

## **Chuang Tzu as an Inspiration for Reflections on the Relation between Existential Cultivation and Inter-subjectivity**

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The *Inner Chapters* in the *Chuang Tzu* has puzzled readers both inside and outside of the Taoist tradition, since the first editions of the text.<sup>1</sup> Not only because of the creative and imaginative stories and parables, or the beauty of the poetic language, which even can be felt by us, who have to read the *Chuang Tzu* through translations, but also because of the philosophical and existential questions Master Chuang raises in these *Inner Chapters*, and the way he reflects on these questions. Several fruitful hermeneutical strategies has been developed to bring us closer to an understanding of, what Master Chuang actually is trying to tell us. Central themes in many of these attempts to interpret his thought are metamorphosis, perspectivism, and the oneness of the *Dao*. These themes have been emphasized in different degrees in different interpretations, interpretations which at the same time often contradict each other, regarding what is claimed to be the central message(s) of Master Chuang.

I will not introduce yet another hermeneutical strategy for understanding the *Inner Chapters per se*. Instead I will, as a philosopher interested in the history of ideas and the translation transformation of ideas from one context to another, reflect in this paper on how different interpreters' situated dynamic "local" perspectives can influence the interpretations of the *Inner Chapters*. More specifically, I will reflect on how the various interpretations of the *Inner Chapters* are interdependent based respectively on the "home-ontologies" of the interpreters. I am therefore primarily interested in the existential, philosophical and/or religious context of the interpreters and its influence on the interpretation.<sup>2</sup> The idea is not to choose which interpretation is the "right" one, but instead to show how the different ontological backgrounds structure the interpretations in different ways. In other words, instead of focusing on the fundamental truth about the ontology of Chuang Tzu and how it is represented more or less faithfully in a given interpretation, I am more interested in what I elsewhere have called *onto-dialogical interaction*<sup>3</sup> between the interpreter and Master Chuang.

More specifically I will reflect on how "Buddhist-like" and "Martin Buber-like" interpretations of the *Inner Chapters*, with different emphasis in light of the different "home-ontologies" into which the ideas of Master Chuang are "translated". This article consists of three parts. The first part raises two questions regarding the differences between Jonathan Herman's Martin Buber inspired interpretation and Robert Allinson's *Ch'an*-inspired interpretation of the *Inner Chapters*. These two questions are: how can we understand the realization of existential insight, and how we can relate the idea of inter-subjectivity to such a realization? The second part of the paper presents an analysis of some passages in the *Inner Chapters* in light of these two questions. This is done with the intention to prepare the ground for part three, which examines how we can

expect Buddhist-like and Buber-like answers to these two questions to interact onto-dialogically with the *Inner Chapters*.

### **Part One: Some Differences between Herman's and Allinson's Interpretations regarding Existential Cultivation and Intersubjectivity in the *Inner Chapters***

Jonathan Herman's book from 1996, *I and Tao – Martin Buber's Encounter with Chuang Tzu*,<sup>4</sup> examines, as the title indicates, Martin Buber's interpretation of Chuang Tzu, especially as it is expressed in Buber's publication of some of the stories and parables in the *Chuang Tzu* and his commentary on these stories. These stories and the commentary were first published in 1910 under the title *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tshuang-Tse*, which was republished in revised editions in 1918 and 1951.<sup>5</sup> A central theme in Herman's book pertains to questions relating to intercultural hermeneutics, both in relation to Buber's interpretation of Chuang Tzu, and to more general reflections regarding interpretations across the borders of different intellectual traditions. Herman's book is divided in two major sections: Part I is a translation of Buber's *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tshuang-Tse*, into English under the title *Text and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, and part II, *The Hermeneutical Chapters*, in which Herman in four chapters present us for his own views.

Robert Allinson has also written a well-known book on Chuang Tzu, namely *Chuang-tzu for Spiritual Transformation* from 1989.<sup>6</sup> He here interpretes Chuang Tzu as a predecessor to Ch'an Buddhism. In his interpretation he emphasizes the idea of spiritual transformation, introduces an interpretation of the Inner Chapter as expressing, what Allinson calls "Asymmetrical Relativism" or "*Either Relativism and Non-Relativism (E/A)*" [my italics],<sup>7</sup> a Ch'an inspired interpretation of Chuang Tzu's use of metaphors, especially in stories about cripples and sick people. Allinson thinks that these stories are meant to give us a kind of mental shock, which might alter our perspective, by presenting us for a kind of "monstrous" beings just as in the Ch'an stories. Allison himself mentions that he could be said to read Chuan Tzu as an extended Ch'an Koan.<sup>8</sup>

In 1998 Allinson wrote a review of "I and Tao" in *Philosophy East-West*<sup>9</sup> of Herman's book. In general the review is positive towards Herman's with a few critical reservations. I will in what follows only focus on one these reservations. Allinson in his review quotes the following remark from Herman about the relation between Chuang Tzu and Buber

"the fundamental ingredients of the I-Thou relation – the primacy of the existential sphere, the integrity of particular entities necessarily bound together through interaction and relation and the potential presence of the absolute within each coming together – are in fact already present within Buber's encounter with Chuang Tzu."<sup>10</sup>

Allinson in relation to this remark claims that Hermann seems to lack an understanding of why Buber later became critical towards Taoism. After having quoted Herman Allison writes:

