

154. I take advantage of the term ‘cognitive organ’ without for this implying that I am transplanting notions of modern psychology into Early Chinese culture. I make use of the terminology, for sake of understanding, and because some passages from the *Zhuangzi* point in that direction. I shall also note that sometimes *xin* can be either ‘mind’ or ‘heart’, with very slight difference in meaning. Yet, as I will show, in some passages it would be misleading to consider *xin* as ‘heart’.

5/13/6–7). How do we understand the passage if we do not raise the possibility of *xin* as ‘mind’? The same goes for the other two occurrences of *cheng xin* (see ZZS 2/4/9).

Xin is also what ‘wanders’, *you* 遊,¹⁵⁵ what should be unfold, *jie* 解,¹⁵⁶ and what should be fasted, *qi* 齊.¹⁵⁷ Not by chance, the fasting of the mind is understood as letting go cognitive thoughts and desires (Miura 2008: 1110). Now, it is true that in many cases ‘mind’ and ‘self’ too seem to be interchangeable, or very close in meaning. The self can be wandering as well, say in “let myself wander over the decades I’ve known in this life”:¹⁵⁸ would the sentence be any different if we used ‘mind’ instead of ‘self’? The same could be applied to some passages of the *Zhuangzi*, yet the fact remains that we do not find *you ji* 遊己, *ji qi* 己齊, and *jie ji* 解己.

Another passage corroborates my theory of *xin* as different from the ‘self’ (either *ji* or *zi*) and as representing what we call cognitive aspects. In chapter seven, ‘Fits for Emperor and Kings’, we read that the ultimate man, *zhiren* 至人, “uses his mind like a mirror [*zhi ren zhi yong xin ruo jing* 至人之用心若鏡]” (W59; ZZS 7/21/21). We may translate *xin* as ‘heart’, but this description is about an attitude of complete stillness, that has to do with emotions¹⁵⁹ as much as with thoughts. To consider *xin* as the bodily organ makes this sentence nonsensical. The *Zhuangzi* may be obscure sometimes, but it is never flimsy. Moreover, we learn from chapter one that the ultimate man has no self, confirming the fact that *xin* and self has little to share.

As conclusive remark, I want to stress once again that this theory is at its first stages. However, if it is possible to demonstrate that *xin* was intended as something having cognition as the mind does, and to establish in which sentences it holds this meaning, we may pave the way to improving translations, avoiding the use of expressions such as “heart/mind” to circumvent the problem.

155. See e.g. ZZS 7/20/16; ZZS 8/22/9; ZZS 25/74/15.

156. See ZZS 11/28/17 and ZZS 23/67/8.

157. See ZZS 4/10/1–3; ZZS 19/52/5.

158. Example taken from M. Yanokoski, 2014, *The Sacred Year*, Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing, p. 119.

159. Watson does so in his first translation of the *Zhuangzi* (Watson 1968: 97), but then changes it in the 2013 version (W59).

2.3.2 On *wu sang wo* 吾喪我

The passage I discuss here is among the most famous ones from the *Zhuangzi*. It opens the second chapter, ‘Discussion on Making Things Equal’. Ziqi of South Wall 南郭子綦 is sitting

“vacant and far away, as though he’d lost his companion [*si sang qi ou* 似喪其耦]. Yan Cheng Ziyou 顏成子游, who was standing by his side in attendance, said, “What is this? Can you really make the body like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes? (...)”

Ziqi said, “You do well to ask the question, Yan. Now I have lost myself [*wu sang wo* 吾喪我]. Do you understand that? You hear the piping of men, but you haven’t heard the piping of earth. Or if you’ve heard the piping of earth, you haven’t heard the piping of Heaven!” (W7; cf. M10)

「仰天而噓，嗒焉似喪其耦。顏成子游立侍乎前，曰：「何居乎？形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎？（...）」子綦曰：「偃，不亦善乎而問之也！今者吾喪我，汝知之乎？女聞人籟而未聞地籟，女聞地籟而未聞天籟夫！」 (ZZS 2/3/16)

Wu sang wo 吾喪我 has been analyzed through the understanding of a difference between *wu* 吾 and *wo* 我: both can be used as subject, but only the latter is usually used as direct object (Chen 2014: 46).¹⁶⁰ This distinction is fine as far as it goes,¹⁶¹ but it does not take us very far. More of interest is the wealth of analyses that consider the possible nature of these two words. *Wu* is interpreted as the ‘true me’ (Chen 2009: 41 no.10; cf. Liu 2014: 215; Cf. Wu 1982¹⁶²), a sort of intimate ‘me’, being a pronoun to call oneself (*zicheng wei* 自称谓, Chen 2014: 44 ff.). *Wo* contrasts *wu* by being a ‘fixed self’ (Chen 2009: 41 no.10), or the ‘secular self’,

160. See Yuan Maoxing 2010 for a recap of the most famous readings of this passage within the Chinese scholarship. Cf. Raphals: she considers the passage a sort of metaphor to explain the concept of hierarchy (Raphals 2009: 320).

