

Introduction

Being and Becoming: The Many Portrayals of Yang Zhu

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Like almost all Chinese masters, Yang Zhu 楊/陽朱 (also called Master Yang 楊子 or Mr. Yang 楊生, fl. ca. 350 BCE) is hardly known in the field of philosophy in general. But in overviews of Chinese philosophy more specifically, he plays a certain role. There he is heralded as the founder of Yangism (*Yang Zhu xuepai* 楊朱學派) and the early promoter of egoism, individualism, and hedonism. He is said to have defended bodily integrity under the motto “for oneself” (*wei wo* 為我) against the moral duty or political pressure to sacrifice oneself for others. According to one of Yang’s contemporary rivals, Mencius 孟子 (Mengzi, 372–289 BCE), Yang’s ideas were immensely popular in his day. Unlike other early Chinese masters, Yang Zhu has no book compiled and transmitted under his name. The modern Chinese novelist Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) jokingly provided an explanation for this:

Yangzi certainly did not write anything. This is really “for oneself.” Because if he had made a book for others to read, he would have ended up acting “for others.”

楊子就一定不著。這才是‘為我。’因為若做出書來給別人看，便變成‘為人’了。¹

And this would, of course, have gone against his deepest conviction. Academics, however, are less prone to joking during working hours: since Yang Zhu was launched as a “Chinese philosopher” about one century ago, the scarcity of evidence for his life and thought has been considered a serious problem. This is because academic training in Chinese philosophy largely relies on reconstruction of the early thinkers’ lives and thought based on textual evidence.

In the case of Yang Zhu, no text has been explicitly associated with him, aside from some loose statements attributed to him and one rather incoherent chapter entitled “Yang Zhu” in the *Liezi* 列子 (ca. 300 CE), a book that postdates him more than six centuries. A second type of material consists of a few scraps of early (Warring States and Han) writings that explicitly mention Yang Zhu. They portray him either negatively, in a fixed pair with Mozi 墨子 (fl. ca. 430 BCE) (e.g., in *Mencius*, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Han Feizi* 韓非子), or neutrally, in longer lists of masters (e.g., in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Huainanzi* 淮南子). Scholars of the early twentieth century have added a third type of source material to Yang Zhu studies, attributing some passages from early sources (e.g., *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Zhuangzi*) to Yang Zhu’s followers on the basis of their content and terminology, even though he is never mentioned there. The most commonly used evidence for such attributions are expressions such as “keep intact one’s inborn nature” 全性, “preserve the genuine” 保真, “do not allow one’s body to be ensnared by things” 不以物累形, “nurture one’s life/inborn nature” 養生/性, do not “harm” 害/傷 it, “value oneself” 貴己 and, less favorably, “for oneself” 為我. The most commonly selected passages occur in *Han Feizi* 50 “Eminent Learnings” 顯學, in five *Lüshi chunqiu* chapters (1/2 “Taking Life as Basic” 本生, 1/3 “Valuing the Self” 重己, 2/2 “Honoring Life” 貴生, 2/3 “Essential Desires” 情欲, and 21/4 “Being Attentive to Aims” 審為) and four *Zhuangzi* chapters (28 “Yielding the Throne” 讓王, 29 “Robber Zhi” 盜跖, 30 “Discourse on Swords” 說劍, and 31 “Old Fisherman” 漁父). The reliance on these three types of textual material has been inherited by modern Yang Zhu scholars in their project of discovering the historical Yang Zhu and reconstructing his original thought.

Far from intending to remedy this dearth of reliable material, the current volume treats this lack of information as a feature rather than a bug. It illustrates how this biographical and bibliographical void has allowed the figure of Yang Zhu to incorporate a wide variety of visions and concerns across more than twenty centuries. Our alternative

approach relies upon but also differs from previous scholarship. Prior to the Republican period, there were only occasional statements about Yang Zhu. A strong scholarly interest in Yang Zhu's thought only emerged in the twentieth century. In addition to his appearance in overviews of Chinese philosophy² and studies about individualism,³ there has been a growing, but still limited, pool of scholarly work on Yang Zhu. For Western readers specifically, the increase has been remarkable, beginning with Alfred Forke's monograph of 1912⁴ up through the more recent work of scholars such as John Emerson,⁵ Attilio Andreini,⁶ and Ranie Villaver.⁷ An even stronger proliferation can be seen in Japan and China, thus far culminating in the work of He Aiguo 何愛國⁸ and in workshops⁹ dedicated to Yang Zhu.¹⁰

