

**Who's speaking for whom? Rhetorical questions as intersubjective
mixed viewpoint constructions in an early Daoist text***

Mingjian Xiang, Esther Pascual & Bosen Ma

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This paper deals with rhetorically-intended questions in the *Zhuangzi*, a foundational text of Daoism (4th c. B.C.). Such questions are generally meant to evoke silent answers in the addressee's mind, thereby involving a fictive type of interaction (Pascual 2006, 2014). We analyze rhetorical questions as constructions of intersubjectivity (cf. Verhagen 2005, 2008), involving not just a conceptual integration of question and assertion, but also a viewpoint blend (Dancygier and Sweetser 2012). They involve fusing the perspectives of the writer, the assumed prospective readers, and possibly also that of the discourse characters (in the case of rhetorical questions ascribed to a discourse character but meant to represent the writer's voice). In this highly influential text with abundant mixed viewpoint scenarios, the interpretation of rhetorical questions involves the resolution of different viewpoints, which are set up and shifted in a multi-layered manner for particular argumentative purposes.

Key words: rhetorical questions; intersubjectivity; viewpoint blending; fictive interaction; *Zhuangzi*

1. Introduction

Despite their interrogative form, rhetorical questions do not call for an overt answer from the addressee, unlike ordinary information-seeking questions (e.g. Quirk et. al. 1985; Huddleston and Pullum 2002). In rhetorical questions the pretended, indeed superfluous, 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). The implied answer, presupposed in the interrogative content itself, is the only possible reading and as such “acquires a definite value, which rules out every other alternative” (Ilie 1994: 13). Indeed, rhetorical questions are “meant to be heard as questions and understood as statements” (Ilie 1994: 130) and are hence indirect speech acts inferentially requesting some mental response (e.g. Searle 1975; Kiefer 1980; Meibauer 1986; Frank 1990; Ilie 1994). Rhetorical questions are generally assumed to evoke silent answers of reversed polarity in the addressee’s mind, and thus understood as homogeneous, clear-cut constructions or categories, all sharing the same fundamental meaning, namely polarity reversal (e.g. Sadock 1974; Ilie 1994; Han 2002). Their basic underlying conversational structure is then characterized by the alternation of the addresser and addressee roles (Pascual 2006, 2014). We claim that rhetorical questions are modeled by the intersubjective structure of conversational turn-taking and thus constitute an instance of what has been called ‘fictive interaction’ (Pascual 2014; Pascual and Sandler 2016).

Combining the theory of conceptual integration or ‘blending’ (Fauconnier and Turner 1996, 2002) with Pascual’s (2014; Pascual and Sandler 2016) idea of ‘fictive interaction’, we suggest that rhetorical questions result from the conceptual fusion of the interrogative grammatical form presented and the assertive pragmatic function to be inferred. They are thus a conceptual integration of literal and nonliteral meaning,

similar to Coulson's (2005) analysis of irony and sarcasm, which also feature such a contrast. This is an extension of the analysis of pure grammatical blending, as in morphological or syntactic constructions (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 1996, 2002), to pragmatic constructions. Focusing on the *Zhuangzi*, the second foundational text of the Chinese Daoist philosophical and religious tradition (4th c. B.C.), we claim that rhetorical questions, as "a somewhat hybrid type of utterance" (Schmidt-Radefeldt 1977: 375), involve both a conceptual blend of question and assertion and a viewpoint blend of the different perspectives (cf. Dancygier and Sweetser 2012).

The *Zhuangzi* text is particularly suitable for studying rhetorical structures involving intersubjectivity, as it is the earliest surviving Chinese text to use abundant imagined dialogues to present the philosopher's views (Coutinho 2016: 19; Xiang 2016). Such an unprecedented mode of philosophizing distinguishes this text from the writings of foregoing and contemporary scholars from Daoism and other schools of thought in the pre-Qin period (before 221 B. C.), who use either monologues or genuine dialogues (quotes of actual prior speech). The *Zhuangzi* also exerted a profound influence on subsequent philosophical texts, which either mimic its rhetorical structure, as in the *Hanfeizi* (Chen 1983: 38), or include intertextual recurrence of discourse fragments from the original *Zhuangzi* text, as in the *Huainanzi* (Major 2014: 195).

2. Data and methodology

The extant *Zhuangzi* text comprises 33 chapters, with a total count of approximately 65,000 Chinese characters (Nienhauser 1986: 340).¹ The text is subdivided into three

¹ No consensus has been reached on the exact number of Chinese characters in the *Zhuangzi*. For instance, in his preface to *Nanhua Zhenjing Zhangju Yinyi* ('Phonetic and Semantic Glosses to the

parts, namely: the ‘Inner Chapters’ (1-7), the ‘Outer Chapters’ (8-22), and the ‘Miscellaneous Chapters’ (23-33). Each chapter contains several interrelated argumentative episodes, including a variety of literary styles, such as didactic narratives, very short prose essays, and poetry (Roth 2008). It is worth mentioning that the *Zhuangzi* text is not the work of a single author (Fung [1948] 1997: 104). The ‘Inner Chapters’, which constitute the core of the text, have been attributed to the historical Zhuangzi, while the “Outer Chapters” and “Miscellaneous Chapters” have been claimed to be by different (variously named groups of) authors (for the most recent comprehensive overview, see Liu 2015). Nevertheless, it seems more plausible to view these three parts as an organic whole (G. Yang 2017: 12-14), given the likeness of the ‘Outer Chapters’ and ‘Miscellaneous Chapters’ to the thought and style of the historical Zhuangzi (Mair 2000: 36-37). The actual authorship issue does not affect our analysis or conclusions, however.

Zhuangzi’s writings, as Sima Qian (ca.145–90 B.C.E.) summarized in his biography of the philosopher in the *Shiji* (‘Records of the Grand Historian’), are “for the most part allegorical” (Fung 1983: 221). Allegories in the *Zhuangzi* appear largely in the form of dialogues, amounting to seventy percent of the total number of Chinese characters in the entire text (Huang 2013: 58–59). The inner structure of these allegorical dialogues features prototypical conversational structures, sometimes exclusively comprising question-answer adjacency pairs. Among the many questions in the *Zhuangzi* text, there are abundant instances of rhetorical questions, whose corresponding answers are presupposed in the immediately surrounding discourse.

