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Authorial presence in some pre-Buddhist Chinese texts

Résumé

Présence d’un auteur dans quelques textes chinois pré-bouddhiques

L’autoréférence est attestée en Chine dès le IIIe siècle avant notre ère, avec le poète Qu Yuan, qui se met en scène lui-même. Néanmoins, il n’est pas évident que ce soit le cas pour les textes des penseurs. Les pronoms de la première personne qu’on trouve dans le Laozi peuvent correspondre aussi bien à un collectif qu’à un singulier ; dans la plupart des passages cités, il semble raisonnable de les interpréter comme des singuliers, mais la validité de ce choix n’est pas démontrable. On relève dans le Zhuangzi des pronoms qui renvoient sans ambiguïté à la première personne du singulier, mais si l’ils désignent le personnage qui donne son nom à l’ouvrage, Zhuangzi, celui-ci n’est pas pour autant posé comme étant l’auteur.

C. Harbsmeier analyse de nombreuses citations. Pour conclure, il distingue cinq degrés de présence de l’auteur dans les textes chinois antérieurs à l’introduction du bouddhisme : 1) propos rapportés d’un auteur s’adressant à un public physiquement présent [ex. : les Entretiens de Confucius] ; 2) l’auteur prouvé, dont le nom constitue le titre du livre, est difficile à situer ; on ne connaît ni les dates ni les circonstances de son existence [ex. : Laozi] ; 3) il y a un « je » qui se présente explicitement comme le créateur de textes, adressés à un public indéfini [ex. : Qu Yuan] ; 4) il y a un « je » qui se présente comme auteur et assortit son texte de remarques éditoriales [ex. : Hanfei] ; 5) il y a un « je » qui se présente comme le rédacteur de certains passages et le compilateur d’un ensemble constituant un livre [ex. : Sima Qian].

Les traducteurs qui donnent à l’auteur une présence qu’il n’a pas dans le texte original commettent une faute herméneutique.
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Qu Yuan (ca. 343 – ca. 277 BC) is often celebrated as the first Chinese poet who put his name to his work. And there certainly is no reticence about the first person in the poem, “Encountering Sorrow”, which is generally attributed to him. Looking through the 374 lines of the *Lisao*, I counted no less than 74 occurrences of the first-person pronouns *wo* 我, *wu* 吾, *yu* 余, *zhen* 至, *yu* 予. The grammatical variety of first-person pronouns in this text is unique in ancient Chinese literature as far as I have been able to ascertain. The grammatical distinctions between these pronouns are interesting and important, but they need not concern us here, except that we note that the first two may be singular or plural in reference, whereas the others always refer to the first person singular.

Qu Yuan is communicative in a still more personal mode where the first-person pronoun (very often *yu* 余) is no longer just an appended poetic signature at the end of a poem:

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不吾知其亦已兮 No matter that no one understands me,
苟余情其信芳.  [I] truly keep the sweet fragrance of my mind.
高余冠之岌岌兮 High towered the lofty hat on my head;
长余佩之陆离兮 The longest of girdles dangles from my waist.
(Chuci, Lisao 117 ff.)
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Even when there is no Chinese pronoun present (the non-bold pronouns), it remains somehow significant that an English translation (like that of Hawkes 1959, from which I have quoted) will naturally introduce it where it is not there in the original. On the other hand, in a context like the present one, one should probably not allow oneself the licence to introduce first-person pronouns where there are none. In any case, there can be no doubt that this poetry is strongly ego-centered, not only in the sense of the second couplet, but particularly in the sense of

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1. Couplets 59-60 as translated by Hawkes 1959: 82. I believe *gou* 貝 must mean "truly, really" here and cannot be taken to introduce a postponed conditional clause.
the remarkable first couplet. And Qu Yuan does speak of his inner life as quite separate from what is uttered:

憤懣懣而不發 動。 Keeping my feelings unexpressed, 余既謝職而終古。 how can I live forever in such a state? (Chuci, Liao 258.)

Note the variation between zhen 朕 and yu 余 as first-person pronouns.

孰云察余之中情？ Who understands my innermost feelings? (Chuci, Liao 140.)

Given the traditional interpretation of his poetry, it is not surprising that Qu Yuan had a most profound impact on the history of authorship and personal expressiveness in China. His influence went beyond poetry. Consider the case of the Laozi in this connection.

**Authorial presence, and the first-person pronouns in Laozi and Zhuangzi**

Traditionally, there was a division of labour in ancient China between the person who uses the knife or the brush to inscribe texts on various materials and the person who creates the texts that specialists in writing down. Writing was originally a specialised craft and it remained a menial, often an anonymous task. The function of the editor/compiler was separate both from that of the originator of the linguistic content of the text and from that of the person responsible for the production of a given inscribed material object.

