

# Why and How to Read the *Zhuangzi*? Late Ming Neidan Master Cheng Yining's Answer

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## Abstract

The *Commentary and Sub-commentary to the True Classic of Southern Splendor* is a late Ming commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, which interprets it from a Neidan perspective. The author Cheng Yining develops an original hermeneutical strategy, seldom seen in the history of *Zhuangzi* exegesis: he reads the *Zhuangzi* as an inner alchemy classic, and his commentary aims to uncover its alchemical meaning. To support his reading, Cheng Yining creates a new figure for the author *Zhuangzi*, who becomes a transformation body of the Most High Lord Lao, and writes the *Southern Splendor* to reveal to the world the road to immortality using “symbolic words.” Cheng Yining’s goal is to decipher those symbols, thus offering what he sees as the sole way of reading the *Zhuangzi* that remains true to its original intent. His commentary stands as a meritorious deed, accomplished by Cheng Yining to provide the real meaning of the *Zhuangzi*, and to gain the Most High Lord Lao’s help to complete his own inner alchemical practice.

**Keywords:** Cheng Yining, hermeneutics, inner alchemy, Late Ming thought, *Zhuangzi*



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## Introduction: Cheng Yining and his *Commentary and Sub-commentary to the True Classic of Southern Splendor*

The “Ox” lodge of Qing Dynasty’s great Daoist canon, the *Daozang jiyao* (《道藏輯要》), ca. 1806), consists of two commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*. Both bear the same title: *Nanhua zhenjing zhushu* (《南華真經注疏》), or *Commentary and sub-commentary to the True Classic of Southern Splendor* (hereafter *Zhushu*). The first work, the famous exegesis by Guo Xiang (郭象, ca. 252-312) and Cheng Xuanying (成玄英, fl. 631-655), is well-known. The second one much less so, it is a commentary on the *Zhuangzi* by the late Ming literati and inner alchemy practitioner, Cheng Yining (程以寧).

The *Daozang jiyao* was compiled by Jiang Yupu (蔣予蒲, 1755-1819), a high-ranking official, with the spirit-writing group to which he belonged. It is interesting to investigate the reasons why this commentary was chosen by these editors as one of the only two *Zhuangzi* exegeses, among all others, to be included in the Qing Canon.<sup>1</sup> However, a better understanding of the commentary itself is required before tackling this question. This paper aims to provide a study of Cheng’s commentary.

Cheng Yining was born and lived in the Wanli era (1573-1620), a period characterized by both uncertainty and creativity in a spiritual as well as intellectual sense. Profound religious concerns were pervading all society, notwithstanding the literati milieu.<sup>2</sup> Cheng was a native of Haiyang (海陽) (current day Xiuning district, (休寧縣)), in Anhui. The son of a scholar who was fond of the *Zhuangzi*, he took the imperial examinations in Shandong, but failed.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, when he was

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<sup>1</sup>On Jiang Yupu and the *Daozang jiyao*, see Monica Esposito, *Creative Daoism* (Paris, France: University Media, 2013), 204-211, and on the spirit-writing group and the edition of the *Daozang jiyao*, see Lai Chi Tim (黎志添) 〈《呂祖全書正宗》——清代北京覺源壇的歷史及其呂祖天仙派信仰〉 (The *Lüzu quanshu zhengzong*: The History of the Jueyuan Altar of Beijing and the Cult of its Lüzu Tianxian Lineage during the Qing Dynasty), 《中國文哲研究集刊》 (*Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan*), 46 (2015): 101-149.

<sup>2</sup>This religiosity has attracted scholarly attention recently. Jennifer Eichman, *A Late Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship: Spiritual Ambitions, Intellectual Debates, and Epistolary Connections* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2016), offers an analysis of Buddhist-Confucian interaction and the attraction Buddhism exerted upon the educated classes. Lu Miawfen (呂妙芬), 《成聖與家庭人倫：宗教對話脈絡下的明清之際儒學》 (*Chengsheng yu jiating renlun: Zongjiao duihua mailuo xia de mingqingzhiji ruxue*) (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing Co., 2016). shows that, during the Ming-Qing transition, even scholars who did not engage in Daoist or Buddhist practice had strong religious concerns involving a preoccupation about divinization or after-death life, though it was under specific Confucian modalities.

<sup>3</sup>Biographical data on Cheng Yining are found in the three prefaces of his commentary, Ming • Cheng Yining (程以寧), 《南華真經注疏》 (*Commentary and Sub-commentary to the True Classic of Southern Splendor*) (hereinafter called *Zhushu*), Our notes refer to the pagination in 《無求備齋莊子集成續編》 (*Wuqiu beizhai Zhuangzi jicheng*

around fifty years old, Cheng decided to cultivate the Dao (道) and follow the path of inner alchemy. We know about him from his two works: a compilation of commentaries on the *Laozi*, including his own alchemical one,<sup>4</sup> and his *Zhushu*, which interprets the *Zhuangzi* as an alchemical text.<sup>5</sup> His *Laozi* commentary is but one among many other Neidan-oriented readings of the same work, and does not stand as particularly innovative. On the other hand, his commentary on the *Zhuangzi* is much more original.

What is the *Zhushu*'s place in the history of *Zhuangzi* exegesis? According to Yang Rurbin (楊儒賓), the commentarial tradition is built around three main approaches to the *Zhuangzi*. The first one emphasizes that this work conveys a rejection of conventional values and a thriving towards an individualistic and freer way of life. The second one offers a mystical reading, where the *Zhuangzi* is about reaching a state transcending the realm of ordinary experience. The third one, which Yang labels a "Confucian" reading of the *Zhuangzi*, accentuate on the creative powers of man, and is concerned with worldly being rather than extra-worldly non-being.<sup>6</sup> Cheng Yining's work belongs to the second category: for him, the *Zhuangzi* is ultimately about transcending the realm of worldly phenomena by reaching a higher state of being, thus becoming an immortal (仙).

Within this rich tradition, Cheng Yining's originality lies mainly in the fact that his work is the only one to attempt reading the *Zhuangzi* predominantly in terms of inner alchemy, or Neidan (內丹). A few decades earlier, Lu Xixing (陸西星, 1520-c. 1601 or 1606), the reputed founder of the Eastern school of Neidan, had written a commentary on the *Zhuangzi* and claimed that it was an alchemical

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*Xubian*), ed. Yan Lingfeng (嚴靈峰), vol. 28, no. 29 (Taipei, Taiwan: Yeewen Publishing Co., 1974), 1-10. This reprint is identical with the *Zhushu*'s version to be found in the 《道藏輯要——牛集》 (*Daozang Jiyao: Ox Lodge*, Sections 9-12), vol. 9, 3991-4032 and vol. 10, 4035-4188 (Taipei, Taiwan: Kaozheng Publishing Co., reprint, 1971).

