

# Zhuangzi and Hui Shi on *Qing* 情\*

Chong, Kim-chong\*\*

Division of Humanities

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

## ABSTRACT

This essay examines Zhuangzi's idea, in his dialogue with Hui Shi in the *De Chong Fu*, of being without human *qing*. This idea is situated within the contrast that Zhuangzi constantly makes between heaven and human beings. Some contexts for this contrast are described. The essay concludes that *qing* should be read as basically referring to "facts" in the *Zhuangzi*, including certain factual beliefs about (false or mistaken) emotions.

**Key Words:** Zhuangzi, Hui Shi, *qing*, facts, emotions, heaven, human beings

In the *De Chong Fu* (〈德充符〉) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (《莊子》) there is the following passage:

Since one is nourished by heaven, what need is there for (what is made/brought about by) human beings! Having the form of human beings, (but) not the *qing* of human beings. Having the form of human beings—thus one congregates with human beings. Not having the *qing* of human beings—thus right and wrong can find no place on one's body. Oh, the insignificant and small, thus they belong to human beings! Oh, the grand and great, only they are one with heaven! (既受食於天，又惡用人！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

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\*\* The author's email address: hmckc@ust.hk

身。眇乎小哉，所以屬於人也！警乎大哉，獨成其天！) (Chen 172)<sup>1</sup>

A dialogue between Zhuangzi (莊子) and Hui Shi (惠施) immediately follows this passage. In the dialogue, Hui Shi asks how it is possible for human beings to be without *qing*. Thus, this is the central question both in the above passage and in the dialogue: What does it mean to be without the *qing* of human beings (無人之情)? My main aim in this essay is to try to answer this question.

Before doing so, however, it is necessary to answer two other closely related questions. First, note that the passage above begins and ends with a distinction between heaven (*tian* 天) and human beings (*ren* 人). This raises the question: What motivates the distinction between heaven and human beings? Or, what is the same, under what contexts can this distinction be understood? Second, and quite obviously, we should be able to provide a reading of the term *qing* (情) before answering the central question of what it means to be without the *qing* of human beings. In other words, we would need to answer the question: What is the meaning of *qing* in this passage and in the *Zhuangzi* as a whole?

A. C. Graham has noted that *qing* (情) in this passage “is traditionally but surely mistakenly taken to mean the passions.” He proposes, instead, “essence” as the appropriate reading.<sup>2</sup> All the other English translators of whom I am aware (and I believe many contemporary Chinese writers too) would disagree. They have read *qing* as meaning the emotions, feelings, affections or inclinations.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, Graham has been heavily criticized for his remarks that

1. Guu-Ying Chen, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi (A Contemporary Annotation and Translation of the Zhuangzi)* (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1999). Page numbers are given in brackets in the text of this essay. I have also consulted the following: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series, *Zhuangzi zhuzi suoyin (A Concordance to the Zhuangzi)* (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 2000). Shu-Min Wang, *Zhuangzi jiaquan (Revised Annotations on the Zhuangzi)* (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1994). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
2. A. C. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” *Studies in Chinese Philosophy & Philosophical Literature* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), Appendix: “The Meaning of *Ch’ing* 情,” p. 61. The original version of this essay was published in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 6.1, 6.2 (1967). See also A. C. Graham (trans.), *Chuang-tzŭ—The Seven Inner Chapters and other writings from the book Chuang-tzŭ* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 82, translation of *qing* as “essentially” and “essentials”.
3. Victor Mair (trans.), *Wandering on the Way—Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), “emotions,” p. 49; Burton Watson (trans.), *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), “feelings,” p. 75; Yu-Lan Fung (trans.), *Chuang-Tzu—A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press,

“Although the word *ch’ing* (*qing*) is very common in pre-Han literature I should like to risk the generalisation that it never means ‘passions’ even in *Hsün-tzū* (*Xunzi* 荀子), where we find the usage from which the later meaning developed. As a noun it means ‘the facts’...”<sup>4</sup>