No overall author asserts his persistent authorial presence as a writer in the Laozi 老子, although there are many statements in the text which use first-person pronouns. The Laozi is an acroromatic text. The first thing to note is that, unlike the Zhuangzi 庄子, the Laozi never uses the unambiguously non-plural first-person pronouns yu 余 or yu 予. There is no preface in the book. There is no postface. How exactly are we to understand the first-person pronouns in the Laozi? I want to study this question afresh in the context of the ethnography of literary communication in ancient China.

Some basic observations are hard to illustrate simply because they concern absences. For example, if we restrict our attention to first-per-

son pronouns that refer to the auctor of a text, then it turns out that forms like “I think that”, “I suspect that”, “I feel that”, “I assume that”, “I presume that”, “I expect that”, “I presuppose that”, “I posit that”, “I maintain that”, “I argue that”, “I contend that”, “I suppose that”, “I deny that”, are interestingly rare in many pre-Buddhist Chinese texts. (A striking exception is the Shangshu 尚書, which makes regular use of nian 念 and si 思, with sentential complements to mean something like “think that”.) The proper form of denying something is simply to say bu ran 不然 “it is not so”, which is couched in an objective mode where the author is not part of the picture he paints. The preferred form is object language. In memorials and the like, it has always been common to say things like “I hope that”, “I beg (you) that”, and so on.

The first, simple, task must be to assemble the evidence, to see how the authorial “I” is used. We need to know what kinds of things are predicated in our texts of the authorial “I”. I start out with the traditional Wang Bi 王弼 text, consulting the variants in Shima Kunio’s wonderful edition of 1973 and collating Gao Ming 1996 for the versions of the text excavated at Mawangdui 马王堆, and try to provide painfully literal translations. By highlighting the alternative “I/we”, I am not suggesting that there is serious doubt, in each case, whether one should choose one reading or the other. I am only drawing attention to a problem area for translation which is easily — indeed pervasively — overlooked in the translations I have seen.

人之所属, What other men teach,
我亦教之, I/we also teach it;
強梁者, The strong and the violent one,
不得不殺, does not come to his natural death.
吾將以為教父, I/we shall make this the beginning [of ] teaching. (Laozi 42, Gao Ming 1996: 33.)

Here the author chooses to conform with the others: he reflects on his teaching as compared to that of others. He comments on his own, personal, starting point in teaching. He takes a stance which he explicitly relates to himself. But does he pose as the writer of these lines? We note that there is no Laozi yue 老子曰 to introduce the chapters or saying anywhere in the text. This is the decisive difference to texts like the Men-

2. It is worth noting that authorship is not limited to men in ancient China: the lyrical “I” in many songs is a woman. Whether these songs, like many Frauenlieder of the German Middle Ages, were written by women, is impossible to ascertain.
3. For the translations, compare Karlgren 1975: 1-18, which I have freely adapted to my purposes wherever desirable.
cius or the Wenzi 文子. The question then is whether the case of the Laozi is one of omission of something that is understood, namely Laozi yue 老子曰 or whether we have a genuinely different and new form in which a writer speaks in his own name without an intermediate compiling redactor. Moreover, we need to ask exactly what it is that prevents us from taking the first-person pronouns in the plural as “we”.

Keeping questions of this order in mind, I shall now consider the rest of the relevant evidence:

天下之至柔， The softest thing in the world,
勝過天下之至堅， Crushes against the hardest thing in the world,
無有人能敵。 The non-existent enters where there is no space.
吾是以知無為之有益。 Therefore I/we know that the non-action has an advantage.
不言之教， The teaching without words,
無為之益， And the advantage of non-action,
天下希及之。 Few in the world come to apprehend it.
(Laozi 4, Gao Ming 1996: 37.)

Here Laozi distinguishes between what he presents as objective observations about the softest thing in the world and about the non-existent. Then he goes on to what he presents as an explicitly subjective deduction: he says wu shi yi zhi 吾是以知 “therefore I/we know”. He does not simply say gu 故 “therefore”, thus. Is this really Laozi’s psychological and autobiographical report on himself? It seems that we know far too little about the author’s person for that sort of personal psychological report to have a plausible psychological context.

There is no internal reason in the text why we should not be able to read this as: “therefore we know”. In any case, since the text tells us next to nothing about this “I”, it would not seem to matter whether it could be understood as a collective first-person pronoun.

The sage has no constant [heart] mind,
for he has the people’s [heart] minds as his own.
He is a true believer. The good one, [we] treat him as good;
the bad one, [we] also treat him as good.

And so he attains goodness.

