

REVIEW ARTICLES

A COMMENT ON A CONCEPT OF THE GREAT MAN (GENIUS) IN THE “AUTUMN FLOODS” CHAPTER OF THE BOOK *ZHUANGZI*

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This review article aims to analyse the problem of the Great Man in the book *Zhuangzi*, especially its Chapter 17, “Autumn Floods”.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional society in China with its inner relations strictly limited the freedom of the individual. There was no room in it for such a display of an individual creative energy the symbol of which in our culture was to become the Romantic genius. Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* contains such a concept of the Great Man which stands comparison with the concept of the European Romantic genius although it differs from it in some ways.

The present work analyses the opening dialogue of Chapter 17 (Autumn Floods) of the *Zhuangzi*,¹ and with regard to the other related sections of the book characterizes the concept of the Great Man described in it. The figure discussed here is the Great Man, one who realizes the relativity of the rational knowledge of the world and the moral values resulting from it. In spite of this all he emphasizes the importance of reason and knowledge as an opportunity to reach human freedom.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, “Autumn Floods” will refer to the long opening dialogue of Chapter 17 of the book.

As far as we know, no special work has ever treated such a relationship between the concepts of genius and the great man; some connections have been hinted at by Marián Gálik, especially in his paper "The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism". In China proper no special attention has been paid to the problem of the great man. The works of Western Sinologists dealing with the concept of the Great Man in Chapter 17 in our opinion have not provided an adequate interpretation of it. They either do not distinguish at all between this very concept and the concepts contained in the other chapters of the book (L.J. Hansen) or, if they do, they find it to be inferior from the standpoint of philosophical argumentation (R.E. Allinson, L. Yearley). An exception is, before all, A.C. Graham, who ventured to redistribute the material of the book according to the semantic units. The results of his research were presented in the book *Chuang-tzu, The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book*.

When writing this article I got enlightened especially by the views of the above-mentioned M.Gálik, A.C. Graham and L.J. Hansen which inspiration I tried to show in the text.

1. THE BOOK OF ZHUANGZI

It is generally known that the present form of the *Zhuangzi* comes from the Jin dynasty 晋代 (265 – 420 AD) when the Neo-Taoist philosopher Guo Xiang 郭象 (? – 312 AD) revised its extant versions and divided them according to their authenticity into the Inner 内篇 *neipian* (Chap. 1-7), Outer 外篇 *waipian* (Chap. 8-22) and Miscellaneous Chapters 杂篇 *zapiian* (Chap. 23-33).²

According to A.C. Graham, "the most prominent Western scholar of Zhuangzi", (Liu 1994: viii) Chapter 17, which is our main field of interest, belongs to the part of the book classifiable as the work of the school of Zhuangzi, whether it is a philosophical reflection of one and the same author, developed and adapted in the course of time, or a teaching of a school of thought founder expounded later by his followers, or an exposition of different conceptions belonging to the same school.³ Its teaching is represented mainly by the Inner Chapters but also by some sections of Chapters 16-27.

² As for the nature of Guo Xiang's edition, see, for example, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Trans. by Burton Watson. New York and London: Columbia University Press 1968, p. 13.

³ Lee Yearley offers an interesting explanation about the relationship between the Inner chapters and the other chapters ascribed to this school. (YEARLEY, Lee: *The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu*. In: MAIR, V. H. (ed.): *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1983, p. 128).

Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢 on account of different methods of analysis concludes that all the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters were written by the followers of Zhuangzi so that they are not a mixture of materials of heterogeneous Daoist schools.

However, he divides these chapters according to three groups of Zhuangzi's followers.⁴ He ascribes the authorship of Chapters 17-27 and 32 to the first group, the "Transmitter (interpreters) school", 述庄派 (*shu Zhuang pai*):

"Almost every essay [contained in these chapters] intended to explain or expand the thought of the Inner Chapters or to record Zhuangzi's activities. Not one raises a new point of view. The authors of these chapters are, in relation to Zhuangzi's thought, "transmitters, not creators." [Therefrom also the name of their school.] This school is the legitimate branch of Zhuangzi's later followers. Their works are primary reference material for the study of Zhuangzi's thought." (Liu 1994: 121)

"While [the members of this school] basically expounded the Inner Chapters, they also applied Zhuangzi's spirit of mind-tranquillity to the creative arts, and also were the first school to propose the Taoist concept of man." (ibid. 169)

In my analysis of the concept of genius (great man) I will concentrate on Chapter 17 (Autumn Floods), the substantial parts of which represent the views of the philosophical school of Zhuangzi (Graham) or, as Liu Xiaogan argues, the whole of which is the work of the Transmitter school (*shu Zhuang pai*).

2. THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVE PERSONALITY IN CHINESE LITERATURE

Unlike the West, which gave birth to the "cult of the genius", the most significant illustration of the ways in which the role of the artist is affected by the value system of a society that generally placed a very high value on achievement and expression of individual personality, in the traditionally "anti-individualistic" Chinese society comparably great achievements have not produced such a concept. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*: vol. 14, 120)

"Any theoretical considerations on genius in the Confucian tradition would of necessity be antiprogrammatic, for genius was not only a superfluous but also an undesirable, destructive element. Everything positive, creative had been codified by ancient Sages;

⁴ As D. Munro remarks, though Zhuangzi had followers, there is no evidence to prove that they formed an organized school after his death. (LIU Xiaogan: *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan 1994. Foreword by D. Munro, p. 10).

their descendants had to be mere commentators of what had already been said, adjusters of old teaching to new conditions, indicators of the transformation of the Way in new works.”⁵ (Gálik 191)

Let us have a closer look now at the causes of such a condition. A man in Chinese Confucian society has always been regarded as a part of a larger whole that he belonged to. Every human endeavour was to serve common or even universal aims. The traditional Chinese world view contained the idea of man as an equal partner in the trinity with Heaven and Earth⁶ (also called the Three Powers, 三才, *san cai*). However, man was always and on principle understood in the plural because in China an individual has always meant very little indeed. Man as a part of this trinity was to make every effort to understand the principles of Heaven and Earth and to obey them, not to try and bring them under his control for it was only this attitude that could bring him a successful existence.⁷ “Individualism of the kind current in Europe since the times of Romanticism would have disrupted the long-established relations between the Three Powers and destroyed their harmony.” (ibid.)