161. Cf. Pulleyblank (1995: 76–77) who notes that *wu* can be used as object as well.

162. See Kjllberg 1993 on the problematics related to the *wo*-self, albeit his review is limited to Wu Kuang-ming’s work.

which in this passage impedes the mind to be complete and become one with the myriad things (Luo 2014: 59, 61).¹⁶³

I generally agree with this reading of *wu* and *wo* as two different aspects of the person who utters these words.¹⁶⁴ However, I do not concur with the reading of *wo* as ‘self’, of whatever nature. The scholarship on this sentence has focused on an understanding of *wu* and *wo*, yet very little attention has been paid to the fact that in the *Zhuangzi* the self is usually represented by *ji* or *zi*. Besides, in one passage *Zhuangzi* makes use of ‘*sang ji* 喪己’ (ZZS 16/43/14). Why then the use of *wo* instead of *ji*?¹⁶⁵

In trying to answer to this question, I present here another line of interpretation of *wu* and *wo*. According to the –limited– research I could do within the *Zhuangzi*, I am under the impression that *wu* is the ‘I’ with reference to a private domain that identifies a person regardless others’ involvement. This does not mean that *wu* is never contrasted with others (see e.g. ZZS 5/15/10; ZZS 6/18/24; ZZS 6/19/3), but that *wu* is used to address one’s intimate

163. Cf. Sai Zihao 2015 who argues against this reading of *wu* and *wo*, yet without constructing a cogent case for doing so. Other interpretations link this passage to the story about *Zhuangzi*’s dream that closes that same chapter. Despite being an interesting connection, I think it often fails to be consistent on both passages (see e.g. Yao 2014).

164. In a recent paper, Thomas Ming defines this interpretation as a “double-reference view”: *wu* and *wo* refer to two different aspects of the same person (Ming 2016: 3). The other popular view, according to him, is the “single-reference view”: *wu* and *wo* refer to the same thing “whether a person or the self” (*ibid.*: 3; a claim that is already *per se* problematic), thus the sentence ‘I have lost myself’ fails logically. He groups almost every study on the passage into the first view, while no study is filed as representing the second. To distance himself for both these views, he develops a “non-reference view (NR)” (*ibid.*: 15), to the end of explaining “that the notion of loosing oneself, when consciously being thought about, means failure to refer to oneself in the very act of expressing it” (*ibid.*: 16). This reading is based on Elizabeth Anscombe’s paper ‘The First Person’ (1981, to which I have currently no access), where she explains her theory of ‘I’ as lacking any referential nature. To her, the sentence “I am not Elizabeth Anscombe” runs perfectly, since the ‘I’ refers to nothing at all. Albeit being an interesting connection, Ming’s work raises more doubts than else. Particularly, he does not eventually explicate how such a reading would shed new light on the issue (he had to follow Anscombe in admitting that the ‘I’ can still be used in assertive sentences). After saying that in the sentence ‘I have lost myself’ the ‘I’ has no reference, thus ‘myself’ has neither, he is forced to say that “in my reading although I subscribe to the NR, my resulting position is rather an epistemic version of the no-self view. But, paradoxically, such a sense of ‘no-self’ is (...) closer to the true-self view” (Ming 2016: 15 no.29). Both the no-self view and the true-self view are views with a double reference (the first view considers *wo* as the self that is lost, thus the *wu* is no-self; the second view holds that by loosing *wo*, what remains is the true-self *wu*). Does Ming believe this sentence is about a true-self or a no-self view? He is not sure (*ibid.*: 18 no.34). So, in the end, Ming has to follow his colleagues, implicitly admitting that the no-reference view does not bring the issue very far. Also, he considers non-native speakers of Chinese as insensitive to the change from *wu* to *wo* (*ibid.*: 3 no.6), but he never once hints at the fact that he is translating *wo* with ‘self’, especially considering that almost every Chinese study uses *wo* to explain the passage, not *ji* 己.

165. Slingerland follows Kjellberg (1993) reading of the sentence as simply proper classical Chinese, so that the sentence would not be different from *wu sang ji* 吾喪己 (Slingerland 2004: 335). I do not concur with this reading.

being. *Wo* differs for it represents those features of one's identity recognized by others.¹⁶⁶ See this passage from chapter two as explicative. Yao talks about his position on the throne: “I go on occupying it [*wo you shi zhi* 我猶尸之], but all I can see are my failings [*wu zi shi queran* 吾自視缺然]” (W3; ZS 1/2/6–9). Taking into account the context, it is reasonable to think of *wo* as the ‘public I’, referring to the person who is taking office, while *wu* is a ‘private I’, the I that reflects intimately on his own position, regardless how others consider him.^{167, 168} Of course, this is not true of any occurrence in the *Zhuangzi*. *Wo* also conveys the meaning of ‘we’, as both Harbsmeier (1997) and Mansvelt Beck (2000) have shown. This reading in a way backs my argument: *wo* as ‘we’ is strictly connected with the sphere of ‘public’, in the sense of regarding a community or group of people, and not the single individual person.^{169, 170}

The different nature of *wo* and self can be further explained by linking this sentence with the idea of detachment from one’s self, *wang ji* 忘己,¹⁷¹ and the state of being without a self, *wu ji* 無己. Among the passages that convey the idea of detachment from one’s being or

166. Truth to be told, in chapter four Yan He reference to *wu guo* 吾國 should be interpreted as ‘our state’ (see W29 and above). Yan He is a minister, so it is not possibly talking of *his* personal state, but rather the state to which he and others belong. However, we may consider the possibility that being this private talk among friends, the use of *wu* indicates Yan He personal feeling of attachment to the state. If he were to talk during his function as minister, he would probably use *wo guo* 我國.

167. Cf. ZS 6/19/4–5 “how do we know that this ‘I’ [*wu* 吾] we talk about has any ‘I’ [*wu* 吾] to it?” (W51). To which Guo Xiang comments: “豈知吾之所在也” (Guo 1961: 277 no.3). The point here is to realize that one’s nature is part of process of changes, and for this reason we are not everyday the same. It is interesting the choice of the pronoun *wu* instead of *wo*.

168. An immediate objection would be that here Ziqi utters these words while he is not performing any kind of public office whatsoever. To Ziyou, he is a master, but this may not suffice to the most skeptic reader. However, if we give to *wo* the possibility of being the ‘public I’, we can apply this meaning in this sentence, thinking about Ziqi explaining to Ziyou what it should be done to undertake this process of detachment.