For the sake of the world he meddles in his [heart] mind.
People all direct their ears and eyes to him,
Laozi comments on public opinion. He then goes on to identify certain appearances that are liable to arise with respect to his person. At first thought, it seems most implausible to understand the first-person pronouns here collectively and translate them as "we". Laozi adds a rather personal comment: It is precisely because he is indeed great that he is unlike others. Laozi is aware of the uniqueness of the sage in general, and of his own uniqueness. The crucial notion is that of du 說 (literally: "alone") But there is nothing in these texts to suggest that what we have here is writing rather than a saying by Laozi. And, on reflection, we had better be entirely clear what the internal explicit evidence is against taking the personal pronouns in the plural. "We are the only ones" is logically as well formed as "I alone". Why exactly are we sure that we have an individual "I" speaking to us?

用兵有奇 Those who [use weapons] carry on wars have a saying:我不為主而為客 We dare not be the host but would rather be the guest.不敢信尺寸之尺 We dare not advance one inch but would rather withdraw one foot.

Laozi 57, Gao Ming 1996: 102 ff.)

There is no internal evidence in the text that prevents us from translating "how do we know that this is so?". The other first-person pronouns are irrelevant because they are part of direct speech.

Laozi 57, Gao Ming 1996: 158.)

It looks as if, at the end of this passage, it is made clear that the whole piece should be read as a text with a personal touch. "If I underestimate the enemy I come close to losing my treasures." This must surely refer back to formulations like those in chapter 67 if it is to be comprehensible. But there still is that - albeit remote - possibility of a collective first-person pronoun.

AUTHORIAL PRESENCE IN PRE-BUDDHIST TEXTS

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吾何以知其然哉? Whereby do I know that this is so?

By the following:

天下有道 If there are many prohibitions in the realm,而民樸樸 Then the people will get the poorer for it.

民不聊生 If the people have many instruments of profit,國家晏愜 Then the state will get the more darkened for it.

人多伎巧 If the people have many skills and tricks,師欲放焉 Then the strange implements will increase.

法令繁飾 The more laws and ordinances are made widely known,盗跖多采 The more thieves and malefactors there will be.

故聖人云 Therefore the Sage says:

我無為 When I have no actions,而民自正 Then the people will be transformed of themselves.

我好靜 When I love stillness,而民自正 Then the people will be corrected of themselves.

我好事 When I make nothing my business,而民自富 Then the people will be enriched of themselves.

我無欲 I have no [extravagant] desires.而民自朴 Then the people turn to simplicity of themselves.

(4)

Laozi 57, Gao Ming 1996: 102 ff.)
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Laozi sets out with a reflection in which he imagines himself in a certain situation, and he is surprised that other people behave differently, "love by-passes". At the end of this passage, there is no need to say that the person who is calling this "the boasting of thieves" is primarily Laozi himself. The "I" does not, in this chapter, speak explicitly as an individual writing the chapter.

It seems unnatural to translate the wo 我 as "we" here: the reflection seems almost on a personal level. And yet: can we exclude the possibility that the text speaks of the collective attitude of a group? What are the decisive grounds for this?

That possibility becomes even more remote as we turn to the next relevant chapter:

Laozi speaks here as the author of words. We do not know whether these were written or spoken. He reflects on their effect on the world. Laozi is confident about his words and deeds: "These words have their ancestry. [My] deeds have their guiding principle." Then we get a direct piece of personal information on his real worry; lack of general recognition. At the same time a proud assertion: "Those [presumably few] who take me as their model are prominent." Without humility, Laozi subsumes himself under the concept of the sage: we are given to understand that his position is a humble one, limiting him to sack-cloth clothes.

The hoi polloi of the Greeks have their perfect equivalent in the zhong ren 罡人 "the common crowd". The pose of the thinker is a sentimental, tragic one; we have a case of the self-satisfied, inspired melancholy of the genius whose genius consists in feeling stupid. His stupidity arises from the fact that he does not take for granted the pleasures and values that the common crowd live by.

But how exactly do we decide that this is not a collective alienation? One point on which Laozi, the sage, feels stupid and confused is that of terminology for his most important concepts. He does not say that there are no appropriate concepts, he describes the psychology of nomenclature. "I don't know its family name." Of course he knows that
concepts do not have family names. We have deliberate personification of the central concepts. Not only is it described as “the Mother”, and so forth, we also have a playful refusal to tie important concepts to words. Playful it may appear, but it is not jocular in the spirit of Zhuangzi.

有物混成， There was a something achieved in chaos,
先天地生。 And it was born before Heaven and Earth.
寂兮寥兮独立不改。 Quiet, empty, standing alone it does not change.
周行而不殆。 It completes its orbits, is never exposed to danger.
可以為天下母。 One may regard it as the mother of the world.
吾不知其名， It we do not know its/her name.
強字之曰道。 If forced to give it an appellation It we say: “the Way”,
強名之曰大。 And if forced to give it a style It we say: “the Great”.
大曰逝。 The Great is called “the Receding”.
逝曰遠。 The Receding is called “the Far Away”.
遠曰返。 The Far Away is called “the Returning”.
故道大， Thus the Way is great,
天大。 Heaven is great,
地大。 Earth is great,
人亦大。 And Man is also great.
域中有四大。 Within the confines of space there are four Great Ones,
兩官居其一者。 And Man occupies one of these places.
人法地。 Man takes Earth as his model,
地法天。 The Earth takes Heaven as her model,
天法道。 Heaven takes the Way as its model,
道法自然。 And the Way takes what is naturally so as its model.
(Laozi 25, Gao Ming 1996: 350.)

