Who’s speaking? Rhetorical questions as intersubjective mixed viewpoint constructions in an old Chinese text

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[Full draft]

This paper deals with non-information-seeking questions in Zhuangzi, a foundational text of Daoism (4th century B.C.). This text is highly interactionally structured, with a large number of rhetorical questions used for argumentative purposes. These questions should produce either affirmative or negative answers in the reader’s mind, thereby involving a fictive type of interaction (Pascual 2002, 2006, 2014). We analyze rhetorical questions as constructions of intersubjectivity (cf. Verhagen 2005, 2008), not just involving a conceptual integration of question and assertion, but also a viewpoint blend (Dancygier & Sweetest 2012) of the writer’s perspective and that of the assumed prospective readers. There are also multiple viewpoint blending chains. When a rhetorical question is produced by a discourse character, which frequently occurs in this text, which is mainly structured by fables, we need to conceptually integrate with the mixed viewpoints of the writer and potential future readers with that of the discourse characters, meant to represent the writer’s voice (Xiang forth.).

Key words: rhetorical question; intersubjectivity; viewpoint blending chain; fictive interaction; Zhuangzi
1. Introduction

Rhetorical questions have an interrogative form but the illocutionary force of a strong assertion of the opposite polarity from what is supposedly ‘asked’ (Sadock 1974; Han 2002). These questions are thus “meant to be heard as questions and understood as statements” (Ilie 1994: 130). Unlike genuine information-seeking questions, rhetorical questions do not call for an overt answer from the Addressee (Quirk et. al. 1985; Huddleston & Pullum 2002), as the answer is already implied by the Addresser (Ilie 1994). In fact, the pretended act of questioning is used to “render evident the impossibility of providing a truthful answer that satisfies the question’s existential presupposition” (Langacker 1999: 90-91).

In terms of linguistic manifestation, both yes-no questions and wh-questions can be used as rhetorical questions (Quirk et. al 1985; Huddleston & Pullum 2002). A positive rhetorical yes-no question presupposes a strong negative assertion and a negative question presupposes a strong positive one; the polarity reversal of rhetorical wh-questions is realized through the substitution of the wh-element with a positive or negative element in the corresponding assertive statement (Quirk et al. 1985: 825-826). The reversal of polarity between affirmative and negative in the silent answers prompted by rhetorical questions can be motivated/constrained/marked by grammatical elements, for instance, negative polarity items (NPIs) in the interrogative form (Quirk et al. 1985; Koshik 2005) and by the situated context of communication (Frank 1990; Ilie 1994; Maynard 1995; Shao 1996; Badarneh 2003).

A great number of studies from different perspectives have dealt with rhetorical
questions in a wide range of discourse genres and interactional settings (see overview in Ilie 1994; Badarneh 2003; and Koshik 2005). Rhetorical questions have been treated as a highly effective communicative strategy. It is our contention that rhetorical questions are modeled or structured by the intersubjective experience of situated face-to-face conversation and hence constitute an instance of fictive interaction (Pascual 2002, 2006a, 2014). As it is, the basic conversational structure underlying rhetorical questions is characterized by alternation of the Addresser and the Addressee roles, and involves cognitive engagement in which the Addressee is presented as sharing the Addresser’s common ground (cf. Oakley & Tobin 2014). Indeed, the identification and interpretation of rhetorical questions involves the cognitive coordination of the epistemic stances of the Addresser and the Addressee, the latter having to infer and acknowledge the presupposed assertion expressed in interrogative form (cf. Ilie 1994). The illocutionary force of the rhetorical question is the output of the relationship between the speech act of asking the question and the speech act of conveying an assertion (Badarneh 2003: 6). Rhetorical questions have been defined as meant to express the Addresser’s strong conviction of the position presented (e.g. Ilie 1994), which is to be jointly attended to and resolved in the Addressee’s mind. The ultimate goal is to convince the Addressee of the expected answer to the question asked by exploring the mutually shared information (Ilie 1994; Oakley & Tobin 2014). It is in this sense that we understand rhetorical questions as being intersubjective in nature and invariably involving mixed viewpoints.

In this paper, we draw on a combination of the theory of conceptual integration or ‘blending’ (Fauconnier and Turner 1994, 1996, 1998, 2002) and Pascual’s (2002, 2006, 2014) idea of fictive interaction, and treat rhetorical questions as viewpoint
blends modeled by the frame of ordinary intersubjective conversation. In written texts, in which Addresser and Addressee may be separated by vast time and space, rhetorical questions involve a general scenario in which the writer and the potential future readers are conceptualized as present at the same time and space. The experience of writing and reading is construed by the Writer and Reader as a simultaneous conversation so that they can draw the same conclusions regarding the issue under discussion (Pascual 2002, 2006, 2014; Xiang & Pascual under review).

1.1 Rhetorical questions as conceptual blends

Conceptual integration or ‘blending’ (Fauconnier & Turner 1994, 1996, 1998, 2002) involves setting up and fusing conceptual domains, i.e. mental spaces, which are partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action (Fauconnier 1994 [1985]). Meaning construction is understood as involving the integration of these conceptual structures, giving rise to a new mental configuration that is both more and less than the sum of its parts. As a ubiquitous and basic cognitive operation, blending is central to how we think, speak and operate in the world.

