

## Language and Logic in the *Zhuangzi*: Traces of the *Gongsun Longzi*

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Language is the subject of a section in chapter 2, “Qi wu lun” 齊物論, “On equalizing things”, of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the well known collection of early Taoist texts. The section contains phraseology also found in the chapter “Zhi wu lun” 指物論, “On classifying things”, of the *Gongsun Longzi* 公孫龍子, named after the philosopher Gongsun Long and being a collection of texts attributed to the pre-Qin *mingjia* 名家, “School of Names”, otherwise known as the logicians. Analyzing these traces reveals deep connections between the thought content of both texts. The *Zhuangzi* text can be shown to rely on notions expressed in the *Gongsun Longzi* and to develop their logical and ontological implications further in order to arrive at guidelines for a theory of the functions and limitations of language. Thus the conclusion imposing itself is that the author of the *Zhuangzi* text must have been well acquainted with ideas expressed in the *Gongsun Longzi* text.<sup>1</sup>

The following is essentially a study of only three sentences, one from the *Gongsun Longzi*, two from the *Zhuangzi*. All three are well known to students of ancient Chinese philosophy, but they still bear investigation. Taking into account the configuration of the context surrounding them as well as the intimate link between them can affect the perception of the „Qi wu lun” as a whole. The aim is therefore to make sense of these utterances and to provide a detailed analysis of their relationship and their philosophic content. The lines of reasoning emerging from this analysis offer an approach for interpreting the philosophy underlying all of the „Qi wu lun”, which is known for its arduousness.

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1 This of course raises questions of authorship and textual history. Both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Gongsun Longzi* anthologies were compiled at a much later date than the writing of the texts they contain, for which the dating is far from established. The philosopher Zhuangzi, with the personal name Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (ca. 370–285 BC), is about fifty years older than the logician Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (ca. 320–250 BC). If one assumes both to be the authors of the texts in question here, the connection between these texts can hardly be what the analysis thereof compellingly reveals. While this discrepancy must remain unresolved here, conjectures can be put forward for overcoming it. The *Gongsun Longzi* text may have been widely accessible at the time of Zhuang Zhou’s writing that is long before the compilation of the *Gongsun Longzi*. On the other hand the author of the *Zhuangzi* text in question may have been a thinker in the Zhuangzi tradition writing at a later time when the *Gongsun Longzi* text could have been written by Gongsun Long himself. That of course would contravene a tradition considering Zhuang Zhou the author of the first seven chapters of the *Zhuangzi* and of the „Qi wu lun” in particular. It remains that there is a case to be made for letting the textual evidence outweigh the considerations of what is known of the textual history.



Whereas the preceding or first section of the chapter can be said to deal with human perception of existence, this section begins with the statement *fu yan fei chui* 夫言非吹, “Well now, speaking is not blowing air”, introducing language as a new subject. In itself this section is structured in a peculiar way:

On the inside of it the phrase *mo ruo yi ming* 莫若以明, “better use clarity”, which seems like a methodical remark, occurs twice, dividing the section into three parts. The section closes with the phrase *ci zhi wei yi ming* 此之謂以明, “this is meant by ‘use clarity’”, which is obviously a closing remark signaling the end of a sequence of reasoning.

It is interesting to see at which points in the structure of the section the sentences Z1 and Z2, which bear similarities with the *Gongsun Longzi* statement G, are located (fig. 2).

夫 (beginning of a general discourse)

**言非吹也** 言者有言其所言者特未定也果有言邪其未嘗有言邪其以為異于穀音亦有辯乎其無辯乎道惡乎隱而有真偽言惡乎隱而有是非道惡乎往而不存言惡乎存而不可道隱于小成言隱于榮華故有儒墨之是非以是其所非而非其所是欲是其所非而非其所是則

**莫若以明** “better use clarity”

**物無非彼物無非是 (Z1)** 自彼則不見自知則知之故曰彼出于是是亦因彼彼是方生之說也雖然方生方死方死方生方可方不可方不可方因是因非因非因是是以聖人不由而照之于天亦因是也是亦彼也以指喻指之非指不若以非指喻指之非指也彼亦是也彼亦一是非此亦一是非果且有彼是乎哉果且無彼是乎哉彼是莫得其偶謂之道樞樞始得其環中以應無窮是亦一無窮非亦一無窮也故曰