<sup>4</sup>In this paper and unless otherwise specified, all the uses of the terms "alchemy" or "alchemical" refer to inner alchemy. This work is the Xiong Tiejī (熊鐵基), ed., 《太上道德寶章翼》 (*Taishang Daode Baozhang yi*), vol. 8, 《老子集成》 (*Laozi jicheng*) (Beijing, China: China Religious Culture Publisher, 2011), 231-291.

<sup>5</sup>On this work, see mainly: Fang Yong (方勇), 《莊子學史》 (*Zhuangzixue Shi*), vol. 2 (Beijing, China: People's Publishing House, 2008), 698-702; Liu Zhongyu (劉仲宇), 〈內丹家眼中的莊子〉 (*Neidan jia yanzhong de Zhuangzi*), in 《全真道與老莊學國際學術研討會論文集》 (*Quanzhendao yu laozhuang xue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji*) (vol. 1), ed. Xiong Tiejī and Zifei Mai (麥子飛) (Wuhan, China: Central China Normal University Press, 2009), 518-528; and Chen Yinghui (陳盈慧), 〈陰陽丹旨的全身全真：程以寧《南華真經注疏》淺析〉 (*The Cultivation and Purification of Body and Mind in the Theory of Yindan and Yangdan-An Analysis of Cheng Yi-ning's Annotation and Explanation of True Scripture of Southern Florescence*), 《鵝湖月刊》 (*Legein Monthly*), 499 (2017): 26-36.

<sup>6</sup>Yang Rurbin, 《儒門內的莊子》 (*Rumen nei de Zhuangzi*) (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing Co., 2016), 452-454.

one.<sup>7</sup> However, alchemical references are in fact so rare in Lu's commentary that it cannot be counted as a proper Neidan commentary.<sup>8</sup> After Cheng Yining's work, to my knowledge, no one has undertaken such an attempt again to write another alchemical commentary. Cheng Yining's *Zhushu* is therefore the first and last Neidan commentary on the *Zhuangzi*.

This paper aims to present this commentary and contribute to answering a simple question: "What is the *Zhushu*?" To investigate it, I will adopt Cheng Yining's perspective in order to try to understand how he sees his own work. I will not focus extensively on the content of his commentary or on his Neidan thought, but on the main hermeneutic strategy he applies, and on the way Cheng Yining develops an original vision of the different elements involved in it. I will first present his commentary on *Zhuangzi*'s famous opening passage, where he institutes his main reading strategy. Then I will focus on how Cheng Yining, in a way that allows him to make sense of his unusual reading strategy, assigns a new identity to both *Zhuangzi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Finally, I will analyze what those new identities entail regarding Cheng Yining's own role and the nature of his commentary.

## 1. Cheng Yining's Main Reading Strategy

The very nature of the *Zhushu* is determined by a particular reading strategy, which is central to its overall understanding of the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>9</sup> Let us begin with an example of this strategy by studying how he interprets the opening section of the first chapter, "Free and easy wandering."<sup>10</sup>

The *Zhuangzi*'s famed kickoff introduces to the reader the grandiose vision of the giant fish "Kun," living in the Northern Oblivion, who rises into the sky and transforms into the giant bird "Peng," before flying towards the Southern Oblivion, or Pool of Heaven. This poetic vision does not seem to have any evident and univocal meaning, and is open to multiple interpretations. In his lengthy commentary to this text, Cheng Yining aims to explain to his reader the real meaning of the different images used by *Zhuangzi*. To do so he builds a web of equivalences between, on the one

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<sup>7</sup>Ming · Lu Xixing, 《南華真經副墨》 (*Nanhua zhenjing fumo*), notes and punctuation by Jiang Menma (蔣門馬) (Beijing, China: Chung Hwa Book Co., Lt., 2010). This work was written between 1575 and 1758.

<sup>8</sup>The main interpretative key of Lu Xixing's reading seems to be Chan (禪) Buddhism. On Lu Xixing's commentary, see Fang Yong, 《莊子學史》 (*Zhuangzixue shi*), vol. 2, 483-504. For a general study of Lu Xixing, see Iliia Mozias, *The Literati Path to Immortality: The Alchemical Teachings of Lu Xixing* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2020).

<sup>9</sup>This, however, is by no means Cheng Yining's only reading strategy: he often comments on the *Zhuangzi* in a more traditional way, in agreement with earlier commentators.

<sup>10</sup>Most of my translations of the *Zhuangzi* are drawn from Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2020).

side, elements from the text, be they mythical beasts, places, actions or single characters, and on the other side, elements from the Neidan tradition, which can be parts of the alchemical body, faculties used in the alchemical process, or alchemical practices.

To give but one example, Cheng understands the first two characters of the *Zhuangzi*, “Northern Oblivion” (北冥), as having Neidan meaning:

The North belongs to water. The Northern Oblivion is the Northern Sea. Among trigrams, it corresponds to kan (坎) 㷊. In man, it corresponds to kidneys, to water and to lead.<sup>11</sup>

北方屬水。北冥者，北海也。於卦為坎，於人為腎，為水為鉛。

The same hermeneutical process can be found throughout his commentary of the story of Kun and Peng. Table 1 shows some equivalences established by Cheng Yining.<sup>12</sup>

Table 1 Equivalences between Terms from the *Zhuangzi*'s First Chapter and Alchemical Terms

<i>Zhuangzi</i>	<i>Zhushu</i>
Northern Oblivion	Kan 坎 㷊 trigram, kidneys, water, lead
Kun (鯤) fish	Existence (命), essence (精) from the kidneys
Furiously, to rise, to stir, to fly towards	The power of intention (意)
Southern Oblivion (南冥)	Li (離) 㷡 trigram, heart, fire, mercury
Peng's (鵬) flight to the South	The River Chariot's (河車) course

This passage demonstrates a particularly representative example of a reading strategy often used by Cheng, which consists of considering different elements in the *Zhuangzi* as designates for alchemical realities.<sup>13</sup> It does not, from a quantitative standpoint, constitute the majority of Cheng Yining's commentary, but is nonetheless an important part of his overall hermeneutic strategy.<sup>14</sup>

This strategy can be applied at different levels: it can be applied at the level of a single word or at the level of a whole sentence, as the table above shows. It could also be applied to an

<sup>11</sup>*Zhushu*, ch. 1, 11.

