

ZHUANGZI'S "DREAM OF THE BUTTERFLY"— A DAOIST INTERPRETATION

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I.

This is how Herbert A. Giles rendered the famous "Dream of the Butterfly" episode from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 into English:

Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly, and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly, I awaked, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a barrier. The transition is called *Metempsychosis*.¹

Giles' translation turned out to be rather influential in the Western philosophical world, since it was eventually used by Martin Buber as a main source for his *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tschuang-Tse*² (Speeches and allegories of Zhuangzi). Buber's edition became very popular among Western intellectuals and inspired a new wave of exoticism among certain well-known philosophers and writers like Martin Heidegger and Hermann Hesse.³

I cite Giles' translation not so much because of its impact on the Western image of Chinese philosophy (and, I presume, the impact this image has had in turn on the contemporary understanding of Chinese philosophy, especially of Daoism, in China itself) as because of the peculiar interpretation it confers on the "Dream of the Butterfly." This interpretation on the one hand is highly representative of what might be called the general understanding of Daoist philosophy in our time while on the other it quite obviously contradicts a traditional Daoist understanding of the text in China. The present essay may thus also be understood as a case study of contemporary misconceptions of "Eastern" philosophy or "wisdom."

Giles' translation of this short, but extremely complex passage of the *Zhuangzi* is more or less compatible with most Western and modern Chinese interpretations and commentaries.⁴ This general line of understanding of the "Dream of the Butterfly" and its corresponding philosophical teaching can be summed up in the following manner: Zhuang Zhou 莊周 dreams he is a butterfly; then he wakes up, remembers his dream, and, because of his remembrance, starts to doubt his own reality and existence.⁵ The philosophical "message" of the story is believed to be something like an insight into the vanity and contingency of (human) existence. This insight might also include an insight into the impermanence of all distinctions in our world, and hence into our interwovenness with all beings in a continuous process of

change. From such a point of view the “Dream of the Butterfly” raises such philosophical questions as what really *are* human beings or things in the final analysis, and what is, after all, true?

In my opinion, neither such an interpretation of the content of the story nor the related philosophical questions are “Daoist.” Nor do I think that Zhuang Zhou remembers “his” dream or that he subsequently starts to doubt his existence. And I also oppose the philosophical conclusion that the story illustrates the relativity of distinctions in the world. I rather take it to illustrate the opposite “moral”: it teaches the importance, the necessity, or the “sense” of distinctions in the world.

Such an understanding of the famous passage from the *Zhuangzi*, even though it contradicts most prevalent interpretations, is by no means original. In fact it is based on the classical commentary on the *Zhuangzi* by Guo Xiang 郭象 (A.D. 252–312).⁶ Therefore, I only claim to be reintroducing a Daoist view on this beautiful piece of philosophical literature (without even claiming to be a Daoist myself).

II.

The “Dream of the Butterfly,” when read along with its commentary by Guo Xiang, can be analyzed on three levels. First I rehearse the “plot” of the story, then I point out its allegorical meaning, and finally I lay out the philosophical ideas implicit in it.

1. Concerning the “plot” of the “Dream of the Butterfly,” it is important for Guo Xiang’s Daoist interpretation that Zhuang Zhou does *not* remember “his” dream—just as the butterfly in the dream has no idea of the Zhuang Zhou who fell asleep before it (the butterfly) “came into being.” Guo Xiang’s Zhuang Zhou has absolutely forgotten “his” dream. When Zhuang Zhou “wakes up,” Guo Xiang explicitly comments on his “mind” at this point:

The not-knowing about a butterfly at this moment is not different from the not-knowing about a Zhuang Zhou during the time of the dream.

It is totally obvious to Guo Xiang that Zhuang Zhou, once he is awake, no longer knows anything of “his” dream. Zhuang Zhou does not remember what “he” had dreamed, and therefore he has no reason whatsoever to start doubting anything.