The difference between these two cultures on this issue will become more obvious in the comparison of the theories of art and literature that determined the character of artistic creation in Europe and China. While the most important feature in European literary theories up to the end of neoclassicism is their mimetic character – literature imitated or artistically reproduced reality, this aspect is lacking or at least is never and nowhere stressed in Chinese literary theories. Literature in China, in view of its social function, had a different purpose, that is to say to express the philosophical and aesthetico-ethical processing of this reality in accordance with Tao.⁸

⁵ See also Note 7.

⁶ For example in the book *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸, *Zhongyong*) or in the work of the philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (around 298-238 BC): “Heaven has its seasons, earth has its wealth, and man has his government. This is how they are able to form a triad.” (CHAN Wing-tsit: *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press – London: Oxford University Press 1963, p. 117).

⁷ “Nature (Heaven, *Tian*) operates with constant regularity... Respond to it with peace and order, and good fortune will result. Respond to it with disorder, and disaster will follow... If people violate the Way and act foolishly, then Nature cannot give them good fortune.” (ibid. 116-7)

⁸ In understanding of Tao, 道, one of the main concepts of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism differed considerably from Taoism. While the first of these schools of thought explained it as the right way of life in the human society, the other used it to label the way in which the universe, that is to say the natural order, worked. (NEEDHAM, Joseph: *Science*

"An individual, even a prominent writer, was a mere vignette, a label of the written work which ultimately had to be only a manifestation of the omnipresent, multi-faceted and *ad infinitum* definable and redefinable Tao, if it was to be regarded as a piece of literature." (Gálik 188)

An important role in the process of literary creation was played by the human mind, or heart (心, *xin*). This role was understood in different ways. Taoists who stood up for a social noncommitment and personal indifference compared it to a mirror that reflects the surrounding world, helps one to know it, but simultaneously does not take note of it as an object of interest or of activity.⁹ On the other hand the Confucians, very active in respect of social problems, as for example Xunzi, had a very different concept of the function of mind, in other words of the human mind that responds sensibly to outer reality, but simultaneously it strives to react to this reality with the aid of its instruments (feelings and passions, cognition and knowledge).¹⁰ Both of these concepts of mind were to some extent antithetical to the idea of personal creativity, to the individual creative principle. (Gálik 185)

It is necessary to remark here that the concept of genius was also unknown to high antiquity in Europe. In the ancient period, a great man was a "hero", as in mythology, or also a philosopher; to the Romans he was *vir illustris*, a great poet or writer. However, antiquity did create conditions for the subsequent birth of the concept of genius in the Italian Renaissance. It was contributed largely by the concept of the demiurge, the divine craftsman who creates, as well as by Socrates' teaching on *daimonion*, Plato's teaching on enthusiasm, the Roman philosopher Longinus and his teaching on the sublime, or Plotinus and his idea concerned with the work of art, and others. (Zilsel 7-105)

The traditional Chinese literature differs from the ancient Greek and the large part of the European literature in its lyrical perception of reality as a result of different relations and affinities between "reality", the author, and the work. The mimetic approach, proper to the Western literary world, was accentuated by

and Civilisation in China. In collab. with WANG Ling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, vol. II, p. 36).

⁹ "The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror – going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself." (WATSON: *Chuang Tzu*, p. 97).

¹⁰ "The mind never ceases to store (impressions), yet it has that which may be called emptiness. The mind has always a multiplicity, yet there is that which may be called a unity.. The mind is always active, yet there is that which may be called quiescence. Man from birth has the capacity to know things; this capacity has its memory. This memory is what is meant by stored-away (impressions)." (FUNG Yu-lan: *History of Chinese Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Transl. by Derk Bodde. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1952, p. 291).

a dramatic and epic procedure, with emphasis being laid on the active or descriptive aspect. The reflective approach to the reality, on the other hand, underlined the lyric, reflexive side. Feelings and emotions were the cornerstone of the first Chinese poetic theory in general, but because of the moderate, ethical, antihedonist and conservative character of traditional Chinese philosophy, feelings never became the decisive factor of human being, they never influenced the concept of human mind to the same extent as in Europe of the Romantic Age. In Chinese society nobody could permit himself not to keep check over his feelings, far less the socially or politically active individuals. The role of poets in the old Chinese society was never one of exercising the function of the highest judges, prophets, or of a socio-political avant-garde. That is why

“the concept of the creative personality, creative only within the framework of Tao, the Three Powers, and chiefly in the realm of lyric vision, remained nearly the same through the many centuries of the existence of the traditional Chinese literature up to the beginning of the 20th century.” (Gálik 198)

As seen above, the concept of literary or artistic genius was unknown in traditional China. However, a concept common to both ancient Chinese and Greco-Roman aesthetics was that of *cai* (才), talent, and *ingenium*. The Latin word *ars* corresponds roughly to the term *shu* (术), art, in the sense in which it was used by Zhuangzi or Liu Xie 刘勰.¹¹ Liu Xie’s concept of *cai* or *tong-cai* (通才), comprehensive talent, is directly related to that of *shu*, for that *litterateur* alone is “comprehensive” who has succeeded in understanding art.¹² Talent in a man of letters is always individual, innate (*ingenium*) and it cannot be passed from one to another. This inexpressibility originally related to Tao and later only was extended to the sphere of art. (Gálik 187)¹³

¹¹ Liu Xie (about 465-522 AD), the author of the book *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, “the most systematic work of the Chinese literary criticism of the ancient times” (GÁLIK, Marián: *The Concept of Creative Personality in Traditional Chinese Literary Criticism*. In: *Oriens Extremus*, 27, 2, 1980, pp. 183-202. Wiesbaden: Kommissionverlag Otto Harrassowitz 1980, p. 186).

¹² A term “*qi*” (气), breath, is used in the same sense, for example in the *Essay on literature* (*Tianlun lunwen*) by Cao Pei (186-226 AD).