“But what *is* present in the later Buber and *not* present in Chuang Tzu is the concern for the other. In *Hasidism and Modern Man*, Buber writes: ‘Here Jewish wisdom of faith meets from a wholly other side with the ancient Chinese: He who brings himself into unison with the meaning of being brings the world with him into wisdom: but here, in the Hasidic saying stands what is lacking in all Taoist ones. One much include the other in unity: then one has a good influence on him’.”<sup>11</sup>

Two questions are as we shall see highly relevant for the examination of how Buddhism and for Buber-inspired dialogical thinking as home-ontologies of the interpretations will inform and be informed by the interpretation of Master Chuang. First: how can the sage cultivate him or her into a harmony which transcends his or humanness, how is the *realization* of this existential insight possible in practice? And secondly: how should we understand the idea of inter-subjectivity in relation to this insight?

Let us here start by looking at the first of the abovementioned questions – the question of how realization of existential insight is possible - in relation to Master Chuang. Commentators of Chuan Tzu have pointed to the fact that Master Chuang several times seem to be hinting at meditation, as a form of activity or cultivation performed by the sage - especially techniques, which has something to do with the control of breath. For example does Master Chuang in chapter 6 talk about “the true man of the old” whose breath was deep: he or she did not breathe from the throat like the common man, but did breathe from his heal. Mair points to the close resemblance this description has to breathing techniques we find in the Yogic breathe control in India<sup>12</sup>. Another famous example of this focus on breath can be found in the introductory story of chapter 2, where Tzu-Ch'i of the south wall is breathing in such a way, that he is asked if the body can be made like withered three and the mind like dead ashes. He answers by confirming that he had lost himself; to put in the terminology of Ch'an: he had dropped of body and mind, and then he continues by telling the story of the piping of men, earth and heaven. We will get back to this story in a moment, but first I will mention another story about cultivation, or spiritual transformation, which we find in chapter 6 in the *Inner Chapters*.

This is the story about the woman Crookback, who is asked by Nan p Tzu-k'uei, how she old in years can have a face of a child. She answers that this is because she has heard the Way. After this they discuss if the Way can be learned and she tells about how she wanted to teach the way to Pu-liang Yi. Crookback says he “has the talent of sage, but not the way of a sage, whereas I have the way of the sage but not the talent of the sage”.<sup>13</sup> Then she gives a description of the development of Pu-Lian Yi through different stages. He learns to put the world outside of himself, to put things outside of himself, put life outside of himself, to achieve the brightness of dawn, where he could see “his aloneness”<sup>14</sup> according to Watson’s translation. After this he could do away with pass and present, and then he could enter where there is no life and death, but that, which kills life, without dying, and gives life, without being living.

This is clearly a description of a cultivation or spiritual transformation of Pu-Lian Yi. But we do not here see a reference to breathing or a wind blowing. What we do see here instead is that it is the woman<sup>15</sup> Crookback, who “keeps him” for different amount of days at each of the early

stages up until he is able to put life outside of himself, where he begins to achieve the brightness of dawn or his “aleness” This could indicate an existential relation between the self and the other, and maybe also a development in that relation, which apparently is not that important at the later states. There are also other places in Chapter 6, where there are hinted to existential relations, but this is where it is most obvious, that the existential transformation is connected with the relation to another being. It is therefore interesting that Allinson, who otherwise from his Ch’an inspired interpretation of Chuang Tzu, emphasizes spiritual transformation, thinks this is one of the lesser important stories in chapter 6. He does not see this story as describing an existential dynamic relation between two beings, but instead consider Crookback as a less successful attempt to work with a “monstrous” metaphor, which only deserves being mentioned in passing.<sup>16</sup>

Other interpreters might – either out of different implicit hermeneutical sensibilities or explicit articulated different hermeneutical paradigms - argue that we here actually have an example of the importance of the *presence of the other*, which should not be reduced to a monstrous metaphor as Allinson does. This possible interpretation of the story is very interesting in connection with Herman’s remark to Buber’s translation of this story, which Herman characterized as the “passage, which without question contains the most extraordinary gloss of the text”. Herman then comments on Buber’s translation of the passage we mentioned above, and more specifically Pu-Lian Yi’s meeting with the brightness of dawn and his ability to see “his aleness”:

“The last phrase in German [from the *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tshuang-Tse*] reads ‘*erschaute das Wesen, sein Ich, Von Angeschicht zu Angechicht*’, translated loosely from Legge<sup>17</sup>, who wrote ‘and after this he was able to see his own individuality’ adding the footnote, ‘Standing by himself, as it were face to face with the Tao’. Here Buber is conflating ‘the one’ with ‘being’ and is describing the experiential insight as a countenance to countenance meeting of ‘being’ with ‘his I’. This clearly suggest an early incarnation of the dialogical principle which, ironically, would be partially expunged for the 1951 edition, where ‘*sein Ich*’ is deleted.”<sup>18</sup>

We here see that Herman recognizes that Buber misreads the original intention *behind* the text, and that this is not (only) because Buber is reading Chuang Tzu through Giles’ English translation, but that Buber does this because he reads a kind of dialogical thinking into Chuang Tzu. This re-reading is *his* understanding of Chuang Tzu, he is reading the meaning *before* the text. Is this an objective misreading or maybe a creative dao-learning as an “art of appropriation” in the presence of the other (to use a concept from Dr Lik Kuen Tong’s Field-Being philosophy) – or maybe both? If it is a form of creative dao-learning then we might here speak about, what I called onto-dialogical interaction, as it seems that Buber is on his way to create not an ordinary “misreading”, but is creating a “dialogical misreading”, which has to with be inspired from one ontology to create an other ontology, without really realizing that this is what he does, when he does it. Maybe the deletion of the 1951 edition should be seen together with Buber’s later critical stance to Taoism in relation to the dialogical principle which Allinson quoted in his review.