When there is no remembering and no doubt involved in the “plot” anymore, a fundamental element of Giles’ translation disappears, too: the continuous “I” that like some substance underlies all the transformations of some Zhuang Zhou. This “I,” which in Giles’ translation of the short passage appears no less than ten times, is—for good reason—completely absent from the Chinese original. Giles’ interpretation is based on a continuous “I” that is at first Zhuang Zhou, and then, when “he” (the “I”) dreams, turns into a butterfly, and finally, after waking up, becomes Zhuang Zhou “again” and starts to remember his earlier experiences and subsequently begins to doubt. Guo Xiang’s interpretation is based on the opposite assumption: there is no continuous substance underlying the different stages of dreaming and being awake. He points out, rather, referring to the original text, that “at its own time, everything is completely in accord with its intentions.” This is to say that dur-

ing the time of the dream the butterfly is no one else but the butterfly without any qualities of some “Zhuang Zhou” or even some “I,” just as when awake Zhuang Zhou—whether before or after the dream—is nothing but Zhuang Zhou himself and does not have anything to do with a butterfly or with some strange “I” connecting him with butterflies. For Guo Xiang it is decisive for the story that in their respective times the butterfly is nothing but a butterfly and Zhuang Zhou is no one else but Zhuang Zhou, and that consequently there is no “I” involved that would accompany the beings of each stage. Since there is no such continuous “I” for Guo Xiang, there is also, in a strict sense, no transformation (nor “*metempsychosis*” as Giles suggests), since both of these terms imply that there is something that, in the course of transformation, changes “itself” and thus persists through these changes.

According to Guo Xiang’s reading, as Zhuang Zhou does not remember “his” dream, there is no idea of a doubting Zhuang Zhou who is not sure anymore of who “he” really is at the end of the story. In the absence of a doubting “I” that doubts itself at the end of the story, Guo Xiang’s reading ends up with perfect certainty, or, rather, *doubtlessness*. The Giles translation leaves the reader with a feeling of uncertainty about what is really real—dreaming or waking—but Guo Xiang points out that we have no reason to deny the reality of any of the stages described in the story: the butterfly of the dream is just as real as Zhuang Zhou (or the two Zhuang Zhou’s) being awake (before and after the dream). To Guo Xiang it is absolutely clear at the end of the story that “it cannot be proven that there was not earlier a butterfly dreaming so that there is a Zhou there now.” Since we cannot decide, from an unbiased point of view, which phenomenon is “only” a dream and which one is “reality,” both stages are “real” to the same degree. We cannot decide whether there is a Zhuang Zhou who becomes a butterfly during “his” dream or a butterfly who becomes a Zhuang Zhou in “its” dream. And so Guo Xiang, the Daoist, says that what we can be sure about is that the one is as “real” as the other. He concludes: “Being one, there is no knowledge of the other. Being a butterfly when dreaming is genuine.”

It is not that two existents mutually put their own reality into question, but rather—since there is no memory connecting them, and no bridge of a common “I” between them—that both are equally “authentic.” Guo Xiang does not give us a doubting Zhuang Zhou; in fact he gives us some doubtless entities: Zhuang Zhou (before and after the dream) and the butterfly. Since each is authentic at its own time and since it is impossible—from an independent perspective—to prove one of them to be more or less real than the other, it is evident and certain that they are both *equally* valid.⁷

For Guo Xiang, Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly are “indifferent” to each other in two senses: they do not know anything of each other, not even that the other exists, and they are absolutely indifferently (equally) valid. This twofold “indifference” of Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly (which is based on their complete difference) is the foundation for Guo Xiang’s allegorical interpretation of the story.

2. Guo Xiang draws a parallel between (a) the relation between being awake and dreaming and (b) a central topic of the *Zhuangzi*, the relation between life and

death. This analogy is for him the key to the allegorical interpretation of the story. Guo Xiang argues in the following way:

This “not know[ing] about a Zhou” while “[Zhuang Zhou] fell into a dream—and then there was a butterfly” is not different from the case of being dead. Since at its own place everything is completely in accord with its intentions, the one that is alive belongs to life just as the one that is dead belongs to death. From that we see, what a mistake it is to worry about death when being alive.