¹³ The *Zhuangzi* abounds in examples to this topic – see passages about the wheelwright Pian (Chap. 13), the woodworker Qing (Chap. 19) or the cook Ding (Chap. 3). It speaks about a knack or art that cannot be explained nor it can be learned. So, for example, the woodworker Qing is not able adequately elucidate the substance of his art although he could point to its certain conditions: “fasting of the mind”, concentration, experience, acting in harmony with Heavenly nature, that is to say, with a natural makeup.

2.1. The Concept of the Perfect Man in Chinese Philosophy

On the other hand, there existed a concept of the perfect man – the Sage (圣人, *shengren*) in Chinese philosophy and it played an important role there. This is connected with its predominantly ethical character, orientation towards man and his role in society and the demands made on him. This concept is related to the man who embodies the value of human life and fulfills its purpose in the sense of moral qualities. In the pre-Qin period (before 221 BC) every school of thought had its own concept of the perfect man. The individual concepts, however, differed from each other with its content or the borders of its horizon. (Cui 149-150)

So, for example, in Confucius' *Lunyu* (论语), Analects, it is written that "[the Sage] makes the most of his wide knowledge for the benefit of the people and can thus be useful to the masses",¹⁴ while Mohists (墨家, *Mojia*) considered it to be the manifestation of perfection when a man (the ruler) "with his own body laboured for the world" or drove himself on to the bitterest exertion. (Watson 366) Mencius, on the contrary, considers the Sage to be the embodiment of the "ultimate standard of human relations" (Chan 73), that is to say a man who in an ordered society based on the principles of humanity, righteousness and rites achieved self-realization in an absolute measure. The Sage is also a "teacher to a hundred generations".¹⁵ Such a concept has even a plebeian quality. "Suppose a man on the street directs his capacities to learning, concentrating his mind on one object, thinking and studying and investigating thoroughly, adding daily to his knowledge and long retaining it" (Fung: vol. I, 287), he can become a Sage. "If he...accumulates goodness without stopping, he can then be as wise as the gods, and form a trinity (参与, *canyu*) with Heaven and Earth. Thus the sage is a man who has reached this state through accumulated effort." (Chan 134) In the Confucian philosophy it is, then, an ethical and epistemological category, a model of ethical virtues and wisdom. (Gálik 187)

As regards the *Zhuangzi*, the situation in terminology is significantly more complicated for the term "perfect man" has several equivalents here: true man (真人, *zhenren*), perfect man (至人, *zhiren*), sage (圣人, *shengren*), great man (大人, *daren*), the man of Tao (道人, *daoren*), the man of perfect virtue (德人,

¹⁴ "博施于民而能济众" CHENG Shude 程树德: *Lunyu jishi* «论语集释» [Collected Explanations of the Analects]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1997, vol. II., chap. 12, p. 427.

¹⁵ *Mengzi yinde* «孟子引得» [A Concordance to Mengzi], Taipei 1966, p. 26. Quoted according to GÁLIK: *The Concept of Creative Personality*, p. 187.

deren) or genius – daemonic man¹⁶ (神人, *shenren*) etc. There is often also a fairly different content attached to each of these expressions with the difference in the level of perfection attained. It is a result of the fact that the book is not a work of one but several hands, every one of which presented his philosophical speculations with a slightly different terminology. However, we can say that the chapters or passages containing a systematic exposition of the philosophical teaching of Zhuangzi and his followers, the “Zhuangzian” chapters (especially the Inner ones), use different expressions with the meaning “perfect man” that are equal and their only point of difference is the attribute or feature of the perfect man they emphasize.¹⁷

The *Zhuangzi* had its origin in the reaction to the teaching of various schools of thought, but in the first place it was a response to the moralistic Confucian philosophy from which it borrowed the term “sage”, the paragon of human virtue, and set it into its own philosophy, at the equal level with the terms “perfect man” or “genius”. In this way Zhuangzi created room for a merciless criticism of Confucianism. (Cui 155)

According to the standard of reaching the absolute, unconditional freedom (逍遥, *xiaoyao*) Zhuangzi selects all the men basically in two groups: the minority that does not depend on anything (无待, *wudai*),¹⁸ for which he uses the terms true man, perfect man, sage or genius, and us the rest (众人, *zhongren*), whose freedom is conditional on something (有待, *youdai*). (Cui

¹⁶ J.W. Goethe in his work *Poetry and Truth* (Dichtung und Wahrheit) talks about young, prodigious men who spare no pains in order to cross the existing borders with the result of disappearing in the borderless in the end. Goethe uses the word “daemonic” (das Dämonische) here to describe the power and understanding, superior to man and alien to him, that cannot be well enough fitted into our categories of rational, personal and moral, that can enter into a man and elevate him onto a higher level. (GOETHE, Johann Wolfgang: *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Vol. I. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1970, pp. 626-8, 641-2. See also GRAHAM: Chuang Tzu, p. 35, Note 72).

¹⁷ Cui Dahua (CUI Dahua 崔大华: *Zhuangxue yanjiu* «庄学研究» [The Research in the Science on the Zhuangzi]. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 1995, pp. 150-156) has here in mind the first followers of Zhuangzi, among whom he also includes the author of the Autumn Flood dialogue in Chapter 17.

¹⁸ See Chap. 1 (Xiaoyao you, Free And Easy Wandering (Watson)). “As for the man who rides a true course between heaven and earth, with the changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on?” (GRAHAM: *Chuang Tzu*, p. 44).

155)¹⁹ This Zhuangzian search for the ultimate human spiritual freedom, though expressed with a language that reflects the specifically Chinese world view, is to a certain extent similar to the search made by Socrates.