169. It is argued that *wo* is used when the person meets other people. But *wu* too is used in that sense (see e.g. ZS 5/15/10 吾與孔丘).

170. Chen Jing (2001) interprets *wo* as made by a physical and emotional essence, closely related to the social realm. However, he also argues that *wo* should be considered on the same level of a thing, since both *wo* and *wu* have a form. Thus, *wo* is passive and without alternatives (Chen 2001: 50). I do not concur with this line of reasoning.

171. Literally, ‘to forget one’s self’. As dr. van Els correctly noted, the idea of forgetting in the meditation process stands for a voluntary act of disengagement with certain thoughts or feeling. Thus I use terms such as ‘detachment’ or ‘being mindfulness’, rather than forgetting.

self in the *Zhuangzi*, these three are positive acts performed voluntarily,¹⁷² and I am of the opinion that they can be seen as describing different stages in a meditation process of increasing intensity.¹⁷³

According to my reading, *sang wo* 喪我 represents the first step of this process. Guo Xiang interprets *sang* as *wang* 忘 (Guo 1961: 45 no.1), and it is difficult to state otherwise: Ziqi is neither losing his body, nor his cognition. I have argued that characters cannot simply be interchangeable. It is also true that by sticking to the semantic meaning of *sang*, the context becomes unclear: *sang* is either to lose a country, or something important, or losing something by death (Schuessler 2005: 187). But here Ziqi is anything but at loss for what he has just lost.

Wang Bo equates *wo* 我 to *ji* 己, so that *sang wo* 喪我 somehow recalls *wu ji* 無己 in the first chapter (Wang 2013: 103). I do not concur with him. Beside the above mentioned fact that we do find *sang ji* 喪己 in the *Zhuangzi*,¹⁷⁴ I should also note that *sang wo* is an act performed voluntarily, while *wu ji* is a state of being. Moreover, I am inclined to believe that *wo* and *ji* represents two different layers of a human being: *wu sang wo* indicates the beginning of a process which has relatively little to do with the physical body (Wang 2013: 103).^{175, 176} Anyone acquainted with meditation knows that after taking distance from the body,

172. Both *shi ji* 失己 and *sang ji* 喪己 (see above, ZZS 6/16/10 and ZZS 16/43/14 respectively) refers to the idea of losing one's self in externalities, ruining one's life. As for *zi shi* 自失, see ZZS 7/21/14 above. Cf. ZZS 17/46/23 and ZZS 30/92/6: in both cases, the subject is losing one's self due to inability to control one's emotions, not through a voluntarily process. I limited my research within the *Zhuangzi* to the verbs *wang* 忘, *shi* 失 and *sang* 喪.

173. In analyzing the process of 'inner cultivation', Harold Roth individuates seven passages that describe it as a "series of psychological stages of increasing profundity" (Roth 1997: 301). He works with different sources dating to different centuries, yet his reasoning, based on the fact that different traditions were shared among thinkers, is consistent. Similarly, I am aware that the passages I refer to are from different chapters and, possibly, from different authors. However, I think it is possible to describe *sang wo*, *wang ji* and *wu ji* as describing different steps of the same process.

174. Be noted, in passing, that *sangwo* and *sangji* are considered differently: to lose one's external being (*sang wo*) has a positive note, whereas to lose one's self (*sang ji*) is negative (ZZS 16/43/14).

175. The idea of a process comes from the Ziqi's final sentence: "You hear the piping of men, but you haven't heard the piping of earth. Or if you've heard the piping of earth, you haven't heard the piping of Heaven." There is undoubtedly the idea of a crescendo, whose start is hearing the piping of men and whose arrival is the piping of Heaven, the highest level. Because of space constraints, I draw this idea without going into deep rumination of what these pipings represent. On this passage, see Cook 2003.

176. Cf. Kohn who takes this passage as representative of ascetic pursuit, a description of the state of trance (Kohn 1992: 85). Yet this reading is strictly related to a religious interpretation of Daoist practice. Moreover, I am not denying the intensity of

one needs to forget one's being, but this does not come as a whole: identity, selves, feelings, states of mind all take a part in the process. First you forget about what is more superficial and external (what to buy at the grocery store), then what is somehow more closer to your being (those mails you have to send for a scholarship), and finally, the difficult part comes when one has to forget feelings, emotions, worries, deeply rooted in one's being.

Whoever wrote this passage in the *Zhuangzi* chose to use *wo*. I think this sensitivity indicates that *wo* is considered somehow a more external layer of a human being, while *ji* 己 represents something more internal.¹⁷⁷ This different nature of *wo* and *ji* seems to be confirmed by the fact that losing two elements is of a different importance: to lose one's external being (*sang wo*) has a positive note, whereas to lose one's self (*sang ji*) is negative (ZZS 16/43/14). Accordingly, here Ziqi is taking his first step into a meditation process by making his 'private I' *wu* losing the 'external I', *wo*. The two of them represent complementary yet different parts of Ziqi, who is in fact described as somebody who has lost his companion, *sang qi ou* 喪其耦.

Once this 'external I' is left apart, one can proceed to 'dismiss one's self', *wang ji* 忘己. I recall to the reader that in chapter twelve *wang ji* comes after forgetting both externalities (*wu* 物) and heaven itself (*tian* 天; see ZZS 12/31/19). This proceeding seems to me on a different level from 'wang wo', since here the subject is going further in leaving behind not only their selves, but also what constitutes the world itself. Not incidentally, those who succeed in forgetting one's self are allowed to enter Heaven.