<sup>12</sup>*Zhushu*, ch. 1, 11-13.

<sup>13</sup>By “alchemical realities” I mean any energy, faculty or process involved in the alchemical practice.

<sup>14</sup>Cheng himself acknowledges the importance of this strategy in his overall reading of the *Zhuangzi*, especially as he considers the misunderstanding of Kun and Peng's alchemical meaning has led previous commentators to misread the *Zhuangzi*, see below and *Zhushu*, Cheng Yining's preface, 5. A proper evaluation of the links between this strategy and parts of his commentary that do not explicitly refer to Neidan would require further study.

entire chapter: such as in the poem that conclude Cheng Yining's commentary on "Free and easy wandering." It can be observed that the *Zhuangzi*'s first chapter can be divided into three parts, each one delineating one phase of Neidan cultivation:

From "There is a Fish in the Northern Oblivion" to "heading south": it is the refinement of Essence to turn it into Breath. From "he whose understanding is sufficient to fill some one post" to "from their dust and chaff you could mold yourself a Yao (堯) or a Shun (舜)": it is the refinement of Breath to turn it into Spirit. From "the King of Wei offered me" to the end [of the chapter]: it is the refinement of Spirit going back to the Void.<sup>15</sup>

自「北冥有魚」以至「圖南」，鍊精還氣也。自「知效一官」至「陶鑄堯舜」，鍊氣還神也。自「魏王遺我」至末，鍊神還虛也。

In Cheng Yining's view, there is a clear hierarchy between the original meaning of the *Zhuangzi* and its hidden alchemical meaning. The character Kun for example, designates an immense fish, but it also refers to Existence and the Essence in the kidneys, and this second meaning is more important than the first one.

Two characteristics of this reading are worth noticing. First, it is unique when applied to the *Zhuangzi*: none amongst previous exegetes has ever taken the opening passage as a stand in for a depiction of the alchemical process. Second, it seems to have little to do with the text's original meaning.<sup>16</sup>

Cheng therefore offers a commentary that is unique and reads from the surface of the text something completely alien to the text itself. Rather than a commentary aiming to explain the meaning of the source-text of the *Zhuangzi*, Cheng attempts to translate it into another language, i.e. the language of inner alchemy. This is a completely new interpretation of *Zhuangzi*'s work, unprecedented in its exegetical history, and seems to find little justification in the text of the *Zhuangzi* itself.

Cheng Yining knew that his reader would be surprised by his unusual commentary. In the postface, he writes:

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<sup>15</sup>*Zhushu*, ch. 1, 29.

<sup>16</sup>This is not to say that there are not deep and real affinities between the *Zhuangzi*'s thought and Neidan tradition. On the affinities between "Neidan" and the thought of the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, see Hsiao Chinming (蕭進銘), 《反身體道：內丹密契主義研究》(*Fanshen tidao: Neidan miqizhuyi yanjiu*) (Taipei, Taiwan: Shinwenfeng Publishing Co., 2009).

The *Laozi* (《老子》) and the *Zhuangzi* are ancestors; the commentaries and sub-commentaries their descendance. The progeny does not have to resemble their ancestors entirely. Nevertheless, their spirit and lineage, often, do not deviate.<sup>17</sup>

道德南華者，祖宗也；二經註疏者，子孫也。子孫象貌不必盡肖祖宗，然而精神血脈未常不肖者。

He situates his own work, the *Zhushu*, true to the spirit of the *Zhuangzi*, as its real heir, while admitting that it does look very different from the text it commentates on. He was indeed aware of the fact that his commentary on the *Zhuangzi* may seem quite farfetched from the original text's most obvious meaning. Cheng needs to explain his rather counter-intuitive approach, and elucidate on how a seemingly atypical commentary can be faithful to the *Zhuangzi*. He must find a way to make his reading plausible, so that it cannot be confounded with a merely arbitrary misreading of the *Zhuangzi*, but proves instead that it is a text which can reach to the very heart of Zhuangzi's thought, unveiling its core.

The question we will address becomes the following: how could it be that the real "spirit" of the *Zhuangzi* is grasped by Cheng, while his commentary, to say the least, does not "resemble" the *Zhuangzi*'s text, and rather seems to be a unfounded transposition of the latter into the alien world of Neidan? How does Cheng justify it, and what is the rationale of his original commentary?

## 2. Zhuangzi's New Identity and the *Zhuangzi* as an Alchemical Work

When the reader tries to make sense of a given text, the figure of the its presumed author determines the way it is understood. To justify his reading of the *Zhuangzi* as a medium with a hidden alchemical meaning, Cheng Yining needs to tell a new story about Zhuangzi. By "Zhuangzi" we mean the putative author of the compilation of works called the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>18</sup> The creation of this new auctorial persona enables him to read the Warring States classic in terms of Neidan.

If Zhuangzi had only been a sage who did not know the art of alchemy, then his book would simply be a work that tries to give an account of the nature of the world we live in, and of the way we have to deal with it. In other words, it would be what we classify today as a "philosophical" account.

Cheng Yining does not deny that the *Zhuangzi* can be read as a work intended to describe

<sup>17</sup>*Zhushu*, postface, 775.

<sup>18</sup>The fact that the *Zhuangzi* is a collection of texts by different authors is not relevant here, as Cheng himself considers the whole of the work is by a single author.

common reality. But if he did examine the whole text only under this angle, he would not see a secret alchemical meaning in it. Therefore, in order to justify his reading strategy, Cheng has to build an original figure of Zhuangzi: Zhuangzi as a divine being and a master of alchemy. He does this in the preface:<sup>19</sup>

The Most High Lord Lao (太上老君) pitied men who have not experienced awakening and to whom the arts of Nature and Existence were not transmitted. Hence, He had to manifest himself in a transformation body to write the *Southern Splendor* (《南華經》).<sup>20</sup>

太上憫人不悟，性命之學無傳，不得不化身作“南華”。

Cheng Yining's bold claim is the following: the author of the *Nanhua zhenjing*, known as Zhuangzi, is actually a manifestation of the Most High Lord Lao. The concept of the “transformation body” (化身) has a Buddhist origin, and designates a body that is a material emanation of a divinity who wishes to become visible to men. A “transformation body” shares the characteristics of the divinity from whom it emanates. Several characteristics of the Most High are then transferred upon Cheng Yining's Zhuangzi. Lord Lao is a divine being and one of the three main Daoist divinities, the Three Pure Ones (三清). Among them, he is the one who is most concerned with human fate and the salvation of human kind.<sup>21</sup> He is also known as Laozi, and is the author of the *Daode jing*.