My direct purpose in this essay is not to discuss this controversy, although I will say something about it here and in the conclusion. I have strong reservations about Graham’s use of “essence”, but I will show that in the *Zhuangzi*, with a few exceptions, *qing* does basically refer to the “facts”.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, this includes

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1989), “affections,” p. 87; Brook Ziporyn (trans.), *Zhuangzi—The Essential Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), “the characteristic human inclinations,” p. 38. Among contemporary Chinese writers or commentators, Guu-Ying Chen, *Zhuangzi jin-zhu jinyi* (*A Contemporary Annotation and Translation of the Zhuangzi*), p. 174, translates 情 as 偏情, which refers to certain human “partialities”. Elsewhere, he explains that Zhuangzi is recommending doing away with various kinds of artifices that humans are partial or disposed toward in terms of their body and to maintain a natural purity of the heart-mind and *de* (德). See Guu-Ying Chen, *Lao Zhuang xinlun* (*New Discourses on Laozi and Zhuangzi*) (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Book Company, 1997), p. 190. Wang Bo 王博 takes *qing* to mean *qing gan* (情感), namely, the emotions. However, Wang is careful to note that this doesn’t mean doing away with all the emotions. Like Chen, he stresses cultivating the heavenly *de* and the heart-mind as against the development of human artifices. See Bo Wang, *Zhuangzi zhexue* (*The Philosophy of Zhuangzi*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004), pp. 68–71. The artifices that both Chen and Wang refer to are mentioned just before the passage we have quoted. These are *zhi* (知) or knowledge, *yue* (約) or bonds, *de* (德), and *gong* (工). These seem to be associated, respectively, with planning and scheming, the “glue” (膠) of the rites, ideas of morality, and commerce. All these are opposed to *tian yu* (天鬻) and *tian shi* (天食) or the “nourishments” provided by heaven or nature. I agree with both Chen and Wang in their stress on this distinction between the human and heaven in their explanation of the passage and the ensuing dialogue. Unlike Chen and Wang, however, I think it is preferable to translate *qing* as “facts”. This has certain advantages that I shall explain, especially in the conclusion of this essay.

4. Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” p. 59. For critical discussions of Graham’s view on *qing*, see for example: Anthony C. Yu, *Rereading the Stone—Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter 2 “Desire”; Chad Hansen, “Qing (Emotions) 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” in Marks, Joel & Roger T. Ames eds., *Emotions in Asian Thought—A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Michael Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* (情) in Early Chinese Thought,” in Eifring, Halvor ed., *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004); Chung-Yi Cheng, “Xingqing yu qingxing: lun ming mo taizhouxuepai de qingyuguan (Xingqing and Qingxing: On the Thought of ‘Feeling’ and ‘Desire’ of the Tai-zhou School in Late Ming),” in Xiong, Bing-Zhen & Shou-An Zhang eds. *Qingyu ming qing-da qing pian* (*Sentiments and Desires in Late Imperial China—On Sentiments*) (Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2004), pp. 23–80.
5. These exceptions, as we shall see, belong to the Outer Chapters (外篇) and the Miscellaneous Chapters (雜篇), instead of the Inner Chapters (內篇). The latter are the first seven

facts with which some emotions are closely involved. Graham's generalization that in the pre-Han literature *qing* never means the passions (or emotions) was over-hasty. Even so, this does not settle the central question which I am concerned with in the *Zhuangzi*, namely, the understanding of what it means to be without the *qing* of human beings. As we shall see, this is a philosophical and logical question that involves an understanding of the distinction between heaven and human beings, and how *qing* is to be read in the context of the *Zhuangzi* itself. I now proceed to a discussion of these questions.

## 1. Heaven and Human Beings

We cannot give a full account of the distinction and the relation between heaven and human beings in this essay. However, we shall provide a few contexts in which this contrast is made to show its significance for Zhuangzi and in a way that would be relevant to our discussion on what it means to be without the *qing* of human beings.