At certain points it is as if Laozi personalises certain general observations and makes them into a part of his personal conviction rather than an objective wisdom.

無欲之天下而為之。 The one who intends and wishes to capture the world and work for this,
吾見其不得已。 It we can see that he definitely will not succeed.
天下神器。 The world is a daemonic object,
不可為也。 And it cannot be manipulated.
為者败之。 He who manipulates it will ruin it,
執者失之。 And he who holds onto it will lose it.
夫物或行或隨。 As for creatures, some choose a path, others follow,
或鸞或俛。 Some breath lightly, others heavily,
或强或羸。 Some are strong, others weak,
或生或破。 Some break things to pieces, others are broken into pieces.
是以聖人去甚。 Therefore the sage eschews excessiveness.
去奢。 He eschews luxury,
去泰。 He eschews grandeur.
(Laozi 29, Gao Ming 1996: 377.)

But how exactly are we sure that the insight here is not a collective one: “We can see...”? Even within the context of Taoist “metaphysics” there is, occasionally, what we are inclined to read as a characteristic personal touch. Laozi declares his philosophy of life not as an impersonal doctrine but as a personal strategy:

道常無為， The Way constantly practises non-action.
而無不為。 And there is nothing it does not get done.
侯王若能守之。 If lords and kings were able to keep to it,
萬物將自化。 Then the myriad creatures would be transformed of themselves.
化而後名。 If when there is transformation desires arise,
名物生之有無之際。 Then It we shall restrain it with the simplicity of the Nameless.
無名之樞。 Given the simplicity of the Nameless.
夫亦將無欲。 Then one surely will be free from desires.
不欲以靜。 If one is free from desires and thus gains peace,
天下將自定。 Then the world will be at peace of itself.
(Laozi 37, Gao Ming 1996: 425-426.)

There are cases when we are not inclined to take the first-person pronoun in a strict referential sense: we are tempted to translate “we” or “one”. There is an important question of what the stylistic force of this is; whether we should not feel constrained to reproduce the Chinese effect by retaining the “I” so that we get a much more lively rendering:

躭辱若驚。 Favour and disgrace are like something frightening.
貴大患身。 And honours as well as great calamities are [transient] like the body.
何謂順辱若驚? What do we mean by “favour and disgrace are something frightening”?
盛為下。 Favour is the lowliest thing.
得之若驚。 When you get it you still get frightened.
失之若驚。 And when you lose it still get frightened.
是謂煩辱若驚。 This is what we mean by “favour and disgrace are something frightening”.
何謂貴大患若身? What do we mean by “honours as well as great calamities are [transient] like the body”?
吾所以有大患。 The reason why one suffers great calamities,
為吾有身。 is because one has a body.
及吾無身。 When one gets to the point that one has no body,
吾有何患? What calamity is there for one?
故貴以身為天下。 Therefore someone who is so honoured that he takes his body to be the world,
若可與為天下。 One can still entrust the realm to.
愛以身為天下。 Someone who is so stingy that he takes his body to be the world,
若可與託天下。 One can still entrust the realm to.
(Laozi 13, Gao Ming 1996: 278 has only two first-person pronouns.)
The explicit pronouns wo 我 and wu 吾 are common in the Laozi, but some points are clear:

1) The unambiguously singular first-person pronouns are absent in the Laozi;
2) There is no first-person pronoun that refers to the author of the text as engaged in the composition or production of that very text. (There is one reference to wu yan 吾言 "my/our words", in chapter 70, but these are not the concrete words of the book we have. The Mawangdui version in chapter 25, Gao Ming 1996: 350, "吾強言之大", "when pushed [to give it a name] I/we call it great", does not change this picture: what is being talked about is general language policy, not concrete formulation of the Laozi text.)
3) Whereas the first-person pronouns are common in many chapters, none of them are autobiographic uses, so that even if we take them in the first-person, the self-references yield no biographical information except that the Way of person/s involved was widely regarded as great (ch. 70).
4) The explicit "you" referring to or appealing to the reader is completely absent in the Laozi. This is a crucial point on which I want to dwell.

Zi 子 "you", or other words with this kind of meaning, never refer to the reader in Chinese prose literature. Direct address is to the listener, or to the recipient of letters, memorials and the like. In ancient China this form was not transferred to larger-scale books. These, unlike their Roman counterparts, do not have overtly addressed addressees. For example, the following has to be within the scope of direct speech.