**莫若以明** “better use clarity”

**以指喻指之非指不若以非指喻指之非指也 (Z2)** 以馬喻馬之非馬不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也天地一指也萬物一馬也可乎不可乎不可道行之而成物謂之而然惡乎然然于然惡乎不然不然于不然物固有所然物固有所可無物不然無物不可故為是舉莛與楹厲與西施恢詭譎怪道通為一其分也成也其成也毀也凡物無成與毀復通為一唯達者知通為一為是不用而寓諸庸庸也者用也用也者通也通也者得也適得而几矣因是已已而不知其然謂之道勞神明為一而不知其同也謂之朝三何謂朝三狙公賦茅曰朝三而暮四眾狙皆怒曰然則朝四而暮三眾狙皆悅名實未虧而喜怒為用亦因是也是以聖人和之以是非而休乎天鈞是之謂兩行古之人其知有所至矣惡乎至有以為未始有物者至矣盡矣不可以加矣其次以為有物矣而未始有封也其次以為有封焉而未始有是非也是非之彰也道之所以虧愛之所以成果且有成與虧乎哉果且無成與虧乎哉有成與虧故昭氏之鼓琴也無成與虧故昭氏之不鼓琴也昭文之鼓琴也師曠之枝策也惠子之據梧也三子之知几乎皆其盛者也故載之末年唯其好之也以異于彼其好之也欲以明之彼非所明而明之故以豎白之昧終而其子又以文之綸終終身無成若是而可謂成乎雖我亦成也若是而不可謂成乎物與我無成也是故滑疑之耀聖人之所圖也為是不用而寓諸庸

**此之謂以明** “this is meant by ‘use clarity’”

今 [...] (further supporting material)

Fig.2. Context: „Qi wu lun” section 2

The two sentences Z1 and Z2 appear exactly following the methodical remarks noted above. They each are at the beginning of two of the parts forming the structure of the section and thus can be presumed to play a key role in the reasoning contained in the section.

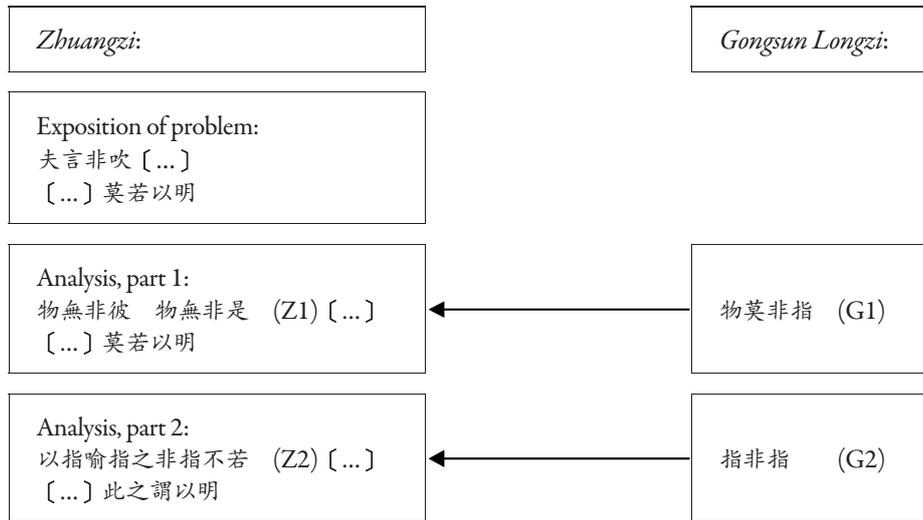


Fig. 3. Context in the „Qi wu lun”, schematized

On the strength of these strictly formal observations one can conclude that the section in view is organized in three parts (fig. 3): the introduction of a problem followed by its treatment in two parts. The latter two parts start with the sentences Z1 and Z2 respectively. The fact that the similarities with the *Gongsun Longzi* statement G appear precisely in these two sentences strongly suggests that the phraseological similarities are not coincidental but reveal an intrinsic connection in thought. Further evidence for this conclusion is that the first clause of G is related to Z1 and the second clause of G is related to Z2. The two clauses of the *Gongsun Longzi* statement can therefore be regarded as a nexus linking and coordinating not only the two *Zhuangzi* sentences but also the entire parts of the section introduced by them. In passing it may be noted that whereas the connection in Z2 with the clause *zhi fei zhi* 指非指 in the *Gongsun Longzi* has been duly recognized mainly by modern commentators, the similarities in Z1 however seem to have so far been ignored by both traditional commentators and modern scholars.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> E.g. references to the *Gongsun Longzi* in connection with Z1 are absent with Guo Xiang 郭象, s. *Zhuangzi jishi* 2.31, and *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* 2.54, note 1.