In this paper we suggest that rhetorical questions are the product of the conceptual blending of the interrogative grammatical form presented and the assertive pragmatic function to be interpreted. This is an extension of the analysis of pure grammatical blending, as in morphological or syntactic constructions (cf. Mandelblit 1997; Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 2002; Fauconnier 2010) to pragmatic constructions. Thus viewed, rhetorical questions are a blend of factive and fictive meaning (Pascual...
2001), similar to Coulson’s (2005) analysis of irony and sarcasm. Rhetorical questions generally prompt for the setting-up of a Conceptual Content space, which is about a possible state of affairs in the Addresser’s world, and a Speech Act space, in which the Addresser sets up a discourse context (cf. Dancygier & Sweetser 2005). Consider the most frequently quoted two lines in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s (1819) poem Ode to the West Wind: “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” The apodosis of this conditional clause is a rhetorical question. In the Conceptual Content space, the Addresser, i.e., the poet, produces a question about the possible state of affairs in the world. This question is to be answered on the basis of the Addresser’s encyclopedic knowledge in the immediate discourse context, namely, the Speech Act space. The Conceptual Content space and the Speech Act space are then fused to produce the Addresser’s Viewpoint space, in which the question asked expresses the Addresser’s strong assertion.

We analyze rhetorical questions in the entire Zhuangzi text as kinds of intersubjective mixed viewpoint constructions. Hence, we suggest that rhetorical questions do not just involve a conceptual blend of question and assertion, but also a viewpoint blend (Dancygier & Sweetser 2012) of the writer’s perspective and that of the assumed reader’s. This viewpoint blending process can become even more sophisticated, as we will show below.

2. Rhetorical questions in classical Chinese

Scholars have found interesting similarities in the use of rhetorical questions and their position in a text in a great number of unrelated languages, such as English (Quirk et al. 1985; Huddleston & Pullum 2002), Old Hebrew (Miller 2003 [1996]; Sandler &
Pascual in prep.), and Arabic (Badarneh 2006) (see also overview in Ilie 1994 and Badarneh 2006). Across languages, it seems that rhetorical questions tend to appear at the end of a complex sentence or a short piece of discourse, and are used to reinforce the Addresser’s perspective. Moreover, rhetorical questions can be identified by language-specific rhetorical indicators (cf. Schmidt-Radefeldt 1977; Grésillon 1980). These observations also apply to rhetorical questions in classical Chinese (Lv 2002 [1942]; Pulleyblank 1995; Yang & He 2001; Yi 2005). Since the Zhuangzi text was written in a third century dialect of classical Chinese, we will restrict our discussion of the rhetorical question indicators in classical Chinese to the Pre-Qin period (before 221 BC).1 Table 1 in the appendix outlines rhetorical question markers (particles, interrogative pronouns/adverbs and other lexical items) in classical Chinese of the Pre-Qin period, illustrated with passages from the Zhuangzi text (Yi 2005). Among all these markers, certain adverbs like 罔 ‘kuàng’ and conventionalized phrases like 庸讵 ‘yōngjù’, are used exclusively in rhetorical questions. Moreover, the occurrence of such final particles as 乎 ‘hū’ and 哉 ‘zāi’ in interrogative forms often presuppose a rhetorical reading (Yang & He 2001: 889). Despite these pragmatic markers, the identification and interpretation of rhetorical questions in classical Chinese is still largely context-dependent, as most grammatical markers of the rhetoricity of questioning are also used in factive information-seeking questions. There are also rare

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1 There might have been intonational features marking rhetoricity of a question in classical Chinese. However, there is no way to trace them in that researchers have not reached a consensus on the reconstructed phonological system of classical Chinese (Tang 1982), let alone its suprasegmental features. Rhetorical questions, indeed questions in general, in the most comprehensively punctuated and commented recensions of Old Chinese texts sometimes end with full stops or exclamatory marks, which reflect different interpretations of the unpunctuated original texts by later philologists.--- see how to say this, as such this doesn’t’ look as that different an interpretation (assertion vs. strong assertion/exclamation).
instances of yes-no questions lacking grammatical marking of rhetorical questions in classical Chinese, thus being entirely context-dependent.

3. Data and methodology

This paper presents an analysis of rhetorical questions in the entire Zhuangzi text, the second foundational text of the Chinese Daoist philosophical and religious tradition (Roth 2008). The philosopher Zhuangzi (c. 369-c. 286 B.C.), the putative author of the text bearing the same name, is considered probably the greatest one of early Daoist thinkers (Fung 1997 [1948]: 104). His philosophy has been compared to that of the Dutch philosopher Spinoza and his writing style resembles that of Plato (Fun 1964: 5), which is largely conversational, as in his famous Dialogues.

The Zhuangzi text comprises a total of 33 chapters, which are subdivided into: the Inner Chapters (7), the Outer Chapters (15) and the Miscellaneous Chapters (11). In each chapter there are several interrelated argumentative episodes, including a variety of literary styles, such as didactic narratives, poetry, and very short prose essays, in all of which a large number of rhetorical questions are found.

The version of the original Zhuangzi text used in our analysis comes from Zhuangzi yinde (‘A Concordance to Chuang Tzu’) compiled by the Harvard-Yenching Institute (1956). This edition reproduces the recension of the text in the most comprehensively annotated Collected Commentaries on Zhuangzi (Guo 2013 [1894]). Given the high under-specificity and context-dependence of the classical Chinese language (Bisang 2008), it was further necessary to consult translations of the text in English, a
language with a much more overt grammatical structure. The English version we mostly used for reference was/is the one translated by Burton Watson (2013 [1968]), and/which is regarded as one of the best English renditions of the text. We occasionally also consulted the translations by Fung Yu-lan’s (1964), Graham’s (1989 [1981]), Victor Mair’s (1994) and Wang Rongpei’s (1999) for a proper identification and interpretation of rhetorical questions in the text.