In Western academia, by far the most influential scholar in this respect has been A. C. Graham (1919–91). Inspired by two Chinese scholars, Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990) and Guan Feng 關鋒 (1919–2005), he identified the five *Lüshi chungiu* chapters and four *Zhuangzi* chapters cited above as containing Yangist source material. He also confirmed portions of the *Liezi*, specifically from the “Yang Zhu” chapter, as authentic testimonies of pre-Qin thought.¹¹ Graham's interest in both the *Mozzi* and the *Zhuangzi* had called his attention to the shadowy figure Yang Zhu. Along with Mo Di 墨翟, Yang had traditionally figured as a heterodox master; and aligned with Zhuang Zhou, he had been considered a Daoist. But Graham gave him an even greater role as the inventor of the notion of “inborn nature” (*xing* 性) and consequently as the instigator of a major philosophical debate in the fourth century BCE. “Little as we know directly about Yang [Z]hu, it seems that his intervention provoked a metaphysical crisis which threatened the basic assumptions of Confucianism and Mohism and set them on new courses.”¹² It is hence only “with the appearance of rival doctrines” that Chinese philosophy became lively and sophisticated for Graham.¹³ This portrayal of Yang Zhu and his role in the growth of Chinese philosophy, although based on little evidence, has been very influential in Western academia.¹⁴

The dominant trend since the twentieth century has consisted in identifying Yang Zhu's original thought in extant sources, reconstructing it as a systematic theory, and comparing it with possible equivalents in other cultures (e.g., hedonism). Without precluding such philosophical endeavors, the authors of this volume have chosen not to join this trend. Our project instead is to describe and situate the various reconstructions of Yang Zhu's thought in Chinese history. It illustrates that today's diligent

search for firm textual evidence and a philosophical theory is largely the result of the most recent and currently dominant reconstruction of Yang Zhu. Rather than discussing Yang Zhu within the confines of that or any other specific historical frame, this volume tries to broaden the lens and retrieve a variety of paradigms in which Yang Zhu has played a role. This not only leads to more multifarious presentations of Yang Zhu but also to the contexts that shaped them. More generally, the remarkable dearth of textual material for this figure represents the almost “nothing” out of which early Chinese philosophers such as Yang Zhu have been fruitfully “created.”

This introduction reviews the eleven Yang Zhu portrayals presented in the current volume. It then concludes with some reflections on Yang Zhu as an extreme case of the more general scholarly predicament with respect to the reconstruction of early Chinese philosophy. All of the portrayals have to some extent been created and re-created in a multiplicity of historical contexts. Despite (but also thanks to) the lack of textual evidence, Yang Zhu represents the undetermined dimension and creative potential of all ancient Chinese philosophers who are now studied, even the most well-attested and supposedly unshakable ones—such as Confucius, Zhuangzi, and Mozi.

1. A Selection of Yang Zhu Portrayals

This volume is chronologically ordered. Following a general overview, it contains three parts: part 1 covers Warring States to the Wei-Jin dynasties, part 2 from Tang to Ming, and part 3 from the Qing dynasty onward. In the introductory chapter, Carine Defoort traces the consecutive emergence and lasting influences of five major Yang Zhu portrayals preceding the creation of him as an ancient philosopher in the Republican period. First, in the late Zhou dynasty, he was primarily seen as a debating rival and secondarily as a defender of physical integrity. Combined, these two characteristics constituted the core of what gradually grew into an enduring interest in the lineage to which Yang Zhu belonged. From the Han dynasty onward, Yang Zhu became part of a rhetorical trope based on Mencius’s negative portrayal of him alongside Mo Di. However, like Mencius, these two figures constituted the least informative parts of the trope. Mencius and Yang-Mo, respectively, were no more than slots where debaters could enter their own contemporary heroes and enemies. The third Yang Zhu

portrayal, in the Wei-Jin period, pictures him as a prominent figure in his own right, most notably in the *Liezi* chapter named after him. By emancipating Yang Zhu from the Mencian Yang-Mo trope, this portrayal differs remarkably from previous and subsequent ones. It was later retrieved in the late Qing dynasty and played a major part in twentieth-century research. Even though in the fourth portrayal, from the Song onward, reflections on Yang's thought mostly reverted to the shadow of Mohist and Confucian thought, they also became increasingly sophisticated. Few of these Neo-Confucian reflections have been adopted in the field of Chinese philosophy, especially when compared with Kang Youwei's influence. Kang's remarks on Yang Zhu represent the fifth and last portrayal before the latter came to be treated seriously as a philosopher. This late Qing reformer portrayed Confucius among a wealth of rivals, including Yangzi, who all confirmed the sage's status as China's major reformer.

The first part of this volume contains three chapters, which cover the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) up to the Wei-Jin dynasties (220–420 CE). The first two, by Ting-mien Lee and Yao-cheng Chang, respectively, focus on the *Mencius* and other early (pre-Han and Han) sources. While Lee presents an alternative reading of Mencius's criticism of Yang and Mo by rereading the *Mencius* along with less familiar sources, Chang suggests an alternative to the Mencian portrayal of Yang and Mo on the basis of the *Zhuangzi* and *Han Feizi*. The third chapter by Erica Brindley turns to the *Liezi*, in which Yang Zhu is portrayed in his own right apart from Mozi.