The passage quoted above is strongly reminiscent of Xunzi's (荀子) remark that Zhuangzi was "blinker by heaven and did not know human beings." (蔽於天而不知人).<sup>6</sup> This succinctly captures a central aspect of Zhuangzi's thinking. In the *Zhuangzi*, "heaven" is a synonym for "nature" (自然). This is constantly contrasted with what is made or brought about by human beings. The presumption is that it is best to live and to act in ways that are in accordance with heaven or nature.

One context for this contrast between heaven and human beings is the protest against the implementation of Confucian (儒) moral, social, and political ideals such as *ren* (仁 humaneness), *yi* (義 righteousness) and *li* (禮 rites). These are regarded as artificial impositions on human beings in their natural state. The

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chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, widely believed to be authored by Zhuangzi himself. The passage and dialogue we are discussing, from the *De Chong Fu* (〈德充符〉), belongs to the Inner Chapters. For discussions of authorship, see A. C. Graham, "How Much of *Chuang-tzu* Did *Chuang-tzu* Write?" in Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, and Xiaogan Liu, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, trans. Donald Munro (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1994), Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, no.65.

6. Disheng Li, *Xunzi jishi, jie bi pian* (Collected Annotations on the Xunzi, Chapter on Dispelling Blindness) (Taipei: Student Book Store, 1979), p. 478. Mu Qian, *Zhuangzi zuan jian* (Compiled Annotations on the Zhuangzi) (Taipei: Dong Da Tushu Gongsi, 1985), p. 46. has also alluded to this in a comment on the dialogue between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi that follows.

reference to right and wrong in the above passage brings out a related context for the contrast, namely, the ideological debates on how to structure human relations and to impose social order. The attachments to systems of thought in these debates are said to betray preconceived ideas, prejudices, and motives of profit and fame. Zhuangzi's stated preference for living and acting in accordance with heaven is a rejection of these attachments and their associated states of mind such as deep anxieties and a "smallness" or meanness of attitude toward the perspectives held by others.

In the *Qiwulun* (〈齊物論〉) chapter, for instance, Zhuangzi describes the interminable wrangling and anxious states of mind of those engaged in these debates. He contrasts these debates and the states of mind behind them with the "pipes of heaven" (*tian lai* 天籟), that is, the natural sounds of the hollows in the forest when the wind blows. The sounds cease when the wind does whereas the debaters do not know when to stop. Even when asleep, their spirits cross with each other (*qi mei ye hun jiao* 其寐也魂交). Zhuangzi refers specifically to the Confucians and the Mohists (儒墨) when he answers the following rhetorical questions that he himself poses:

Where is the *dao* hidden such that there is (dispute over) genuine and false? How are words (or teachings) hidden such that there is (dispute over) right and wrong? Where is the *dao* headed such that it no longer remains? Where do words (or teachings) reside such that they forbid (others)? The *dao* is hidden by small prejudices and words (or teachings) hide behind eloquence. Thus, there are the disputes of the Confucians and Mohists over right and wrong. They affirm what the other denies and deny what the other affirms. Wishing to affirm what the other denies and to deny what the other affirms—well, there is nothing better than illumination. (道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？道隱於小成，言隱於榮華。故有儒墨之是非，以是其所非而非其所是。欲是其所非而非其所是，則莫若以明。) (Chen 56)

In other words, we fail to see the *dao* (what is given by heaven or is natural) because it is "hidden" by distinctions such as those made by the Confucians and Mohists. Their prejudices, concealed by their eloquence, drive them to contradict each other. This betrays a smallness of mind that is unable to accommodate different perspectives.

How are we to read the last statement that if we wish to affirm what the other party denies or *vice versa*, there is nothing better than "illumination" (*ming* 明)? There could be different interpretations here. However, consistently with what has been said so far, I would read this as a dismissive rejection of the ideo-