Just as Zhuang Zhou, during the time of the dream, is completely replaced by the butterfly, who does not know anything of a Zhuang Zhou who was awake—and vice versa—the one that is dead does not know anything of the one that is alive—and vice versa. Therefore, it is wrong to worry about death, since it is perfectly certain and *without any doubt* that it is impossible to prove one of the two realms to be more “authentic” than the other. Guo Xiang makes it clear that being awake is by no means more “real” than dreaming. When the text, after the dream, speaks of some “awakening,” Guo Xiang reminds us that this is “said from the perspective of Zhuang Zhou,” which is to say that the “awakening” can by no means “falsify the dream.” From an unbiased perspective, this “awakening” does not have the sense of an “awakening” from an illusion to reality. It is only a “little awakening,” the counterpart to “dreaming,” and not the “great awakening” that is the awakening from both average dreaming and being awake.⁸

Guo Xiang’s Daoist interpretation of the allegorical meaning of the story is this: just as dreaming is not less “authentic” than being awake, being dead is not less “authentic” than being alive. Therefore, only the stupid begin to doubt and worry in the face of death.⁹

3. With Guo Xiang’s interpretation in mind, it becomes clear that from a philosophical perspective, Giles’ translation is based on some conceptions that are quite obviously un-Daoistic. First, the notions of remembering and doubt, central to Giles’ version of the story, contradict the notions of forgetfulness and doubtlessness that are central to Guo Xiang’s. Thanks to these totally different assumptions about the main philosophical “leitmotifs,” Giles’ version of the story makes sense only because he introduces a continuous “I” that undergoes a series of transformations (which it is, moreover, able to reflect on), whereas in Guo Xiang’s Daoistic understanding each segment of the process of change is absolutely in its own right. In Guo Xiang’s understanding there is not at first “someone” who then is sometimes Zhuang Zhou, and then a butterfly, and then “again” (there is no mention of any “again” in the Chinese text) Zhuang Zhou “himself.” There is not any continuous “someone” who is at first alive and then dead: rather, since “at its own place everything is completely in accord with its intentions,” the butterfly is no one else but the butterfly, the dreamer is no one else but the dreamer, and the one that is dead is no one else but the one that is dead. The Daoist idea¹⁰ is not that of a bridge between the different segments constituting a process of change, and constituted by something that would continuously accompany all the segments. It is rather the idea that a sharp “distinction” (*fen* 分)

between the segments of a process is the basis for the equal authenticity of each segment. Guo Xiang writes:

The distinction between waking and dreaming is not different from the separation between life and death. The reason it is possible to be self-content in accord with one's intentions is that these distinctions are firmly established and not that there are no distinctions.

What is Daoistic is not the blurring of the borderlines between the segments, between (the two) Zhuang Zhou(s) and the butterfly, between being awake and dreaming, between life and death, nor the doubts about one's "real I," but rather the belief that the authenticity of each segment of a whole is guaranteed by the very fact that the segments are *not* connected to each other by any continuous bridge between them. It is un-Daoistic to believe that life and death are about the same and not clearly divided from each other: rather, life and death are as different, from the Daoist point of view, as they can possibly be.¹¹

The segments are separated from each other by a sharp distinction—and this is precisely the reason they can be seamlessly connected with each other. The sharply distinguished segments constitute a continuous and perfectly connected whole just because they have nothing in common with each other. What is continuous is the process from segment to segment: each segment is complete in itself precisely because no part of it is transferred to the following segment.

III.

So far I have discussed the relation between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly, between waking and dreaming, between life and death, and between the segments of a continuous process (which makes up our "world"). But this is still not the whole story of the "Dream of the Butterfly": there is another important element that should not be neglected. On the level of the "plot" this element is Zhuangzi as the narrator of the story; on the level of the allegorical meaning this element is the state beyond life and death; and on the level of philosophical ideas it is the non-being in the midst of being, or (as I prefer to call it) the non-presence in the midst of presence.

Using this third element of the story, I should like to describe the *structure* that makes the Daoist idea that is exemplified in the "Dream of the Butterfly" so different from the idea expressed in Giles' translation (which is surely much less "Eastern" in tone, being influenced by the metaphysical tradition of the West as represented by philosophers like Descartes or Kant).

The Daoist conception of the "world"—which to my mind is still dominating Chinese philosophical thought—is based on the very structural components that are revealed by Guo Xiang's interpretation of the "Dream of the Butterfly." Important philosophical leitmotifs such as forgetfulness and doubtlessness make sense against the background of a certain structural pattern. This pattern I would like to call the "structure of presence."