By confronting the currently dominant interpretation of Mencius's criticism, Lee demonstrates that due to the dearth of textual evidence, this portrayal of Yang Zhu as Mencius's rival is inevitably speculative and open to radical challenge. In her alternative reading, Mencius does not criticize Yang and Mo for their opposite scope of moral concern—ranging from “for oneself” to “care for all”—but for their shared opposition to his advocacy of the war to end all wars. For Yang Zhu and Mozi, military unification is not the right way to restore peace and order. Yang Zhu argues that wars and interstate power struggles would naturally stop if no one would be willing to sacrifice oneself by participating in them. Mohists believe wars would stop if everyone would be willing to sacrifice oneself rather than others. Rather than defending this alternative reading as the correct interpretation of the debate between Mencius, Mozi, and Yang Zhu, Lee's construction is meant to shock the reader out of all-too-familiar lines of interpretation.

Chang's focus is not on interpreting Mencius's criticism but rather on reconsidering the long-standing fixation with this criticism and highlighting an alternative, often neglected, yet significant portrayal of Yang and Mo. While Mencius seems to depict Yang Zhu and Mozi as advocates of extreme forms of egoism and altruism, they are depicted in other early texts as deploying extraordinary but futile skills in manipulating language. This portrayal of Yang and Mo as debaters not only differs from the Mencian portrayal of them as promoters of certain ethical perspectives but also figures into Mencius's own use and defense of *bian* 辯 against his rivals. It does not criticize Yang Zhu or Mozi for their pernicious perspectives but rather for their useless skills: the *Zhuangzi* suggests that they lost their inborn nature, while the *Han Feizi* thinks that their skills do not contribute to the prosperity of the state. Drawing on the Yang-Mo discourses in *Zhuangzi* and *Han Feizi*, Chang offers an alternative methodological perspective on these non-Mencian Yang-Mo descriptions in early texts. He considers them a product of a dynamic development in a highly open and fluid textual culture rather than, as is usually assumed, the expression of a dominant and stable Mencian depiction of Yang and Mo.

Erica Brindley's chapter tries to identify the type of hedonism that can be attributed to the "Yang Zhu" chapter of the *Liezi* and the book as a whole: it is not just the enjoyment of immediate physical pleasures but rather a deeper understanding of what enhances authentic pleasure in life. Her analysis suggests that simple pleasures of immediate and physical joys cannot fully encapsulate the hedonism and conception of pleasure in the "Yang Zhu" chapter. Its conception of pleasure should be understood within the web constituted by the concepts of nature, destiny, joy, life, freedom, possession, reputation, and so on. By focusing on the themes of "life over death," "reality over pretense or reputation," "internal, not external," and "freedom," she argues that the philosophical orientation of Yang Zhu's hedonism echoes simple or popular hedonism in its advocacy of indulgence in sensual pleasures, but it does not always prioritize sensory pleasure as the ultimate life goal. The pursuit of the most authentic and unadulterated forms of enjoyment of life points to hedonism in a deeper philosophical sense. The *Liezi's* Yang Zhu figure in general expresses an appreciation of vitality and freedom in each living moment and considers that sort of joy to be the highest good in life.

The second part covers the period from the Tang (618–907) to the Ming (1368–1644) dynasty. It also contains three chapters, two of which

are by John Makeham and one by Esther Klein. They represent two ends of a spectrum between serious speculation and literary ploys: at one end, Makeham's chapters show Yang Zhu's role in the gradual construction of the *daotong* 道統 (succession of the Way) lineage; at the other end, Klein's contribution on the iconoclast Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) portrays a more surprising, personal, and ambiguous treatment of Yang Zhu.

Makeham's first chapter depicts the gradual emergence of a pro-*daotong* discourse preceding Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) construction of his own orthodoxy. In this discourse the negative image of Yang Zhu plays a notable role. Makeham identifies and examines key themes that emerged in the course of four centuries, across a broad range of literary genres including letters, reading notes, essays, prefaces, postfaces, tomb inscriptions, epitaphs, laudations, and commentaries written by important intellectuals of the period, such as Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), some proponents of *guwen* 古文 (ancient-style learning), and the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao 程顥 [1032–1085] and Cheng Yi 程頤 [1033–1107]). Yang Zhu was not a central figure in the process of *daotong* construction at that time, but his appearances in the Confucian discourses that appropriated the Mencian rhetoric indicate certain key steps in the *daotong* construction. Han Yu, for example, portrayed the Daoists and Buddhists as latter-day Yangists and Mohists and hence more dangerous than the erstwhile Warring States masters Yang and Mo. Later advocates of *guwen* adopted the same rhetorical strategy, while the Cheng brothers and their disciples eventually removed Han Yu himself from the lineage of orthodox transmission.