But we have to remember that this development is done in a dialogue with Master Chuang or at least the text Chuang Tzu. And the interesting thing is that there is something in Master Chuang's philosophy, which actually might make acceptable that the reader is making new ontological reflections – as long as the reader can work non-attached with these reflections in an onto-dialogical way. The irony would then be that Buber actually dismissed the dialogical principle at the most fundamental ontological level in 1951, and that he does this in relation to a text, which actually “works” at the onto-dialogical level. In this way it seems that Buber's later critical stance might have overlooked the potential in Chuang Tzu for being read creatively and thereby indirectly for being a philosophy, which inspires to an inter-subjectivity, where *onto-dialogical interaction* is one form of appropriation of the Way.

### **Part Two: Searching for Possibilities for Onto-dialogical Interaction with the *Inner Chapters* regarding Existential Cultivation and Intersubjectivity**

This brings us back to question of cultivation and realization. We will now try to see if we can learn a little more about the form of realizations of the way, both in relation to the spiritual transformation through the Wind, and how Spiritual transformation and the presence of the other, might or might not be connected. We will do that by looking at some of the stories and content in Chapter 2 “Discussion on making All Things Equal” from the *Inner Chapters*.

Let us return to Tzu-Ch'i and his story about the piping of men, earth and heaven. The central point here is that the piping is done when

"The Great Clod belches our breath and its name is wind. So long as it doesn't come forth, nothing happens. But when it does then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly"<sup>19</sup>

The piping of earth is the sound of the hollows, the sound flutes and whistles the piping of men, and the piping of heaven is the "blowing of ten thousand things in a different way, so that each can become itself"<sup>20</sup>. We here see something like the harmonizing of the natural attributes of things in the way the vital wind plays through the pipes- and one pipe's acceptance of this in form of individual human deep breathing. The way of the individual is then to be understood of as an empty hollowness, which the vital wind blows through and thereby making the sounds of this pipe in form of diverse feelings, emotions and states.

Just after this story Master Chuang first raises the question of the character of the relation between self and other as the more specific question of the relation between “the self” as the I, who has emotions - and “the other” as these emotions. His “non-Cartesian” answer to this question is to realize that we exist because of these emotions and they exist because of us. This means that I and my emotions exist interdependently like the pipe (as a pipe) and the tones coming out of it exist interdependently. The question then is who is the ruler of the pipe(s) and the music? Master Chuang here inform us that that ruler can act even though we cannot find any trace of him or her - and Master Chuang concludes that *true master has identity but no form*. This leads to some reflections of who is the true teacher, which is taken up again in chapter 6,

but which unfortunately in chapter 2 is translated in very different ways by the different translators. As I understand it, it seems that Chuang Tzu pities the people who identify themselves with form instead of listening to the formlessness of the true master. He notices that when the humans receive a fixed bodily form, they cling to it until dead, and he finds this sad. The right way of living would instead be to relate to the much wider spectrum of emotions and states that are expressed as the notes and tones in the world played by the formless true master, who is acting and playing the music.

Let us now move from the formless master to the issue of the relation between language and reality. This is interesting because in language there is the possibility of operating with determinate terms; it is here we express the idea of “something” or “someone”, which is underlying interpretations of the story of the pipes. In language, there are words, which refer to “something” which “is”, “exist” or have being as “this” or “that” existence. Master Chuang apparently makes it clear that

“Words are not just wind. Words have something to say.”<sup>21</sup>

They might be wind, but there is something more in words, than there is in the wind, which is producing the music through the pipes. This more is that words have some-thing to say in form of “this” or “that”; they thereby apparently operate with a limit between what *is* “this” or “that,” and what *is not* “this” or “that.”

Master Chuang contextualizes his treatment of the question of language by saying that

“When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohism. What one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs an wrong their right, then the best thing to use is clarity.”<sup>22</sup>

We here see he criticizes the moral argumentation of the Confucians and Mohists for relying on small accomplishments, their words are what he earlier have called little words, which are connected with fixations of certain emotions and states of mind and body, and thereby express a fixated understanding of both self and other. As moral judgment in general fixates meaning and value, we might therefore not only understand this as a critique of Confucianism and Mohism, but as a more general critique and skepticism regarding the use of moral language.