3. CHAPTER 17 – AUTUMN FLOODS (秋水, *QIUSHUI*)

3.1. An Analysis of the Rational Concept of the Great Man

The present analysis attempts a rational explication of *Tao*, the Taoist Way. According to the Graham's dissection²⁰ the *Zhuangzi* contains three dialogues that in a question-answer style, similar to Plato's Dialogues, define the terms of "Great man" (大人, *daren*) and "Great scope" (大方, *da fang*), the breadth of his horizon. It is, primarily, the "Autumn Floods" dialogue representing a substantial part of Chapter 17 (Autumn Floods) and the dialogues with Know-little (少知, *Shaozhi*) and the "Snail" dialogue in Chapter 25 (则阳, *Zeyang*). On account of the philosophical and textual analysis of these dialogues we can claim that the first two of them are a work of one and the same author (which we can also suppose about the third one). We can also find in the *Zhuangzi* several other passages related to these 3 dialogues – a passage from Chapter 12 (天地, *Tiandi*, Heaven and Earth), containing "the most comprehensive attempt in the Chuang-tzu to organize basic concepts in a cosmological scheme" (Graham 156), and particularly the fragments from Chapters 11, 17 and 24, which expose respectively the "integrity", the "teaching" and the "conduct" of the Great Man. Though scattered over different chapters, they belong together and have the look of fragments broken off the end of the mutilated Autumn Floods dialogue. (Graham 143)²¹

¹⁹ For more occurrence of this term see *Zhuangzi yinde* «庄子引得» [Concordance to the *Zhuangzi*]. Beijing: Beijing daxue yinshua 1947, 2/1/20, 7/2/93-94, 15/6/3, 55/21/20, 60/22/75, 76/27/24-25.

²⁰ See GRAHAM: Chuang Tzu, pp. 143-157.

²¹ Liu Xiaogan denounces the attempt at reconstructing some of the chapters of the book with related passages from other chapters. (LIU: *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*, pp. 170-171). He believes that such an attempt is not necessary and that it is, moreover, unrealizable. However, he talks about filling some of the gaps in the Inner chapters with scraps from the Miscellaneous chapters and his arguments do not refer to "Autumn Floods" chapter. More conservative Chinese Sinologists must undoubtedly find Graham's attempt too bold. However, there are some Chinese scholars who also voice their doubts about the correspondence of certain passages to their respective chapters (see e.g. CHEN Guying: *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* [The *Zhuangzi* with Commentaries and Translation to Modern

The most striking characteristic of these sections is a trust in the intellect which might be thought quite un-Taoist. (Graham 143)²² “Autumn Floods” and “Know-little” are sustained expositions of a coherent metaphysical system. The word “knowledge” is always used here in a good sense.²³

In my analysis I will confine myself to the core of Chapter 17, the extensive opening dialogue between the Lord of the Yellow River and god Ruo of the North Sea which consists of a sequence of 7 questions and answers.

3.2. The “Autumn Floods” Dialogue

A review of the “Autumn Floods” dialogue will be presented here together with its interpretation based on the works of L.J. Hansen²⁴ and A.C. Graham. Our aim is to indicate how the logical deductions form a homogeneous whole, the subject-matter of which is to establish knowledge of the “Great Principle” (大理, *da li*).

When the floods of autumn came with the season, the Yellow River got swollen. The river was in such a flood that a man from the opposite bank could not tell a cow from a horse. The Lord of the River (河伯, *He Bo*)²⁵ got exuberantly pleased with it and started to believe that “all the beauty under

Chinese]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1996, p. 410 – the passage in question here is a part of Chapter 17). This justifies the Graham’s attempt to a certain degree.

²² Zhuangzi, however, is not principally against wisdom and study, he just opposes a man getting caught and imprisoned in them. For the same reason he is also sceptical to words in the language or discourse. But it would be a mistake to assume that Zhuangzi condemned language completely. After all, he himself enjoyed it to the fill. However, he was against limiting oneself to words or, if we take it all, to things, people and thought, as well. (MAIR, Victor H.: *Wandering in and through the Chuang-tzu*. In: *Journal of Chinese Religions*, no. 11, Autumn 1983, p. 111).

²³ “In the exuberant attack on knowledge which introduces Chapter 22, ‘Knowledge roams north’ (知北游, *Zhibeiyou*), personified Knowledge requests and receives from the Yellow Emperor a verbal exposition of the Way, in which it is declared that only the Great Man easily returns to the root of things. But the Yellow Emperor then repudiates his own account by adding that he and Knowledge are both remote from the Way precisely because they know about it. Here “Great Man” serves as a catch-phrase to identify a too intellectual type of Taoism.” (GRAHAM: *Chuang Tzu*, p. 143).

²⁴ HANSEN, Lars Jul: *An Analysis of “Autumn Floods” in Chuang Tzu*. In: NAESS, Arne and HANNAY, Alastair (eds.): *Invitation to Chinese Philosophy*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1972, pp. 113-140. The essay offers several possible systematic interpretations of the theory of knowledge and metaphysics in the Autumn Floods dialogue. Considerable emphasis is put on clarifying Chuang Tzu’s arrangement of the arguments into groups; the author also traces out the steps in the reasoning.

²⁵ Below referred to as “The River Lord” for the sake of convenience.

Heaven concentrated within himself" (以天下之美为尽在己, C. 42/17/2). His joy, however, did not last too long. Delighting in his own greatness he journeyed east until at last he reached the North Sea. Here he stiffened suddenly – as far as his eyes could reach, he only saw the infinite vastness of the Sea. Having realized his limited outlook, he turns to Ruo (北海若, *Beihai Ruo*), god of the North Sea,²⁶ with a request for instruction. The sea god begins here – on behalf of the author of the dialogue – his exposition on the great man.

In the first question-answer section we are introduced to one of the main ideas of the dialogue, namely that of size or greatness (大, *da*). According to Hansen,

“from the outset we are confronted with the fact that the author of the dialogue wants to prove: namely, that empirical knowledge of the sensible world depends upon relations between the object to be known and measured and the other objects which go to make up the former’s surroundings, i.e. which constitute the context of perception.” (Hansen 116)

After the above-mentioned encounter the greatness of the River God, the former value of his world, which constitutes the circle defining his surroundings and values, is exchanged for a new greater value – the vastness of the Sea.

In spite of these qualities of the Sea, the Sea God, its personification, however, exhibits no pride and does not take himself to be very important or significant. He is clearly conscious that he himself and his vastness depend upon Heaven and Earth, or nature, as well as upon the mutual relationship between the principles *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳. Therefore his position in the universe remains no more than that of “a pebble or a bush on a great mountain” (犹小石小木之在大山也, C. 42/17/10). A stance of a true Great Man indeed! But the Sea God goes even further and exposes the relativity of judgments and established standards, undertaking in this way an attempt at re-evaluation of all values.