丘也與女皆夢也，予謂汝夢，亦夢也。 Confucius and you are all dreams. And I calling you a dream is also a dream. (Zhuangzi 2.)

There is no clear evidence that Zhuangzi addressed his readership with a second-person pronoun. But somehow one would not be surprised if one found an example where he did. We shall return to this question of the explicitly addressed public at several points below.

We must now remember that yu 于 "I", like yu 余 "I" are unambiguously singular. The phrase yu yi ren 余一人 "I, the single person", is current in early Zhou literature. And the pronoun would be singular even without the addition of yi ren 一人. Sima Qian regularly uses unambiguously singular first-person pronouns, and so does Chuci.

The case of the Zhuangzi

The following could not, according to the rules of pre-Han Chinese rhetoric as I understand them at this stage, involve Zhuangzi addressing his reader, except if we assume that breaking rhetorical rules is exactly what we would expect of Zhuangzi.

既使我與若辯矣，若勝我，我不若勝，若果是也，我果非也邪？
我勝若，若不勝我，果果是也，而果非也邪？其果是也，果果是也，其果非也邪？
You and I having been made to argue over alternatives, if it is you not I that wins, is it really you who are on to it, I who am not. If it is I not you that wins, is it really I who am on to it, you who are not? Is one of us on to it and the other of us not? Or are both of us on to it and both of us not? (Zhuangzi 2, tr. Graham 1981: 60.)

In his translation Graham takes Zhuangzi to be addressing the reader as "you". This is plausible for a Westerner and perhaps to westernised modern Chinese, but such a reference is exceedingly rare according to the rhetorical conventions of pre-Han Chinese. Most modern punctuated editions (except Guan Feng 關融) will take this to be part of Chang Wuzi's speech, in which case there is no reference to the reader of the book. We need a set of neat examples of the reader being addressed by ruo 若 ("I") before such an interpretation begins to be plausible. Words like zi 子 "you" cannot refer to the reader of a book, only to the listener within a story, or to the addressee of a letter or memorial.

This is the general rule throughout pre-Buddhist literature. And yet Zhuangzi can address his readership in an unusually communicative chapter like "Rifling Trunks", thus demonstrating that there is nothing somehow completely unthinkable in addressing the readership. The exception shows up the element of manifest cultural choice in the rule:

子獨不知聖德之世乎？

I am extremely keen to find more examples of this sort, especially in other pre-Buddhist authors.

By comparison with the Laozi, the Zhuangzi strikes one in several ways as a much more personal book, as has been often noted. For one thing, a character by the name of Zhuangzi figures prominently in the book. For another, autobiographic first-person pronouns might seem to abound in that text. One might even want to cite to the opening of chapter 3 as a case in point:
Here the author, wo 我, is contrasted with the others, ren 人, but significantly there is nothing in the context which definitely or absolutely excludes a plural reading: “or are only we confused”. The first-person pronoun may be self-referential but it is not autobiographical. It might even plausibly be taken to refer to the group constituted by the author and his intended esoteric audience. Certainly the first-person does not present himself as the writer of a whole book or any part of it.

This is part of a quite unusual internal dialogue where Zhuangzi writes as if transcribing his inner uncertainties. This rhetorical feature is rare even within the book Zhuangzi.4

百骸，九竅，六腑，顱面 DOCUMENTS，吾誰與為友？

Of the hundred joints, nine openings, six viscera all present and complete, which should I [or: we] recognize as more kin to me than another? (Zhuangzi 2, tr. Graham 1981: 51.)

Again, nothing excludes the plural here, but nothing particularly recommends it.

誰有神勇，且不能知，吾豈且奈何哉！

Even the daemonic Yu could not understand you, and what am I [or: are we] supposed to manage to do about it [i.e., how am I supposed to understand]? (Zhuangzi 2, ed. Wang Shumin 1988: 56, tr. Graham 1981: 51.)

The plural remains possible.

自我觀之： From my [or: our] point of view,

仁義之端： The starting points of goodness and humaneness,

是非之塗： and the path of right and wrong,

樊然縠蠱： are hopelessly confused.

吾誰與為朋？ How should I [or: we] be able to tell the difference.

(Zhuangzi 2, ed. Wang Shumin 1988: 79.)

謂吾所謂天之非人乎？ How do I [or: we] know that what I call Heaven is not human?

所謂人之非天乎？ And that what I [or: we] call human is not from Heaven?

(Zhuangzi 6, beginning; ed. Wang Shumin 1988: 205.)

夫大塊載我以形， The great eld supports me/us with a body,

操我以生， it bohers me/us with life,

佚我以老， it gives me/us peace in old age,

息我以死。 it gives me/us rest in death.