But is this skepticism about words only a skepticism of moral language or if it is a part of more thorough skepticism regarding rationality and language in general? Or as Master Chuang formulates it: are words really different from the peeps of baby words, as we tend to think? The question he raises is how we should understand what it means that something “is” or “is not” or more precisely that some-thing is *presented* as *true* or *false* through the operations of that mind, that each of us takes as our teacher?<sup>23</sup> In relation to the question of inter-subjectivity as I stated it before, we can see this question as relevant in relation to the understanding of “*this* self as

someone” and “*that* other as someone”. There is a good deal of confusion about how to translate the relevant passage, where Master Chuang presents the central question:

(Mair) “How has the Way become so obscure that there are true and false. How has speech become so obscured that there are right and wrong?”<sup>24</sup>

(Graham) “By what is the Way hidden, that there should be a genuine or a false. By what is saying darkened that sometimes ‘That’s it and sometimes ‘That’s not.’”<sup>25</sup>

(Watson) “What does the Way rely upon when we have true and false? What do words rely upon, that we have right and wrong?”<sup>26</sup>

We see that Mair and Graham translates the passage as meaning that true and false is something which hides the Way, where Watson translates it as Master Chuang is asking, what does the Way rely on, given that we have true and false?

Let us start by noticing that Master Chuang later in Chapter 6 of the *Inner Chapters* talks about “hiding” in way that can indicate that “hiding” can have at least two different meanings. Master Chuang here discusses several ideas in relation to Confucianism’s idea of the ancestor as an ideal realization of humanness through cultivation. For Master Chuang the central point is that, that the *ultimate* ancestor has cultivated him or her by harmonizing the ways of *tian*, heaven, and *ren*, humaneness, and thereby has attained *zhen ren*, true humanity. What humans cannot interfere with are “the attribute of things”, and death is here mentioned as a central example. Humans should therefore willingly accept that they die and thereby harmonizing humanness and the natural flow of things. This can be done by forgetting attachment; we have to ourselves and our emotions and instead focus on the greater flow of things. Or put differently, we should forget about the perspective, where smaller things are only hidden under relatively larger things and instead change the perspective of hiding:

“A boat may be hidden in a gully on a hill that, in turn, is hidden away in a marsh. We may think this is a secure arrangement, but someone might come in the middle of the night and bear (both) the boat (and the hill) away, unbeknownst to the sleeping owner. The idea of hiding the smaller in the larger is appropriate, yet things may still disappear. But if we were to hide all under heaven inside of all under heaven, nothing would disappear.” This is the great attribute of the eternity of things.”<sup>1</sup>

Master Chuang here talks about two forms of hiding. The first form, which leads to attachment, is the attempt to hide the small under the apparently bigger. The moral argumentation of the Confucians and the Mohists (and moral argumentation in general) would fall into this first category of hiding, because it hides the “small” self/diminishes the self through the attachment to one (moral) perspective. The use of moral argumentation can in other words be seen as examples of the use of what Master Chuang terms small words. Secondly, the world can be hidden in the world in an inner-worldly transcendence, even when we are entangled in language. This is so because there is also another way to use language, namely the Great Words. But what characterize the other way of “using” language in form of Great Words?

The sage does not work with a “this” which is excluding a “that”.

“The sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven. He too recognizes a ‘this’, but a ‘this which is also ‘that’, a ‘that’ which is also ‘this’. His ‘that’ has both a right and wrong in it, his ‘this’ too has both a right and a wrong in it. So in fact, does he still have a ‘this’ or ‘that’? “A state in which “this” and “that” no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly. Its right then is a single endlessness and its wrong too is a single endlessness. So, I say, the best thing to use is clarity.”<sup>27</sup>

We again see Master Chuang according to Watson’s translation is referring to illumination, clarity and a state which is called “the hinge of the way”. This state makes it possible to recognize the words “this” and “that”, but at the same time the meaning of these words are altered. He operates with these words in way, where they not are considered as opposites, as the “this” is also a “that” and vice versa, and instead of claiming this as right and that as wrong, they both have a right and wrong. Master Chuang therefore asks if the sage actually has a “this” or “that”, without – at it, at least in this translation is total clear, what he himself thinks is the answer.

As mentioned above is Master Chuang critical towards judgments, especially moral judgment, not least because it tends to fixate the perspective of the self, so that the self becomes a kind of isolated substantial entity. But does this means that he is against differentiation of any kind? He explains his view like this:

“The understanding of men of ancient times went a long way. How far did it go? To the point where some of them believed that things have never existed – so far, to the end where no-ting can be added. Those of the next stage thought that things exist but recognized no boundaries among them. These at the next stage thought that there were boundaries but recognized no right and wrong. Because right and wrong appeared, the Way was injured and because the Way was injured love became complete.”<sup>28</sup>

It seems that there is a kind of hierarchy, even though Master Chuang is attempting to level things out in Chapter 2, but the point is rather, that the leveling is build into the hierarchy as the higher states, which level things out and maybe even makes all things into One. Level 4 is the state where we evaluate things as right and wrong, while we in level 3 accepts that, there are boundaries between things but without operating with right and wrong this means exactly that we have the possibility of operating with determinate being, as a some-thing, or at least a there-being. In level 2, there are things but no boundaries between them and in level 1 are there are no things at all.

It seems obvious that level 4 is related to small language’s wrong use of “this” and “that”, but what about the other stages? In relation to the metaphor of the pipes, it seems that it operates with threefold dynamic of the one in form of transcendent wind and 2) difference in form of the different pipes and 3) the unity of these two expressed in the harmonious music which is played.