Makeham's second chapter goes on to explore the role that Zhu Xi accorded to Yang Zhu in his notion of *daotong*. It shows how Zhu's appropriation of the negative image of Yang and Mo was further developed in his critiques of Daoism and, even more so, of Buddhism. Makeham's analysis casts light on the importance of this critical dimension of Zhu Xi's project. By promoting and excluding certain figures, Zhu Xi presented himself as the legitimate heir to the succession of the true Way. As Makeham's previous chapter has illustrated, the Cheng brothers' criticisms of Yang Zhu and Mozi elaborated on the idea that a small diversion could develop disastrous consequences. In this respect, the brothers held that both Yang Zhu and Mozi came from the Confucians, initially only differed slightly from Mencius but nevertheless had led to terrible heresies under their followers. Zhu Xi, however, refuted this judgment. He argued that Yang Zhu's teaching was derived from Laozi's and that

Buddhism was an even more deviant version of extreme Yangism and Mohism. For Zhu Xi, it was through Buddhism that Yang and Mo had been perpetuated. By re-narrating the intellectual affiliation of Yang Zhu and Mozi, Zhu Xi formulated his particular account of *daotong*, which identified Daoism and Buddhism not only as “the other” but also as the latter-day incarnation of Yang and Mo. He moreover suggested that Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) all lost the Way of Confucius.

Klein’s chapter shows how surprisingly seldom the notorious iconoclast and individualist Li Zhi referred to Yang Zhu. When he did, the allusions were unclear and therefore are all the more alluring and pregnant with possible interpretations. As a notorious individualist or egoist, Li might strike many scholars as “a Yang Zhu type”: he resigned from office to pursue intellectual pleasures, refused to respect social norms, and advocated perspectives that certainly could be labeled as “for oneself.” In spite of superficial similarities, however, Li Zhi’s references to Yang Zhu tend to be negative. An intriguing example is found in his “Self-Evaluation” 自贊, one of Li’s best-known pieces of work. By contextualizing the piece within Li Zhi’s life experiences and the intellectual traditions that might have shaped his thought, Klein explores potential readings of the “Self-Evaluation” and analyzes the significance of its Yang Zhu references. Her close analysis suggests that Li Zhi’s disapproval of Yang Zhu was meant to signal that he was *not* acting merely for himself; instead, he viewed himself as a man who contributed to the realm.

The third and last part of this volume, covering from the Qing (1644–1911) into the twentieth century, contains four chapters that focus on the emergence and changing visions on Yang Zhu as a philosopher. The first chapter is by Masayuki Sato on the scholarship related to Yang Zhu in Japan during the Meiji period (1868–1912). The Japanese scholarship constructed some crucial stepping-stones for Yang’s entrance into the world of philosophers. Xiaowei Wang’s analysis of Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 (1873–1929) deployment of Yang Zhu describes a second important step from Japan to China. Then follows Diana (Xiaoqing) Lin’s description of five stages in Feng Youlan’s evolving views of Yang Zhu. Feng Cao’s chapter concludes the volume by presenting three important scholars’ contributions to Yang Zhu study: Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Meng Wentong 蒙文通 (1894–1968), and Guan Feng.

Sato’s chapter is an overview of the discourse on Yang Zhu produced in the last decades of the Meiji period. It illustrates how young

intellectuals of the time began to interpret and elaborate on the thought of Yang Zhu, often called “Master Yang” (Yōshi 楊子), in the scholarly framework of “philosophy.” The discipline of “Chinese philosophy” or “Eastern Philosophy” was institutionalized in the 1880s at Tokyo University. Sato analyzes lecture transcripts of the courses delivered in the philosophy department, notes taken by students, and subsequent articles and monographs on Chinese or Eastern philosophy. Yang Zhu played a significant role in those writings even though he had been a marginal figure throughout Chinese history. Not only was Yang Zhu often mentioned among other well-known Warring States thinkers, he also enjoyed much philosophical attention. He appeared in almost every history of Chinese philosophy written in Japanese. Being studied under the disciplinary category of philosophy, he was even treated by some scholars as the founder of a “Yang Zhu school,” which was associated with distinctive philosophical perspectives.

In China, pre-Republican portrayals of Yang Zhu were generally negative. This changed in the twentieth century, and Liang Qichao was one of the important Chinese intellectuals contributing to this change. Inspired by Japanese intellectuals, in 1902 Liang became the first Chinese scholar to call Yang Zhu a philosopher (*zhhexuejia* 哲學家). He was also the first Chinese intellectual to depict Yang Zhu as an advocate of the notion of “rights.” This depiction led to the portrayal of Yang Zhu as an individualist in the May Fourth period. While some scholars have noted Liang’s contribution to the shift from a negative to a positive evaluation of Yang Zhu, little attention has thus far been paid to the specific complexities of Liang’s new portrayal of Yang Zhu in light of his sociopolitical agenda. Xiaowei Wang’s contribution not only traces the various steps of Liang’s refiguration of Yang Zhu between 1896 and 1904 but also brings out the wavering and tensions between Yang’s supposed pernicious world weariness and his laudable promotion of rights.