A classic lore ascribes eighty-one transformations to the Most High Lord Lao, and Zhuangzi does not count as one.<sup>22</sup> Since nothing implies that the Most High's number of transformation bodies are limited, there is room left for other ones. This is what allows Cheng Yining to state that the Most High, after writing the *Daode jing* (《道德經》), again took human form to compose the *Zhuangzi*, its author Zhuangzi a divine emanation.

This action could be called a “wild divinization” of Zhuangzi. It is divinization by an individual who has neither clerical nor political authority, and for the purpose of rendering his own idiosyncratic reading of the *Zhuangzi* legitimate. This divinization proceeds by creating a relation between an

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<sup>19</sup>Most of the texts helpful to understand the nature of Cheng Yining's overall project and the way he tries to accomplish it are found in the preface and the postface of his work.

<sup>20</sup>*Zhushu*, Cheng Yining's preface, 5.

<sup>21</sup>On the Most High Lord Lao's revelations, see Livia Kohn, *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies Publications, 1998), esp. 69-86 for his role in revealing methods of cultivation.

<sup>22</sup>For example, this can be seen in the “Laojun bashiyi huatu” (老君八十一化圖). On this influential Yuan Dynasty text, see Florian Reiter, *Leben und Wirken Lao Tzu's in Schrift und Bild: Lao-chün pa-shih-i-hua-t'u-shuo* (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990). Zhuangzi is often presented as a patriarch of Daoism, but not as an emanation of the Most High Lord Lao.



extant divine figure, the Most High, author of the *Daode jing*, and *Zhuangzi*. This connection holds some grounds insofar as the *Southern Splendor* is closely associated with the *Daode jing* and with Laozi: the most widespread view among commentators maintain the *Zhuangzi* assumes, extends, and develops ideas found in the *Laozi*, and a single expression combining their two names, “Laozhuang” (老莊), designates their thought.

The main goal of this “wild divinization,” through the figure of the Most High, is to provide a new identity for the author of the *Southern Splendor*: that of a divine alchemist. Although *Zhuangzi* has been canonized and granted the titles of Perfected Man of the Southern Splendor (南華真人) and Perfected Lord of Subtlety and Primal Comprehension (微妙元通真君),<sup>23</sup> he was never explicitly associated with inner alchemy. The divinized Laozi, on the other hand, is often considered, among Neidan practitioners, to have close ties with Neidan. He can be described variously as a Neidan master, as the originator of Neidan, or as the author of Neidan works.<sup>24</sup> His *Daode jing* has been commented from a Neidan perspective by some of the leading representatives of this tradition: Bai Yuchan (白玉蟾, 1134-1229) and Li Daochun (李道純, late 13th century), to name but two of the most influential ones who had written such commentaries, and Pregadio lists fourteen commentaries on the *Laozi* written by alchemists, including Cheng Yining's commentary.<sup>25</sup> When *Zhuangzi* is seen as a new emanation of the Most High Lord Lao, Laozi's identity as a Neidan master can then be transferred to him.

This new identity ascribed to *Zhuangzi* is reinforced by the new name he was given: Immortal Elder (仙翁). To my knowledge, this name had never been attributed to *Zhuangzi*. It is best-known as the honorific epithet of Ge Xuan (葛玄, 163-244), Ge Hong's (葛洪, 283-343) paternal grand-uncle, known as a patron of the alchemical arts and said to have transmitted the *Taiqing jing* (《太清經》), the *Jiudan jing* (《九丹經》) and the *Jinye jing* (《金液經》) to Ge Hong's master Zheng Yin (鄭隱, ca. 215-ca. 302). All these works are alchemical classics.<sup>26</sup> Both the legendary Wei Boyang (魏伯陽)

<sup>23</sup>Respectively by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang in 742, and by Emperor Huizong of Song (1100-1125). See Isabelle Robinet, “Chuang-tzu et le taoïsme ‘religieux,’” *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 11.3 (1983): 59-105 on the links between what she calls “religious Daoism” and the *Zhuangzi*.

<sup>24</sup>Fabrizio Pregadio, “Laozi and Internal Alchemy,” in *Reading the Signs: Philology, History, Prognostication. Festschrift for Michael Lackner*, eds. Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz (Munich, Germany: Iudicium, 2018), 271-302. See pp. 272-278 on the different ways Laozi is perceived in the Neidan tradition.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 278-282.

<sup>26</sup>Another reason of this renaming might be the following: a folk divinity of longevity is named Nanji xianweng (南極仙翁), and Cheng Yining might have played on the phonetical resemblance between the names Nanji xianweng and Nanhua xianweng.

and Zhang Boduan (張伯端, 987?-1082),<sup>27</sup> to whom two of the most influential alchemical works are attributed, also bear the same nickname. Wang Boxiu (汪伯修), the author of the last preface to Cheng Yining's commentary, uses the term Immortal Elder to name Zhuangzi too.<sup>28</sup> One could suppose that he did so in order to support Cheng Yining's creation of the new persona of Zhuangzi as a divine alchemist versed in the arts of immortality.

As aforementioned, Zhuangzi's identification with Laozi gives him not only the status of an alchemist, but also a divine identity. Consequently, Zhuangzi is no longer a mere sage thinker who lives in the ordinary world, tries to understand it, and shares his insights in a written text. He writes from a very different position:

The Immortal Master says: "Before Heaven had appeared, I already was." Master Zhuang wrote his work for he stood where Heaven and Earth had not yet appeared.<sup>29</sup>

仙師云：先有吾身後有天。漆園先生之作南華，蓋身在天地之先也。

Thus Zhuangzi is not only given the identity of a great alchemist, but he is also a divine being living in and writing from a superior realm that transcends the phenomenal world.<sup>30</sup>

The first step towards the legitimization of his reading strategy consists, for Cheng Yining, in assigning a new identity to Zhuangzi. Far from being just a minor official characterized by his freedom and disdain towards power and prestige, Zhuangzi is actually a divine being, belonging to a transcendent realm, and mastering fully the alchemical arts.<sup>31</sup> This new auctorial figure in turn implies a wholly different *Zhuangzi*.