The logic of the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition G

On the surface the sentence “Of things none is not a finger but a finger is not a finger” makes no sense. Since the context it occurs in is a collection of texts compiled under the name of the logician Gongsun Long,<sup>9</sup> and dealing with problems of concepts and predication, the proposition expressed in this sentence will be analyzed in terms of syntax and logic.<sup>10</sup>

The sentence is a coordination of two clauses having identical equational nominal predicates *fei zhi* 非指, “is not a finger”, joined by the conjunction *er* 而, “and” / “but”. Starting with the first clause, there are three aspects to be considered: the effect of the double negation, the logic of equational predicates, and of course the figurative sense in which *zhi* 指, “finger” / “to point at”, is employed here (fig. 4).

First clause:				G1
物	莫	非	指。	
Things	none	is not	“finger”.	
subject	distributive	negative equational verb	equational nominal	

Fig.4. The first clause of the *Gongsun Longzi* statement

While the double negation could be seen as a rhetorical flourish for the simple expression *wu zhi ye* 物指也, “things are fingers”, it does change the subject / predicate relation in a significant way in that it makes the subject a logical individual. “Of things none are not [...]” is logically equivalent to “Every single thing is [...]”. With this in mind, the next thing is to consider the logical functions of the equational nominal predicate. It can express one of three types of logical relation between subject and predicate:

Identity of two individuals:	a = b
E.g.: Snoopy is Charlie Brown’s dog.	
Individual as an element of a set:	a ∈ A
E.g.: Snoopy is a beagle (one of the set of beagles).	
Subset-set relation:	A ⊆ B
E.g.: A beagle is a dog (The set of beagles is a subset of the set of dogs).	

9 The texts compiled under the name *Gongsun Longzi* cannot be ascribed to Gongsun Long with certainty; cf. footnote 1. In fact, some parts of the collection have even been dated to the Jin era, 3rd and 4th cent. AD. For details cf. Graham 1957.

10 For differing thoughts on the „Zhi wu lun” see Graham 1978, 457ff. Graham criticizes the use of logical concepts in the evaluation of ancient Chinese texts of logic. Like all commentators I am aware of, Graham ignores the relation (G1) / (Z1).

In the present case the identity relation must be ruled out. The same applies to the subset relation since here the subject is explicitly meant to be an individual. That leaves only the element-set relation, so that the meaning of the clause can be paraphrased as

物莫非指。

G1

Every single thing is an element of (a set expressed by) *zhi* 指.

Since the expression *zhi* 指 taken in the literal sense of “finger” renders the clause meaningless, it must be used here in a terminological sense.<sup>11</sup> Indeed it is one of three interconnected terms appearing not only in the *Gongsun Longzi*,<sup>12</sup> but also in the *Zhuangzi*,<sup>13</sup> to denote the three basic aspects of a concept. These are:

<i>ming</i>	名,	“name”	name of a concept;
<i>shi</i>	實,	“full”	intension (connotation, meaning, sense) of a concept;
<i>zhi</i>	指,	“finger”	extension (denotation, reference) of a concept.

Their semantic connotations are reflected in three meanings expressed by an elementary predication such as “Snoopy is a beagle”:

- (1) “Snoopy is called a beagle”, stating that we may address Snoopy as “that beagle over there”, linking Snoopy to the name (*ming*) of the concept “beagle”.
- (2) “Snoopy qualifies as a beagle”, stating that Snoopy has all the properties required to be acknowledged as a beagle, linking Snoopy to the intension (*shi*) of the concept “beagle”.
- (3) Finally “Snoopy is a beagle”, the formula proper to elementary predication, stating that Snoopy is one of all the beagles, linking it to the extension (*zhi*) of the concept “beagle”.

11 The literature on the „Zhi wu lun” chapter of the *Gongsun Longzi* is vast, as is the variety of interpretations of *zhi* 指. Lao Sze-kwang 勞思光 is an exception as he – like the present author – reads *zhi* in this context as *lei* 類, “class”, connected to a *gainian* 概念, “concept”, and *wu* 物, “thing”, as a *fenzi* 分子, “element”, of a class. Cf. Lao Sze-kwang 1984, 333.