This brings to the condition of having no self, *wu ji* 無己, the highest stage. In fact, it is attributed either to the ultimate man, *zhiren* 至人, or to the great man, *daren* 大人. This seems to be confirmed also by the fact that those who reach the state of *wu ji* can be one with the beginning of everything (see footnote no.59). I have shown above that both for the ultimate man and the great man, *ji* indicates something related to what is external. Thus, *wo* and *ji* both represent externalities that have to be dismissed while meditating, yet the actions of *sang wo* and *wang ji* are progressive. *Wu ji* explicates then the final step, a state of being that requires

the meditative state Ziqi reaches, but simply arguing that what he is trying to take distance from is simply something of a different nature from the self.

177. I talk here of 'internal' and 'external' layers of a human being as a matter of convenience to explain how different aspects can be more or less rooted in one's being.

no direct action: it is proper of those who control themselves thoroughly, and they need not to further act on their beings.¹⁷⁸

To conclude, I have argued that *sang wo*, *wang ji* and *wu ji* are three different stages to describe a positively and voluntarily detachment from one's being in a meditation process. While *ji* and *wo* share an 'external nature', I believe they stand for different aspects of a person. *Sang wo* concern the more superficial stage, whereas *wang ji* and *wu ji* further the process. In fact, it is easier to get rid of your external identity (*wo*) than of something you make yours to the point that you feel it belongs to your self (*ji*). Accordingly, the translation of *wu sang wo* as 'I lost myself' should be reconsidered, maybe with 'I have lost my [external] identity', if *wo* is representing what we are in the public sphere of our lives.¹⁷⁹ Our being is not identical to our identity, especially if the latter is dictated by a social context (Shoemaker 2006: 48).

The sentence '*wu sang wo*' is surely an ambiguous one, meant to be open to interpretations. Whilst I do not intend to force my interpretation as *the* right one, I shall also mention that meditation was a practice deeply rooted in ancient Chinese culture, whose importance is too often underestimated, especially after the introduction of Buddhism. If this reading of mine has a chance, we should accordingly advance our understanding of *wu* and *wo*, and of Daoist practices of meditation. It goes without saying that further investigations are required, especially on the process of meditation and the notion of identity as they were conceived in Early China, yet I believe it is a possible path.

178. Once you have reached a state of calmness, you can enjoy it directly, there is no further need to calm yourself down and force your anger to vanish. And yet, *remaining* calm is not easy, especially considering that we are continuously responding to different circumstances.

179. Needless to say, this translation opens a discussion of what 'identity' is, and to what extent we can use this word (Rorty 1976). Shoemaker (2006) presents the idea that identity is a set of traits a person has over a period of time, and if we give credit to the fact that identity can be lost, we have also to acknowledge that identity cannot be equated with the individual essence (Shoemaker 2006: 41). As such, *wu sang wo* as 'I have lost my identity' runs perfectly. However, additional inquiries need to be done, but I cannot address them here.

3. Zhuangzian Self and Social Issues

Non sono un introverso.

È che mi diverto di più quando sono da solo.

Paolo Conte

The Daoist tradition has given rise to many and different interpretations, both philosophically¹⁸⁰ and politically¹⁸¹ speaking. These readings generally find their justification in the fact that the content of the *Daodejing* 道德經,¹⁸² and the *Zhuangzi* especially, is very rich and diverse. I here address the wide-spread claim that the *Zhuangzi* promotes a withdrawal from society and is not concerned with politics, a claim that, in my view, is only partially true.

I argue that *Zhuangzi's* promotion of social participation is secondary to individuals' knowledge of one's self. Millner takes this further, seeing the *Zhuangzi* as a book that instructs people to respond according to their natural inclinations, rather than to moral teachings (Millner 2000: 169 ff.). I concur with him: *Zhuangzi* is primarily concerned with single persons' being rather than with a social structure in which persons have to fit.¹⁸³ The book encourages the readers to know their being, their social position, and the historical context they happen to live. In the following section, I address these aspects. This individuals' awareness towards their beings and the world has already been noted as being part of the Zhuangzian message (Wenzel 2003), and the link between individuals and social participation

180. See e.g. Ivanhoe 1993; Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996; Hansen 2003 and 1992: 292–296; Cf. Hansen cf. Raphals 1994.

181. See e.g. Roger Ames, 1983, "Is Political Taoism Anarchism?" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 10: 27–47; cf. John A. Rapp, 1998, "Daoism and Anarchism Reconsidered" *Anarchist Studies* 6.2: 123–51. Cf. Rapp 2012. On the the *Zhuangzi* as a promoter of a laissez-faire philosophy, start from Ken McCormick, 1999, 'The Tao of Laissez-faire', *Eastern Economic Journal* 25(3): 331–341.

182. See footnote no.50.

183. With this I do not imply that the *Zhuangzi* is about 'individualism'. Cf. Millner 2000: 272–283. The author pushes the reasoning further to say that the *Zhuangzi* offers an alternative way of considering individual rights. I limit myself to a more general consideration on *Zhuangzi* as more concerned with individuals than society, without talking of it as promoting individualistic propaganda, not at least if with 'individualism' we indicate a social philosophy that elevates the individual's importance as separated from that of the community (See 'Individualism' 2016, *Britannica Academic*. Retrieved 11 January 2016, from <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/286303/individualism>).

has been differently addressed (Millner 2000;¹⁸⁴ cf. Wang 2013: 33–60). Starting from these positions, I add a few personal comments. I finally move to another consideration, to my knowledge almost unmentioned, namely that *Zhuangzi*'s ideal of deep understanding of one's nature and place in the world cannot be reached by everybody.