Sections and Sentences of the Nanhua Zhenjing’), Chen Jingyuan (?-1094) reported that there are 65,923 characters altogether, whereas Chen Xiaohe et al. (2013: 149) counted 64,744 characters in the text. These numeric differences most probably result from the use of different recensions of the original *Zhuangzi* text.

The version of the original *Zhuangzi* text we use comes from *Zhuangzi Yinde* ('A Concordance to Chuang Tzu') (Harvard-Yenching Institute 1956), which reproduces the recension of the text in the most comprehensively annotated *Collected Commentaries on Zhuangzi* by the late Qing writer and philologist Guo Qingfan (1844-1896). We further consulted translations of the text into English, a language with a much more overt grammatical structure than classical Chinese. We mostly used Burton Watson's translation ([1968] 2013), regarded as probably the best English renditions of the text, "eclips[ing] all others for many years" (Classe 2000: 1515). We occasionally also consulted the translations by James Legge (1891a, 1891b) and Wang Rongpei (1999), for a proper identification and interpretation of rhetorical questions in the text.

3. Rhetorical questions in the *Zhuangzi* text

Interesting similarities are found in the use of rhetorical questions in a great number of typologically unrelated languages (see overviews in Ilie 1994 and Badarneh 2003). For instance, rhetorical questions can be identified by language-specific grammatical indicators in many languages, such as English (e.g. Schmidt-Radefeldt 1977), German (e.g. Grésillon 1980; Meibauer 1986), and Russian (e.g. Conrad 1992), despite them being classified as a pragmatic category (Ilie 1994, 2010). Additionally, rhetorical questions across languages tend to appear at the end of a complex sentence or a short piece of discourse (e.g. Grésillon 1980: 277) and are used to reinforce the addresser's argument (e.g. Ilie 1994, 1999). These observations also apply to rhetorical questions in classical Chinese (e.g. von der Gabelentz 1881; Pulleyblank 1995: 140-146; Yang and He 2001: 889-892; H. Wang 2015).

Critically, however, since classical Chinese is grammatically underspecified and hence highly context-dependent (Bisang 2008, 2013), modern readers cannot rely on many formal features for the identification of rhetorical questions. For instance, the word order of interrogatives in classical Chinese is generally SVO (Pulleyblank 1995), which is also the word order of declaratives. Genuine information-seeking and rhetorical questions generally also share the same interrogative pronouns and adverbs (e.g. 何 ‘hé’ [what], 孰 ‘shú’, 谁 ‘shuí’ [who]), as well as final particles (e.g. 乎 ‘hū’, 哉 ‘zāi’, 邪 ‘yé’).² Although certain final particles, such as 乎 ‘hū’ and 哉 ‘zāi’, often presuppose a rhetorical reading of the interrogative form (Von der Gabelentz 1881; Yang and He 2001), the co-occurrence of interrogative pronouns or adverbs and final particles is not always sufficient to prompt a rhetorical reading. This notwithstanding, written classical Chinese occasionally uses certain grammatical indicators (e.g. the 不亦……乎 ‘búyì……hū’ construction [lit. Is it not X?], the modal particle 其 ‘qí’ [how], the adverbial particle 岂 ‘qǐ’ [how can], the combination of adverbial particles 庸詎 ‘yōngjù’ [how], the conjunctive particle 况 ‘kuàng’ [how much more or less]), and conventionalized phrases (e.g. 何足 ‘hézú’ [lit. how can], 何暇 ‘héxiá’ [lit. what leisure], 安得 ‘āndé’ [lit. how should]) to indicate a rhetorical question reading (for the most complete list of grammatical indicators of rhetorical questions in the history of classical Chinese, see H. Wang 2015:368-436). Lastly, the classical Chinese

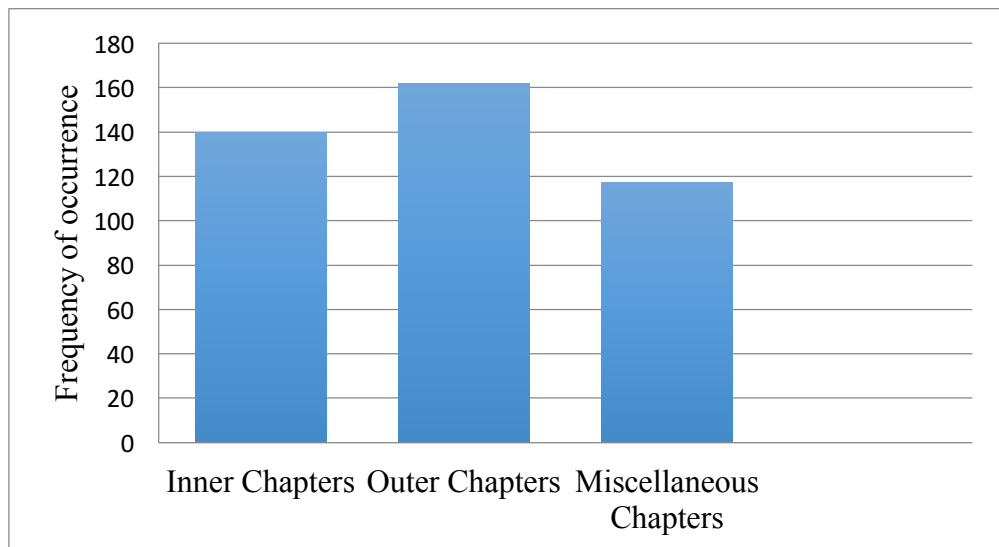
²In this paper the original Chinese characters are followed by their *Pinyin* Romanization in single quotes and their corresponding English translations between square brackets. The parts of speech and English translations of the Chinese characters provided are mostly searched on the *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae* (<http://tls.uni-hd.de/procSearch/procSearchLex.lasso>). It should be pointed out that the English translations may not always indicate the part of speech of the Chinese characters, as they are literal and for illustrative purposes only. Additionally, final particles are added at the end of a sentence to suggest interrogative or exclamatory mood. Instead of translating these semantically empty particles and their possible combinations with other lexical items, I describe their grammatical functions in the analysis below.