This music then maybe can be considered as harmonization of heaven and humanness attained by the true man, making all things equal or making all things into one. On the other hand we also have to remember that the wind differs from words in that the wind do not generate “some-things”, this is only done by words. A something is something because it can be delineated from other things, so the concept of “something” is connected with the idea of borders, which is situated at level 3 and 4, and therefore these levels seem to be connected with words solely. The story of the wind is therefore apparently most suited in relation to level 1 and 2, but it does also seem that the realization of the true human implies both the ultimate and differences, which are harmonized into a harmonious unity.

This brings us to the question how we should understand level 3 and 4, which are where boundaries between beings appears. I already mentioned that the wind, does not seem to reach down to level 3 and 4, and that level 4 seem to be related to small words. Let us start by recalling Chuang Tzu’s description of the hinge of the way as that which makes a use of language possible. The hinge of the way operates with “this” and “that” in a way, where they not are considered as opposites, as the “this” is also a “that” and vice versa. We earlier saw that in the story of the woman Crookback can both Crookback and Pu-Lian Yi be seen as a “this” and a “that”, as they both can be seen as “self” and “other”. This could be interpreted as Master Chuang would point to a kind of dynamic interdependent relation. I think this would be a way of interpreting the story, which might be acceptable to both a Buddhist inspired interpretation and a Buber inspired interpretation of this story of Master Chuang.

Above we discussed different interpretations of the highest state, where Crookback is not mentioned, namely the state of the morning light, which in normal Taoist interpretations would be the state where the One (or “the unique”) appears. But we saw that Buber interpreted it as the appearance of the mirror of the I in form of the face of the other I. In both cases are the next state, the state where there is no life and death. But at least as long as Crookback is waiting for Pu-Lian Yi, we might say that the dynamic works in a dynamic interdependent relation at what I have called level 3; that is the level where there are boundaries, which arises in language. Language is here not re-presenting, but presenting, something new, namely delineated beings. But this dynamic interdependent relation might be interpreted differently according to how much emphasis we want to put on the reality of this phenomenon of the lineated being at stage 3. This is where we would discover the difference between for example a Buddhist and a Buber-oriented understanding of inter-subjectivity.

To understand this we might here refer to a distinction made in Dr Tong’s Fieldbeing philosophy. Dr. Tong here operates with an idea of what he calls the universal principle of individuation or the Ego-principle, which

“is at work whenever we perceive, cognize, or speak of a ‘this’ as distinct, differentiated, or separated from a ‘that’.”<sup>29</sup>

Dr Tong also calls it the principle of own-ness, and then raises the question of what in the final analysis constitute “own-ness”. To answer this question he makes a distinction between, what he calls the *ontic self* and the *empirical ego*. He writes

“While the ontic self points to the integral reality of a thing, the empirical ego pertains only to its abiding ownness as existentially grasped and conceptually projected in a particular context of experience—of which the notion of a substantial subject in traditional Western metaphysics conceived as an independent substratum is the most notable example.”<sup>30</sup>

In relation to our analysis of the four levels is this distinction between the ontic self and the empirical ego parallel to the distinction between using “this” and “that” at level 3, where we delineate the possibility of talking about a ontic self at all, but do not thereby exclude others and other selves, and level 4, the empirical ego where the excluding use of “this” and “that” is prominent.<sup>31</sup>

### **Part Three: themes in Buddhist- and Buber-inspired Interpretations of Master Chuang’s Worldview – Ontology and Language in Relation to regarding Existential Cultivation and Intersubjectivity**

We will now return to question of how different interpretational paradigms, and more specifically how a “Buddhist-inspired” and a “Buber-inspired” interpretation of Master Chuang will “translate” Master Chuang’s ideas into their own “home-ontologies” in different ways. I here will especially focus at the similarities and differences in the interpretations of Master Chuang’s four levels of understanding, and the different interpretations of the dynamic interdependent relation idea of “self” and “other”.

- 1) Both kinds of interpretation will be skeptical about the role of what Dr Tong called the empirical ego, located at level 4 in our analysis of Master Chuang’s four levels of understanding.
- 2) Both kinds of interpretations will be interested in the role language plays in generating this kind of attachment to the empirical ego.
- 3) Further could we expect both kinds of interpretation of Chuang Tzu to have a tendency to interpret the development of this attachment to the empirical ego as a kind of forgetfulness of a more authentic inter-dependency between existent beings, due to the fact that both Buddhism and Buber, works directly with an explicit relational ontology.<sup>32</sup>
- 4) But a Buddhist and Buber-inspired interpretation of Master Chuang will differ in relation to actual interpretation of level 3, their view of language, and their relational aspect of their ontology. Let us examine these points more carefully.