In order to count the number of rhetorical questions in the text, we first conducted a corpus search with the above mentioned rhetorical question indicators in classical Chinese as key words in the entire Zhuangzi text, as found in the Academia Sinica Tagged Corpus of Old Chinese. We then carried out a manual double-check against the entries in the Dictionary of Laozi and Zhuangzi (Wang and Han 1993), which lists the lexical items that appear in the text with their frequency of occurrence counted and their meaning(s) or function(s) taxonomically arranged. In ambiguous cases, we also used the reversed polarity replacement test to check whether the rhetorical reading of the interrogative form was pragmatically consistent with its context of occurrence. Altogether we found 405 rhetorical questions in the text, among which there are 196 yes-no questions and 209 wh-questions.

In our examples in the analysis section below, we sometimes modify Burton Watson’s translation of a particular rhetorical question, rendered as an declarative or exclamatory sentence, by replacing it with a corresponding translation in the interrogative form from other English translations. This is done only for clarification purposes, as Burton Watson’s translation is functionally equivalent to the rhetorical questions used in the original text. Following Liu (2008), we use question marks in
both the original and the English translation(s), for clarification purposes. In all examples, we indicate the rhetorical questions in the original text with emphasis marks (.) with the grammatical markers underlined and the corresponding English translations italicized. When citing examples from the text, we follow the Yenching convention (SOURCE+) by indicating the page, chapter, and line number(s) from left to right.

4. Analysis

In this section, we discuss rhetorical questions, treated as fictive interaction blends, in the *Zhuangzi* text in the Here-and-Now Space and the Current Discourse Space. In the Here-and-Now Space, we have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the writer is conceptualized as speaking directly to the reader. Fictive interaction blends at this level highlight the structure of turn-taking between Addresser and Addressee or Bystander in the Conversation Frame, to be mapped with the writer and the reader. In the Current Discourse Space (Langacker 2001, 2008, 2013), we have the discourse characters in the so-called Story-Viewpoint Space (Dancygier 2012) integrated with not only the writer but also the reader. Fictive interaction blends at this level highlight the mapping between what more often than not is not a conversational reality with the roles of Addresser, Addressee (eventually also Bystander), and message in the Conversation Frame (cf. Xiang and Pascual 2015/under review). In the Here-and-Now Space, we have short monologic argumentative essays presented by the narrator from the writer’s perspective. In the Current Discourse Space, we have the constructed fable-like dialogues between discourse characters, as presented by the narrator, thereby also involving the writer’s perspective. The fictive interaction blend
in the *Zhuangzi* text can be diagramed as follows:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1 Fictive interaction blend in the *Zhuangzi* text  Xiang & Pascual under review

4.1. Rhetorical questions in the Here-and-Now Space

In this section we analyze rhetorical questions in the Here-and-Now Space, in which we have the conventional writer-reader blend (Herman 1999; Fauconnier and Turner 2002). The writer and the subsequent readers along the centuries get compressed into a fictive interaction blend (Pascual 2002, 2014; Xiang and Pascual under review). This blending process involves massive compression of time and space, since the reader in the blend represents a large number of individuals scattered over large time spans and spatial locations. In the blend, the literary experience is conceptualized as a fictive conversation between the writer and the readers. In the Here-and-Now Space, the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed future readers are aligned in the writer-reader blend.
Despite the fact that the Here-and-Now Space naturally applies through the entire 
Zhuangzi text, as shown in Figure 1, we restrict our discussion to its linguistic 
manifestations in the discourse content, namely in the monologic argumentative 
episodes. These include chiefly the short argumentative essays in the Zhuangzi text, 
as no instance of such questions has been observed in the poems. Altogether we 
counted 93 rhetorical questions in the monologic argumentative episodes. An example 
is:

1) 故圣人有所游，而知为孽，约为胶，德为接，工为商。圣人不谋，
恶用知？不斲，恶用胶？无丧，恶用德？不货，
恶用商？四者，天鬻也，天鬻者，天食也，既受食于天，
又恶用人？（14/5/52-54）

“So the sage has his wanderings. For him, knowledge is an offshoot, promises are 
glue, favors are a patching up, and skill is a peddler. The sage hatches no schemes, so 
what use has he for knowledge? He does no carving, so what use has he for glue? He 
suffers no loss, so what use has he for favors? He hawks no goods, so what use has he 
for peddling? These four are called Heavenly Gruel. Heavenly Gruel is the food of 
Heaven, and if he's already gotten food from Heaven, what use does he have for 
men?” (Watson 2013 [1968]: 40)

In the above piece of discourse, there is a succession of rhetorical questions with 
extactly the same grammatical structure, marked by the interrogative adverb 乎 ‘wū’ 
(‘what’). In the Here-and-Now Space, we have the writer conceptualized as directly 
speaking to the subsequent readers, who ‘talk’ back to the writer by silently producing 
the corresponding answers to the rhetorical questions in their mind. The philosophical 
messages that the writer wants to convey are beyond the interrogative forms used in
the above piece of discourse. The silent answers evoked in the readers’ mind are the ultimate morale of the above piece of discourse. Rhetorical questions in the Here-and-Now Space involve the resolution of the mixed viewpoints of the writer/narrator and the potential readers. The immediate discourse context provides cues for the readers to recognize the viewpoint of the writer. In the writer-reader blend, the possibly different viewpoints between the writer and the assumed readers are aligned and the readers come to recognize the rhetorical questions as strong negative assertions. The alignment of different viewpoints requires the writer to make mental contact with the common ground of potential readers’ and thus adopt their viewpoint, just as readers have to adopt the narrator’s and thus the original writer’s.