Next, Diana Lin outlines five stages of Feng Youlan’s assessments of Yang Zhu, from the 1920s to the 1980s. Similar to Liang Qichao, Feng’s descriptions and evaluations of Yang Zhu vary in accordance with the changing conditions of his personal experiences and the sociopolitical situation. Yang Zhu does not play a significant role in the first stage and is nonjudgmentally described as a hedonist in Feng’s 1923 PhD dissertation. The second stage depicts Yang Zhu as an egoist, whose idea of self-preservation, according to Feng’s 1931 *History of Chinese Philosophy*, proposes a balanced life approach for mankind to adopt. It also constructs

an extensive genealogy of Daoism, assigning Yang Zhu the role of Daoist founder associated with a wide range of primary texts. During wartime in the 1940s, Feng's assessment of Yang Zhu entered the third stage. He criticized Yang's philosophy for being selfish and discouraging individuals from contributing to the nation. The fourth stage was Marxist: Feng applied the idea of the declining slave-owning class in portraying Yang Zhu. The last stage, as presented in Feng's *New History of Chinese Philosophy*, is marked by harsher criticism of Yang Zhu. Echoing the first stage, it depicts him as a pernicious hedonist. After going through experiences related to the Gang of Four during the last years of the Cultural Revolution, Feng had come to consider Yang Zhu's hedonism reprehensible. Lin's analysis of Feng's five stages shows that despite shifts in his views, Feng's concern throughout remained centered on the relationship between individual and society.

The last chapter, by Feng Cao, argues that Hu Shi, Meng Wentong, and Guan Feng represent three different directions in the study of Yang Zhu. While Hu showcased him as a model of modernity with imported notions of "individualism" and "self-awareness," Meng drew on a wide variety of early sources and figures to reconstruct a large network of lineages surrounding him, and Guan used Marxist class analysis to shape him into a representative of the small craftsmen such as Mozi. Guan has also exerted influence upon the Western scholarship through A. C. Graham's research on Yangism. Cao's analysis of the three scholars' Yang Zhu research shows not only their different interpretations or characterizations of Yang Zhu's "philosophy" but also the different approaches they envisaged to tackle the intellectual and social situations they were facing. For Hu Shi, the essential aspect of modernity was the pursuit of independent thought and the individual's status, which echoes the ethos of the May Fourth movement. Guan Feng was one of the leading scholars who applied Marxism to the study of Yang Zhu. As for Meng Wentong, according to Cao, his approach was an attempt to appropriate positivism to conduct scientific research on Chinese philosophy. Such case studies illuminate how modern scholars, motivated by their pursuit of modernity or ideological integrity, deployed and reshaped the philosopher Yang Zhu.

2. To Be or to Become: That Is the Question

The eleven contributions to this volume present a wealth of information. However, they do not add up to a complete and reliable picture of who

the historical Yang Zhu was and what he really thought. In line with Roger Ames's insistence, inspired by the American pragmatist John Dewey (1859–1952),¹⁵ on “becoming” rather than “being,” the current volume tries to establish Yang Zhu's successive *becomings*, rather than aiming at a consensus on who he might have *been*. This approach of unfolding Yang's process of “becoming” is not only provoked by the remarkable dearth of information about the original figure but also by the potential we see in it for the study of early masters in general. Those masters who have books named after them—Mozi, Laozi 老子, Mencius, Xunzi 荀子, Guanzi 管子, Han Feizi, and so on—or who are closely associated with one, as Confucius is with the *Lunyu* 論語, also underwent an ongoing process of becoming during the vicissitudes of Chinese history. Yang Zhu's extreme case therefore is highly illuminating and instructive in terms of forming an approach to the uncertainties in the field of Chinese philosophy. Our ignorance about the early masters is inevitable, but it has a positive side: it is the source of endless potential for new portrayals. Yang Zhu represents this potential more than well-attested masters. We elaborate on this predicament in three ways.