original text had no punctuation marks. Consequently, text parsing is generally carried out “on the basis of context, relying on an array of grammatical and modal particles” as well as the “often parallel structure of sentences, its organic symmetry and rhythm” (Galambos 2014: 341).³

Thus, we identified rhetorical questions partly through grammatical indicators, and partly through contextual clues, possibly “the most salient determiner of frequency and function of rhetorical questions” (Frank 1990: 737). We first conducted a corpus search of the grammatical indicators of rhetorical questioning in classical Chinese as key words in the entire *Zhuangzi* text, as found in the Academia Sinica Tagged Corpus of Old Chinese (<http://lingcorpus.iis.sinica.edu.tw/ancient/>). We then carried out a manual double-check against the entries in the *Dictionary of Laozi and Zhuangzi* (Sh. Wang and Han 1993), which lists the lexical items in the text, with their frequency of occurrence and their meaning(s) or function(s) taxonomically arranged. Altogether we counted 950 questions in the entire *Zhuangzi* text, 419 out of which can be considered as rhetorical. The distribution of rhetorical questions in the three sections of the text is: 140 instances in the ‘Inner Chapters’ (999 out of 13,791 Chinese characters, i.e. approximately 7.2%); 162 instances in the ‘Outer Chapters’ (1,141 out of 28,083 Chinese characters, i.e. approximately 4.1%); and 117 instances in the ‘Miscellaneous Chapters’ (762 out of 23,367 Chinese characters, i.e. approximately 3.3%) (see Table 1). The statistical distribution seems to be rather random, perhaps due to the fact that rhetorical questions occur more frequently in dialogues than monologues in this text.

³ Critically, a large part of the grammatical indicators in modern Chinese appear at a later stage and are hence absent in the *Zhuangzi* text. There might also have been prosodic features marking the rhetoricity of questions in classical Chinese (Lin 1981: 108), but these are naturally not traceable in a written text.

Table 1 Distribution of rhetorical questions in the sections of the *Zhuangzi*



In our examples in the analysis section, we on occasion modify Burton Watson’s translation of a particular rhetorical question by replacing it with a more literal rendition as an interrogative from other English translations (Legge 1891a, 1891b; Wang 1999). These modifications, between angle brackets, are for illustrative purposes only.

4. Analysis

In this section, we discuss the use of rhetorical questions in the argumentative episodes of the *Zhuangzi* text. These episodes can be further distinguished into two general categories according to their discourse structure, namely monologic argumentative episodes and dialogic argumentative episodes. These correspond respectively to the Grounding Space (à la Oakley and Coulson 2008), where language is produced and interpreted and the Current Discourse Space (Langacker 2001, 2008,

2013), where the allegories are introduced (Xiang and Pascual 2016).⁴ Two modes of speech, 寓言 ‘yùyán’ [imputed words] and 重言 ‘chóngyán’ [repeated words], appear separately or in combination in the allegories. According to the philosopher himself, imputed words, which “make up nine-tenths of [the text]”, are “like persons brought in from outside for the purpose of exposition”, while repeated words, which “make up seven-tenths of [the text]” and are “intended to put an end to argument”, as “they are the words of the elders”.⁵ As indicated by their frequency of occurrence, these two rhetorical devices are not mutually exclusive. In fact, repeated words can be viewed as a particular subtype of imputed words (Xiang 2016: 68). Indeed, more than seventy percent of the allegories use both devices (Ye [1979] 2004: 5-80). More generally, the writer speaks through story characters in the allegories to present his views for the benefit of subsequent readers. Thus, the philosopher’s voice can be ‘heard’ in the voice of his characters (Zhang [1948] 2007; Ye [1979] 2004; B. Wang 2013).

Rhetorical questions in written texts are particularly intriguing, since the addresser and addressee may be separated by vast time and space. We understand the very experience of writing and reading as a non-actual conversation between writer and reader (Herman 1999; Fauconnier and Turner 2002; Pascual 2014). Since its interactional structure cannot be overtly observed in the communicative situation of production and interpretation, this type of interaction is utterly conceptual in nature and instantiates what has been referred to as a ‘fictive interaction blend’ (Pascual 2008). This is a conceptual configuration in which a non-conversational reality (a feeling, opinion, state of affairs) is presented as modeled by –indeed conceptually

⁴ Embedded in the Grounding Space, the Current Discourse Space is a conceptual configuration that contains elements and relations generally shared by the addresser and addressee, which make it possible for communication to flow at a particular moment (Langacker 2001: 144).

⁵ This quote was translated by Burton Watson ([1968] 2013: 234).

integrated with– the entrenched frame of simultaneous face-to-face conversation. The fictive interaction blends underlying the *Zhuangzi* text can be diagrammed as follows:

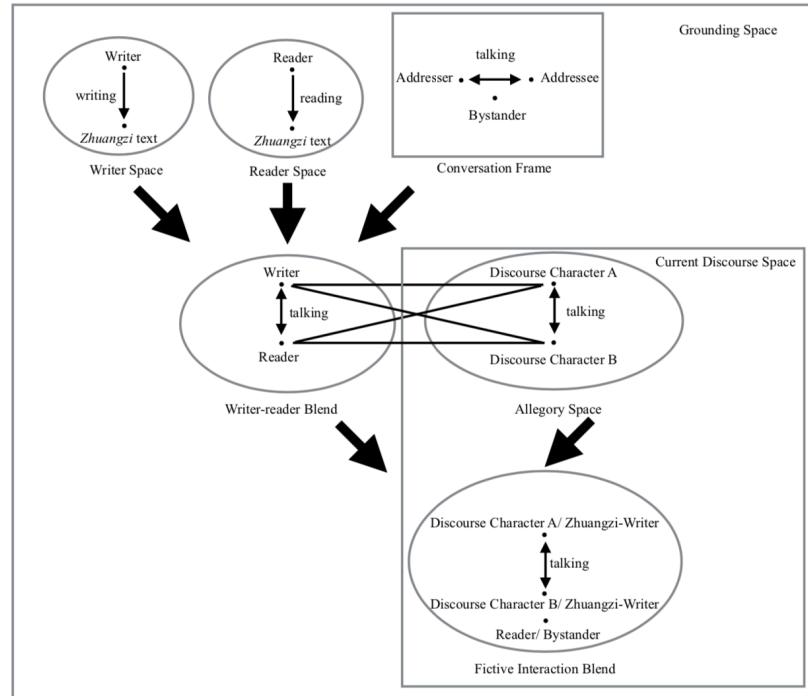


Figure 1. Fictive interaction blends in the *Zhuangzi* text

In the Grounding Space, we have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the writer and reader are interacting directly (Herman 1999; Fauconnier and Turner 2002; Pascual 2014). This involves massive compression of time and space, since the fictive reader in the blend represents a great number of individuals scattered over large temporal and spatial spans. In the Current Discourse Space, we have the writer and reader jointly attending to the story enacted by discourse characters in the Allegory Space. The writer speaks in the voice of the discourse characters, like a puppeteer or ventriloquist (cf. Cooren 2010, 2012). The writer of the *Zhuangzi* is also talking to himself, while the reader becomes the bystander of this staged imagined conversation (Xiang 2016; Xiang and Pascual 2016).

4.1 Rhetorical questions in the Grounding Space

We now analyze rhetorical questions in the monologic argumentative episodes of the *Zhuangzi*. These questions are ascribed to the writer as narrator, and addressed ‘directly’ to prospective readers. Altogether we counted 93 rhetorical questions at this level of analysis. Consider the following questions from Chapter 9, ‘Horses’ Hoofs’:

(1) 夫至德之世，同与禽兽居，族与万物并。恶乎知君子小人哉！同乎无知，其德不离；同乎无欲，是谓素朴。[……] 故纯朴不残，孰为牺尊！白玉不毁，孰为珪璋！道德不废，安取仁义！性情不离，安用礼乐！五色不乱，孰为文采！无声不乱，孰应六律！夫残朴以为器，工匠之罪也；毁道德以为仁义，圣人之过也。(23/9/9-14)⁶

‘In this age of Perfect Virtue men live the same as birds and beasts, group themselves side by side with the ten thousand things. <How could they know among themselves the distinctions of superior men and small men?> Dull and unwitting, men have no wisdom; thus their Virtue does not depart from them. [...] Thus, if the plain unwrought substance had not been blighted, <who could have made a vase from them?> If the white jade had not been shattered, <who could have made the handles for the libation-cups from it?> If the Way and its Virtue had not been cast aside, how would there be any call for benevolence and righteousness? If the true form of the inborn nature had not been abandoned, how would there be any use for rites and music? If the five colors had not confused men, who would fashion patterns and hues? If the five notes had not confused them, who would try to tune things by the six tones? That the unwrought substance was blighted in order to fashion implements - this was the crime of the artisan. That the Way and its Virtue were destroyed in order to create benevolence and righteousness - this was the fault of the sage.’ (Watson [1968] 2013: 66-67, slightly modified on the basis of Legge 1891a: 278-279)

In this extract, we have seven questions, the first one occurring in isolation and the remainder in a cluster. The stand-alone question is introduced by the adverb-particle combination 恶乎 ‘wūhū’ [how] (‘How could they know among themselves ...?’).

From the immediately preceding discourse context we can infer that the implied

⁶ When citing examples from the classical Chinese original, we follow the Yen-ching convention by indicating the page, chapter, and line number(s) from left to right (p/c/l) (Harvard-Yenching Institute 1956: v-vi). The p/c/l numbers of the examples analyzed were searched on the website of the *Chinese Text Project* (<http://ctext.org/zhuangzi/zhs>). Relevant discourse fragments are indicated with emphasis marks (.) in the original, while their corresponding English translations are italicized. Words or strings of words that we want to draw particular attention to appear underlined.

answer to this question is a negative one ('They could not know...'). Indeed, since humans live just as animals and group themselves among the ten thousand things, there can be no distinction between superior and inferior individuals, as they are all equalized. The clustered questions, introduced by the interrogative pronoun 孰 'shú' [who] and the interrogative adverb 安 'ān' [how] respectively, appear in a cyclic manner. A set of rhetorical questions with a similar syntactic structure is followed immediately by another set of rhetorical questions with a different structure. Intriguingly, the successive questions are unanimously translated as the apodoses of epistemic conditionals in the parallel translations (Legge 1891a; Watson [1968] 2013; Wang 1999), despite them showing no overt grammatical marker for conditionality (Chou 1961: 225-226) or subjunctive mood in the original. The combination of conditionality and negation (the sentence connective 不 'bù' [if not]) contributes to the questions' rhetorical reading. The implied answers to these clustered questions are also negative. Despite their interrogative forms, the questions in (1) are used to express strong negative assertions, thereby constituting prototypical instances of rhetorical questions. In terms of discursive function, they serve either to challenge a belief assumed to be in the addressee's mind or to emphasize a point that should be considered obvious.

In the Grounding Space, the writer is directly speaking to 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 intends to convey lie not in the interrogative forms, but rather in the silent answers evoked, which constitute part of or the ultimate moral aimed at. The interpretation of rhetorical questions in the Grounding Space hence involves the resolution of the mixed viewpoints of the writer/narrator and the prospective readers. This requires the

writer to make mental contact with the potential readers' common ground (Oakley and Tobin 2014) and thus adopt their viewpoint, just as readers have to adopt the perspective of the narrator and thus the original writer. In the writer-reader blend, the possibly different viewpoints between the writer and the assumed readers are aligned on the basis of the immediate discourse context and knowledge of classical Chinese grammar.