Let us start by taking a closer look on what an idealized Buddhist interpretation of Master Chuang’s 4 levels will look like. The empirical ego at level 4 will also in a Buddhist interpretation be interpreted as a kind of attachment, namely to the attachment to the *Atman*, the self, and *Samsara* the illusional world. In the Middle-way Buddhism as unfolded by Nagarjuna will this attachment further be related to the way language tricks us into fixated ontologies. In his

famous two-truth theory, he develops an idea of higher truth, which can be explicated in language, and a relative or conventional truth, which can be explicated in language. What is important in this theory is that Nagarjuna does not claim that these two truths as separated forms of truth. He instead emphasizes the continued dynamic difference between these two truths, the continued emptying of concepts, as the important thing. Language can then by an enlightened teacher, in form of a Bodhisattva (and later in Ch'an Buddhism in form of a Ch'an Master) be used as a skillful mean, *upaya*, to show the student the way to enlightenment. If we relate this too the four levels of understanding, we then see that, we can expect Buddhist interpreters, to be happy to talk about a higher unspeakable level of truth which might be presented through a higher contemplative praxis at level 1 and 2, but that they will at the same time emphasize the use of language as skillful means at level 3, which *points* to these higher levels, while level 4 is where language is mistaken for re-presenting isolated entities. This means that re-presentational language should at all costs be avoided because it tends to fixate the words in language. Instead we might expect a focus on the use of metaphorical language, as language, which transfers meaning from one place to another. This is actually what Robert Allinson is doing, when he interprets the "monstrous" beings as examples used by Master Chuang as a kind Ch'an koan or skillful means, which might lead us to enlightenment. Level 3 then becomes a playground for enlightened language because it uses transferring language, while level 4 is seen as the misinterpretation of language, which takes the form of the ego-principle expressed as the empirical self.

But what will the Buddhist interpretation have to say about the idea of an ontic self at level 3? Dr Tong himself makes it perfectly clear, that this is where his analysis and idea of the Ego-principle differs from a Buddhist perspective, and maybe also from a Buddhist interpretation of Master Chuang, as Buddhism will be more hesitating to accept to talk about the reality of an "ontic self", than he is. The deeper reason for why Buddhism will not accept this is the ontological idea of the interdependence coming into and ceasing from being, *pratitya-samutpada*, which can be said to be positive expression of the ontological critique of Atman. But does Buddhism really not accept any idea of self, or real being, at level 3? A short reflection on this might lead us to another idea of language, which might bring us to understand, how a more Buber-inspired interpretation would look like

Buddhism focuses on metaphorical and symbolic use of language in relation to its idea of *pratitya-samutpada* and – in Middle-way Buddhism – the idea of emptiness, *sunyata*. But this use of language does in certain form of Buddhism itself have a certain "effect", which might lead to enlightenment, not only because of the content, but also because of the "saying" itself in form of for example mantras. *Shingon's* "True Word"-Buddhism in Japan is a very good example of this. The interesting thing here is that, there in the use of metaphorical and symbolic language apparently not is an idea of the contingency between words' delineated content and their expression as there is in much modern thought. This is closely related to an idea of language, where the language is not "owned" by the ego, but is expressing the flow of everything, which the contemplative mind, tries to interact with, and in way tries to be lifted up into. In other words it is not the ego, which is making the *Saying*, but the *Saying* which is making the self, which on the other hand "really" or "actually" (from *actus*) is made by this *Saying*. In the Buddhist

analysis this self will still be only a metaphorical self, as the self is expressed only as a skillful mean to lead others to enlightenment, and hereby implying both the non-self and the interdependence of everything. But nevertheless, there will be a larger “realistic” aspect of the self in this form of Saying, than there is, when an ego on level 4, thinks it is producing language itself, and that this is the only way to say something. The Woman Crookback might in such a Great Saying still only be a metaphorical self helping others to enlightenment, but she might not only be a product of Master Chuang’s imagination but be as real as any other being. With these remarks let us now turn to idealized Buber-interpretations of Master Chuang.

Let us start by noticing that a person with a background in Abrahamic religion also will be open for an idea of a form of “trans-human Saying”. This form of Saying is in these traditions of course related to the idea of the Word of God, but we might for a moment forget about this and consider the Saying as something, which makes being, becoming determinate being as *Da-sein*, as “being-there”. In this way the Saying will become another level of expression of the Way besides the expression of the Wind, namely as an expression of the Way in determinate beings from a transcendent background of the levels of the Wind. This would mean that maybe not all words, but some words have the potential of expressing the Way directly in form of “words”, not only in form of metaphors. This, according to this form of interpretation of Master Chuang, has to be words which express delineation in form of a “this” or “that” on level 3, but does not fall into the trap of the small language of the “this” and “that” at level 4. In other words there has to be something similar to what Dr Tong called the Ego-principle, which be differentiated into its different modes analogous to differentiation between the Ego-principle in the mode of an ontic self and the Ego-principle as an empirical ego.

The Latin word “Ego” is often translated into German as the word “Ich” and into English as the word “I”, which is relevant when we talk about Buber’s idea of the “I-Thou” (in the original German “Ich-Du”). We might therefore instead of talking about the ego, talk about the “Ich” or the “I”.<sup>33</sup> But we will still distinguish between the “I” as an ontic self and the “I” as the empirical ego using Dr Tong’s terminology. The word “I” indicates that I know the meaning of this word *as myself*. But the term “I” is also related to a certain group of words, namely the personal pronouns, as a way of presenting delineated beings, that is beings involved in the language game of “this” and “that”. Now there is a difference in the level of presentation and re-presentation in the personal pronouns of “I”, “You”, “he”, “she”, “it”, in singularis, and the “We”, “You”, “they” in pluralis. The difference is that, when we use the pronouns in first and second person, it seems to signal a kind of presence of either our self, or the other in relation to our self, while when we talk pronouns in the third person it is very often in form of re-presentation, we do not speak to a *present other*, but about a *re-presented other*.