4.2 Rhetorical questions in the Current Discourse Space

In this section we analyze expository questions in the Current Discourse Space, i.e., rhetorical questions in the fable-like dialogues in the text. The Zhuangzi text is very interactionally structured with a large number of fable-like dialogues. The discourse characters of these dialogues are real historical or contemporary figures, entirely fictitious characters, deities or personified entities such as animals or plants as well as abstract concepts such as Grand Purity or No-Action (Xiang forth.).

Altogether there are 146 fable-like dialogues in the Zhuangzi text (Xiang forth.). Modeled by the frame of intersubjective face-to-face communication, these fable-like dialogues are constructed by the philosopher to present his actual views, very much like Aesop’s fables, the Soliloquies or the Socratic method. Therefore, the philosopher is like a puppeteer or ventriloquist (Cooren 2010, 2012) behind all the
fable-like dialogues. This is best described by the philosopher himself in Chapter 27 ‘Fables’: “the ninety percent of my talk which is fable-like relies on other people to expound my thoughts” (Wang 1999: 475). Thus, even though the dialogues are entirely made up and hence fictitious, they constitute a rhetorical device to present something that is very actual, namely the philosopher’s real thought (Zhang 2007 [1948], Ye 2004 [1979]; Wang 2013). Thus analyzed, these dialogues are somewhere between reality and fiction and may be analyzed as fictive interaction blends (Xiang forth.). The actual philosophical messages of the fable-like dialogues are normally presented for the benefit of the subsequent readers of the text by one of the discourse characters, which can be the fictive Addresser, the fictive Addressee or the fictive Bystander in the Conversation Frame (Xiang forth.).

These dialogues suggest that there exist multiple viewpoints in the text. In the Current Discourse Space, we have the writer/narrator splitting himself up into two selves, thereby adopting the viewpoints of the discourse participants respectively. These inhabit the Story-Viewpoint Space (Dancygier 2012). The viewpoints of the writer/narrator and the narrated discourse characters are then resolved in the fictive interaction blend. Since fictive interaction is modeled by the Conversation Frame (Pascual 2002, 2014; Pascual and Sandler in prep.), we have the projection of the roles and relationships in the Conversation Frame into the fictive interaction blend. In the blend discourse participants are engaged in a fictive conversation, taking the roles of fictive Addresser and fictive Addressee alternately. Subsequent readers become the Bystanders (Goffman 1963) of the fictive conversation (Xiang forth.). They will also mentally simulate the fictive conversation and take the viewpoints of the discourse participants. Hence, the readers are both Bystanders and partly discourse participants.
through a split-self.

First we examine rhetorical questions in fable-like dialogues involving two discourse participants, which is the most common type in the text. Then we will analyze rhetorical questions in the dialogues with even more complicated conversational structures. Consider:

2) 颜回曰： “端而虚，勉强一，則可乎？” 曰： “惡！惡可？[……]名之曰日漸之德不成，而況大德乎？將執而不化，[……]其庸讵可乎？“[……]與天為徒者，知天子之與己皆天之所子，而能以言責乎人善之，誅乎人不善之乎？[……]人皆為之，吾敢不為邪？[……]若斯，則可乎？“仲尼曰： “惡！惡可？[……] 去飾可以及化？猶師心者也。“ (9/4/15-24)

Yan Hui said, “If I am grave and empty-hearted, diligent and of one mind, won’t that do?” “Goodness, how could that do? […] But with him, what is called ‘the virtue that advances a little each day’ would not succeed, how can you expect him to accept higher virtues? He will stick fast to his position and never be converted. […] How could such an approach succeed?” “[…] Then why would I use my words to try to get men to praise me or to try to get them not to praise me? […] Everybody does it, so why shouldn’t I? […] “[…] If I go about it in this way, will it do?” Confucius said, “Goodness, how could that do? […] How do you think you can actually convert him? You are still making the mind your teacher!” (Watson 2013 [1968]: 24-25, slightly modified2)