4.2 Rhetorical questions in the Current Discourse Space

This section deals with rhetorical questions in the allegorical dialogues, where the perspectives of the writer, the discourse characters, and the prospective readers are fused together, as the characters speak for both the writer and the readers through bi-directional mental simulation (Hogan 2013: 5-6; Xiang and Pascual 2016: 147). Altogether we identified 326 instances of rhetorical questions in the Current Discourse Space. In the following, we analyze the use of rhetorical questions in three prototypical mixed viewpoint scenarios, which exhibit varying degrees of complexity regarding viewpoint shift and viewpoint blending.

Consider first an allegorical dialogue between two discourse characters from Chapter 2, 'Discussion on Making All Things Equal':

(2) 啮缺问乎王倪曰：“子知物之所同是乎？”曰：“吾恶乎知之！”
“子知子之所不知邪？”曰：“吾恶乎知之！”“然则物无知邪？”曰：
“吾恶乎知之！虽然，尝试言之。庸詎知吾所谓知之非不知邪？庸詎知吾
所谓不知之非知邪？且吾尝试问乎女：民湿寝则腰疾偏死，鲇然乎哉？木
处则惴栗恟惧，猿猴然乎哉？三者孰知正处？民食刍豢，麋鹿食荇，螂且
甘带，鸱鸦耆鼠，四者孰知正味？猿，獮狙以为雌，麋与鹿交，鲇与鱼游。
毛嫱、丽姬，人之所美也，鱼见之深入，鸟见之高飞，麋鹿见之决骤。四
者孰知天下之正色哉？自我观之，仁义之端，是非之涂，樊然淆乱，吾恶

能知其辩？”啮缺曰：“子不知利害，则至人固不知利害乎？”王倪曰：“[……] 若然者，乘云气，骑日月，而游乎四海之外。死生无变于己，而况利害之端乎！” (6/2/64-73)

‘Nie Que asked Wang Ni, “Do you know what all things agree in calling right?”

“*How would I know that?*” said Wang Ni.

“Do you know that you don’t know it?”

“*How would I know that?*”

“Then do things know nothing?”

“*How would I know that?* However, suppose I try saying something. <*How do you*

know that what I say I know is not what I do not know? How do you know that what I say I do not know is not what I know?> Now let me ask you [italics in the original] some questions. If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, *but is this true of a loach?* If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, *but is this true of a monkey?* *Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live?* Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. *Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste?* Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play around with fish. Men claim that Maoqiang and Lady Li were beautiful; but if fish saw them, they would dive to the bottom of the stream; if birds saw them, they would fly away; and if deer saw them, they would break into a run. *Of these four, which knows how to fix the standard of beauty for the world?* The way I see it, the rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong all are hopelessly snarled and jumbled. *How could I know anything about such discriminations?*”

Nie Que said, “If you don’t know what is profitable or harmful, then does the Perfect Man likewise know nothing of such things?”

Wang Ni replied, “[...] A man like this [The Perfect Man] rides the clouds and mist, straddles the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas. <Neither death nor life makes any change in him, and *how much less* should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!>” (Watson [1968] 2013: 14-15, slightly modified on the basis of Wang 1999: 33)

This dialogue between fictional discourse characters Nie Que and his master Wang Ni comprises four question-answer adjacency pairs. The first answer by Wang Ni takes an interrogative form marked by 恶乎 ‘wūhū’ [how] (i.e. “*How would I know that?*”), and is subsequently repeated twice. This question primarily functions as an emphatic ‘no’ answer to the genuine information-seeking questions posed to Wang Ni. Its rhetorical reading receives further support in Wang Ni’s penultimate answer, where it is immediately followed by a sentence beginning with the conjunction 虽 ‘suī’

[although]. This instantiates what is termed a contrastive discourse marker, “signal[ing] that the speaker intends the explicit message conveyed by S2 to contrast with an explicit or indirect message conveyed by S1” (Fraser 1998: 303ff). This contrastive relationship suggests that the implied answer to the preceding question (*‘How would I know that?’*) is a negative one. Although Wang Ni claims that he does not know the answer, he still considers it worthwhile to elaborate on the complexity of the issue raised in Nie Que’s questions.

Wang Ni’s elucidation begins with two questions marked by the adverbial particle combination 庸詎 ‘yōngjù’ [how] (i.e. “*How do you know that what I say I know...? How do you know that what I say I do not know...?*”). This prompts a negative answer, hence requiring a rhetorical question reading (Pulleyblank 1995: 144). Instead of making assertive statements in his extended speech, Wang Ni addresses five questions to his interlocutor, among which the first two are yes-no questions marked with the modal particle 乎哉 ‘hūzāi’ (e.g. “*but is this true of a loach/monkey?*”). The remainder are alternative questions introduced by the interrogative pronoun 孰 ‘shú’ [which] (e.g. “*Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the proper place to live?*”, etc.). Given the mutually shared encyclopedic knowledge between the characters that can be inferred, the implied answers to the yes-no questions are obviously negative (e.g. ‘It is not true that a monkey will be terrified...’). Regarding the alternative questions, it is impossible for the reader to select one from the multiple options provided, as all the salient propositional alternatives in the preceding discourse constitute felicitous answers to the questions posed. Consequently, these questions no longer involve an either-or choice, but rather an all-or-none dichotomy. This makes them resemble polar questions. The implied answers to the alternative questions are positive (e.g. ‘They all know how food ought

to taste’). At the end of his speech, Wang Ni puts forward yet another question (i.e. “*How could I know anything ...?*”), whose ultimate illocutionary force is identified as a strong negative assertion. This becomes the protasis of Nie Que’s if-then question (i.e. “If you don’t know what is profitable or harmful...”), despite the absence of an overt marker of conditionality in the original. In Wang Ni’s reply, he describes the unique qualities of the Perfect Man, concluding his remarks with a question marked by the conjunctive particle 况 ‘kuàng’ [how much more or less] (i.e. “*and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!*”).