3.1 Individual's Awareness and Society in the *Zhuangzi*

I have argued above that *Zhuangzi* urges people to care for what is most natural in their being, instead of running after externalities. This, however, is possible only if people learn to reflect on their selves and become aware of their being: “how do I know that loving life is not a delusion?” (W16).¹⁸⁵ People find themselves in the world, and are told to love themselves and their parents, very often without the slightest reflection on what all this implies. Of course, *Zhuangzi* recognizes that feelings are somehow inborn: “That a son should love his parents is fate—you cannot erase this from his heart” (W27), but this does not exclude the possibility to ruminate about them or human nature.

In chapter twelve, *Zhuangzi* tells us: “[h]e who knows he is a fool is not the biggest fool; he who knows he is confused is not in the worst confusion” (W95). That is to say, real fools are those who fail to recognize their own nature¹⁸⁶ (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 2004: 45-46). This is a lack of self-knowledge. The *Zhuangzi* also asks people to follow their mind: “If a man follows the mind given him and makes it his teacher, then who can be without a teacher?” (W9). Our inborn nature is what should guide us, blindly acquiring others' teaching may lead to repress it. Accordingly, *Zhuangzi* says: “My definition of expertness has nothing to do with benevolence or righteousness; it means following the true form of your inborn nature, that is all. When I speak of good hearing, I do not mean listening to others, I mean simply listening to yourself” (W62; cf. W132). Many in the *Zhuangzi* travel far to get advice

184. Although the work presents some unclear statements (see e.g. Millner 2000: 180 on why withdrawal from society is not a valuable option) and the underlying idea of *Zhuangzi* as pessimist, a position I do not concur with, I generally back his reading of society as the background of Zhuangzian figures.

185. Cf. Liezi's meeting with a skull, W143: “Only you and I know that you have never died and you have never lived. Are you really unhappy? Am I really enjoying myself?”

186. Cf. W151, a man swims in a river so superbly that Confucius, in seeing him, thinks he is a ghost. The man simply replies that he is following his nature.

from sages, yet they rarely obtain a response to their conundrums.¹⁸⁷ When there is a reply, this is not a straightforward explanation. The listener has to discover its meaning.

This is not to say that, according to the *Zhuangzi*, nobody needs any teaching. However, the *Zhuangzi* seems reluctant to instruct people.¹⁸⁸ Wheelwright Pian 扁 explains to the Duke Huan 桓公 that there are no real instructions to chisel wheels. The worker has to feel it: “Not too gentle, not too hard—you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind. (...) I can’t teach it to my son, and he can’t learn it from me” (W107).¹⁸⁹ *Zhuangzi* seems the type of intellectual who, to use Noberto Bobbio’s saying, casts doubts, rather than promising certainties.¹⁹⁰

This self-awareness is neither easy nor priceless. The possibility of forgetting one’s being requires practice and, moreover, a crude sincerity to accept of our limits.^{191, 192} The sea is vast and greater than any river or lake, yet:

“But I have never, for this reason, prided myself on it. I take my place with heaven and earth and receive breath from the yin and yang. I sit here between heaven and earth as a little stone or a little tree sits on a huge mountain. Since I can see my own smallness, what reason would I have to pride myself?” (W127)¹⁹³

187. Cf. Millner 2000: 181. The author explains this lack of response as outcome of *Zhuangzi* pessimism towards language and rational judgment. I do not sympathize with this analysis. As we will see shortly, I think *Zhuangzi*’s criticism of conventions aims at something different.

188. This reading resounds the anthropological approach Defoort 2012 takes to show that in the *Zhuangzi* masters inspire by *not* teaching. They show only parts of a possible answer, and then leave it to the disciples.

189. Cf. W165: “If you act worthily but rid yourself of the awareness that you are acting worthily, then where can you go that you will not be loved?”

190. “Compito dell’intellettuale è oggi più che mai quello di seminare dubbi, non già di raccogliere certezze” (Bobbio, 2005: 67).

191. W154: “He who has mastered the true nature of life does not labor over what life cannot do.”

192. In this sense, the *Zhuangzian* idea of accepting the inevitable, *bu de yi* 不得已, is another hint at the fact that many aspects of human life’s fall beyond personal control. Accepting this erases a good deal of stress and emotions in trying to reverse this condition (cf. Fraser 2008: 133).

193. Cf. W209: “Nothing possesses a larger measure of greatness than Heaven and earth, yet when have they ever gone in search of greatness? (...) He returns to himself [*fan ji* 反己] and finds the inexhaustible; (...)—this is the sincerity of the Great Man.”

Besides overturning the value of ‘normality’,¹⁹⁴ *Zhuangzi*’s crippled figures promote the acceptance of one’s being: they stand above other people because they no longer care about their deformed body. Again, this is not simple: Shentu Jia was full of anger because of other people’s laughing, and it took time to learn how to wander carefree with his master (W35 ff.). If it is true that on the one hand to understand the limits of human nature frees people from submitting to them, it is also true that ultimate freedom comes from acceptance of those limits: struggling to hide a deformity brings the opposite outcome to make it even more evident.¹⁹⁵ Those who fail to acknowledge these limits (cf. W128), will be like the ugly woman from chapter fourteenth:

“The beautiful Xishi, troubled with heartburn, frowned at her neighbors. An ugly woman of the neighborhood, seeing that Xishi was beautiful, went home and likewise pounded her breast and frowned at her neighbors. But at the sight of her, the rich men of the neighborhood shut tight their gates and would not venture out, while the poor men grabbed their wives and children by the hand and scampered off. The woman understood that someone frowning could be beautiful, but she did not understand where the beauty of the frown came from. A pity, indeed!” (W113)

As best as I can understand it, a fundamental difference between the *Zhuangzi* and Confucianism¹⁹⁶ is that, while the latter promotes the ideal that being human comes after cutting and polishing (*Lunyu* 論語 1.15; see Slingerland 2003b: 7; cf. Lippiello 2003: 9; cf. Fingarette, 1972: 3), the former advances an idea of self-consciousness that starts from accepting what people *are* and their diversity (cf. Wang 2013: 33; cf. Yang 1982: 22 ff.), instead of what they can become. In this sense, we may regard the *Zhuangzi* as truly giving

194. Csikszentmihalyi (2004: 47-48) recalls to the reader the story of the Duke of Ai, who identifies Confucians by their clothing, while *Zhuangzi* maintains that a true Confucian must possess the Way, regardless the way they dress.