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2 Burton Watson translated the second rhetorical questions marked with the full word 爲 ‘kuàng’ as “[…], much less a great display of virtue!”, which is an elliptical exclamatory sentence. For purposes of clarification, we replaced Watson’s translation with a corresponding rendition from Wang Rongpei (1999: 53):” how can you expect him to accept higher virtues?”. Given the grammatical marker 爲 ‘kuàng’ is used exclusively in rhetorical questions, rendering this sentence into an interrogative form is closer to the original.
The above piece of fragment occurs between two discourse characters, Confucius and his most favorite disciple Yan Hui, who naturally correspond to historical figures with actual counterparts in the Present Reality space. Altogether there are 7 rhetorical questions with various grammatical markers in it. Rhetorical questions are used bi-directionally, i.e., they are produced by both the superior discourse character Confucius and the inferior discourse character Yan Hui. Since it’d be probably difficult for an inferior to answer a factive question by a superior with a rhetorical question, the relation between these two discourse characters and the structure of the story (disciple asking the master questions, which is how it goes in these kinds of relations) can help distinguish the factive and fictive reading of the interrogatives used. Rhetorical questions are meant to evoke silent answers in each other’s mind, leading to the reinforcement of the arguments each character is making. Here rhetorical questions are used to express the disputational function (Banardeh 2003). While reading the text, the potential readers will also mentally simulate these rhetorical questions and come up with possible answers of their own on the basis of their knowledge of classical Chinese grammar and the discourse context. Thus, in the above piece of discourse, we have the mixed viewpoints of the writer as narrator, the assumed readers and the discourse characters, namely, Confucius and Yan Hui. In the Here-and-Now Space, we have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed readers are aligned. In the Current Discourse Space, the viewpoints of Confucius and Yan Hui are blended so that they can identify and interpret the message each wants to convey. The above piece of discourse is no mere quote from an actual conversation between the historical figures. Rather, the philosopher makes use of the above conversation for his own rhetorical
purposes. The actual philosophical message is presented through the senior Confucius, whose speech is used to “put an end to further argument” (Wang 1999: 475). Since we have the philosopher speaking through these historical figures, Confucius and Yan Hui being no Daoists, their viewpoints are also blended with the writer as narrator. While reading the text, the readers will also mentally simulate the conversation, thus also adopting the viewpoints of the discourse characters. The mutually shared immediate discourse context provides cues for the identification and interpretation of rhetorical questions.

Rhetorical questions can also occur in a non-genuine dialogue, which embeds another fable-like dialogue between two personified animals.

3) 公孙龙问于魏牟曰： ‘[……] 今吾无所开吾喙，敢问其方？’ 公子牟隐机太息，仰天而笑曰： ‘子独不闻夫堋井之鼃乎？’ 东海之鳖左足未入，而右膝已絷矣。于是逡巡而却， [……] 子乃规规然而求之以察，索之以辩，是直用管窥天，用锥指地也， [……] 公子龙口呿而不合，舌举而不下，乃逸而走。 (44/17/65 - 45/17/81)

Gongsun Long said to Prince Mou of Wei, '[…] I find now that I can't even open my beak. May I ask what you advise?' Prince Mou leaned on his armrest and gave a great

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3 The writer of a narrative speaking through fictional characters to teach something to the readers is similar to Tannen’s (2004) analysis of pets as interactional resources in family discourse and Cooren’s (2010, 2012) ventriloquial model of communication. The only difference lies in the fact that this discourse strategy is used in a philosophical discourse rather than everyday conversation. → [[These pieces of work should appear cited somewhere, but it's gotta make sense;-)]. The fables in Zhuangzi are much more complex than talking to a dog for the sake of a bystander, and not just because you directly talk to them rather than having a character do that, and the functions are also really different. You can't say 'The only difference' is the one is philosophical discourse and the other everyday conversation, this is not helpful (stating the obvious;-) and does not get to the actual differences, which are many and huge. Also, you said before this was ventriloquism -which I agree--, so it'd be the same as what Cooren says, not similar to it.]]
sigh, and then he looked up at the sky and laughed, saying, "Haven't you ever heard about the frog in the caved-in well? He said to the great turtle of the Eastern Sea, '[...] To have complete command of the water of one whole valley and to monopolize all the joys of a caved-in well this is the best there is! Why don't you come some time and see for yourself?" But before the great turtle of the Eastern Sea had even gotten his left foot in the well his right knee was already wedged fast. He backed out and withdrew a little, and then began to describe the sea. [...] "Still further, aren't you, whose knowledge is inadequate to understand the words for discussing the uttermost mysteries and who satisfy yourself with a moment's profit, like the frog in the broken-down well? [...] Now you come niggling along and try to spy him out or fix some name to him, but this is like using a tube to scan the sky or an awl to measure the depth of the earth - Aren't you insignificant indeed? You'd better be on your way! Haven't you heard of the story about a young man from Shoulin in the state of Yan learning how to walk in Handan in the state of Zhao? [...]" Gongsun Long's mouth fell open and wouldn't stay closed. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and wouldn't come down. In the end he broke into a run and fled. (Watson 2013 [1968]: 135-136, slightly modified⁴) The above piece of discourse involves a conversation between two discourse characters, Gongsun Long and Prince Mou of Wei, who introduces another fable-like... ⁴ Burton Watson translated the last rhetorical questions as a declarative sentence: “Or perhaps you've never heard about the young boy of Shouling who went to learn the Handan Walk”. For clarification purposes, we replaced Watson's translation of that sentence with the more literal corresponding rendition from Wang Rongpei (1999: 281): “Haven't you heard of the story about a young man from Shoulin in the state of Yan learning how to walk in Handan in the state of Zhao?”. Given the rhetorical question is grammatically marked with an adverb 独 ‘dú’ and final particle 与 ‘yú’, rendering this sentence into an interrogative form is closer to the original.
dialogue between personified animals, the frog in the caved-in well and the great turtle of the Eastern Sea. Altogether there are five rhetorical questions. In the Here-and-Now Space, we have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed readers are aligned on the basis of the latter’s encyclopedic knowledge and their common ground. Given the writer constructed the above fable-like dialogue to present his actual views, the viewpoints of Prince Mou, Gongsun Long, the frog, and the great turtle in the dialogue are all blended with the viewpoint of the writer and ultimately that of the subsequent readers, for whose benefit the above fable-like dialogue is produced. In the Current Discourse Space, the first rhetorical question is produced by Prince Mou, which can evoke a silent answer in the mind of his interlocutor, Gongsun Long. The second question is produced by the frog but also involves the viewpoint of the great turtle, as the question is directed toward the latter and functions as an invitation. This question is not information-seeking and with a particular rhetorical effect. The perlocutionary act of the great turtle confirms that he has accepted the invitation. Despite the fact that the question does not involve polarity reversal, we still view it as a rhetorical question, though a peripheral or non-prototypical one. The viewpoints of the frog and the great turtle in this example are also blended with the viewpoint of Prince Mou’s, since the narrated fable-like dialogue is used to advance Prince Mou’s argument. The remaining three rhetorical questions once again involve the viewpoints of Prince Mou and Gongsun Long. The message the philosopher wants to convey is in the silent answers the rhetorical questions are to evoke in the readers’ mind.