The intriguing aspect of kuàng questions is that this particle requires a rhetorical reading by indicating a comparison (Pulleyblank 1995: 146), but its scalar implicature is not overtly specified. Whether the elements being compared are at the top or bottom of the scale is unspecified and hence entirely context-dependent. Kuàng questions constitute the latter component of a complex sentence, in which the addresser presents two elements to be compared in the component clauses separately. The conjunctive particle 况 ‘kuàng’ signals that there exists a gradable, conflicting but not necessarily opposing relationship between these elements. Therefore, the implied answer to a kuàng question, given the discourse context, does not involve reversed polarity. Indeed, if life and death cannot affect the Perfect Man, then trivial things such as profit and loss will never concern such a noble individual. Additionally, kuàng questions can also have an interpretation as exclamatives, as confirmed by the punctuation added by modern commentators in the classical Chinese original and by translators in the parallel English translations (Legge 1891 a, b; Watson [1968] 2013; Wang 1999). Despite this, kuàng constructions are primarily understood as rhetorical questions (Pulleyblank 1995; H. Wang 2015), suggesting that exclamatives and

rhetorical questions may constitute two ends of a continuum and that *kuàng* questions may instantiate an in-between category.

The rhetorical questions in (2) are meant to evoke silent answers in Nie Que's mind, leading to the reinforcement of Wang Ni's arguments. In terms of their function, rhetorical questions in this extract are used to: (i) problematize a controversial issue (i.e. "*How do you know that what I say I know...? How do you know that what I say I do not know...?*"); (ii) provoke thought (e.g. "*but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows...?*"); (iii) conclude a discussion (i.e. "*How could I know anything...?*"); and (iv) emphasize a point that should be considered obvious (i.e. "*and how much less should the considerations...?*").

In the Current Discourse Space, the viewpoints of Nie Que and Wang Ni are conceptually blended, so that they can identify and interpret the message each wants to convey. The above extract illustrates Zhuangzi's combined use of 'imputed words' and 'repeated words' (Ye [1979] 2004: 89-90), and hence is not presented for its own sake or for entertainment purposes, but rather to express the philosopher's actual thoughts, and ultimately the moral of the story. Since the philosopher is speaking through these fictional figures, their viewpoints are also blended with that of the writer as narrator. While reading the text, the readers will mentally simulate the conversation, thus also adopting the viewpoints of these discourse characters. Therefore, in (2) we have the mixed viewpoints of the writer as narrator, the assumed readers, and the discourse characters. These viewpoints are resolved in the Grounding Space, given the mutually shared discourse context and overall encyclopedic knowledge.

Consider now the following extract, involving multiple participants and hence multiple viewpoint shifts from Chapter 22, 'Knowledge Wandered North':

(3) 于是泰清问乎无穷，曰：“子知道乎？”无穷曰：“吾不知。”又问乎无为，无为曰：“吾知道。”曰：“子之知道，亦有数乎？”曰：“有。”曰：“其数若何？”无为曰：“吾知道之可以贵、可以贱、可以约、可以散，此吾所以知道之数也。”泰清以之言也问乎无始，曰：“若是，则无穷之弗知与无为之知，孰是而孰非乎？”无始曰：“不知深矣，知之浅矣；弗知内矣，知之外矣。”于是泰清中而叹曰：“弗知乃知乎！知乃不知乎！孰知不知之知？”无始曰：“道不可闻，闻而非也；道不可见，见而非也；道不可言，言而非也！知形形之不形乎！道不当名。” [……] (59/22/57-65)

‘At this point, Grand Purity asked No-End, “Do you understand the Way?”

“I don’t understand it,” said No-End.

Then he asked No-Action, and No-Action said, “I understand the Way.”

“You say you understand the Way—is there some trick to it?

“There is.”

“What’s the trick?”

No-Action said, “I understand that the Way can exalt things and can humble them, that it can bind them together and can cause them to disperse. This is the trick by which I understand the Way.”

Grand Purity, having received these various answers, went and questioned No-Beginning, saying, “If this is how it is, then between No-End’s declaration that he doesn’t understand and No-Action’s declaration that he does, which is right and which is wrong?”

No-Beginning said, “Not to understand is profound; to understand is shallow. Not to understand is to be on the inside; to understand is to be on the outside.”

Thereupon Grand Purity gazed up and sighed, saying, “Not to understand is to understand? To understand is not to understand? *Who understands the understanding that does not understand?*”

No-Beginning said, “The Way cannot be heard; heard, it is not the Way. The Way cannot be seen; seen, it is not the Way. The Way cannot be described; described, it is not the Way. <Do we know the Formless which gives form to form? In the same way the Way does not admit of being named.>” [...]’ (Watson [1968] 2013: 184-185, slightly modified on the basis of Legge 1891b: 69).

Here, we have a sequence of three interrelated allegorical dialogues between personified abstract concepts, namely Grand Purity and No-End, Grand Purity and No-Action, as well as Grand Purity and No-Beginning. The first two dialogues provide the setting for the subsequent discussion between Grand Purity and No-Beginning in the third conversation, which constitutes the gist of this allegory. All three dialogues are fictional, as abstract concepts do not exist as actual living entities, let alone conversational participants. In the first two dialogues, Grand Purity produces genuine information-seeking questions to No-End and No-Action, asking if

they understand the Way. The answers to these questions are presented to No-Beginning for appraisal by an alternative question (i.e. “[...], *which is right and which is wrong?*”). In his reply, No-Beginning outlines the differences between ‘not to understand’ and ‘to understand’. Grand Purity seems to be enlightened by No-Beginning’s remarks, producing two exclamatory questions when the eureka moment dawns on him. The exclamatory reading of the first two questions in Grand Purity’s speech, as confirmed by the punctuation added to the classical Chinese original, is motivated by the discourse context. Grand Purity’s newly acquired insight leads him to wonder if there is anyone like No-End. This becomes the third question in his speech, also with a rhetorical reading (i.e. “*Who understands the understanding that does not understand?*”). According to Cheng Xuanying (fl. 631-652), an early Daoist priest, this question implies that such a person is extremely rare, if existent at all. The rhetorical reading is motivated by the writer’s cognitive context (i.e. an individual speaker’s patterns of entrenched knowledge as indicated by their usage preferences, Günther 2016: 156), as instantiated elsewhere in the text. In a subsequent conversational turn, No-beginning does not answer this question directly, but expounds on “the understanding that does not understand”, also using a question (i.e. “*Do we know the Formless which gives form to form?*”). Given the immediate discourse context, the implied answer to this question is a negative one, which imposes a rhetorical reading on the interrogative form. The two questions in this excerpt share the same discursive function, namely, to challenge a belief ascribed to the addressee.