195. Chapter eight begins with a passage about acceptance of one’s being, and states that everything else is a violation of one’s nature: “If we must use curve and plumb line, compass and square, to make something right, this means cutting away its inborn nature” (W61).

196. Like “Daoism”, this label has been recently reconsidered as misleading. “Ru” would be a more appropriate term, but for sake of convenience I decided to use “Confucianism”. See Csikszentmihalyi 2004: 13–22.

concrete attention to human nature, so much more than Confucianists:¹⁹⁷ “I have heard of the gentlemen of these middle states—enlightened on the subject of ritual principles but stupid in their understanding of men’s hearts. I have no wish to see any such person” (W167).¹⁹⁸

This reliance on self-knowledge does not bring to a ‘every man for himself’ policy: *Zhuangzi* is aware that the social context is inescapable. There is no clear outline of a social structure in the text, but this does not justify reading it as an anarchist pamphlet.¹⁹⁹ Social participation is mandatory, yet to join society being aware of one’s being is quite different from a blind participation to it. Cook Ding 庖丁 (chapter three,²⁰⁰ W19 ff.), the hunchback who catches cicadas (chapter nineteen, W147), the ferryman (chapter nineteen W148), woodworker Qing 慶 (chapter nineteen, W152), and the tax collector Beigong She (chapter twenty, W159) do not escape their social role (cf. Millner 2000: 187 and 262). But the way they perform their activities, which are in the end social roles, is notably different from common workers. They are aware of their beings and their activities, so much so that they can forget about them, and just perform spontaneously.²⁰¹ The sage has a different attitude, but is still *part of* the society (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 2004: 177): “he has the form of men but not the feelings of men” (W40); the perfect man “can follow along with men without losing himself” (W232).²⁰²

It is also clear that the Zhuangzian way to consider individual participation to society is radically different from the Confucian one. Firstly, people should recognize the historical time

197. See Lippiello 2003: viii, who argues that Confucius devoted himself to human beings and their condition, with Fingarette’s work as premises. While it is true that Fingarette calls Confucius an anthropologist (Fingarette 1972: 64) and a thinker who considered the holiness of human nature as central (*ibid.*, 1), in discussing Confucius’ social concerns Fingarette also writes that men’s community “for Confucius, was indeed an ultimate concern (...), more than the individual’s life itself” (*ibid.*: 17).

198. Cf. W167: “These men of the middle states are enlightened in ritual principles but stupid in the understanding of men’s hearts.”

199. Actually, the *Daodejing* is the book usually considered as the basis of anarchist thought among ancient Chinese thinkers. However, as Feldt notes, supporters of this position often couple together these texts (Feldt 2010: 325 no.3).

200. Note that Wang Bo defines chapter three as describing a way to peacefully live one’s life, yet being aware that humans cannot escape the world. However, it is possible to live in the world without being trapped in it (Wang 2013: 64–65).

201. Cf. Fraser 2008: 125–132, who considers this ability to act perfectly a result of a psychological state of emptiness, *xu* 虛: the *xin*-heart parts from fixed programs, and the actions are guided by the situation itself.

202. Cf. W91: “You do not even know how to look after your own body – how do you have anytime to think about looking after the world.”

in which they live. It makes no sense to struggle about past time, ignoring the present time people are living:²⁰³

“Nothing is as good as a boat for crossing water, nothing as good as a cart for crossing land. (...) if you try to push it across land, you may push till your dying day and hardly move it any distance at all. And are the past and present not like the water and the land (...)? To hope to practice the ways of Zhou in the state of Lu is like trying to push a boat over land—a great deal of work, no success, and certain danger to the person who tries it.” (W112)

Secondly, the story that takes place in the Diaoling park presents us the fact that the myriad things in the world are closely interconnected. Failure to understand the nature of their environment brings creatures to harm each other (W164 ff.). After this realization at the park, Zhuang Zhou comes back home and explains his unhappiness in terms of misunderstanding: “Staring at muddy water, I have been misled into taking it for a clear pool” (W165).

Thirdly, *Zhuangzi* understands that people need conventions to live together and understand each other. The text, in fact, does not attack conventions *per se*; what is under scrutiny is the unquestionable truth we think these have: “Names should stop when they have expressed reality, concepts of right should be founded on what is suitable” (W143; cf. W130; cf. W140). The story in chapter one of a man who travels to Yue to sell ceremonial hats, but the people of Yue make not use of them (W5) is basically breaking with the idea that values have universal truth. The same is valid for *Zhuangzi*’s questioning the validity of words: “What one calls right, the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong, the other calls right” (W10), and of values such as righteousness and benevolence: “I wonder, then, whether benevolence and righteousness are part of man’s true form? Those benevolent men— how

203. “Be content with this time and dwell in this order, and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. In ancient times this was called the ‘freeing of the bound’” (W48). See also W107 and W113. Cf. Csikszentmihalyi 2004: 47 ff.

much worrying they do” (W61).²⁰⁴ This, as many have noticed,²⁰⁵ not to dismantle society but to free people from what I define a ‘passive’ use of knowledge.