The structure of presence is first expressed in the “Dream of the Butterfly” when the butterfly in the dream is, in complete accord with itself, only itself and nothing else. The idea of “presence” is that whatever *is* is just what it is and nothing but what it is. This sort of pure presence characterizes (the two) Zhuang Zhou(s) and the butterfly in the story, whether awake or, in the other case, dreaming. According to the Daoist view, a process is constituted by such present segments, which are simply what they are—without the slightest split between an “I” and an “am.” Such is the process of dreaming and being awake, the process of life and death, the process of the “world.” The seasons of the year are likewise present segments constituting the process of time, and along with these the activities of human beings—which also have their respective times and places—constitute the social whole. Present segments constitute ongoing and continuous processes.

It is of crucial importance for the whole process that no segment violates the distinctions between the segments. To overstep one’s borderline is to violate one’s presence. If we start to remember or to doubt, if we start to split our “identity” by pondering on what “we” “are,” and if, while being alive, we start to worry about death, we leave our total “presence”—we violate our present “identity.” If, while awake, we ponder our dreams, as soon as we start to “reflect,” we are no longer perfectly present. When one oversteps the limits of one’s momentary segment, when one does something *at the wrong time* or *at the wrong place*, one not only does harm to oneself but also brings disorder to the sequence of segments and thereby endangers the order of the whole process. In short, one acts in disaccord with *Dao* (which is nothing but the well-structured process).

All segments of the perfect process are likewise “present.” Neither life nor death, neither waking nor dreaming, is inauthentic. None of the segments is more or less present than any other segment. The realm of presence is called *you* 有 by the Daoists. Everything—the ten-thousand things (*wan wu* 萬物)—which “is there” (*you*) is present.

However, the present segments do not alone constitute the continuous process. The realm of presence (*you*) is held together by non-presence (*wu* 無). The image of the wheel (from the *Daodejing* 道德經, chapter 11) helps to illustrate this structure: just as the empty “non-present” hub in the midst of the wheel holds together all “present” spokes (which are clearly distinct from each other), the continuous process of the segments revolves around non-presence.¹²

In the “Dream of the Butterfly” this notion of non-presence in the midst of present segments is manifested by Zhuangzi, the narrator. In the midst of the two Zhuang Zhou(s) and the butterfly, there is (the non-present) Zhuangzi himself. “Once,” the story begins, there was a Zhuang Zhou. Giles identifies Zhuang Zhou with Zhuangzi, the writer of the book, of whom we know that his name was Zhuang Zhou. But apparently Zhuangzi, the narrator, does not at all identify himself anymore with this Zhuang Zhou: “once” there was such a person, he begins. Hence, there is no first-person-singular narrator in this story. Zhuangzi, the narrator, has already given up any identification with a certain person. Once there was a Zhuang Zhou, but now Zhuangzi, according to other passages in the book, is “a man who has

forgotten himself" (*wang ji zhi ren* 忘己之人).¹³ Zhuangzi tells us the story of a Zhuang Zhou (or, rather, two of them), having already given up any identification with himself. Zhuangzi has thus taken the place of the Daoist sage—because it is precisely the Daoist sage “who has forgotten himself.” Zhuangzi is non-present in the midst of the present Zhuang Zhou(s) and butterfly.

The place of the Daoist sage is the hub of the wheel, the empty space between the segments of a process. This place is equally close to all segments, in the midst of the process, and yet it does not turn along with it. It is the unchanging center in the midst of change. In the story, in the midst of a Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly—neither awake nor dreaming, neither alive nor dead, with no “identity” at all—is the narrator Zhuangzi, who, from the “zero-perspective,” tells his tale. He who has no “I” is as close to the butterfly as he is to a Zhuang Zhou; he has no predilections. He does not “transcend” life or death in the sense of belonging to some “other world,” he rather loses himself in the midst of the present world, and dwells there—involved in it, yet not attached to any definite present (and thus timely) form of being-there.¹⁴

The sage has no sort of “higher knowledge”; he is not enlightened in that sense of the word: he has rather achieved the “no-knowledge” of the “great awakening” (*da jue* 大覺).¹⁵ The “great awakening” awakens from both dreaming and being awake and enters non-presence in the midst of presence.