In the Current Discourse Space, Grand Purity’s viewpoint is first blended with the viewpoints of the discourse characters No-End and No-Action in the first two allegorical conversations. This blending viewpoint is then further fused with the

viewpoint of No-Beginning in the last dialogue, so that Grand Purity can identify and interpret his interlocutors' messages. Similar to example (2), the philosopher articulates his views through the discourse characters (Zhang [1948] 2007; Ye [1979] 2004; B. Wang 2013), more specifically, adopting the rhetorical device of 'imputed words' (Ye [1979] 2004: 216-217). Thus, the viewpoints of all the discourse characters are also fused with that of the writer as narrator. Additionally, the viewpoints of the discourse characters, which are shifted as the discourse flows, are further blended with those of subsequent readers, who will have to mentally simulate the dialogues while reading. In the Grounding Space, we again have the conventional writer-reader blend, in which the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed readers are aligned on the basis of the mutually shared discourse context.

Lastly, consider a dialogue between two discourse characters, one reporting his own words to a third character, from Chapter 12, 'Heaven and Earth':

(4) 将闾蒯见季彻曰：“鲁君谓蒯也曰：‘请受教。’辞不获命，既已告矣，未知中否，请尝荐之。吾谓鲁君曰：‘必服恭俭，拔出公忠之属而无阿私，民孰敢不辑！’”季彻局局然笑曰：“若夫子之言，于帝王之德，犹螳螂之怒臂以当车轂，则必不胜任矣！且若是，则其自为处危，其观台多，物将往，投迹者众。”将闾蒯覩然惊曰：“蒯也亡若于夫子之所言矣。虽然，愿先生之言其风也。”季彻曰：“大圣之治天下也，摇荡民心，使之成教易俗，举灭其贼心而皆进其独志，若性之自为，而民不知其所由然。若然者，岂兄尧舜之教民，溟滓然弟之哉？欲同乎德而心居矣。” (30/12/45-52)

‘Jianglü Mian went to see Ji Che and said, “The ruler of Lu begged me to give him some instruction. I declined, but he wouldn’t let me go, and so I had no choice but to tell him something. I don’t know whether or not what I said was right, but I would like to try repeating it to you. I said to the ruler of Lu, ‘You must be courteous and temperate! Pick out and promote those who are loyal and public-spirited, allow no flattery or favoritism, *and then who of your people will venture to be unruly?*’”

Ji Che heehawed with laughter. “As far as the Virtue of emperors and kings is concerned,” he said, “your advice is like the praying mantis that waved its arms angrily in front of an approaching carriage—it just isn’t up to the job. If the ruler of Lu went about it in that way, he would simply get himself all stirred up, place himself on a tower or a terrace. Then things would flock around him, and the crowd would turn its steps in his direction!”

Jianglü Mian’s eyes bugged out in amazement. “I am dumbfounded by your

words,” he said. “Nevertheless, I would like to hear how the Master would speak on this subject.”

Ji Che said, “When a great sage rules the world, he makes the minds of his people free and far wandering. On this basis, he fashions teachings and simplifies customs, wiping out all treason from their minds and allowing each to pursue his own will. All is done in accordance with the inborn nature, and yet the people do not know why it is like this. Proceeding in this way, *what need has he either to revere the way in which Yao and Shun taught their people or to look down on it in lofty contempt?* His only desire is for unity with Virtue and the repose of the mind.” (Watson [1968] 2013: 90)

At the very beginning of this allegorical dialogue, Jianglǔ Mian tells Ji Che about an incident in which a king sought governing advice from him. Upon the ruler’s persistent request, Jianglǔ Mian has no choice but to ‘improvise’ a suggestion that ends with a question marked by the phrase 孰敢 ‘shúgǎn’ [lit. who ventures] (i.e. “*and then who of your people will venture to be unruly?*”).⁷ The propositional content of this question anticipates the idealized outcome of the ruler’s government if he follows Jianglǔ Mian’s advice. Given the discourse context, the answer implied is negative (i.e. ‘No one will venture to be unruly’) and its only possible reading is rhetorical. Addressed to the ruler, this rhetorical question evokes a silent answer in his mind, thus involving the ruler taking Jianglǔ Mian’s viewpoint. Meanwhile, Ji Che also needs to interpret this question before he can pass any judgment on Jianglǔ Mian’s suggestion. In fact, Ji Che does recognize its illocutionary force but envisages an entirely different outcome. Perplexed by Ji Che’s remark, Jianglǔ Mian demands a further clarification. Ji Che then provides his personal view of the ruling of a great sage, which contains another question introduced by the adverbial particle 曷 ‘qǐ’ [what] (i.e. “*what need has he either to revere the way...?*”). This particle, which

⁷ The phrase 孰敢 ‘shúgǎn’ [who ventures] was not listed in Wang Haifen (2015) as an indicator of rhetorical questioning in classical Chinese. This is probably due to its low level of entrenchment, resulting from its low frequency of occurrence, as suggested by our search in the Old Chinese subcorpus compiled by the Centre for Chinese Linguistics (CCL), Peking University, China (http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus/index.jsp?dir=gudai).

evokes a negative silent answer in the addressee's mind (Pulleyblank 1995: 142), requires a rhetorical reading of the interrogative form. The above two rhetorical questions serve to: (i) emphasize a point that should be considered obvious, and (ii) challenge a belief assumed to be in the addressee's mind.