To call into question what is given for granted not only brings to see things differently,²⁰⁶ but it also allows to better understand of one’s possibilities: “But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity” (W10; cf. W129). That is to say, we can use words, with their ‘wrongs’ and ‘rights’, as long as we are conscious of their conventional, therefore limited, nature.²⁰⁷ From a Zhuangzian point of view, the problem with Confucianists is that they pursue righteousness and benevolence without asking themselves what these ultimately mean (W61).²⁰⁸

Zhuangzi does not ask to reject social commitment either. The above-mentioned story about Yan Hui who wants to travel to Wei to instruct the state’s tyrant elucidates this. At the end of the story, Confucius does *not* keep Yan Hui from going. When Yan Hui successfully learn about the fasting of the mind, Confucius simply replies: “You may go and play in his bird cage but never be moved by fame” (W25). This story is about participation to society, but with a very different approach: after fasting, Yan Hui can now fully accept what he is going to do *being conscious* of what it means. He will not be moved by fame, he will not go to Wei for the sake of reputation,²⁰⁹ and once there he will be able to follow his instinct. Not by chance, *Zhuangzi* reminds us that the sage does not govern starting from the outside: “he makes sure

204. Cf. W77: “Who can convince me that sagely wisdom is not in fact the wedge that fastens the cangue, that benevolence and righteousness are not in fact the loop and lock of these fetters and manacles?”. Cf. W104: “Universal love – taht’s a rather nebulous ideal, isn’t it?”

205. Cf. Mollner 2000: 169; cf. Ivanhoe 1993: 645. Cf. Schwitzgebel 1996: 70 and 80. He argues that *Zhuangzi* plays with words to have the readers taking words less seriously, but I think this is only part of the message, and not necessarily the most important one.

206. That is why Allison 1989 argues that the *Zhuangzi* is a book about relativism; Soles and Soles 2008 push this further into saying that *Zhuangzi* promotes an epistemological nihilism. Both positions hold some truth, but do not present an accurate account of the text.

207. W106: “Words have value; what is of value in words is meaning. Meaning has some- thing it is pursuing, but the thing that it is pursuing can- not be put into words and handed down.”

208. Millner argues that a self-conscious approach to society does nothing but substituting a strategy of attachment to external values (Millner 2000: 196). I find this position contradicted by the the fact that the author’s explanation of Confucius dialogue with Yan Hui from chapter four (Millner 2000: 209 ff.) is on the same line of mine. Thus, self-consciousness does matter.

209. Cf. W160: “he does not dwell in fame. Vacant, addled, he seems close to madness. Wiping out his footprints, sloughing off his power, he does not work for success or fame. So he has no cause to blame other men, nor other men to blame him. The Perfect Man wants no repute.”

of himself first, and then he acts” (W56). The difficulty of this position is explained by the following words of Confucius: “It is easy to keep from walking; the hard thing is to walk without touching the ground. It is easy to cheat when you work for men but hard to cheat when you work for Heaven” (W25).

The famous story of the oak that acts like a shrine to preserve its safeness (chapter four, W30 ff.) confirms the engagement with society is inescapable, and suggest the possibility of using this engagement to our advantage. In fact, the oak would not be able to disguise itself as a shrine if people did not believe in local shrines. We should also note that it is only because the oak knows its nature as potentially useful for carpenters that it thinks about this trick to preserve itself. If the oak did not understand its “being a tree”, and the social context that surrounds it, the story would have ended differently.

Truth to be told, the *Zhuangzi* also presents stories that contemplate withdrawal from society: Zhuangzi himself is said to prefer dragging his tail in the mud, rather than serving as minister to the King of Chu 楚 (W137). More than a contradiction, this seems to show that people are free to choose whether or not commit themselves to social participation, another aspect that separates *Zhuangzi* from his peers who consider social participation as noble (Millner 2000: 198). If we decide to be actively involved in society, we should be aware of what it implies, and how it will affect our lives. If we prefer not to be, it is probably because we recognize our nature as unsocial. There is also an intermediate position, that of participation without real engagement (Millner 2000: 201). Besides the above quoted story of the oak, this attitude is proper of the Perfect Man, who “can follow along with men without losing himself” (W232), or of the True Man, who embraces virtue and harmony, and “follows along with the world” (W212).²¹⁰ In chapter nineteen, Tian Kaizhi 田開之 tells us of men who failed in their lives exactly because they were too extreme in their positions (W149). *Zhuangzi* gives people the freedom to choose what most fits their nature. To do so, a sincere understanding of this nature is unescapable.

210. Millner notes that even enlightened sages remains recognizably human and do literally not elude human condition (Millner 2000: 180). He has a point, but common sense implies that human condition is *literally* escapable through suicide. We should also notice, in passing, that some passages about sages seem to imply that they have some sort of responsibility towards people: “I, too, consider myself a demented drifter, but the people follow me wherever I go, and I have no choice but to think of them” (W80; cf. W93). More than a contradiction, this is I think another piece of proof that *Zhuangzi* does not call for a total disengagement with the social realm.