In the beginning of the second question-answer section the confused River Lord asks: “In that case, is it allowable for me to judge heaven and earth great and the tip of a hair small?” (Graham 145) (然则吾大天地而小毫末可乎, C. 42/17/14-15) The Sea God refutes this illusion of his by putting forth four axioms, each in a form of a negative statement: 1. The number of things is without limit (物量无穷, *wu liang wu qiong*), 2. Times have no stop (时无止, *shi wu zhi*), 3. Distinctions have no constancy (分无常, *fen wu chang*), 4.

²⁶ Referred to, similarly, as “The Sea God”.

Beginning and end cannot be fixed (终始无故, *zhong shi wu gu*). (Hansen 124-128)

To make his position clear, the Sea God uses an example showing how a wise man who has reached the understanding of the nature of things conducts his life attitudes:

“Therefore the wisest, because they have a full view of far and near, do not belittle the smaller or make much of the greater, knowing that measuring has no limit; because they have an assured comprehension of past and present, they are not disheartened by indefinite delay or on tiptoes for what is within reach, knowing that times have no stop; because they are discerning about cycles of waxing and waning, they are not pleased when they win or anxious when they lose, knowing that our portions have no constancy; because they are clear-sighted about our unvarying path, they do not rejoice in being alive or think it a calamity to die, knowing that nothing ending or starting can be kept as it was.” (Graham 145-146, C.42/17/15-18)

Of course, the afore-said four axioms relate to Heaven and Earth as well as to the tip of a hair as they are not beyond the relativity of values either. In this way, according to Hansen, the author of the dialogue expresses his profound pessimism about the possibility of human knowledge.

“We may achieve a fairly broad insight, transcending that of the summer insect, the well-frog, or the cramped scholar, and reach a new level of thought from which everything, including ourselves, may be looked at. ... A possible improvement of our understanding ... remains nevertheless restricted. What we comprehend as the greatest cannot be sufficiently proved to be actually the greatest.” (Hansen 128)

The third question-answer sequence shows the way to the sphere of conceptual thinking. An important role is played by two concepts – fineness (精, *jing*) and coarseness (粗, *cu*). Drawing from Hansen’s analysis, everything which human thinking may encompass or words express presupposes either of these categories. This implies that whatever does not participate in these categories eludes thought and language. Such a thing must be defined by pure negation, as something which is neither fine nor coarse.

We are thus left with a negative knowledge of the absolute values which we ventured to discover. “To what viewpoint must one attain if one is to find standards for noble and base, small and great?”, the River Lord asks in the fifth sequence.

"If we examine them in relation to the Way, things are neither noble nor base. If we examine them in relation to other things, they see themselves as noble and each other as base. If we examine them in relation to custom, the nobility or baseness does not depend on oneself." (Graham 146)

Therefore, as Hansen concludes, there only remains a relativism of the values and objects perceived in our world of senses. Within every isolated milieu and world of one's being and understanding the values and measures have their validity, but one that is restricted and limited to this specific context. There is no single universal standard that we could understand, a standard of what is great and small, valuable and worthless:

"Our limited world of insight, though it may be enlarged and brought to a certain perfection, is incapable of fathoming the absolutely greatest and smallest. A man thus remains a part of a whole transcending his powers of understanding." (Hansen 132)

A question about the practical implications of such a conclusion arises here. In the beginning of the sixth question-answer sequence the River Lord asks: "What shall I do and what shall I not do? On what final consideration am I to refuse or accept, prefer or discard?" (Graham 147) The only direct answer to this problem offered in the text itself, according to Hansen, is genuinely Taoist – to let everything, including oneself, pursue spontaneity (自化, *zihua*), the natural course of nature, or Tao.²⁷

The innovating approach of A.C. Graham should be emphasized in this place. He was the one to point out the rational aspect of such a great man, to stress the trust in the intellect.

"Whoever knows the Way is sure of penetrating the patterns, whoever penetrates the patterns is sure to be clear-headed in weighing things, whoever is clear-headed in weighing things will not use other things to his own harm." (Graham 149)

Graham then spells this principle out for us in the "Snail" dialogue where Dai Jinren, a true Great Man, is introduced to the King of Wei in order to reason him out of waging war against the state of Mou.²⁸

However, an inquiring man would surely ask now along with Graham: How is one to reconcile in practice the rejection of all prudential and moral rules with the need to live in a highly regulated society?

²⁷ How should one understand this spontaneity? Graham offers an explanation to it in various places in his analysis. He prompts an adept to train his *qi* (the breath and other energizing fluids) with meditation including controlled breathing (see *Chuang Tzu*: Note on p. 69. Cf. also pp. 7-8).

²⁸ See Graham: *Chuang Tzu*, pp. 153-154.

"The Great Man is both selfless and amoral; and refuses to distinguish and judge between either benefit and harm or right and wrong", Graham concludes, while as for social conventions, he is "alert to the dangers of colliding with them, but sees them as deserving only an outward conformity." (Graham 13)

"We can conceive his weighing of things not as evaluation but simply as an objective estimation of their greater or lesser effects on each other and on himself, so that he will respond to them in full awareness of their interrelations and consequences. The only value judgement assumed, therefore, is that aware reactions are better than unaware ones, which is no more than preferring truth to falsehood, reality to illusion." (Graham 144)

The principle of a sage's acting would be, according to Graham, a conscious preferring of one kind of incipient reaction rather than another.

Further implications of the rational attitude of the Great Man from the epistemological point of view are shown in section 3.6. of the present article (The Concept of Greatness in "Autumn Floods").