Next we analyze rhetorical questions in a piece of discourse involving multiple participants and thus multiple viewpoint shifts. We have a sequence of three
interrelated fable-like dialogues between the gardener, who asks the factual question “Who are you, anyway?” and Zigong, who answers “A disciple of Kong Qiu.”, as well as Zigong and his disciples and Zigong and his master Confucius. Note that the last dialogue is less typical, as Zigong’s speech is represented.

4) [……] 有间，为圃者曰：“子奚为者邪？”曰：“孔丘之徒也。”为圃者曰：“子非夫博学以拟圣，于于以盖众，独弦哀……乎?而身之不能治，而何暇治天下乎?子往矣，无乏吾事!”子贡卑陬失色，顼顼然不自得，行三十里而后愈。[……] 反于鲁，以告孔子。孔子曰：“[……] 夫明白入素，以游世俗之间者，汝将固惊邪?且浑沌氏之术，予与汝……哉? (31/12/52-69)

[……] "Who are you, anyway?" "A disciple of Kong Qiu." "Aren't you one of those who would like to rival the sage with knowledge, to surpass others by boasting, and to buy a reputation in the world by playing and singing sad solos? [...] You don't even know how to look after your own body how do you have any time to think about looking after the world? On your way now! Don't interfere with my work!" [...] When Zigong got back to Lu, he reported the incident to Confucius. Confucius said, "[……] A man of true brightness and purity who can enter into simplicity, […] if you had met one like that, you would have had real cause for astonishment. How can you and I understand the Chaotic doctrine?" (Watson 2013 [1968]: 91-93)

Altogether there are three rhetorical questions in these dialogues. The first two instances are produced by the gardener and the third one by Confucius. The first rhetorical question differs from the other two examples as it functions as a reproach and there is no answer expected in the discourse participant’s and ultimately the subsequent readers’ mind. This, however, contradicts the classical definition of a rhetorical question presented in the introduction, which states that it always involves an expected silent answer and a reversed polarity of a particular element in the interrogative form. The rhetorical reading of this question is largely context-
dependent, though it is marked with the negative particle 非 ‘fēi’ (‘not’) and final particle 乎 ‘hū’ (particle marking information-seeking and non-information-seeking questioning), as these two particles can also appear in factive questioning. Apparently, the discourse character Zigong said something that really annoyed the gardener in the preceding piece of discourse. So, by posing the question, the gardener was not seeking information. Instead, he was unleashing his anger and annoyance and accusing Zigong of being such a person. At the level of illocutionary force, this question is a strong assertion that Zigong would never acknowledge, either verbally or mentally. Despite the fact that the question does not produce a silent answer in the discourse characters’ mind, we still view it as a rhetorical question, if not a prototypical one. In the Here-and-Now Space, we have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed readers are also aligned. In the Current Discourse Space, Zigong’s viewpoint is blended first with the gardener’s viewpoint in the first fable-like conversation and then Zigong’s viewpoint is blended with Confucius’ viewpoint in the last non-prototypical dialogue, so that Zigong can identify and interpret the messages the gardener and Confucius want to convey. Since the philosopher presents his actual philosophical views by adopting the discourse strategy of having the discourse characters speak for him (Zhang 2007 [1948]; Ye 2004 [1979]; Wang 2013), the viewpoints of the discourse characters, Zigong, the gardener and Confucius, are also blended with the writer as narrator. What’s more, the viewpoint of the discourse characters are further blended with that of the subsequent readers, who will have a mental simulation of the dialogues while reading the text. The mutually shared previous discourse context provides cues for the identification and interpretation of rhetorical questions.
Finally, rhetorical questions can also be found in an entirely fictitious dialogue, produced between two imaginary discourse characters, with one reporting the speech of a third character. Consider:

5) 肩吾见狂接舆。狂接舆曰：“日中始何以语女?” 肩吾曰：“告我：君人者，以己出经式义度，人孰敢不听而化诸?” 狂接舆曰：“[……]且鸟高飞以避矰弋之害，鼷鼠深穴乎神丘之下，以避薰凿之患，而曾二虫之无知?” (19/7/4-20/7/7)

