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TRANSLATION REVIEW

Zhuangzi. The Way of Nature

Illustrated by C. C. Tsai. Foreword by Edward Slingerland

Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019,
xvi + 237 pp.

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When the renowned academic publisher Princeton University Press decides to publish a comic book, it has to be something special. And indeed, the English translation of C. C. Tsai's comic version of the *Zhuangzi* is such a special thing.

Born in 1948, the Taiwanese Tsai Chih Chung 蔡志忠 became one of Asia's most famous cartoonists. As Brian Bruya states in his introduction to the present book (xv): "At the height of his popularity as a syndicated cartoonist, he turned in yet another direction - the illustration of the Chinese classics in comic book format. They were an instant success and propelled him to the top of the bestseller list". More than 40 million copies in over twenty languages of C. C. Tsai's comic versions of the classics were sold. In his foreword to the present book, Edward Slingerland (ix) testifies to the impact upon him of C. C. Tsai's version of the «*Zhuangzi*», a copy of which he came across in a local bookstore when he was studying in Taiwan in the late 1980s: "The drawings themselves were wonderful and really seemed to capture the spirit of the text as I'd glimpsed it in English. Probably more importantly, the *baihua* (colloquial) Chinese explanations and dialogues vividly brought to life the conversations and stories that I was struggling to comprehend as I slogged through the painfully difficult original text. The original classical Chinese appeared in the margins, so I could refer back to it, but the illustrations and lively modern Chinese gave me an easy and pleasurable way to access the ideas behind the text".

In the present English version of the text, done by Brian Bruya, the original layout has been kept intact. In the margins, we find the original classical Chinese text, and the colloquial Chinese of the text balloons in the original work have been replaced by equally lively colloquial English. All in all, 155 stories from the Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, and Miscellaneous Chapters (with the exception of chapter 33 (All-under-Heaven) of the «*Zhuangzi*» are rendered into a comic version. Among this selection, we find such famous stories as 'Huizi's Giant Gourds', 'Three at Dawn and Four at Dusk', 'The Dream of the Butterfly', 'The Cook Carves Up a Cow', 'A Tree's Natural Life Span', 'An Autumn Flood', 'The Frog in the Well', 'Zhuangzi Drums to Death', and 'Catch the Fish, Discard the Trap'.

The philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* which, through these stories, is made easily accessible for the reader who is not familiar with Chinese classical philosophy is further succinctly

introduced in Brian Bruya's introduction, touching upon the pre-Qin history of China, the development of the so-called 'one hundred philosophical schools', and the basic ideas of 'Daoist' philosophy. For the lay reader, the fact that contemporary scholarship has raised many questions on the authenticity of the text and its possible authorship(s), is not of primary concern and should not distract her or him from the general philosophical message conveyed in the selected stories. Text-historical questions may be of importance for the sinologist, but even for the sinologist, the comic drawings and witty expressions of the book more than once conjure up a smile. After all, as C. C. Tsai allegedly said: "I work 365 days a year, 18 hours a day, but at the same time I am not working at all because I am just enjoying what I am doing". Or as Brian Bruya phrased it: "This book is the result of playtime in his modest studio" (xvi).

When "not all conventions are as useful, benign, or advantageous as they are often made out to be" (xiii), this Princeton University Press comic version of the «*Zhuangzi*», with the visual dimension that brings the reader directly into the world of the ancients, is both for the sinologist and for the lay reader alike, a very enjoyable book – and that is what it should be.

In 2018, the English versions of C. C. Tsai's «*The Analects*» (translation by Brian Bruya; foreword by Michael Puett) and «*The Art of War*» (translation by Brian Bruya; foreword by Lawrence Freedman) were also published, and, in 2020 also the English version of his «*Dao De Jing*» (translation by Brian Bruya; foreword by Pico Iyer) was published.