3.3. Evaluation of Chapter 17 by Chinese Authors

On the issue of evaluation of Chapter 17 (Autumn Floods) a traditional view prevails among Chinese scholars,²⁹ namely that it is an elaboration of the ideas contained in the Inner Chapters (especially Chapters 1 and 2). That is why, for all we know, none of them has dealt with the specificity of the concept of the great man in this chapter. I will quote here as an example a passage from *An Interpretation of the Zhuangzi* (庄子解, *Zhuangzi jie*) – Explanatory Notes to the Chapter *Qiushui* (Autumn Floods) (秋水:题解, *Qiushui tijie*) – written by the philosopher Wang Fuzhi.³⁰

"...[The "Autumn Floods" chapter] develops the Free and Easy Wandering (逍遥游, *Xiaoyaoyou*) and Discussion on Making All Things Equal (齐物论, *Qiwulun*) chapters and draws from them the conclusion about non-existence of a primordial substance of

²⁹ Among the older authors e.g. Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) (see the quotation below), from the modern ones e.g. CHAN Wing-tsit (DE BARY, Theodore Wm. – CHAN, Wing-tsit – WATSON, Burton: *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, pp. 65-82) or FUNG Yu-lan: *History of Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 225-226, 236).

³⁰ Quoted according to FANG Yong 方勇 – LU Yongpin 陆永品 *Zhuangzi quan ping* «庄子全评» [The Zhuangzi with Annotations and Critical Analysis]. Chengdu: Bashu shushe 1998, p. 461.

Heaven and Earth and the myriad of things, or of their real being. By extending the knowledge about Heaven and Earth and the myriad of things we can attain their complete knowledge, that is to say that none of them can be taken for a basis – that is why they cannot disturb the calmness of my mind. That there appeared different views of things has probably originated from the different understanding of great and small. That which is small cannot understand that which is great; that which is great cannot understand that which is small. To misunderstand the small means to take a certain degree of greatness for real greatness, while at the same time not really understanding the meaning of real greatness.

Different understanding of great and small brings about distinguishing between noble and mean. Distinguishing between noble and mean results in the appearance of different views of right and wrong, proper and improper. Different understanding of great and small also makes different standards for beginning and end appear. Different standards for beginning and end bring about the feelings of joy of life and disgust for death. Different understanding of great and small also results in distinguishing between fine and coarse, which consequently results in mistaking meaning for words and vice versa. This is how directions and restrictions for conduct appear – we are trying to use our strengths to conceal our weaknesses.

Knowledge has limits – that is why distinguishing between things brings about prejudices. Time has a limit – that is why the views about the causes of things cannot change. He and I do not understand each other – that is why I have no way of conceiving of what he knows and what he does not. It leads so far that the gain or the impossibility of gain bring about the change in attitude, the noble or the low position brings about the change in a man's feelings. Incessant debates make a man forsake his creed; he does not have a solid conviction so he looks for the truth with the others; he will sacrifice things and thus he will lose himself, as well. However, he does not understand that the sage who has reached the understanding of the unity of all things considers such changes to be quite usual."

The above-cited Liu Xiaogan, a contemporary author who dedicated himself to the philological analysis and criticism, as well as textual analysis of the *Zhuangzi*, speaks similarly to this opinion.

As already mentioned, he identifies Chapters 17-27 and 32 as a work of a follower or interpreter of the teaching of Zhuangzi. Which is clear from his

evaluation of Chapter 17 is that its main point is an interpretation of the ideas of the Inner Chapters (especially Chapter 2) and their developing.

"The Transmitter (interpreters) school of Zhuangzi (*shu Zhuang pai*) explained, among other things, the scepticism of Zhuangzi. Chapter 17 (Autumn Floods) emphasizes that the size of the world cannot be known." (Liu 1988: 265) Referring to the words of the Sea God in the first part of "Autumn Floods" he states:

"[Zhuangzi] points out here that human life has its borders, that there will always be less of what a man knows than of what he does not know; he remarks that the tip of a hair may not be the limit of the least, neither Heaven and Earth must necessarily be the largest sphere." (ibid. 265-266)

"All that is true," Liu Xiaogan says, "but the author, starting from this premise, underestimates the cognitive knowledge of a man. His aversion to the exploration of the sphere of the unknown is erroneous." (ibid. 266)³¹

"The Transmitter school also consciously developed Zhuangzi's theory of the unity and equality of all things (齐物论, *qi wu lun*). Especially Chapter 17 clearly deals with the relativity of differences between things from the relativistic point of view." (ibid.)

These statements are followed by an analysis of part IV of "Autumn Floods" (C. 43/17/28-41) which admits the stimulating nature of the views contained in it, since they bring an overall view of the problem. On the other hand, however, as Liu Xiaogan observes,

"the author of Chapter 17, much like Zhuangzi himself, not only does not emphasize the identity of differences and the relativity of opposites but, starting from relativity of knowledge and contradiction, denies all differences and contradiction." (ibid. 268)

Using other examples he shows that the central point of the exposition of the author of Chapter 17 is the unity of 10,000 things. He further explains this topic saying: "The element of relativity in Zhuangzi's thought was given a systematic explanation and extensive elaboration in terms of Chapter 17. Without this

³¹ We suppose that Liu Xiaogan passes here his own judgment off for an opinion of the author himself. Although the author of the dialogue speaks on behalf of the Sea God that "[man] tries to use the smallest [i.e. what he does know or human life] to exhaust the compass of the greatest [i.e. what he does not know or the time before he was born] – that is why he is lost and confused and incapable of finding himself" (GRAHAM, A.C.: *Chuang-tzu*, p. 146) but he does not denounce inquiry of the unknown, he just points to the objective borders of human knowledge. This dialogue and the related passages of other chapters, however, give an answer to this problem. We tried to suggest it in the previous section "Autumn Floods" Dialogue and the following The Concept of Greatness in the "Autumn Floods" Dialogue.

chapter the relativism of the school of Zhuangzi would lose much of its brilliance.” (ibid.)

Although Liu Xiaogan concedes some reason to the conclusions about the relativity of the common judgement of things, he considers it a mistake to

“merely emphasize such relativity of knowledge that ignores the existence of the absolute among the relative and thus discounts the absolute – in this way it comes close to wiping away all differences and to the theory of the equality of all things. Chapter 17 out of all the chapters written by the followers of Zhuangzi defends relativism in the most expressive way. Even in the whole history of Chinese philosophy it represents the apex in the systematic elaboration of the relativistic theory.” (ibid.)