Jian Wu went to see the madman Jie Yu. Jie Yu said, “What was Zhong Shi telling you the other day?” Jian Wu said, “He told me that the ruler of men should devise his own principles, standards, ceremonies, and regulations, and *who dares refuse to obey and be reformed by them?*” The madman Jie Yu said, “This is bogus virtue! […] The field mouse burrows deep down under the sacred hill where it won’t have to worry about men digging and smoking it out. *Have you got less sense than these two little creatures?’* (Watson 2013 [1968]: 55-56; slightly modified⁶)

There are two rhetorical questions with different markers in this fragment. In the Here-and-Now Space, we have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed readers are aligned. The above two rhetorical questions are slightly different. The first rhetorical question occurs in a (free) direct speech, in which the discourse character Jian Wu adopts Zhong Shi’s

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⁶ Burton Watson translated the first rhetorical questions as a declarative sentence: “[…], and then there will be no one who will fail to obey him and be transformed by them”. For clarification purposes, we replaced Watson’s translation with the corresponding more literal rendition of that sentence from A. C. Graham (1989 [1981]: 95), in which it appears as a rhetorical question: “*who dares refuse to obey and be reformed by them?*”. The rhetorical reading of the interrogative form is due to the interrogative pronoun 孰 ‘shú’ and the discourse context. Hence, rendering this sentence into an interrogative form is closer to the original.
viewpoint instead of merely reporting what the latter said, which involves an even more complex configuration of embedded viewpoints. We first have the viewpoint blend of Jian Wu and Zhong Shi, which gets further blended with the viewpoint of the madman Jie Yu. If Jian Wu were merely reporting what the reported man said, there would be one layering of viewpoint blending chain missing. After Jian Wu finished reporting using direct speech, the conversational turn of the dialogue would either come to an end or a new topic would be introduced into the conversation to keep the conversational turn going. The original fictive dialogue would become a genuine one, just as one we’d have in everyday conversation. The second rhetorical question involves the viewpoints of the discourse characters Jian Wu and the madman Jie Yu. Since the above conversation is constructed by the philosopher for rhetorical purposes, the viewpoints of Jian Wu and the madman Jie Yu are also blended with the narrator’s. Moreover, the required mental simulation of the conversation by the readers also involves a viewpoint blend of the readers and the discourse characters. The mutually shared discourse context and world knowledge provide cues for the identification and interpretation of the two rhetorical questions.

5. Summary and conclusions

In this paper, we adopt a fictive interaction blend approach to rhetorical questions, which differs from previous ones (see overview in Ilie 1994 and Badarneh 2003). Some previous approaches were more referential, focusing on what a rhetorical question means rather than the configuration it can set up to mean something different; other approaches were more focused on the functions of rhetorical questions. In what follows, we integrate these two approaches and present rhetorical
questions not only as a rhetorical device but also as a linguistic construction involving processes traditionally restricted to pragmatics. A fictive interaction blend approach to rhetorical questions can account for what is being presented (a question) and what it ultimately meant (strong assertion), without losing the importance of the one or the other. This particularly indirect way of presenting one’s ideas resembles what Langacker (1999) calls ‘virtual speech acts’ (like rhetorical questions) and Pascual’s (2002, 2006, 2014) fictive interaction at the sentential level (like fictive commands). The Addresser pretends to present a given speech act in order to produce another one. Hence, there is fictivity at the level of illocutionary force (Langacker 1999), which is something different from an indirect speech act (e.g. “I am so cold” for “Please close the window!”).

Our analysis further suggests that rhetorical questions are intersubjectively grounded since they involve the mutual sharing and management of the viewpoints of the Addresser and the Addressee (cf. Verhagen 2005, 2008; Zlatev et al. 2008). This intersubjective nature of rhetorical questions is inherently presupposed by the mismatch between the overt grammatical form and the covert pragmatic function (cf. Verhagen 2008: 307). The philosophical message that the writer wants to convey lies not in the interrogative form itself but in the silent answers in the subsequent readers’ mind that are evoked by it. At the discourse content level, the pieces of discourse where the rhetorical questions occur are each a representative of a particular type of fable-like dialogues with distinct conversational structures, which may involve two discourse participants (eg. 2), a fable-like dialogue embedded in another one (eg. 3), a sequence of three interrelated small dialogues (eg. 4), and two discourse participants with one reporting the speech of another character (eg. 5).
Rhetorical questions occurring in the Here-an-Now Space and the Current Discourse Space involve the integration of different viewpoints. In Zhuangzi, the writer blends his own perspective and that of the assumed readers through rhetorical questions, which are ascribed to the narrator or discourse characters, in order to convince subsequent readers of his original insights into human nature and the universe. In a text with multiple viewpoints, our approach of viewing rhetorical questions as intersubjective mixed viewpoint constructions becomes even more manifest, as we know all the different viewpoints are set up to present the writer’s actual views. This study on pragmatic constructions like rhetorical questions is an extension of Verhagen’s (2005) work on constructions of intersubjectivity, which focuses on grammatical constructions, as well as previous studies on viewpoint in discourse (Dancygier and Sweetser 2012).