Now it might be argued that we also very often, and maybe most of the time just re-present ourselves, when we use the word “I”. This might be true, but from a Buber-like interpretation of Master Chuang, this exactly can be seen as a use of small words, or as form of hiding behind the wrong use of this and that. This point is connected with a relational understanding of this and that, where they are not opposites but both are there at the same time, as presented in the “Hinge of the Way”. The reason why they are not opposites is not because no-thing is said, neither is it

because the s/Saying is only metaphorical, but it is because the saying *is* Saying, that is the saying is the *Saying of the Way*, and the phenomenological presence of this is the reciprocal relation between the I and Thou. If it is forgotten that saying is Saying, then the individuation hardens into the idea that saying is the work of the I, and not vice versa. Everything then takes the form of re-presentation through the eyes and ears of the small I, and the relation takes the form of an I-it relation.

The I-Thou relation indicates a dynamic relation to another being as a Thou and becomes aware of itself as open subjectivity, where the I-it relation indicates a focus on the lonely subject's isolated experience and use of the other as an "it". The inter-subjective ontic self (to use Dr Tong's terminology) in the I-Thou relation Buber calls a *person*, while the misguided I in the I-it relation, which hides itself in moralistic language and more general re-presentations he calls a *individuality*. We can according to our analysis say that small words for a Buber-like interpretation of Master Chuang is a re-presentation also at the fundamental level, because the I-It relation tries to re-present the I-Thou relation. Both uses of the I is characterized as by Buber as relational words, whereby we come into existence through Saying of the Way, but in the "I-Thou" it is in form of *presentation* of the Great Words of the Saying of the Way, while it in the "I-It" it is in the form of the *re-presentation* of that original Saying, which hides itself under the saying of the small words of the I-it.

### **Some Questions and Perspectives**

We have now reflected on the theme of inter-subjectivity in relation to some different readings, or possible readings of Chuang Tzu. I will here at end mention some philosophical questions, which might lead to further philosophical reflections along the lines of some of the thoughts in this paper.

The first thing one could ask is, what aspects in Chuang Tzu might a Buddhist-like and Buber-like interpretation overlook? We already here have seen, what might be some examples of this. If we take Dr. Tong's analysis of the Ego-principle as maybe closer to the Taoist tradition, than the more Buddhist oriented interpretations, then we might say that Taoism at least in Dr Tong's version, might have a stronger emphasis of the reality of self and existence than might normally be expected, and that the Buddhist interpretations might have a tendency to overlook this. And the danger in a more Buber-oriented reading, could be that the I-Thou relation might be emphasized as ontological prior to a degree that the non-relational, non-determinate Way of the Wind in level 1 and 2 is overlooked.

Further could we also ask if there is a difference in the way relations is conceived in Dr. Tong's idea of the art of appropriation, and Buber's I-Thou relation? In both cases can we see that there is a form of Ego-principle or I-principle as I termed it, which is "relational". But in Buber's case is the relation from the beginning to the Thou, he is so to speak starting at level 3, where Dr. Tong is working with a more open form of the "relational" which I guess also opens up for the non-delineated levels 2 and 1 in a way, which be more difficult from a "Buberian" perspective?

This is especially interesting in relation to the question of how we conceive, what it means to be in dialogue. It might here be interesting to make a detailed comparison between Buber's I-Thou relation and his idea of dialogue, and Dr. Tong's "art of appropriation" in relation to the other as a kind of dancing with the other.

Finally it might be interesting to see how ideas of the coming in to be of the personal pronouns will look like, both in relation to Buber, and maybe also in relation to possible interpretations of Chuang Tzu. Both in Islam and in Christian theology, there are other ways of interpreting the personal pronouns ontologically and linguistically, than the way Buber does it. It might here be interesting to use the text Chuang Tzu as an partner for onto-dialogical interaction inspired by the way Buber and Buddhism have done it.

## NOTES

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1. I will here not get into the sea of hermeneutical problems regarding, who wrote what of the text known as Chuang Tzu, and when and why they did it, but only focus on the Inner Chapters, which by most commentators are regarded as a reasonable coherent text in itself. I will sometimes talk about "The Inner Chapters" and sometimes about the teaching of Master Chuan, if I want to emphasize "the teaching" more than "the textuality" of the Inner Chapters. This focus on the Inner Chapter limits this article in important respects. Especially would a reflection on the use of "goblet words" described in Chapter 27 be relevant in relation to part 3. But as the major focus in this article is not the text Chuang Tzu per se, but ways of interpreting it from the "otherness" of other home-ontologies, I have not done that to avoid a larger hermeneutical discussion about the status and meaning of the different sections of the text Chuang Tzu.

2. This does not mean that historical and cultural contextually is not relevant or important. This is already implicitly indicated with the existential focus. The point is rather that I am here interested in that particular form of contextually, which is explicitly connected with questions of truth and meaning of life, and here is religious, philosophical worldviews and the *existential* dimension of the historical and cultural context important. In some forms of what has been termed interpretive pluralism that the principal role of existential, historical and cultural categories is not given its proper place. This is for example the case with Watson's and Dilworth's otherwise intriguing attempt to continue the work of Richard Mckeon and construct a general interpretive pluralism. This attempt culminates - regarding intercultural hermeneutics - in David Dilworth's attempt to develop a comparative hermeneutic of major philosophical and religious ideas in the world, and his interpretation of Kitaro Nishida's last work. But the focus on the contextually of conceptual schemes is so strong, (at least according to my "archaic profile" to speak in the language of Watson and Dilworth), that the importance of the existential dimensions of the Way tends to be overlooked.