12 In the *Gongsun Longzi* the chapter named „Mingshi lun” 名實論 (“On names and connotations”) is one of a pair with the „Zhi wu lun”.

13 *Zhuangzi* 59/22/47 (“Zhi bei you” 知北遊), describes three synonymous concepts: 周遍咸三者, 異名同實, 其指一也。 “Comprehensive’, ‘ubiquitous’, ‘universal’, these three have different names but the same meaning, their extension is one and the same.” Cf. Graham 1978, 459, for a differing reading.

Ancient Chinese logical terminology not only distinguishes between name 名, intension 實, and extension 指 of a concept. It also provides expressions distinguishing the three related meanings of elementary predication, together with the appropriate marks of negating and judging, i. e. confirming or denying. They are

- (1) *wei* 謂, “is called”,<sup>14</sup> negated by *bu wei* 不謂, confirmed or denied by *ke (wei)* 可(謂), “admissible (to be called)”, resp. *bu ke (wei)* 不可(謂), “not admissible (to be called)”.
- (2) *wei* 為, “qualifies as”,<sup>15</sup> negated by *bu wei* 不為, confirmed or denied by *ran* 然, “so”, resp. *bu ran* 不然, “not so”.
- (3) [...] *ye* 也,<sup>16</sup> the final particle 也 being the syntactical mark of elementary predication in absence of a copula as in “Snoopy beagle 也”, negated by [...] *fei* 非 [...] *ye* 也, “[...] is not a [...]”, confirmed or denied by *shi* 是, “is”, resp. *fei* 非, “is not”.

Consequently the term *zhi* 指, “finger”, is employed here in the sense of “a class of things falling under a certain concept”, logically the set of individuals mutually equivalent with regard to the intension or set of properties (i. e. *shi* 實) they must have in order to be classified under the concept.<sup>17</sup>

As a result the first clause of the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition can be said to state:

物莫非指。

G1

Every single thing is (an element of a class) 指 (of things belonging to the extension of a concept).<sup>18</sup>

With this statement the *Gongsun Longzi* says that for every single thing a concept exists under which the thing falls. An important implication thereof is the notion of the totality of things, logically speaking the “universe of discourse” or “universal set”. Thus the totality of things is said to be completely divided up into classes. Not one single thing is exempt from belonging to at least one of these classes. Furthermore, since concepts are based on language, clause G1 also implies that the classification of all things has to do with the use of language.

14 E.g. *Zhuangzi* 14/5/51: 此謂誠忘: “This is called true forgetting.”

15 E.g. *Zhuangzi* 5/2/52: 彭祖為夭: “Pengzu can be qualified as shortlived.” Cf. Graham 1978, 209f.

16 E.g. *Zhuangzi* 7/2/94f: 莊周 [...] 胡蝶也。 “Zhuang Zhou [...] is a butterfly.”

17 Some authors take *zhi* 指 in its verbal sense of “to point at” / “to point out” and consequently read *wu mo fei zhi* 物莫非指 as “No thing is not pointed at (or out).” Grammatically, however, *zhi* must be seen as a nominal as indeed it is indicated by the fact that the *Zhuangzi* text substitutes *zhi* with the nominals *shi* 是, “this”, *bi* 彼, “that”, and *ma* 馬, “horse”. Cf. Reding 2002, 195.

18 As to the usage of “set” and “class”: a “set” is defined as a collection of logical individuals of which no two are identical; a “class” is defined as a set of individuals which, while being different from each other, are connected by a relation of equivalence. In the case of the extension of a concept the equivalence is based on the properties pertaining to the concept, which are common to all elements.

The second clause G2 of the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition G provides a crucial opposition.