The non-present narrator of the story neglects neither being awake nor dreaming, neither life nor death. To him, all present segments are equally valid and authentic. Even if he no longer identifies himself with any particular segment, this is by no means to deny their authenticity. The validity of the realm of presence is by no means negated or falsified by non-presence: on the contrary, it is balanced or held up by non-presence. So just as the narrator does not deny or falsify the validity of a Zhuang Zhou or the butterfly, Daoist non-presence does not deny or falsify the validity of the present. In this sense, Daoism does not “relativize” (as it is sometimes proposed¹⁶) the validity of present forms of being: the sage, while being non-present, rather *affirms* the realm or process of presence with all its equal but distinct segments.

In the “Dream of the Butterfly,” understood in a Daoist way, the two Zhuang Zhou(s) and the butterfly exemplify the segments of presence, and Zhuangzi, the narrator, exemplifies the non-present center of presence. The Daoist teaching is: when being a “normal” present being, it is best to be in such complete accord with one’s present form of existence that there is no reflection on “oneself,” on one’s role, or even on what will be in the future or on what has been in the past. “Present” being in fact means that there is absolutely no split between “that which is” and what “that which is” is. And present beings, which are fully “there,” will, in turn, completely disappear and vanish in favor of the next segment in the sequence of presence to take their place. But the sage “is” even less than that: he is less than a pure and full presence; he is empty non-presence.

The Daoist structure of presence, as illustrated in the “Dream of the Butterfly,” consists of a steady and well-ordered process, a process that is constituted by the continuous change of distinct present segments kept in balance by a non-present center.

The structure of presence is to be distinguished from another structure, which is made use of in Giles' translation of the "Dream of the Butterfly": the structure of *representation*. This structure is based on the assumption that something is always in fact—or "in truth"—something else: "I" am "Zhuang Zhou," "Zhuang Zhou" is the "butterfly," and so forth. When remembering and when doubting (like Descartes), truth is *re-presented*. That which has been present is made present *again* by means of reflection (and usually in the medium of language). But what is present "again" is not purely present anymore, it is not "totally in accord with itself"; it is, rather, "re-present."

Guo Xiang's interpretation of the "Dream of the Butterfly" is based on the structure of presence, whereas Giles' translation is based on the structure of representation. Giles' Zhuang Zhou, when remembering and when doubting, has already left pure presence and entered the stage of representation: he reflects on himself. And when he is not present anymore, but already "re-present," then he is "essentially" (or, rather, structurally) different from Guo Xiang's and Zhuangzi's Zhuang Zhou. Moreover, having left presence he is even further separated from the realm of total forgetfulness, from the non-present realm of Zhuangzi, the narrator. Giles' Zhuang Zhou, it seems, has in fact "never heard of the changing of things."

A Translation of the "Dream of the Butterfly" from the *Zhuangzi*, with Commentary by Guo Xiang

The text of the *Zhuangzi* is followed by Guo Xiang's commentary (in italics).

Once, Zhuang Zhou fell into a dream—and then there was a butterfly, a fluttering butterfly, self-content in accord with its intentions.

Acting happy with himself and with wishes gladly fulfilled.

It did not know about a Zhou.

This "not knowing about a Zhou" while "Zhuang Zhou fell into a dream—and then there was a butterfly" is not different from the case of being dead. Since at its own place everything is completely in accord with its intentions, the one that is alive belongs to life just as the one that is dead belongs to death. From that we see what a mistake it is to worry about death when being alive.

With a sudden awakening there was, fully and completely, a Zhou.

Since this is said from the perspective of Zhuang Zhou, there is talk of "awakening." This is not necessarily to falsify the dream.

One does not know whether a Zhou dreams and then there is a butterfly, or whether a butterfly dreams and then there is a Zhou.

The not-knowing about a butterfly at this moment is not different from the not-knowing about a Zhuang Zhou during the time of the dream. Because at its own time everything is completely in accord with its intentions. Therefore it cannot be proven

that there was not earlier a butterfly dreaming so that there is a Zhou there now. Insofar as it is possible in a dream to live through a whole century during a noontime nap, it cannot be proven that our present century is not a dream during a noontime nap.