所以吾生者。 Therefore my/us considering life as good,

4. See Zhuangzi 12, end, for a less spectacular but still relevant case of authorial you 子.
One might argue that the author relates in a personal way to the Way. There is an apparent contrast with the *Laozi*. But one might still go on to insist that all these may be plausibly read in the plural. What this means is that even when read in the singular, they have no truly personal, individual ring to them in this context. We still do not have the autobiographical "I", even less the authorial "me".

Paradoxically, the authorial "I" is more manifestly present in the *Zhuangzi* without any overt pronoun or pseudo-pronoun whatsoever:

在 the book. There are similar well-known cases involving speech habits of Confucius. The "trying" is not a collective trying, it is not a collective but an individual pose, a pose close to, but not identical with, the traditional Western *dubitatio*, "hesitation".

Authorial presence is a matter of degree, and it will not come as a surprise to anyone that there is more of it in the *Zhuangzi* than in the *Laozi*. Large parts of the book *Zhuangzi* have a presupposed omniscient and ultimately impersonal sage "I" as the authorial persona. But there is another note in the *Zhuangzi*. It turns out that the question of the rhetoric of authorship in the *Zhuangzi* is sometimes extremely complex and almost post-modern.

I shall consider the opening lines of the first chapter of the book as an example. The first thing mentioned is a *bei ming* 北冥 "Northern Dark". And we only understand this reference if we realise that the author does not really intend to make a reference to anything at all. Commentators like Sima Biao 司馬彪 suggest that this is at the North Pole. The place is imaginary. The next thing we hear of is a fish, and the same is true of this fish. It is no use speculating whether it was a whale, as some commentators do: the thing is a fragment of the writer's poetic and philosophical imagination. Next comes a little philological scandal: the fish is called a *kun* 鰲 "spawn, tiny baby-fish", just as the vast sea in the North is called the *tianchi* 天池 "Pond of Heaven". It is no use explaining this away as a scribal error for some name of a gigantic fish: the name is a playful fragment of the author's imagination. There is, of course, a philosophy behind this apparent incongruousness: what we must describe as a gigantic fish might still be, in a cosmic perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*, a tiny fish. The author teases his congenial readership into this insight. Many later commentators were unable to enter into this world of flippant rhetoric.

What all this complex rhetoric does, however, is to force the reader to speculate on the author's underlying intention as opposed to the overt and covert linguistic meaning of the text. We are not told about the fish and the bird because we are invited to believe in their existence and transformation. The meaning is beyond the discourse. The text is an instrument in the hands of an author who must be focussed if the text is to be appreciated properly. The vast expanse of water that sustains the gigantic fish is referred to as a *chi* 池, "pond": the usage is provocative, certainly not naive, but neither is it mystical in a technical sense, as we often find in the *Laozi*. The *Zhuangzi* cultivates the traditional Western rhetorical category of the *aprosoketon*, "the unexpected", sometimes to the point where one comes to expect the unexpected. Even when *Zhuangzi*
quotes the “Jests of Qi” as an authoritative text, we suspect an authorial intention of ridiculing the insistence on references to historical authorities. What kind of a serious “authority” are the “Jests of Qi”? We read this source with suspended belief.

Then, in an abrupt change of rhetorical perspective, the reader is faced with a short passage of philosophical poetry. The giant bird is described as ye ma 野馬, “floating vapour”, and minute dust blown about by the creator breath: the reader suspects he is hearing the Master’s Voice. Zhuangzi himself. Or does he? He has no way of being sure. Before the reader has made up his mind on this, the perspective changes radically again. Zhuangzi invites the reader to join the bird in the subjectivity of its mystical flight, to see the world through its eyes. He does this by first inviting the reader to join his own subjectivity: “Is what appears as the blue of the sky the true colour of the sky, or is it just an optical effect of distance?” When this world appears to the bird, then it stops.

We are almost metaphysically elevated. But, abruptly, the reader is brought down to earth with perfectly mundane reflections on the amount of water needed to float a boat. Parenthetically inserted into this, again, a surely trivial reflection on how mustard seed would float in a puddle: are we to take this as Zhuangzi’s serious discourse? Surely we have parody of mundane pedestrian thinking. His rhetoric keeps us guessing.

After all this parenthetical material, Zhuangzi returns briefly to straight poetic and reasoned narrative: the bird faces south. Then, abruptly, Zhuangzi enters the psychological world of the cicada and the turtle-dove: a new change of philosophical perspective. The discourse of these little animals is entirely from their own world of undergrowth and bushes. Abruptly again, Zhuangzi goes on to an ordinary and reasonable human perspective: surely, one has to make sure that one has proper supplies according to how far one intends to travel. These little animals have a hopelessly narrow perspective. “What do they know?” Surely, small intelligence does not reach large intelligence.