In his analysis of part I of “Autumn Floods”, this author also refers to the nihilistic message of Chapter 17 that “exceedingly emphasizes the futility of human life, the triviality of matters and defends the insignificance of everything; it is a denial of the value of human life, the denial of life in general.” (ibid. 273)³²

3.4. The Analysis of the Concept of the Great Man by Other Authors

Apart from A.C. Graham whose concept of the Great Man was described above there were several other authors who also dealt with the problem of the Great Man in the *Zhuangzi*, especially in Chapter 17.

The above-cited L.J. Hansen draws false conclusions from his formally rather well-wrought analysis of “Autumn Floods”. Although he admits that the book as a whole is a compilation made by several hands, perhaps pupils of one author, he identifies the author of the dialogue with the main author of the *Zhuangzi*. (Hansen 115) He explains the heterogeneity between the dialogue referred to and, let us say, the Inner chapters (although not explicitly mentioned) with the development of thinking of the author himself during a certain period of time (20-30 years) and describes it just as superficial and, in reality, irrelevant. (ibid. 116) L.J. Hansen considers “Autumn Floods” to be the starting point for exposition of some of the main points of Zhuangzi’s philosophy issuing from the assumption that the *Zhuangzi* as a whole is an exposition of a coherent, logically ordered philosophical system. This argument is probably not tenable any more and has no supporters among authors today.

Marián Gálík in his article quoted above advances his views about the problem of genius in this way:

³² Again, we cannot but disagree with this conclusion. The reasons why are explained in the section The Concept of Greatness in “Autumn Floods” Dialogue and in the Conclusion.

"If genius is something more than *ingenium*, if it is an artistic genius and an individual that has achieved much or at least something great or unusual in the literary development, then the book *Chuang-tzu* may be said to have indicated the vision not of a genius, but rather of some sort of an anti-genius, a demonic genius bent on destroying values socially recognized though not justified in all their aspects. ... The genius of Chuang-tzu and of his pupils, however, failed to set up a positive alternative to their iconoclastic work." (Gálik 191)

When writing this article, Dr. Gálik had in mind the concept of genius as it was described especially in the Inner Chapters of the book.

Lee Yearley speaks about the perspective of "the perfected person" (Yearley 125-139). In connection with it, he divides the Zhuangzian sections of the book (i.e. the significant passages of Chapters 1-7 and 17-22) into 2 parts. The first part (Chap. 1-7) according to him represents a radical view of the perfected person, which he identifies as a work of the founder of the school, an alien sage and a radical philosopher challenging the contemporaneous "theory of knowledge".³³ He calls this philosopher a skeptic and his standpoint a specific Chinese form of mysticism ("intra-worldly mysticism" (ibid. 130)). In the Zhuangzian mysticism no absolute reality is sought; it rather aims to see the world in a new way, to obtain a new viewpoint on normal experience. Yearley describes the meaning of this form of mysticism with images, metaphors of mind – the image of the axis at the centre of the circle or a hinge fitted into a socket, that is to say something that moves continuously, that responds constantly and yet that is centred; the second image is that of the mind as a mirror. In this way the radical Zhuangzi prompts us to "view all life as an esthetic panorama, ... as a series of esthetically pleasing new beginnings" (ibid. 136). This is without doubt a far-fetched idea that is unrealizable in the normal life of human society.³⁴ However, the aim of the radical Zhuangzi is, according to Yearley's explanation, just this – to shock his reader and to make him think, ask him questions without answers and thus enable him to achieve a new perspective on the world.

As an example of a possible interpretation of the ideas contained in the Inner Chapters Yearley sets forth a conventional view of the perfected person (as described in Chap. 17-22) that resulted from "grinding off" of the most radical parts of Zhuangzi's teaching and its adaptation to the conditions of everyday life. (Such an interpretation is, according to him, encapsulated especially in the

³³ See YEARLEY: *The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu*, p. 138, Note 2.

³⁴ Just see the breathtaking examples of this attitude if introduced into real life. (ibid., pp. 135, 137).

long opening passage of Chapter 17, Autumn Floods, analysed in the previous section of this article.) Yearley finds this conventional view to be philosophically less relevant than the radical view.

Professor Robert E. Allinson in his work *Chuang Tzu for Spiritual Transformation* arrives at a similar conclusion to Lee Yearley (although he does not pass his opinion directly on the problem of the Great Man). On the basis of his philosophical analysis of the Inner Chapters (with emphasis on Chapter 2) he solves the problem of blurring the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic chapters of the *Zhuangzi* using Chapter 17 as an example. (Allinson 137-142) He claims that in spite of its superficial resemblance to Chapter 2 there are several fundamental points of difference:

1. The absence of any dream analogy or awakening from a dream, an important precondition (as he proves in the previous sections of his work) for awakening from a perspective of illusion to a perspective of true knowledge is the evidence that "the author(s) of Chapter 17 did not clearly understand the intention of Chapter 2" (Allinson 138) and actually violated the sense of Chapter 2 and the rest of the Inner Chapters.
2. If Ruo, the God of the North Sea, postulates his 4 laws of relativism and states, apart from the other things, that "From the point of view of the Way, what is noble or what is mean? These are merely what are called endless changes." (Watson 181), how can there be an outline of progression from what is mean to what is noble, from a narrow to a broader point of view? "What meaning can there be," Allinson asks, "in the concept of a hierarchy of value if as soon as one obtains wisdom, one becomes ignorant?" (Allinson 139) Therefore he considers the stance of Chapter 17 as a stance of "hard core relativism" that is at odds with the main tenor of self-transformation of the Inner Chapters.
3. With reference to the logical irrelevance of Zhuangzi's reasoning in the dialogue with the sophist Hui Shi 惠施 (the end of Chapter 17), which he terms a standpoint of naive, perceptual realism, Allinson concludes his treatise declaring this chapter to be "more primitive in its philosophical argumentation and philosophical conclusion" (ibid. 141). Therefore he cautions against stressing the undue importance in constructing an overall interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* (ie its Inner Chapters) on the basis of the standpoint of Chapter 17 which, according to him, in the philosophical respect distorts and debases the message of the whole book.

3.5. Discussion

Along with the growing interest in the *Zhuangzi*, this masterpiece of Chinese philosophical Taoism, among the Western Sinologists, the number of disputes

over its interpretation is also increasing. It is without doubt a positive phenomenon for precisely thanks to a dialogue a better understanding of this excellent work can be reached.