Since its author is a divine Neidan master, the *Zhuangzi* cannot be read simply as a profane book dedicated to describing the world and the way one can deal with it wisely. Cheng Yining's creation of a new author to the *Zhuangzi* goes hand in hand with a new identity he assigns to the work itself.

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<sup>27</sup>Wei Boyang is a legendary Han Dynasty character who was said to have authored the *Zhouyi cantong qi* (周易參同契). Zhang Boduan is considered the founder of the Southern lineage of Neidan, and wrote the *Wuzhen pian* (悟真篇)

<sup>28</sup>*Zhushu*, Wang Boxiu's preface, 9.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, Cheng Yining's preface, 6.

<sup>30</sup>This is referred to as Anterior Heaven in Neidan.

<sup>31</sup>It is worth noting that the Buddhist monk Hanshan Deqing (憨山德清) (1546-1623), often quoted by Cheng Yining, considers Zhuangzi as a bodhisattva. This too might have been an inspiration for Cheng Yining. See Sara Epstein, "Boundaries of the Dao: Hanshan Deqing's (1546-1623) Buddhist Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*" (Ph. D. diss, Stanford University, 2006), 103-105.

Just as *Zhuangzi* has been closely associated with Laozi, the *Southern Splendor* is closely associated with the *Daode jing*. To explain the term “splendor” in the title of *Zhuangzi*'s book in relation to the *Daode jing*, Cheng Yining states in the postface of the *Zhushu*: “From the most remote times, no one has ever grasped the *Way and its Virtue* without a thorough understanding of the *Southern Splendor*. The latter is just a trap and the web to catch the former.” (千古以來，知道德者未有不透南華。南華者所以筌蹄道德也。) <sup>32</sup> Again in the *Zhushu*'s postface, Cheng makes it clear that the very title of the *Zhuangzi* shows the way it is related to the *Laozi*: “The sages of old said: ‘Way and Virtue lie deep inside, while glory and splendor float on the surface’. The *Southern Splendor* is the glory and splendor of the *Way and its Virtue*.” (先哲云：湛為道德浮為英華也。“南華”即“道德”之英華。) <sup>33</sup> The *Zhuangzi* is thus deemed subordinate to the *Laozi*, but linked to it in a consubstantial way.

As we have already seen, this association is a very traditional one. However, the *Daode jing* to which the *Southern Splendor* is supposed to give access to is understood by Neidan masters as the “ultimate source” <sup>34</sup> of alchemical practice. The *Zhuangzi* will have to consume this characteristic of the *Laozi* to be considered an alchemical book.

The discovery of this fact is, according to Zou Zhongyun's (鄒忠允) preface, what compelled Cheng Yining to write his commentary: “During the spring of the *guiyou* year, Cheng Yining had a sudden illumination: the Southern Splendor is the ancestor of all alchemical classics.” (癸酉春，頓悟其為丹經之祖。) <sup>35</sup> Cheng Yining insists on the fact that, just as the *Daode jing*, the *Zhuangzi* actually is not only an alchemical book, but occupies a fundamental place among alchemical classics, and is the highest in their hierarchy: as both Zou Zhongyun and Cheng Yining put it, “the *Nanhua* is the ancestor of alchemical classics,” (南華為丹經之祖) <sup>36</sup> and “the lord of alchemical classics.” (南華為丹經之主) <sup>37</sup>

Just as the alchemical adept has a false body and a true one, the *Zhuangzi* is not anymore just a

<sup>32</sup>*Zhushu*, Cheng Yining's postface, 773.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, postface, 773.

<sup>34</sup>Fabrizio Pregadio, “Laozi and Internal Alchemy,” in *Reading the Signs: Philology, History, Prognostication. Festschrift for Michael Lackner*, eds. Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz, 272. The way the *Daode jing* is perceived in Neidan tradition is different from the way Cheng Yining sees the *Zhuangzi*: for Neidan masters, as Pregadio shows, the *Daode jing* is not an alchemical work, but rather contains the general principles that the alchemist will apply in his practice, while Cheng Yining considers the *Zhuangzi* to be an alchemical work *per se*. But what matters for Cheng's own project is the fact that the *Daode jing* is closely associated with Neidan, more than the specific modalities of this association.

<sup>35</sup>*Zhushu*, Zou Zhongyun's preface, 1.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 4, 95.

philosophical book, but has a deeper identity, hidden between its lines: that of an alchemical book, and one of the most fundamental ones, because it comes directly from the *Daode jing* (i.e. from the source of all alchemical works).

Before moving on to explain the role that Cheng Yining assigns to himself, a clarification of the nature of the *Zhuangzi* is necessary. There are reasons why the Immortal Elder Zhuangzi bothered writing this work.

The lore here is classic: because he took pity of a world deprived of the road to transcendence, awakening, or immortality<sup>38</sup>, Zhuangzi, as a transformation body of the Most High, wrote his book for mankind. The *Zhuangzi* was written to “reveal the secret” (以洩其秘)<sup>39</sup> of the study of Nature and Existence (性命之學), i.e. Neidan.

Present through Cheng Yining's thought is a tension between two different realms, a tension that polarizes all his thinking: the realm ordinary men live in, which is ontologically inferior and deemed to be illusory, dangerous, and harassing; and the world where the immortals dwell, which precedes the manifestation of the thousand beings, transcends all phenomena, and represents salvation from the former realm. To be free from pain, ignorance, the limitedness and finitude of our world, man has to reach a state that allows him to live in the transcendent realm that is the source of everything there is. Man's salvation can only be obtained if he can, “from the world posterior to phenomena, pursue and attain the world of the beginning where no phenomena yet exist.” (以有物之後而追窮無物之始)<sup>40</sup>

In other words, for Cheng Yining as for the Neidan tradition,<sup>41</sup> man is doomed because he has left the Dao, the source of being, but he can find salvation by retracing the source. The practice of Neidan is the way through which one can make this journey. The *Zhuangzi* is for this reason aimed to offer salvation to man, and this salvation implies Neidan. That is why the divine Immortal Elder decided to offer his work, the *Zhuangzi*, to mankind: so that mankind can know how to transcend the worldly realm and reach the transcendent one through the correct practice of Neidan. The *Zhuangzi* “serves as a raft for following generations of scholars,” (津筏後學者)<sup>42</sup> through which they will be able to learn the art of Nature and Existence. As Cheng Yining puts it, “the Immortal Elder tries by all possible means to indicate [how to comply to the Original Spirit].” (仙翁多方為人指點之耳)<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., Cheng Yining's preface, 5, quoted above.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., postface, 774.