Zhuangzi’s conclusion, introduced by the potentially pompous gu yue 故曰, “therefore it is said”, is a sequence of oxymora, “contradictions in terms”, in which he rises above these various perspectives: the person with a perfectly developed self has no self; the person with spiritual achievements has no achievements; the renowned sage has no fame. Thus the momentum of the liberation from omniscient-sage mode of authorship represented in the Laozi leads not only to an occasional personal authorial presence, but to a highly complex ironic display of assumed authorial personae. This is manifest in the first chapter of the book, common in the Inner Chapters, and there are quite a few reflections of it in the rest of the book. Soon afterwards, this initial momentum was lost. There is none of it left in Huainanzi 淮南子 (second century BC), none in Guo Xiang 郭象 (died 312 AD) or Xiang Xiu 向秀 (ca. 221–309 AD), certainly none of it in the Liezi 列子 (third century AD).

Thus, in the Zhuangzi we not only have yu yan 語言, “attributed, fictitious words”, we have an author who assumes a whole range of voices, an author who deliberately avoids the ordinary straight mode of saying “I the author of this piece of writing am telling you, the intended reader of that piece, my current honest opinion as follows...”, the mode which is never used throughout, for example, by Wang Chong 王充 (27 AD–ca. 100 AD). Lu Deming 陸德明 (AD 556-627) in his preface to the Zhuangzi comments very much to the point:

The literary zest is lush and profound.
正言若反。 His [seemingly] straightforward formulations are as if turned round [i.e. ironical?]).

In the Xunzi 孫子 the typical uses of wēi 我 outside quotation is impersonal:

若夫志氣蔽，德行厚，知見明，生於今而志乎古，則是其在我者也。
Was nun solche Dinge anbelangt, wie die Pflege des eigenen Innern, ernsthaftes Bemühren um sittlichen Lebenswandel, Klärung des eigenen Wissens und Planens, trotz des Lebens im Heute nicht auch die Alten vergessen u.s.f., so hängt das alles vom Menschen persönlich (wēi) ab. (Köster 1967: 218.)
... ce sont des choses qu'on a en soi. (Xunzi 17, Kamenarovic 206.)

故我樂之以亡，敵得之以譏。
Was also [die Regierenden] selbstsüchtig horten, dient nur dem eigenen Untergang, während der Feind, falls er das Gehörte erobert, dadurch nur stärker wird. (Köster 1967: 94.)

Knoblock posits a quotation and thus avoids a reference to the author of the Xunzi:

Thus, amassing tax revenues on my part will bring on my destruction, and my enemies by gaining my lands will be made stronger. (Xunzi 9.29; Knoblock1988, 1: 98.)

The case of wēi 我 in Xunzi is similar. The meaning is close to the impersonal “one”:

5. Qu 謝 "zest" is an important technical term of aesthetic appreciation.
spuriously personalise the statement, thus distorting the impersonal mode of the original: “Ich nenne das Behauptungen von Phantasten”, “I call that the opinions of men with uncontrolled phantasies.”

The varieties of the authorial “I” in ancient Chinese literature

The constitutive features of textuality are manifestly problematic in traditional ancient Chinese prose literature.6 (Inscriptions, letters and the like raise complex problems in their own right that are beyond my present scope.) The books we have (our textus recepti) are results of long processes of literary accretion from widely different sources. Compilation, editorial redaction, scribal, and authorial functions tended to be disconcertingly separate.

If we were to treat such texts as written statements by an author intending to convey his thoughts to a general public (present and future), we would be making a very serious hermeneutic category mistake. Such hermeneutic category mistakes affect translation. Thus, for example, it is often directly relevant for translation that the “gentle (generalised) reader” of a book, the person addressed by the proverbial caveat lector, is practically never mentioned in all of traditional pre-Buddhist prose literature and that he certainly is not routinely addressed in any of our traditional texts of the period. One must realise that, when one interprets an author as directly addressing his audience by a second-person pronoun, one attributes to him an act of hermeneutic revolution.

First, there is the speaker who is quoted, the context-bound “I” presented in explicit quotation, where a speaker is addressing a concrete audience that is within earshot. The Lunyu 論語 is a text that presents predominantly such context-bound quotations. But already in that text, one has to be aware that what is said may begin to be intended as decontextualised statement, where the “I”, while physically addressing an audience within earshot, is aware that he will indirectly reach a wider audience. Confucius, Mo Di 莫離 (late fifth century BC), Yan Ying 晏嬰 (ca. 580–500 BC) and Mencius belong into this category: they are known not through writings but as the originators of dicta. In these books there is an embedded “auctorial” I. Consider the case of Mozi 15:
Fifthly, there is the writer-editor, the "I" presenting himself as the person who composed certain written documents and who declares himself responsible for the overall arrangement of these documents in an integrated "book" through an editorial policy and editorial remarks. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 – ca. 85 BC) is a case of such a writer-editor, who even introduces cross-references to other parts of his book into his text.