3.2 The *Zhuangzi*'s message as exclusive

When I say that the Zhuangzian message is not graspable by everybody, I do not imply that the book targets a few people. Everybody can benefit from reading it. However, I am under the impression that the Zhuangzian message of understanding one's nature and place in the society, without forgetting our being, is not something anybody can fully grasp. Fingarette (1979) described Confucius as a yea-sayer, holding a positive attitude towards human beings and their chance to improve. I do not think *Zhuangzi* could be described in this sense. Although anyone can potentially follow *Zhuangzi*'s advice, not everybody eventually becomes an ultimate man. In talking with Confucius, Laozi says: "People who have heads and feet but no minds and no ears—there are mobs of them" (W89), as if he recognizes that not everybody can understand what being a sage means. It is also explicitly said that, for some people, it is not a matter of practice:

"Now Sun Xiu 孫休 is a man of ignorance and little learning. For me to describe to him the virtue of the Perfect Man is like taking a mouse for a ride in a carriage or trying to delight a quail with the music of bells and drums. How could he help but be startled?" (W155)

Accordingly, Prince Mou retires to learn how to attach importance to life, but did not fully grasp this learning; Nie Que 齧缺 is regarded as superior, yet he is not apt to governing the world. There is no hit to a possible enhancement of his nature (W86–87).²¹¹

I finally consider the fact that the Zhuangzian life style is extremely difficult to live. The problem is not really society and social engagement, but rather the fact that sincerely questioning, and reasoning on, human life have a double-sided outcome. If on the one hand it

211. Cf. W118: "Inborn nature cannot be changed, fate cannot be altered, time cannot be stopped, the Way cannot be obstructed."

To a certain extent, even the story of the man on a boat who meets another boat quoted above points in the same direction. I recall to the reader that the entire story is told from the point of view of the man *with* a self. When the man meets the empty boat, he does not get angry. He might have been, if he would be able to go beyond appearance, and imagine that somebody left the boat going along the river. But he did not, and in this sense, the man with a self is limited in his vision. He too clearly benefits from the meeting with the self-empty man, and he is content with how things are.

hand to ponder on human life's significance frees people, on the other hand realizing that there is no 'right' that is ultimately right leads to the possibility of considering everything right, exactly because nothing is. To accept this fragility of human nature without letting it nullify your life requires introspection and strength. Besides, if everybody subscribed to this life style, social regulations would have no ground on which to base itself – let alone the fact that there would be no social regulations at all, nothing permanent or universal at least. Human nature is easily vulnerable, and this feature threatens both personal and interpersonal stability, which is in turn a fundamental component of any social interaction.²¹² In an era of social and political instability, the Zhuangzian message was no tool to build the foundation of a state. Was *Zhuangzi* misunderstood? Intentionally by some, unwillingly by others. It happens to many great thinkers: “[t]o be great is to be misunderstood” (Emerson 1883: 58).

212. With this I do not imply that Chinese society was stranger to social mobility among classes, another wide spread truism usually hold to stress the dynamic aspect of European society vs the static nature of Asian societies. This truism was addressed and proved wrong by Hsu 1965. I refer here to the simple fact a social structure requires values and regulations stables over time and understood by the majority of people.

4. Conclusion

When I started my thesis, I wanted to write about the notion of individualism in the *Zhuangzi*. I now find myself doubting not only the mere notion of ‘individualism’, but also of ‘self’, ‘mind’ and ‘body’. For sure, trying to wear *Zhuangzi*’s shoes in explicating this book’s content made me realize how little has been done not only to really appreciate Chinese culture for what it is, but also to dismantle the long series of commonplaces regarding European culture.²¹³ This thesis, if anything, is a first step towards the discovery of these clichés, both Chinese and European.

With regard to early Chinese philosophy, I demonstrated that Chinese thinkers were perfectly aware of human nature as dualistic. Besides passages where this dualism is clearly exploited, many others clearly explicate not only a notion of self, but also its possible nature and how people may relate to their own self. Lackoff and Johnson studies, as applied by Slingerland to Chinese language, are surely a step ahead towards a better understanding of Chinese texts, yet there is more to be said, as I believe my discussions have shown. At the risk of being redundant, I shall repeat that this discovery does not immediately eliminate any notion of holism from the picture. Indeed, holistic theories may have been the counter part of dualistic ones. The complexity of the subject involves a detailed examination.

In the introduction, I also committed myself to the discovery of a native Chinese philosophy of mind. Despite my reasonings are just the tip of the iceberg, both my discussions on the different ways in which the body was addressed, and the rumination on the character 心 *xin* as representing the cognitive organ in a human being, authorize using the expression ‘philosophy of mind’ with regard to Chinese culture. How many trends belong to the Chinese philosophy of mind, as well as where their differences lie, are topics which require proper investigation. I aimed here to present a beginning into this inquiry, dismantling some of the truisms still circulating in the academia.

Finally, I argued against the *Zhuangzi* as a book upholding positions like anarchism, nihilism or skepticism. The *Zhuangzi* presents its own positions towards society and social commitment, taking distance from the Confucian view on the matter. In a nutshell, the

213. Besides Said's eponymous book (1978), orientalism and related phenomena are investigated in App 2010 and 2012; cf. Masuzawa 2005.

message of the book is to live within society without being overwhelmed by it. Social participation is inescapable, yet people shall not for this reason take social engagement as the goal of their lives. It is true that there is no clear-cut description of a social structure. In my opinion, this is due to the fact that, according to the *Zhuangzi*, social participation should respond to one's nature, and people should not be obliged to fit into a system tailored beforehand. The third chapter explicates different possible approaches that might be taken by the individual person towards society, while elucidating that this freedom of choice is difficult and ultimately based on self-knowledge.

If the reader made it to the conclusion, it should be clear to them now that many aspects related to my work are to be furthered investigated. Above all, a historical inquiry on the different chapters of the *Zhuangzi* would clarify semantic changes occurring over the centuries, adjusting the conclusions of my linguistic analysis. What I present here is the result of a choice I made for obvious reasons of space. However, if this research will be, if not convincing, at least consistent enough to appeal to further inquiries on the subject, my efforts will be repaid.

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