<sup>41</sup>And, in one way or another, for the entire Daoist tradition.

<sup>42</sup>*Zhushu*, Cheng Yining's preface, 5.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., ch. 6, 152. The 之 in the quote refers to “comply to the Original Spirit,” expression meaning a

The framework of the work Cheng Yining reflects on is now clear: written by a divine but disguised alchemist, the *Zhuangzi*, is an alchemical book that is supposed to offer man a way back to the Dao through its instruction of the arts of Nature and Existence.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, another question remains: if the *Zhuangzi* does not seem to convey any alchemical meaning, then how can it assume the position of the lord of all alchemical books?

The answer lies in the *Zhuangzi*'s mode of expression. In chapter 27 of the *Zhuangzi*, three methods of expression are described by the author: “symbolic words” (寓言), “words from weighty ancient authorities” (重言), and “spillover-goblet words” (卮言).<sup>45</sup> What is directly relevant to the *Zhuangzi*'s status as an alchemical book is the first of these three. Cheng Yining understands it as follows:

Symbolic words are just like metaphors in poetry, even though they are talking about human affairs, mostly they are hinting about the great Dao.<sup>46</sup>

寓言猶詩之比體，所言在人事而所指多在大道。

In his preface, Cheng Yining expresses the same idea in a slightly different way, saying that those symbolic words “teach men how to perfect their Nature and keep intact their Existence.” (全性保命也)<sup>47</sup>

The opening section on Kun and Peng is said to be made of such symbolic words. Consequently, Cheng sees two levels of discourse in the *Zhuangzi*. The first one deals with “human affairs.” This has to be understood in the larger context of a discourse that can involve mythical beings — as in the case of the first chapter's opening — but does not deal directly with the way one reaches the Dao, i.e. the arts of Nature and Existence, or Neidan. The second level of discourse deals directly with the practice of Neidan and the realm of the Dao. The first one finds its end and rationale in the second

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successful Neidan practice.

<sup>44</sup>A similar role is attributed to Lü Dongbin during the Ming-Qing transition: he is often perceived as having been sent by a higher divinity (be it one of the Three Pure Ones or the Jade Emperor) to save people by revealing scriptures, Lai, Chi Tim, 〈明清道教呂祖降乩信仰的發展及相關文人乩壇研究〉 (A Study of the Development of Lüzu's Spirit-Writing Cult and the Related Literati Spirit-Writing Altars in the Ming and Qing Dynasties), 《中國文化研究所學報》 (*Journal of Chinese Studies*), 65(2017): 144-145. The differences between Lü Dongbin and Zhuangzi are noticeable, as the former appears through spirit writing, and is not a transformation body of a divinity, but has his own identity. The roles they fill nonetheless bear interesting resemblances.

<sup>45</sup>Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*, 227. I have changed Ziporyn's translation of *yuyan* (寓言) to make it compatible with Cheng Yining's reading.

<sup>46</sup>*Zhushu*, ch. 27, 637.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, Cheng Yining's preface, 5.

one.

Cheng Yining's understanding of Zhuangzi's use of "symbolic words"<sup>48</sup> enables us to comprehend how the *Zhuangzi* can be a classic of alchemy: this work does not convey directly alchemical concepts or instructions, it does in a hidden manner.

So there goes the story of the *Zhuangzi* according to Cheng Yining: in order to help wayward humanity to find a path back towards the Dao, the divine immortal Zhuangzi, a transformation body of the Most High Lord Lao, wrote a book in which the Neidan content is cloaked under a non-Neidan discourse. It is easier now to understand why Cheng Yining's commentary can be, from his point of view, faithful to the *Zhuangzi* even when it does not seem to be so. The discrepancy between the apparent and hidden meanings of the *Zhuangzi's* words is displayed by its use of language: symbolic words seem to dwell on a certain level of reality while hinting to another. The fact the this second level belongs to Neidan cultivation makes sense due to the identity of its author, and the goal he seeks to achieve: he is a divine being who wants to help mankind reach salvation through the practice of Neidan.

### 3. Cheng Yining the Commentator and his Reasons for Writing the *Zhushu*

Deduced from aforementioned elements, it is now easier to assess Cheng Yining's perception his own role as a commentator and the mission his commentary has to achieve. The *Zhuangzi*, if it has to fulfill its role, is to be read as a book devoted to the alchemical arts of Nature and Existence. However, its identity as an alchemical book is not explicit, as the book "does not dare to let its [alchemical meaning] leek out." (不敢顯露乎)<sup>49</sup>

With such a configuration, the role Cheng Yining assigns to himself becomes straightforward: he is the one who has to make this truth evident, and the *Zhushu* will be the work through which he demonstrates it. Let us first consider the information that Cheng imparts on himself — the way he presents himself to his readers.

First of all, Cheng Yining does not depict himself as an accomplished alchemist. Rather, he readily acknowledges that he has not yet reached the transcendent realm he longs for. Immediately after his description of Zhuangzi as existing before the creation of Heaven and Earth, he writes:

As for me, who now write a commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, could I dare to say that I dwell

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<sup>48</sup>Cheng's understanding differs from that of most of the commentators after Guo Xiang, who understands (寓言) as "lodging words": words presented as coming from other people's mouth.

<sup>49</sup>*Zhushu*, ch. 1, 27.

before Heaven and Earth? For I only know the realm of the nine Heavens and nine Earths, and of the accumulation of Breath and Earth [of which they are made].<sup>50</sup>

予今之註疏南華，敢云身在天地之先？特知九天九地，積氣積塊之所以然耳。

Cheng Yining has not reached the end of the alchemical path, and he gives one of the reasons why it is the case: he has not yet found his “patrons and companions” (外護侶伴).<sup>51</sup> Successful Neidan cultivation is a long process that requires certain material conditions: one has to find patrons to provide for one's needs, and companions who also engage in Neidan, and whose assistance is needed during the process of cultivation.<sup>52</sup> As Cheng Yining laments, he cannot further pursue his path towards immortality because of these material obstacles.