3. Instead of claiming that we have to choose between universalism, transcendental categories or relativism, we might look for a dynamic tension between two fundamental existential dimensions namely the search for the fundamental meaning of existence, and the search for a meaningful relation to others, who might or might not share our philosophically or religious ideas, but who also exists in this dynamic tension, which I will term the onto-dialogical tension. I will talk about the *onto-dialogical focus* of a religious or philosophical worldview as far as this worldview includes a conscious reflection on this

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dynamic tension. It has to incorporate both of these two dimensions in a non-reductionistic way, so that neither one's own nor the other's ontology are reduced to sameness. And further does the onto-dialogical focus acknowledges the others ontology as a source for expanding one's own ontology. A central aspect of such a focus is the awareness of the hermeneutical difficulties by interpreting across not only across cultural, but especially also religious and philosophical borders.

4. Jonathan Herman, *I and Tao—Martin Buber's Encounter with Chuang Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996)

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

6. Robert Allinson, *Chuang-tzu for Spiritual Transformation - An Analysis of the Inner Chapters*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989)

7. *Ibid.*, p. 122. It might be philosophically interesting to compare this Asymmetric Relativism with Buddhist two-truth theory.

8. *Ibid.*, *Chuang-tzu*, p. 9.

9. *Philosophy East-West*, v. 48, no. 3 (July 1998)

10. Herman, *I and Tao*, p. 163. Also quoted in Robert Allinson's review of "*I and Tao*" in *Philosophy East-West*, *ibid.* p. 531.

11. *Ibid.* (Allinson's review), p. 531.

12. Chuang Tzu, *Wandering on the Way - Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, trans. with an introduction and Commentary by Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawaii press, 1994), p. 371.

13. Chuang Tzu, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 82.

14. "Aloneness" is based on Watson's translation of the Chinese word *du*. See Chuang Tzu, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 83. Graham's translation is "the Unique." See Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu—The Seven Inner Chapters*, trans. A.C. Graham (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 87. Mair, similarly, renders *du* as "uniqueness." See his translation *Chuang Tzu, Wandering on the Way*, p. 57.

15. It is interesting that it is a woman, who is telling the story. I do not here follow up on this, but it might be interesting to consider if there might be a gender issue at stake here. To express my own bias, I find it interesting that it is a woman who is telling the story, which perhaps shows what might be considered the importance of the presence of the other (intersubjectivity) in relation to at least some stages of existential development.

16. Allinson, *Chuang-tzu* p. 66.

17. Notice that Buber himself makes his translation of the selections of Chuang Tzu into German from English translations, and Herman translates Buber's translation and understanding of the text back into English. The "pure objectivity" of a more philological approach to text is very small, and this of course again raises the question of, what in "traditional western hermeneutics" is the question of the relation between "the letter" and "the spirit" of the Inner Chapters and Master Chuang's teachings.

18. Herman, *I and Tao*, p. 216. This is from his note to his translation of Buber's German, which in Herman's translation into English becomes "After this his mind became radiant like daybreak and he beheld being, his I, countenance to countenance," Herman, *I and Tao*, p. 33.

19. Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, p. 36.

20. *Ibid.* p. 37.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 38

24. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

26. Ibid., p. 39.

27. Ibid., p. 40.

28. Ibid., p. 41.

29. Lik Kuen Tong, "In Search of the Quintessential: Towards a Field-Being Hermeneutics, Part I The Power Thesis: Quintessentiality and Transfinite Subjectivity," p. 3 (keynote lecture, The Ninth Symposium on Field-Being, August, 2006).

30. Ibid., p. 3.

31. Several other categories in Dr. Tong's "Field-Being" philosophy such as "the wholesome universal," "the art of appropriation," and "absolute fluency" indicate that he is inspired by Taoist thought while at the same time seeks to reinterpret and revitalize it in a way that makes it a central part of modern world-philosophy. This might be compared with the way Buddhist philosophy was appropriated by Nishida Kitaro and the Kyoto school in the same direction. In both cases there is a respect for the history of ideas in the respective traditions under consideration, accompanied by a keen awareness and focus of the possibility of being in philosophical dialogue with other traditions in the history of ideas

32. Might this be the point that distinguishes these two forms of interpretation from the more traditional Taoist "holistic-monistic" interpretations?

33. I owe María Inés Arrizabalaga thanks for calling to my attention that there might be several problems at stake also in this apparently simple translation. Consider for example the often negative use of "ego" in English (for example "egoism" - there is no "I-ism"). Another complex issue is the possible differences in the types of *innerlichkeit* ("inwardness") in for example the German "Ich", the English "I" and the Spanish "yo". I mention this just to indicate that differences in the interdependency between language and philosophy also can complicate the analysis of how a home-ontology influences interpretation of philosophical and religious ideas, but I will not in this article pursue this further.