First, “being” and “becoming” are not mutually exclusive but rather intricately related. We have hardly any textual testimony about who Yang Zhu really was, let alone an autobiography (and even that would have been merely one of the portrayals, albeit a privileged one). Yet there is some point in trying to identify the oldest surviving portrayal of who he was. Mark Cskiszentmihlyi's effort with Confucius is an example of such attempt. His identification of the historical figure behind the wealth of later portrayals is short, tentative, and relies on those portions of the *Lunyu* that he considers old and apparently not influenced by Han ideology.¹⁶ We have no reason to deny the historical existence of Yang Zhu, though the scarcity of textual support means that any conclusion about Yang Zhu must be even more limited and tentative. We offer two conjectures. Considering the chronology of the portrayals, we have more reasons to believe that Yang Zhu was among the earliest masters who challenged the status quo with argumentation (*bian*) than to believe that he invented the notion of individual rights or represented the class of slave owners. His resort to argumentation is not only attested in the oldest sources uninfluenced by later or foreign ideologies, but even in different and seemingly unrelated ones: the *Mencius* as well as the *Zhuangzi-Han Feizi* portrayal discussed by Yao-cheng Chang. Second, since various early sources identify Yang Zhu with ideas concerning “oneself” (我/己) and “body” (身) or “life” (生), we can suppose that he argued for physical integrity or

health against social duties, participation in warfare, or political aggrandizement. His ideas may have influenced later authors, stretching from those recorded in some *Lüshi chungiu* chapters to the biography of Mao Zedong's personal doctor.¹⁷ The fact that his name was not mentioned by them does not necessarily deny his possible influence. But due to the scarceness of evidence, both characteristics can only tentatively be associated with the historical figure Yang Zhu.

Our second point relates to “being” or Yang Zhu as a historical figure: namely, who he really was. While it is natural that scholars who quote or refer to Yang Zhu think of the person who lived in the past (slightly before Mencius), we are also aware of the fact that any portrayal of this person is to some extent a construction. The supposed historical figure differs in character and importance depending on the portrayal to which it belongs. The notion of a historical Yang Zhu may have had some relevance for all those who referred to him, but it might not have been a crucial matter for most premodern scholars. It is, for example, hard to identify the real opponent behind Mencius's polemic statements,¹⁸ and the Zhuangzian-Han Feizian cluster does not seem particularly interested in the real Yang Zhu. Nor does the oft-quoted Yang-Mo trope, which uses Mencius's statement as a rhetorical tool to label Confucian opponents—Daoists, Buddhists, Christians, or even other Confucians. Likewise, Kang Youwei's presentation of Yang Zhu, along with other masters, basically served to uncover the real Confucius rather than the real Yang Zhu. Later portrayals of Yang Zhu in the context of China's nation building, the May Fourth movement, or the advocacy of Marxist ideology, were also not all primarily driven by curiosity about the historical figure. Interest in the textual basis for reconstructing the *Liezi*, and hence also in Yang Zhu, initially emerged among textual scholars, especially in the Qing dynasty. Of the twenty-four opinions on this matter that Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (1909–1992) collected in his *Liezi* edition, only six predate the Qing. The dominant view among these scholars, including Yang Bojun himself, was that the *Liezi*—and also the “Yang Zhu” chapter—was at the earliest a Wei-Jin text.¹⁹ It is only with the emergence of Yang Zhu as a philosopher that this interest also turned into some sort of obsession: Who was this person? When and where did he live? And most of all: Is the *Liezi* a reliable source for reconstructing Yang Zhu's thought? The urge to identify one individual personality behind a reliable set of texts therefore seems to be part of the modern academic philosophical

endeavor. In China as well as in the West, this paradigm has come to dominate much of Yang Zhu research. Almost every academic discussion of Yang Zhu is nowadays steered toward these questions.²⁰ Because of its current dominance and despite its relatively recent date, the emergence of and variations in the philosophical portrayal have received more attention in this volume (four chapters for one century) than the preimperial and imperial ones (seven chapters for more than twenty centuries). Our study of Yang Zhu is therefore also an attempt to historically situate the philosophical portrayal of early Chinese masters in general.

The third and final reflection about Chinese masters through the study of Yang Zhu concerns their “becoming.” While our approach may not offer the clearest possible presentation of an ancient philosopher’s thought, we gain a variety of other insights. We could speculate on the textual passages that are selected or overlooked in the various portrayals. Anecdotes about Yang Zhu “lamenting at a crossroads” (*Xunzi*, *Huainanzi*, *Lunheng*) or “lodging in the inn” (*Zhuangzi*, *Han Feizi*), for instance, have thus far received little attention. Another interesting issue is how the various portrayals relate to each other, for example, how Song and Ming scholars enhanced the Mencian trope or how Kang Youwei revived early textual evidence. Some contributions also show how political or intellectual contexts fed into the evolving portrayals of Yang Zhu, going from his negative role in the *daotong* construction to a more diverse one in nation-building projects and perceived class struggles. The most striking is the question about the many other possible Yang Zhu portrayals that can be retrieved and studied. One could, for example, trace the consecutive opponents attacked through the framework of Yang-Mo, going from Daoists and Buddhists to Christians and even rival Confucians. How to understand the Song-Ming association of Yang Zhu with *yi* 義 or with an extreme that guides us away from the perfect “middle”? What were the growing pains of the Daoist lineage into which Yang Zhu was increasingly but differently incorporated? And what degree of variety did the Marxist views allow, positioning Yang Zhu in the declining slave owners’ class (Feng Youlan) or the rising class of small craftsmen (Guan Feng)? A wealth of Chinese intellectuals are discussed in relation to Yang Zhu.²¹ Each of them could be singled out and made the focus of one’s research, as Esther Klein shows with Li Zhi. Through her analysis of Li’s very sporadic and unclear references to Yang Zhu, we get to know Li Zhi much better than Yang Zhu. Narrowing the focus thus allows one to