Hence why Cheng Yining wrote the *Zhushu*. The material conditions for a successful practice are only granted to those who have accomplished enough meritorious deeds:

One has to find patrons, guardians, and a blessed place [to practice]. If a single one among these three is missing, a troop of demons would cause obstructions. He who would reach a celestial rank by his innumerable meritorious deeds will naturally find the caldron to boil the Dragon and the Tiger.<sup>53</sup>

當訪外護覓雲朋尋福地。三者缺一，必為羣魔作障緣。若果三千八百功行與天齊。自然有鼎烹龍虎矣。

Moreover, the *Zhushu* is written in the hope that the immortals Laozi and Zhuangzi<sup>54</sup> will assist him and help him access to conditions that would allow him to achieve his practice:

May the Most High and the Immortal Elder of the Southern Splendor be grateful for the pain

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., Cheng Yining's preface, 6.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., Cheng Yining's preface, 8, for other mentions of the necessity of having patrons, companions, and Cheng's own lack thereof.

<sup>52</sup>For an analysis and examples of the construction of a space and the building of the fellowship required by Neidan practice during the late Ming, see Liu Xun, “Numinous Father and Holy Mother: Late Ming Duo Cultivation Practice,” in *Internal Alchemy: Self, Society, and the Quest for Immortality*, eds. Livia Kohn and Robin R. Wang (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press: 2009), 137-140. Although the material needs of “solo cultivation” differ from those of “duo cultivation,” the conditions that need to be fulfilled for a successful practice are similar.

<sup>53</sup>*Zhushu*, Cheng Yining's preface, 7.

<sup>54</sup>As we have seen, according to Cheng Yining both Laozi and Zhuangzi are actually the same divinity, for they are “transformation bodies” of the Most High Lord Lao.

I took to write my commentary, and soon let me meet patrons and companions.<sup>55</sup>

倘太上與南華仙翁嘉予註疏之勞，早為予作外護侶伴之合。

Thus, Cheng Yining is a Neidan practitioner who has not yet reached the end of the path, but is determined to do so. For this reason, he writes a commentary on the *Zhuangzi*. The very act of writing this commentary is presented as propitiatory: through his work, he hopes that Zhuangzi, the divine author of the work he comments on, will remove the obstacles that prevent him from becoming an immortal.

One question remains to be answered in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the nature of the *Zhushu*: Why should the composition of a commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, by someone who is not an accomplished Neidan master, be considered an important meritorious deed, as Cheng Yining seems to imply?

To answer that, let us examine the account Cheng Yining gives of the fate of the *Zhuangzi*. As we have seen, the *Zhuangzi* is a work that is supposed to bring salvation to the world through the alchemical meaning it divulges. Cheng Yining tells us the contrary, that so far it has not succeeded in fulfilling its mission, and that the reason of this failure lies with previous commentators:

The tradition of commentaries on the *Zhuangzi* began with Guo Xiang, followed by Xiang Xiu (向秀, ca. 227-272). It reached its end with Jiao Hong (焦竑, 1540-1620)'s *Wings to the Laozi and the Zhuangzi*. Although more than a hundred writers belong to this tradition, they all look quite alike. Even those as smart as Li Bai, when they explain the meaning of the fish Kun and the bird Peng, mistake the illusory for the real. The more they indulge in their wanton expressions, the further they get from the real meaning [of the *Zhuangzi*]. No wonder then that all mediocre literati confound a pheasant for a phenix, and a malefic illusion for a spiritual dragon.<sup>56</sup>

南華之註始於郭象，繼之向秀，終於焦猗園之老莊翼。百有餘家，尚隔山萬重。即聰明如李青蓮，讀南華而賦鯤鵬，且認虛為實，其詞愈縱恣而背真意愈遠。無怪世儒指鸞鳳為山雞，視神龍為妖幻也。

Through these few words, Cheng Yining gets rid of the entire exegetical tradition. The first

<sup>55</sup>*Zhushu*, Cheng Yining's preface, 8.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, Cheng Yining's preface, 5.



received commentary is the one by Guo Xiang and Xiang Xiu, while the *Wings to the Zhuangzi* by Jiao Hong is a compilation from the late Ming period. All these and other commentaries, although ones differ from others, are reduced to a common denominator, from the most brilliant to the most common: they misunderstood the true meaning of Kun and Peng and betrayed the “real meaning” (真意) of the text by not looking for its alchemical sense. That is how they have “taken what is illusory for what is real” (認虛為實), what is illusory being the *Zhuangzi*'s textual meaning, and what is real being the hidden and more essential alchemical meaning it tries to convey.<sup>57</sup>

The *Zhuangzi* is therefore a work whose essential function has been forgotten during the two past millennia, a raft to salvation that has been left untouched due to the lack of worthy commentators. As Wang Boxiu remarks in his preface, “possessing a treasure without recognizing it is truly a great pity.” (得寶而不見寶，真千古之一大恨)<sup>58</sup>

After two millennia of exegetical blindness, Cheng Yining finally delivers the correct interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*. He is the one who, at last, understands that Kun and Peng are but metaphors for alchemical concepts. Even though the question of the source of the “sudden illumination” (頓悟) that allowed him to understand the true meaning of this work is unclear, it is nonetheless certain that this discovery is supposed to represent a major shift in the history of the *Zhuangzi*: only with Cheng Yining's commentary can the *Zhuangzi* be truly understood.

Two details further exhibit Cheng Yining's will to be seen as the one and the only who seized the *Zhuangzi*'s true meaning. The first one is the title he chooses for his work. He calls it *Commentary and Sub-commentary to True Classic of Southern Splendor*. As it would be obvious to any reader of the *Zhuangzi* of Cheng's time, this title is inspired by the most influential and classic exegesis of the *Zhuangzi*, authored by Guo Xiang for the commentary (注), and Cheng Xuanying for the sub-commentary (疏). Cheng Yining appropriates these elements in his own title, where both the commentary and the sub-commentary are from his hand. By doing so, he tries to erase the very source of the hermeneutic tradition, and gives a whole new facet to the interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*.