Let us take note now of some of the above-cited arguments critically evaluating the significance of Chapter 17 or the concept of the Great Man that is contained in it, as the case may be. We suppose that Prof. Allinson (see the first point in his argument) holds too strictly to the results of his own analysis when talking about the absence of the dream and the awakening from dream analogy in Chapter 17. He probably passed unnoticed the passage in the first part of "Autumn Floods" in which the God of the North Sea, though wording it differently, also talks about the awakening of the God of the Yellow River: "Now you have *come out beyond your banks and borders* and have seen the great sea – so you realize your own pettiness. From now on it will be possible to talk to you about the Great Principle." (Watson 177)

As Joseph Needham states in his grandiose work *Science and Civilisation in China* precisely with reference to "Autumn Floods", "Chuang Tzu scornfully describes Confucian scholastic social knowledge as the 'distinctions between princes and grooms'; this is, 'knowledge' as distinguished from that true knowledge of the Tao and of Nature for which the Taoists sought. Once we have the thread in our hand we can explain a large number of passages which would otherwise be puzzling." (Needham: vol. II, 87-88)

We presume that Yearley as well as Allinson did not have this thread in their hands when carrying out their analyses and that in their attempt to "purge" the message of the Inner Chapters of false, relativistic interpretations they disregarded this very feature of "Autumn Floods". It is the only way to understand the explanation indicated by Allinson, that is to say that as soon as one obtains wisdom, one becomes ignorant.

We definitely do not want to blend the message of "Autumn Floods" with that of the Inner Chapters. But unlike Prof. Allinson, we feel an obligation to mark out the genius of its unknown author. Therefore we cannot but disagree with Allinson's conclusion that the interpretation of the Inner Chapters in its philosophical aspect is distorted and violated by Chapter 17. On the contrary, we believe that, from the epistemological point of view, it is developed by it. Aware of the Way, the Great Man takes up a rational attitude on the point of cognition and constantly enlarges his range of knowledge. This can be seen in the following passage:

"...These names and realities can be recorded, their details and minute parts can be noted. ..." (Watson 292)

"Their mutual paternity as they follow in sequence,
Their mutual causation as their cycles recur,
At its limit turns back again,

At its end begins again.

These are the regularities which things possess, words exhaust, knowledge attains; they extend throughout but no further than the realm of things. The man who perceives the Way does not pursue them to where they vanish or explore the source from which they arise. This is the point where discussion stops.” (Graham 152)

(此名实之可纪，精微之可志也，随序之相理，桥运之相使，穷则反，终则始，此物之所有，言之所尽，知之所至，极物而已，睹道之人，不随其所废，不原其所起，此议之所止，C. 72/25/71-3)³⁵

3.6. The Concept of Greatness in “Autumn Floods”

We suppose that it is in comparison with the antigenius of the Inner Chapters that the greatness of the genius of “Autumn Floods” stands out. While Zhuangzi himself in the Inner Chapters, as we already mentioned, defined greatness negatively, his genius directed his attention at questioning of the generally recognized social values, while Socratic wisdom is seemingly negative – Socrates allegedly said: “What I do not know I don’t think I do.” (Plato 427), the follower of Zhuangzi, the author of “Autumn Floods”, goes further in this way and develops his teacher’s theory of knowledge.³⁶

Chapter 71 of the book Daodejing has it on the problem of knowledge:

“To know yet to think that one does not know is best;

Not to know yet to think that one knows will lead to difficulty.

It is by being alive to difficulty that one can avoid it. The sage meets with no difficulty.

It is because he is alive to it that he meets with no difficulty.” (Lau 105)

(“知不知上，不知知病，是以圣人不病，以其病病，是以不病”) (Zhu 282-283)

³⁵ As regards the logical irrelevance of the Zhuangzi’s argumentation in the dialogue with Hui Shi on the bank of the Hao river, Allinson probably did not take in account the explanation provided by Graham who elucidates the meaning of Zhuangzi’s last argument in the following way: “Whatever you affirm is as relative to a standpoint as how I see the fish while I stand up here on the bridge.” (Graham: Note on p. 123) See also GRAHAM: *Chuang Tzu*, pp. 21-22.

³⁶ According to a Gálik’s observation, “when evaluating this dialogue we should not be misled by its mythical guise, typical for the Chinese south, the state of Chu where everything great came out of myths”. (GÁLIK, M., private correspondence, 18.12.2000, the property of the author).

A statement with a similar meaning can be found in Confucius' Analects:

"When you know a thing, say that you know it; when you do not know a thing, admit that you do not know it. That is knowledge." (De Bary – Chan – Watson 26)

(«论语» 2.17: “知之为知之，不知为不知，是知也”) (Cheng: vol.I, 110)

The genius of “Autumn Floods” does not criticize big knowledge, just little knowledge and limited outlook. His modesty is remarkable – he himself has nothing to boast of, though he created great things, as there can always come a better, more talented one and accomplish more. As such he is actually a forerunner of the genius of the Renaissance (Galileo, Michelangelo) or the classicist (Goethe).³⁷

4. CONCLUSION

The present article suggests a comparison between the concept of the Romantic genius and the Daoist Great Man – the genius in the Western civilization and in China, respectively. Such a relationship has not yet been surveyed in detail, so the proposed view is, to a certain degree, at variance with the views of the earlier authors. It contraposes two substantially different concepts of the true greatness and freedom of man. It defends the standpoint that the Chinese philosophy with its sober, rational approach in this respect proved superior to the Western philosophy. While the Western genius is a genius of the absolute, the *Zhuangzi* introduces a relative genius, one who is great only within a certain framework, in comparison with somebody else.

The artistic genius – creator in Western civilization casts doubt upon all the values, he is a bold challenger of God himself. In his Faustian desire for knowledge he knows no obstacles; he elevates his individuality to the highest principle even at the price of self-destruction. On the other hand the Great Man of *Zhuangzi*, although he never stops enlarging his knowledge, remains modest, because he realizes the limitations of the cognitive ability of the human mind. He is aware of his belonging to a larger unit the borders of which he cannot cross and he adjusts his values and attitudes accordingly – that is where his deep wisdom lies.

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