When there is a Zhou and a butterfly, there has to be a distinction [between them]. The distinction between waking and dreaming is not different from the separation between life and death. The reason it is possible to be self-content in accord with one's intentions is that these distinctions are firmly established and not that there are no distinctions.

This is called the changing of things.

Well, the course of time does not stop for a moment, and the today does not persist in what follows. Thus yesterday's dream changes into a today. How could it be different with the change between life and death!? Why should one let one's heart be made heavy by being moved back and forth between them!? Being one, there is no knowledge of the other. Being a butterfly when dreaming is genuine. Relating this to human beings: when alive, one does not know whether one later may actually have beautiful concubines. Only the stupid think they really know that life is something delightful and death is something to be sad about. That is what is called "never having heard of the changing of things."

Notes

I am indebted to Graham Parkes for revising the English version of this essay and to an anonymous referee for helpful comments and suggestions, particularly concerning notes 10 and 16 below. Of course, I myself am responsible for all remaining errors.

- 1 – Herbert A. Giles, *Chuang Tzu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*, 2d rev. ed. (1889; London: Allen and Unwin, 1926), p. 47.
- 2 – Martin Buber, ed., *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tschuang-Tse* (Leipzig: Insel, 1910). Cf. Jonathan Roy Hermann, "The Text of Chuang Tzu and the Problem of Interpretation: A Critical Study of Martin Buber's Translation and Commentary" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992; reprint, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1996) (see note 5 below for a comment on this work); Irene Eber, "Martin Buber and Taoism," *Monumenta Serica* 42 (1994): 445–464.
- 3 – On the influence of Buber's edition on Heidegger see Graham Parkes, "Thoughts on the Way: *Being and Time* via Lao-Chuang [老莊]," in Graham Parkes, ed., *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 1990), pp. 105–144, as well as the many references in Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on His Work*, trans. Graham Parkes (London: Routledge, 1996). On its influence on Hesse, see Adrian Hsia,

Hermann Hesse und China: Darstellungen, Materialien, Interpretationen (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 99–100.

- 4 – I should like to mention three representative and influential modern translations that are similar to Giles' interpretation, as far as a general understanding of the passage under discussion is concerned: Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 49; Richard Wilhelm, *Dschuang Dsi: Das wahre Buch vom südlichen Blütenland* (Köln: Diederichs, 1969), p. 12; Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Zhuangzi jin zhu jin yi* 莊子今注今譯 (Peking: Zhonghua, 1994), 1:92.
- 5 – Jonathan Roy Hermann, in his dissertation on Martin Buber and Taoism, comments on the "Dream of the Butterfly": "Chuang Tzu awakens unsure of his own true self-identity after having dreamed that he was a butterfly" ("The Text of Chuang Tzu," pp. 200–201). He is, at this point, not at all "critical" toward Buber (as the title of his work suggests) but uncritically accepts his version of the story—which, I shall argue, is not at all Daoist.
- 6 – I am referring here to the edition of Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, published in *Zhuazi jicheng* 諸子集成, 6th ed. (Peking: Zhonghua, 1986), 3:53–54. Other "traditional" commentaries I have checked, contained in Yan Lingfeng 嚴靈峯, ed., *Wuqiubeizhai Zhuangzi jicheng* 無求備齋莊子集成 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1972–1974), do not contradict Guo Xiang's interpretation. Since the problem of the authenticity of Guo Xiang's authorship of the commentary on the *Zhuangzi* is not relevant to the issue under discussion, I have decided to speak here of the "commentary by Guo Xiang," even though the original author of this commentary might have had another name.
- 7 – It might be of some importance in this respect that the "Dream of the Butterfly" is the concluding passage of the chapter called "Qiwu lun" 齊物論, "On the Equality of Things."
- 8 – *Zhuangzi yinde* 莊子引得 (Taipei: Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, 1966), 6/2/82; cf. note 15, below.
- 9 – See the translation of the "Dream of the Butterfly" in the Appendix to this article.
- 10 – The use of the definite article in phrases such as "the Daoist idea" should not suggest that I claim to regard Guo Xiang's point of view as the ultimate truth of Daoism. By speaking of "the Daoist idea" I am demonstratively referring to the idea of Guo Xiang—whom I believe to be a Daoist—as opposed to the un-Daoist notions underlying the Giles/Buber interpretation. Thus, Guo Xiang, "the Daoist interpreter," is contrasted with Buber and Giles, the non-Daoist interpreters, without giving rise to the misconception that Guo Xiang is the only "real" Daoist or that Buber and Giles are the only "real" non-Daoists.
- 11 – The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 depicts the Daoist sage as someone who "is clear on the distinction between life and death" (*ming yu si sheng zhi fen* 明於死生之分).