broaden the scope, especially with a figure such as Yang Zhu who always seems to have functioned as a “secondary figure,” ceding the main stage to others.²² As a result, the information contained in this book will not satisfy one’s hunger for the “authentic” Yang Zhu but hopefully will whet the appetite for more knowledge about Chinese intellectual history and the construction of philosophy in it.

These three characteristics of Yang Zhu research presented in terms of “being” and “becoming” do not concern only him but the whole field of early Chinese masters. They keep our interest lively and the conversation going. Our gratitude goes to our interlocutors: the authors of this volume, the participants of the workshop organized at the University of Leuven in the spring of 2019, and the various reviewers of our work: Roger Ames, Attilio Andreini, Steve Angle, Erica Brindley, Feng Cao, Yao-cheng Chang, Chen Shaoming, Paul Goldin, Hao Sutong, Esther Klein, Li Lanfen, Diana Lin, Liu Gusheng, Philippe Major, John Makeham, Yuri Pines, Thomas Radice, Masayuki Sato, Nicolas Standaert, Paul van Els, Xiaowei Wang, Wu Xiaoxin, Yves Vendé, and the two anonymous reviewers of this volume. We also thank Flanders Research Foundation for their support,²³ Bobby Carleo for his painstaking proofreading of the whole manuscript, and the staff of SUNY press. Without their precious contribution and generous support, this volume would not have been possible.

This volume was conceived before the worldwide pandemic hit, and manifestations of climate change struck hard around the globe. The authors revised their contributions in the years 2020 and 2021, as they were confronted head on with these disasters. With nature fighting back, humankind slowly became aware of the often implicit choices that had hitherto shaped our lifestyles. How much of the climate must be sacrificed before some of those choices are reconsidered? These are the types of questions that are associated with Yang Zhu: What are the priorities in life? How much value is attributed to good health? What are we willing to sacrifice in return? What is worth fighting for? Is our body given a voice in crucial decisions? Yang Zhu’s inspiration has become increasingly relevant, regardless of the historical figure and the coherence of his original insights. For us he is the sum of all past and present Yang Zhu figures. We hope that future generations will continue creating powerful portrayals of him that contribute to a world in which we can and want to live.

Notes

1. Lu Xun 魯迅, *Collected Works of Lu Xun* 魯迅全集, 18 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005) 3:538.
2. See, e.g., Hu Shi 胡適, *Zhongguo zhexueshi dagang* 中國哲學史大綱 [*Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1995 [1919]), 155–62; Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo zhexue shi: Juan yi* 中國哲學史: 卷一 (*A History of Chinese Philosophy, vol. 1*) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2015 [1931]), 147–56; Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 175–79; A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), 53–64; Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 154–57, 162; Bryan Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 200–11.
3. Compared to general overviews of Chinese philosophy, Yang Zhu's role is more prominent in studies of the Chinese notion of individualism. See, e.g., Donald Munro, ed., *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985); Erica Brindley, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).
4. Alfred Forke, trans., *Yang Chu's Garden of Pleasure*, with introduction by Hugh Cranmer-Byng (London: Murray, 1912). A later but undated work (postdating WWII) was by the Dutch poet and China aficionado, Jef Last, *Het ware boek der volkomen leegte. Bloemlezing uit de geschriften van Liéh Tze en Yang Tsjoe* (Deventer: Kluwer). See also Aloysius Chang, *A Comparative Study of Yang Chu and the Chapter on Yang Chu* (New York: St. John's University Press, 1969).
5. John Emerson, "Yang Chu's Discovery of the Body," *Philosophy East and West* 46, no. 4 (1996): 533–66.
6. Attilio Andreini, *Il pensiero di Yang Zhu (IV secolo a.C.) attraverso un esame delle fonti cinesi classiche* (Trieste: Edizione università di Trieste, 2000).
7. Ranie Villaver, "Does Guiji Mean Egoism?: Yang Zhu's Conception of Self," *Asian Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2015): 216–23. His doctoral dissertation was also dedicated to Yang Zhu: Ranie Villaver, "Zhuangzi's Scepticism in Light of Yangist Ideas" (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2012).
8. He Aiguo 何愛國, *Xiandaixing de bentu huixiang: Jindai Yang Mo sichao yanjiu* [Local echoes of modernity: A study on the modern thought trends of Yang Zhu and Mozi] (Guangzhou: Shijie tushu chubanshe Guangdong, 2015). He has also dedicated several articles to Yang Zhu.
9. In the summer of 2017, Tsinghua and Wuhan Universities co-organized a workshop titled "The Value of Life and Respect for Humans: Academic

Forum on Yang Zhu's Human Centered Thought” 生命的价值和人的尊严：杨朱的人本主义学术论坛。

10. Discussion of early Japanese and Chinese scholarship related to Yang Zhu is contained in the current volume as well as in a recent issue of the journal *Contemporary Chinese Thought* dedicated to him. See Xiaowei Wang and Carine Defoort, eds., “How Yang Zhu Became a Philosopher: A Selection of Yang Zhu Scholarship in the PRC,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 50, no. 3–4 (2019).