The second is found in Zou Zhongyun's preface, where he establishes a parallel between Zhu Xi (朱熹)'s commentaries and the Confucian Classics, and likewise Cheng Yining's commentaries to

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<sup>57</sup>Lu Xixing, although he clearly influenced Cheng Yining, is not mentioned in Cheng's own preface. Zou Zhongyun, the author of another preface, acknowledges that Lu Xixing has a better understanding of the *Zhuangzi* than most other commentators, but harshly criticizes his perceived use of sexual cultivation, as well as the shallowness of his understanding of Kun and Peng. The relation between Lu Xixing's commentary and the *Zhushu* will require further study.

<sup>58</sup>*Zhushu*, Wang Boxiu's preface, 9.

both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*:

In the days of old, Zhu Ziyang (朱紫陽)<sup>59</sup> commented the Classics, and wrote what will forever remain their real explanation. Nowadays, Master Fugui (復圭子)<sup>60</sup> comments the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, and writes what is to endure forever as their mystical explanation.<sup>61</sup>

昔朱紫陽註經書，為千古之的解。今復圭子註疏道德南華亦為千古之玄解。

This parallelism displays the will to confirm the *Zhushu* as the only commentary that reveals the true sense of the *Zhuangzi*, just as Zhu Xi has revealed and defined decisively the meaning of the Confucian Classics.

We come to understand that the writing of the *Zhushu* is no small feat, and that it is indeed an important meritorious deed: by writing a definitive commentary that surpasses and renders obsolete all previous ones, Cheng enlightens his fellow human beings and helps the divinities Laozi and Zhuangzi accomplish their goal of letting man access, through Neidan cultivation, the transcendent realm of immortality.

## Conclusion

We now have a clear picture of the *Zhushu*, the reading strategy at its core, and how its author has created new understandings of Zhuangzi, the *Zhuangzi*, and a role for himself and his commentary in order to make sense of his reading strategy.

At the center of this work lies a reading strategy that expose from some passages of the *Zhuangzi* alchemical concepts that obviously do not relate to its original meaning, and builds a network of equivalences on two levels. What Cheng Yining presents to us as the real meaning of the *Zhuangzi* has little to do with the *Zhuangzi* itself. Cheng Yining is aware of this problem.

This unusual Neidan approach of reading the *Zhuangzi* is framed within a specific context built by Cheng Yining. This context is also a way of legitimizing his peculiar reading strategy. Cheng Yining is thus able to make original claims about the identity of Zhuangzi and the nature of his work. The author Zhuangzi is considered as a divine being, an emanation of the Most High Lord Lao, who has written a Neidan book. This book is derived from the classic that is considered as the source of

<sup>59</sup>Zhu Xi's hao (號).

<sup>60</sup>Cheng Yining's hao.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., Zou Zhongyun's preface, 3.

all alchemical texts: the *Daode jing*. The *Zhuangzi*, just like its predecessor the *Laozi*, was written to reveal to man the way to immortality.

However, *Zhuangzi* has written his work in a cryptic way, so that its real meaning is hidden behind the surface meaning of its text. He expresses himself through “symbolic words,” which means through words that seem to deal with mundane topics, but are actually showing the way with which one can reach the Dao through Neidan practice. In consequence of its peculiar literary form, the *Zhuangzi*, during the time-span of around two thousand years that elapsed from the time it was written to the end of Ming Dynasty, has not been understood as the major alchemical classic that it should be.

The beginning of the seventeenth century becomes the time when the *Zhuangzi* can at last fulfill its role and guide people towards the transcendent realm, thanks to the work of Cheng Yining.

Cheng Yining is a Neidan practitioner who has not yet reached the end of the alchemical path. He is a mortal seeking immortality, but who has not yet succeeded. The path he follows has been impeded because of certain material obstacles, and he knows that divinities can help him overcome these obstacles if he accomplishes enough meritorious deeds.

He happens to realize how to read the Immortal Elder *Zhuangzi*'s symbolic words. He knows that between the lines of the text of the *Zhuangzi* lie alchemical concepts that constitute its true meaning and its rationale. Cheng Yining then writes the *Zhushu*, a commentary disclosing the *Zhuangzi*'s true meaning, and saves the text from the shallow and misleading understanding of all previous commentators. Only through Cheng Yining's new commentary does the *Zhuangzi* reach the full realization of its soteriological potentiality, and can be used by mortals to transcend their condition.

Cheng Yining collaborates with the divinized *Zhuangzi* by writing the *Zhushu* and contributes to accomplish the Immortal Elder's wish to help men become immortal through Neidan practice. By doing so, he accomplishes a remarkable meritorious deed. He can then hope that *Zhuangzi* himself will be grateful and help him find patrons and companions to cultivate the Dao.

The *Zhushu* is therefore a commentary that fulfills a double function: first, it reveals the hidden true meaning of the *Zhuangzi*, and secondly, the very act of writing it serves as a propitiatory act that Cheng Yining wishes will grant him the favors of the divinized *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* and would allow

him to join them in their transcendent realm.

The *Zhushu* then, with its “violent misreading”<sup>62</sup> of the *Zhuangzi*, tells us the story of a literati hoping to achieve salvation through Neidan practice by writing a highly original reading of the *Zhuangzi*, a deed in agreement with the general late Ming trend of creating innovative works that are set apart from established traditions.

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<sup>62</sup>I borrow this expression from Michael Puett, “Violent Misreadings: the Hermeneutics of Cosmology in the *Huainanzi*,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 72(2000): 29-47. He applies it to the *Huainanzi*'s cosmological reading of a few sentences from the *Zhuangzi*'s second chapter. Cheng Yining's own reading can be perceived as its distant heir.

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## 《莊子》詮釋的原因與方法： 明末內丹家程以寧的答案

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摘要

《南華真經注疏》是一部明末時以內丹角度去研讀《莊子》的註解。其作者程以寧闡述了一種罕見於莊子詮釋歷史中的原創詮釋學方法：他將《莊子》看作內丹經典，而他的註解目的則在於揭示其內丹精義。為了支持他的解釋，程以寧必須創造一個新的作者莊子的形象，讓他不但成為了太上老君的化身，還為了給世人揭露一條藉由寓言走向成仙的道路而著了一部《南華經》。因此程以寧的目的在於解釋這些寓言和象徵，從而提出他認為唯一能讀懂莊子本意的方式。程以寧的註解作為一個功德所為，除了為提出《莊子》的真義，也為了獲得太上老君的幫助以完成他自己的內丹實踐。

關鍵詞：程以寧、詮釋學、內丹、明末思想、《莊子》

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