Cf. the *Zhuzi jicheng* edition (Peking: Zhonghua, 1954), p. 22. This statement is to be understood in connection with the context of chapter 2 of the *Huainanzi*, dealing with the same topics as the “Dream of the Butterfly”: dreaming and waking, life and death, and presence and non-presence. Günter Wohlfart (to whom I am grateful for several helpful comments on this essay) has reminded me of a corresponding Buddhist passage from Dōgen’s 道元 *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (“Genjōkōan” 現成公案):

Kindling becomes ash, and cannot become kindling again. However, we should not see the ash as after and the kindling as before. Know that kindling abides in the Dharma state of kindling, and though it has a before and after, the states of before and after are disconnected. Ash, in the Dharma state of ash, has before and after. Just as that kindling, after having become ash, does not again become kindling, so after dying a person does not become alive again. This being the case, not saying that life becomes death is an established teaching in Buddhism—therefore it is called *unborn*. That death does not become life is an established teaching of the Buddha; therefore we call it *imperishable*. Life is an individual temporal state, death is an individual temporal state. It is like winter and spring—we don’t think winter becomes spring, we don’t say spring becomes summer.

The translation (slightly modified here) is by Thomas Cleary, in *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1986), p. 3.

- 12 – Cf. my book *Laotse: Tao Te King: Nach den Seidentexten von Mawangdui* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1995), pp. 17–18.
- 13 – See *Zhuangzi yinde* 30/12/45, and also 3/2/3.
- 14 – See my essay “Speech and Permanence in the *Laozi*: A Reading of the Twenty-third Chapter as It Is Found in the Ma-wang-dui Manuscripts,” *Taoist Resources* 6 (1) (1995): 31–40, for a critical evaluation of a Daoist conception of being in time as opposed to existentialist conceptions.
- 15 – Cf. *Zhuangzi yinde* 6/2/82. This passage from the *Zhuangzi*, which directly compares waking and dreaming with life and death, discusses the same philosophical problem from a different point of view. Here, by contrast with the “Dream of the Butterfly,” it is assumed that someone who had a dream and awakens in fact remembers his dream—and believes his dream to be “only” a dream and nothing authentic. This position is contrasted with the position of the Daoist sage. Whereas the dreamer just mentioned only experiences a “little awakening,” the sage experiences a “great awakening.” The sage awakes from both dreaming and waking, and thus it is made clear that the belief of the one with the “little awakening,” the belief that being awake is more authentic than dreaming—and the belief that “he” dreamed—is in fact the “great dream.” The one who awakes should not think that a dream is less “real” than being awake or that death is less real than life. The one who experiences a “little awakening” should not hang on to his dreams, but the one who experiences the “great awakening” hangs on neither to his dreams nor to his “awakenings.”

16 – For a discussion of the different kinds of “relativism” ascribed to the *Zhuangzi* (which in some cases might well be in accord with Guo Xiang’s interpretation), see Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds., *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), and Robert E. Allinson, *Chuang Tzu: For Spiritual Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 11–143. I do not agree with Allinson’s interpretation of the “Dream of the Butterfly,” since he also suggests: “after awakening, he [Zhuang Zhou] is not certain if he is even Zhuang Zhou. . . . After awakening, he is confused as to his self-identity just as if he were still in a dream” (Allinson, *Chuang Tzu*, p. 103). Hence, I also do not share his view that the “Dream of the Butterfly” is a “primitive” or “rudimentary” version of the philosophical core of the *Zhuangzi*. Like many other modern commentaries, Allinson’s interpretation suffers from not taking into account Guo Xiang’s comments. That Zhuang Zhou “is not certain” or “is confused” is not at all mentioned in the Chinese original text; it is a mere interpolation by some (Western) translators.