11. Summarized in Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 55, 60. See also A. C. Graham, “The Right to Selfishness: Yangism, Later Mohism, Chuang Tzu,” in Munro, *Individualism and Holism*, 73–84, esp. 73–75. For more on Feng Youlan, see chapter 10 by Diana Lin; for Guan Feng, see chapter 11 by Feng Cao.

12. A. C. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics, and Science* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978), 16.

13. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 59.

14. See, e.g., Van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism*, 200–11; and Karyn Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 46–47.

15. See Roger T. Ames, “Reconstructing A. C. Graham's Reading of *Mencius* on *xing* 性: A Coda to ‘The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature’ (1967),” in *Having a Word with Angus Graham: At Twenty-Five Years into His Immortality*, ed. Carine Defoort and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 185–213.

16. Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Confucius,” in *The Rivers of Paradise: Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Muhammad as Religious Founders*, ed. David Noel Freedman and Michael James McClymond (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 233–308. The suggestions about the possibly historical Confucius are on 265–73.

17. Mao's doctor Li Zhisui (1919–1995) is one of the many testimonies of what some scholars might want to identify as Yangist priorities and cautions. See Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician* (New York: Random House, 1994).

18. See Carine Defoort, “Unfounded and Unfollowed: Mencius' Portrayal of Yang Zhu and Mo Di,” In Defoort and Ames, *Having a Word with Angus Graham*, 165–84.

19. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 [Collected explanations of the *Liezi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996 [1979]). These views on the *Liezi*'s authenticity were collected in the third appendix (pp. 287–348), which was first published as an article in 1956. It was later included in the book in 1957 and revised in 1978. Linguistic features and the absence of citations in extant pre-Qin sources convinced Yang Bojun that the *Liezi* did not even contain many (if any) pre-Qin fragments (348).

20. For China see, e.g., Liu Gusheng and Li Haijie, “The Thought of Yang Zhu in the History of Laozi's Thought: Along with a Discussion of the

Authenticity of the *Liezi*,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 51, no. 3–4 (2019): 75–91. For the West, see A. C. Graham presented above.

21. Other figures whose Yang Zhu portrayal is worth studying are Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581), Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), Li Ao 李翱 (772–841), Lu Zhongxuan 盧重玄 (8th c.), Lu Xisheng 陸希聲 (?–895), Sun Fu 孫復 (992–1057), Shi Jie 石介 (1005–1045), Du Mo 杜默 (1019–1085), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), Chen Jingyuan 陳景元 (1025–1094), Feng Xie 馮灝 (1060–1140), Shi Yaobi 史堯弼 (1118–1157), Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1193), Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (1193–1271), Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (1179–1262), Wu Cheng 吳澄 (1249–1333), Zhu Dezhi 朱得之 (16th c.), Wu Yu 吳虞 (1872–1949), Gu Shi 顧實 (1878–1956), Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921), Jiang Weiqiao 蔣維喬 (1873–1958), Tang Yue 唐鉞 (1891–1987), Bi Yongnian 畢永年 (1869–1902), Chen Li 陳澧 (1810–1882), Gao Xu 高旭 (1877–1925), Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909), Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921), Chen Sanli 陳三立 (1853–1937), Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), Yang Daying 楊大膺 (1903–1977), Chen Cisheng 陳此生 (1900–1983), Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), Tao Xisheng 陶希聖 (1899–1988), Xiong Meng 熊夢 (1902–1983), Lü Simian 呂思勉 (1884–1957), Du Guoxiang 杜國庠 (1889–1961), Hou Wailu 侯外廬 (1903–1987), Zhao Jibin 趙紀彬 (1905–1982), Cao Bohan 曹伯韓 (1897–1959), Ji Wenfu 嵇文甫 (1895–1963), etc. Most of these figures are mentioned in the current volume and in *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 51, no. 3–4 (2019).

22. Chen Shaoming, “A Secondary Figure in the ‘World of Classics’: An Analysis of Yang Zhu’s Image,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 51, no. 3–4 (2019): 92–103.

23. The FWO project G060817N: “Mozi and Yang Zhu from Heretics to Philosophers: Caught in Another Web? The Genealogy of ‘Chinese Philosophy’ in Three Major Steps.”