Rhetorical questions in the Here-and-Now Space are Addresser-oriented and can be used to answer actual questions (Ilie 1994), as in example 1). The factive information-seeking questions that can be answered by rhetorical questions are all related to polarity questioning. Meanwhile, not all rhetorical questions will necessarily evoke a silent answer of the reversed polarity in the readers’ mind, as the first instance in example 4). Given that most rhetorical question markers can also be used in factive questioning, the rhetorical reading of interrogative forms in the above examples are still largely context-dependent. This shows how good we are at viewpoint shifting, since we can do it well even without very overt markers. Finally, counter to He and Yang’s (2001) assumption, rhetorical questions in classical Chinese do not always appear at the end of a piece of discourse, which is at most a general tendency. They
can also appear in the middle of or at the very beginning of a conversational turn, as in examples 2) and 4), respectively. The position of rhetorical questions in old Chinese texts can thus be very flexible. This flexibility is possibly related to the various functions rhetorical questions can express (i.e. strong assertion, invitation and reproach).

Rhetorical questions in the *Zhuangzi* text can express not only such discourse functions as the prominent disputational function, as in example 1, but also certain pragmatic functions, such as invitation in example 3, and reproach in example 4. As can be seen from the above analyses, rhetorical questions expressing different functions have fundamentally different configurations. This seems to indicate that the classical definition of rhetorical questions involving polarity reversal is too restrictive. Instead, we should speak of fictive questions, which are all non-information seeking and intersubjective mixed viewpoint constructions.

Rhetorical questions constitute a highly successful communicative strategy, as they can help make the text more engaging in a parsimonious, implicit manner. In the *Zhuangzi* text, rhetorical questions occur in a cluster. The maximum number of rhetorical questions in a row, altogether 13, appears in the fable-like non-genuine dialogue between Confucius and Yanhui, from which example 1 is quoted. The great number of rhetorical questions used in *Zhuangzi*, as is also the case in the Hebrew Bible (Miller 2003 [1996]; Sandler & Pascual in prep.) and the Quran (Badarneh 2003), confirms that these ancient formal texts are conversationally structured. This fact shows that the use of conversational structures in discourse is not restricted to modern public discourse (Fairclough 1994; Vis 2011; Vis et al. 2012) or spoken
informal speech (Streeck 2002). The fact that conversationalized structures are typical in ancient written texts may have to do with their orality feature, since these texts were meant to be read aloud and commented in a community (Bowery 2007). This also applies to modern public discourse, even though they may be written, as we are immersed in an audio-visual culture and the social media have always been very interactional.

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Appendix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Rhetorical) Question Indicators</th>
<th>Meaning or Function</th>
<th>Polarity of Answer Expected</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Particle 无 ‘wú’</td>
<td>‘not’</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td>The field mouse burrows deep down under the sacred hill where it won't have to worry about men digging and smoking it out. <em>Have you got less sense than these two little creatures?</em> (Watson 2013 [1968]: 55-56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final particles</td>
<td>Modal particle</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>We have already become one, so how can I say anything? (Watson 2013 [1968]: 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>乎 'hū', 善 'zāi', 邪 'yé', 誰 'zhū', 師 'yú', 也 'yè'</td>
<td>marking question</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>非此可説乎? (5/2/53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“不亦......乎” &quot;construction</td>
<td>Marking rhetorical questioning</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td>Now you and I are studying together to improve our inner selves and yet you still pay attention to my bodily shape. Isn't that too much? (Wang 1999: 77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal particle</td>
<td>Marking rhetorical questioning</td>
<td>Affirmative or negative</td>
<td>若人之形者，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>其 'qí'</td>
<td>in the sense of “what” or “how”</td>
<td></td>
<td>万化而未始有極也，甚為非可勝計邪? (16/6/27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particle</td>
<td>Marking rhetorical questioning, in the sense of “what” or “how”</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>天无私覆，地无私載，天地岂私賚我哉? (17/6/96-97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>嘿 'qī'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘The heaven has no bias against anyone it covers; the earth has no bias against anyone it supports. How could they have bias against me and make me poor?’ (Wang 1999: 113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particle</td>
<td>Marking rhetorical questioning</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>將執而不化，外合而內不和，其誰諺可孚乎? (9/4/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>廠訖 'yōngjù'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Though he may make outward signs of agreement, inwardly he will not give it a thought! <em>How could such an approach succeed?</em> (Watson 2013 [1968]: 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative Pronouns/ Adverbs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>But nothing can ever win against Heaven - that's the way it's always been. What would I have to resent? (Watson 2013 [1968]: 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>何 ‘hé’ ('what')</td>
<td>Affirmative or negative</td>
<td></td>
<td>且夫物不勝天久矣，吾又何求乎? (17/6/53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'shú', 師 'shú' ('who')</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>'shú', 誰 'shú' ('who')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'wú'</td>
<td>Affirmative or negative</td>
<td></td>
<td>何為不知其然也，孰知其所終? (10/4/51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'誰'，</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>If they themselves do not understand why they behave like this, <em>then who knows where it will end?</em> (Watson 2013 [1968]: 28)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Rhetorical question indicators in Pre-Qin classical Chinese (Pulleyblank 1995; Yang and He 2001; Yi 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full word</th>
<th>‘kùàng’</th>
<th>‘how much the more’</th>
<th>Affirmative or negative</th>
<th>To men such as these, how could there be any question of putting life first or death last? (Watson 2013 [1968]: 50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘hú’</td>
<td>‘ān’</td>
<td>‘xī’</td>
<td>Affirmative or negative</td>
<td>With a crippled body, he’s still able to look after himself and finish out the years Heaven gave him. How much better, then, if he had crippled virtue! (Watson 2013 [1968]: 32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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