Finally, one might be tempted to introduce the compiler-editor, the "I" presenting himself as the person who is responsible for the overall arrangement of certain materials from different sources. Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BC) and Liu Buwei 呂不韋 (ca. 290–235 BC) might appear to be cases of such compiler-editors. However, it is characteristically difficult to find passages where these editors refer to themselves in the first person.

If we now turn to the instances where a person refers to himself in some sense or another as the author of a given text, further complications arise. We have already noted the important question of whether he ever engages in a dialogue with the public reader, whether he ever dramatises this dialogue in something like the form "You might say... But I tell you..." The answer is, he does not.

But there are important further questions concerning pre-Buddhist Chinese texts:

1) How do writers pose for their audience: what are their standardised poses? What is the cultural register of authorial personae "masks" in pre-Buddhist China?

2) To what extent and how do writers explicitly place passages in their writing in a personal-life autobiographic context? What is the cultural register of autobiographic contextualisation in pre-Buddhist China?

3) To what extent do we find the fictionalisation of the authorial Self? What is the cultural register of prosopopeia?

4) To what extent could authors explicitly address their writings to themselves? Archilochos: thyme thym’ amechanoinos pemasi kyko-menos. ... Cicerò’s "Consolatio", written as advice to himself after the death of his beloved daughter, Tullia.

5) What is the cultural register of sustained and explicit inner conflict among writers?

6) To what extent could authors correct their own use of language through such phrases as "or rather"? What is the cultural register of second thoughts on one's own formulations in pre-Buddhist China?

7. I shall abandon the term "auctor" as soon as I hear of a less offensive way of putting the matter.
Questions of this order are legion. Few of them have been investigated by a "historical critical method". Historically well-founded answers to these questions will severely restrict the range of plausible translations in all those Chinese texts where one of the grammatically possible readings would attribute to a pre-Buddhist writer authorial ploys and devices that were alien to the culture at a given stage.

Aside from questions of historical grammar, historical lexicography, the semantics of sentences, and so on, there are crucial dimensions of the historical anthroplogy of literary communication which should define and limit the options translators have when approaching traditional Chinese texts. We need more than W.V.O. Quine's *Principle of Charity* (interpret in such a way that a maximum of statements you interpret turn out to be true) and more than Richard Grandy's *Principle of Humanity* (interpret in such a way that a maximum of the statements you interpret turn out to be consistent with each other). What we need is a *Principle of Hermeneutic Austerity*: Do not attribute to texts of a certain culture, time and genre semantic features and rhetorical devices that are not a plausible part of the literary communication in that culture, at that time, and in that genre. This may sound plausible to the point of triviality. It is therefore all the more surprising that this principle is so consistently overlooked in translations from classical Chinese.

Concluding remarks

Some relevant contrasts between different varieties of authorial "I" must be distinguished. Firstly, and crucially, one has to emphasise the fact that the non-explicit authorial "I" is often much more personal and individual than the explicit authorial "I".

There is the important question of the scope of authorship claimed by the authorial "I": is it a passage in a chapter, a sequence of passages or episodes, the chapter as a whole, a sequence of chapters, or a whole book?

There is an important progression from the abstract, untensed authorial "I" which construes itself as the author of the whole text or passage to the tensed author who construes himself as being at a given stage in the production of his text.

There is the basic difference between an author who construes his role as emotionally expressive versus the authorial "I" which poses as a transmitter of fact and judgment.

There is the difference between the authorial "I" that construes itself as the producer of oral text versus the authorial "I" that construes itself as the author of the written text.

There is the contrast between the authorial "I" that construes itself or poses as being in a concrete dialogue with a certain audience and the authorial "I" that simply expounds things to an uncircumscribed and unfocussed general audience.

There is the contrast between the authorial "I" that poses as the creator versus the author that poses as the transmitter of messages.

There is the contrast between the authorial "I" that poses as a real historical person versus the authorial "I" that poses as an explicitly fictional character.

There is the contrast between the authorial "I" that poses as objective versus the authorial "I" that poses as subjective.

There is the contrast between the authorial "I" that poses as a generic, collective "I/we" versus the authorial "I" that poses as an individualistic "I".

Finally, among many other distinctions along these lines, one might mention the distinction between the authorial "I" as referring to a concrete author versus the abstract philosophical "I" that no longer refers to the individual author at all but to the generalised philosophical notion of the "Self".

I shall not continue in this recitation of relevant contrasts within the conceptual field of the authorial "I". My point is that, unless and until the historical dynamics of the evolution of such contrasting construals of the authorial "I" in early Chinese literature is given proper close attention, unless it is closely reconstructed text by text, chapter by chapter, passage by passage, histories of early Chinese literature will omit a central feature in the evolution of early Chinese literary sensibilities. The study of this important subject, it seems to me, has barely begun.
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Rémunérer la défaisance des mots