In the Current Discourse Space, the rhetorical question aims to elicit a mental response in Jianglü Mian's mind. Consequently, the interpretation of the second rhetorical question involves the viewpoints of the discourse characters Jianglü Mian and Ji Che. Furthermore, the viewpoints of the ruler of Lu, Jianglü Mian, and Ji Che in the dialogue are all conceptually integrated with the viewpoint of the writer, since the above conversation, instantiating the use of 'imputed words' (Ye [1979] 2004: 140), is constructed by the philosopher for rhetorical purposes. Moreover, while reading, readers will mentally simulate the conversation, which also involves a viewpoint blend of the readers and the discourse characters. The alignment of the viewpoints of the writer and the assumed readers in the Grounding Space owes to the immediate discourse context and the latter's knowledge of classical Chinese grammar.

5. Summary and conclusions

As illustrated in the above examples, the rhetorical reading of interrogative forms, is largely context-dependent. This shows how good we humans are at holistic interpretation without very overt markers, or any at all. Additionally, not all silent answers evoked by rhetorical questions in the readers' mind are of reversed polarity, as illustrated by the alternative questions (e.g. "*Of these three creatures, then, which one knows...*") and the kuàng question ("*and how much less should the considerations of advantage and injury do so!*") in (2). This suggests that the long-established definition of rhetorical questions involving polarity reversal may be too restrictive.

Instead, we should treat rhetorical questions as a radial category with both prototypical and peripheral members (cf. Rosch 1973).

The various functions rhetorical questions can serve in the above examples indicate that they constitute a highly successful communicative strategy in the *Zhuangzi* text. Since Daoist philosophy precludes the philosopher from making self-assertions, he adopts rhetorical questions as a compensatory strategy and expects the readers to figure out his intended message themselves. Rhetorical questions have a self-involving dimension (Adams 2006: 138) and can engage readers in a parsimonious, implicit manner, as they can set up a fictive interaction scenario, in which the writer and reader assume different conversational roles, fictively talking to each other. This is opposed to using straight assertions (non-dialogic) or open questions (dialogic but not argumentative), strategies often used by defense attorneys at trial in order to create doubt in the jury's mind (cf. Pascual 2006, 2014). Hence, rhetorical questions in the *Zhuangzi* text reflect both the structure of the imagined dialogues that constitute the main structure of the text and the philosophy that is the text's message.

Earlier work on rhetorical questions examines either their semantic meaning or their functions in different communicative settings, rather than the conceptual configuration they set up (see overviews in Ilie 1994; Badarneh 2003; and Koshik 2005). Here, we integrated these different focuses and presented rhetorical question not only as a rhetorical figure but also as a linguistic construction involving intersubjectivity and viewpoint blending. This can account for both what is presented (i.e. a question) and what is ultimately communicated (i.e. a strong assertion).

Our analysis suggests that rhetorical questions are intersubjectively grounded, since they involve the mutual sharing and management of the viewpoints of the

addresser and addressee (cf. Verhagen 2005, 2008; Zlatev et al. 2008). The potential rhetorical reading of an interrogative form is attributed to the conceptual link established between the ‘onstage conceptualizer’, namely the referent of the subject of this interrogative sentence, and the addressee of the question (Verhagen 2005: 130). The intersubjective nature of rhetorical questions is inherently presupposed by the mismatch between their overt grammatical form and covert pragmatic function. This constitutes a coordination problem that the addresser of a rhetorical question expects readers to resolve in their mind, something they in their turn know is expected from them (cf. Verhagen 2008: 307).

In this paper, we focused on how rhetorical questions ought to be interpreted in a text abundant with mixed viewpoints. Our approach to rhetorical questions as intersubjective mixed viewpoint constructions becomes even more transparent, as all the different perspectives are set up to present the writer’s actual thoughts. In the *Zhuangzi*, the writer blends his own viewpoint with that of the assumed readers through rhetorical questions, which are ascribed to the narrator himself or to discourse characters. In the latter case, we need to conceptually integrate the mixed viewpoints of the writer and potential future readers with that of the discourse characters, who are meant to represent the writer’s voice, thereby giving rise to multiple viewpoint blending chains. Meanwhile, the readers frequently navigate through the viewpoint network prompted by rhetorical questions in a stepwise manner from the Current Discourse Space to the Grounding Space, where possibly different viewpoints of the writer and readers are eventually aligned. The very emergent structure of this sophisticated viewpoint blend is thus the novel multi-voicedness surfacing from the fictive space shared by the writer and potential readers. The present study on pragmatic constructions like rhetorical questions is an extension of Verhagen’s (2005)

work on constructions of intersubjectivity as well as previous studies on viewpoint in discourse (e.g. Dancygier 2008; Dancygier and Sweetser 2012; Dancygier, Lu and Verhagen 2016; van Krieken and Sanders 2019).

The great number of rhetorical questions used in the *Zhuangzi*, as well as in the Bible (e.g. Estes 2013, 2017) and the Quran (Badarneh 2003), confirms that these ancient written texts are conversationally structured, which may be related to orality (Xiang 2016; Xiang and Pascual 2016), since these texts first appeared in an overwhelmingly oral culture and were also meant to be read aloud and commented in a community (Bowery 2007). This shows that the use of conversational structures in discourse is not restricted to modern public discourse (Fairclough 1994; Vis et al. 2012) or spoken informal speech (Streeck 2002) and that fictive interaction may be a primordial means of communication in ancient times. For instance, the spoken word, despite the availability of written documents, is still the preferred form to present evidence in the Judaic system (e.g. Jaffee 2001: 140-151), while allegorical dialogues mostly with fictitious characters as interlocutors are the first to be employed to express the philosopher's views in the *Zhuangzi* text. In highly influential texts like the *Zhuangzi*, rhetorical questions can engage readers as more active participants in the subject matter (cf. Claridge 2005) and thus serve as a pedagogical tool. This affects viewpoint shift as a tactic, crucial to attaining some kind of discursive goal.

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