Second clause:		G2
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <span style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 0 5px;">(物莫非指)</span> <span>[而]</span> <span style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 0 5px;">指</span> <span style="margin-left: 20px;">非指。</span> </div>	
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <span>but</span> <span>Finger</span> <span>is not “finger”</span> </div>	
subject	conjunction    subject	predicate

Fig. 5. The second clause of the *Gongsun Longzi* statement

The syntactical relation to the first clause is as follows (fig. 5): The equational nominal of G1, *zhi* 指, “the class of things representing the extension of a concept”, is a logical individual and as such becomes the subject of the second clause. The predicate of G1, *fei zhi* 非指, “is not an element of a class of things belonging to the extension of a concept”, as a whole remains the same in G2. This, by the way, is a further rhetorical effect of the double negation, analyzed above and showing the ingenious construction of the sentence. Had the author of the text used the roughly equivalent construction of *wu ge zhi (ye)* 物各指(也), “things each are a finger”, this effect could not have been achieved.

Taken together, the (admittedly cumbersome) translation of the two clauses would be:

物莫非指，而指非指。 G  
 Of things none is not an element of a class 指 of things representing the extension of a concept, but this class 指 (itself) is not an element of a class 指 of things representing the extension of a concept.

A fitting paraphrase of proposition G would be:

Every single thing belongs to a class of things defined by a concept, but this class of things itself is not an element of a class of things (and therefore not a thing).

Consequently classes of things defined by concepts are not part of the world of things, in relation to which they must be regarded as virtual entities. While beagles are found all over the world, the class of beagles is an abstraction.<sup>19</sup>

Reading the proposition G as a statement of logic is further supported by the fact that it can be formalized in logical notation:

$$\forall x \exists P (x \in P \wedge P \notin P)$$

In words: For each individual thing *x* there is the extension *P* of a concept, so that *x* is an element of *P* and *P* is not an element of *P*.

The *Gongsun Longzi* statement is however not only one of logic. It reveals moreover a deep-lying ontological insight insofar as it recognizes that the use of concepts designated by language divides the world of things into classes. These classes however are by no means new

<sup>19</sup> The idea of a class of objects not being an object of the same kind as its elements is attributed by Jean Lévi in a fictitious dialogue to Zhuangzi himself. Cf. Lévi 2003, 147ff.

things added to the world. They are only part of a virtual screen projected onto the world. The division of all things into classes and the virtuality of these classes are both notions that are taken up in the *Zhuangzi*. In the context of the „Qi wu lun” they are developed further to yield fundamental elements of a theory of language.

### The logic of the *Zhuangzi* proposition (Z1)

The first one of the two propositions in the „Qi wu lun” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* showing traces of ideas found in the *Gongsun Longzi* is

物無非彼，物無非是。 Z1  
Of things there is none which is not that, of things there is none which is not this.

The way in which it is related to the *Gongsun Longzi* can be schematized as follows (fig. 6):



Fig. 6. Common features of G1 and Z1

The syntax of both clauses in Z1 is the same as that of G1.<sup>20</sup> Only the equational nominal has been exchanged from *zhi* 指, “class of things falling under a concept”, in G1 to *bi* 彼, “that”, and *shi* 是, “this”, respectively in Z1. On the strength of the foregoing analysis of G1 the meaning of Z1 can be paraphrased as:

物無非彼，物無非是。 Z1  
Every single thing is an element of (a class named) “that”, every single thing is an element of (a class named) “this”.

The *Zhuangzi* statement Z1, while confirming the *Gongsun Longzi* notion that each thing belongs to a class based on a certain concept rendered here as *shi* 是, “this”, maintains that each thing at the same time belongs to yet another class rendered here as *bi* 彼, “that”. The use of *shi*, “this”, and *bi*, “that”, in this instance differs from ordinary usage which pairs *shi*, “this”, with *fei* 非, “not this”, and *ci* 此, “this”, with *bi*, “that”.<sup>21</sup> The semantic difference is intended. The class named *shi*, “this”, is meant as the class belonging to a concept one has positively in mind, e.g. the class of beagles, taking the place of *zhi* 指 as opposed to the class of “dachshund” (“Dackel” in German) which would be considered *fei*, “not this”. The class

20 Disregarding the exchange of *mo* 莫, “none”, for *wu* 無, “there is not”, which does not constitute a significant change in semantics.

21 This has been noted by Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 in his *Guanzhui bian* 管錐編: cf. Qian Zhongshu 1979, vol. 1, 4ff. I am grateful to Ni Shaofeng and Michael Friedrich, both University of Hamburg, for independently pointing this out to me. The pair *bi ci* 此彼 appears also in the chapter „Mingshi lun” of the *Gongsun Longzi*; cf. footnote 12.

named *bi*, “that”, on the other hand would be considered the opposite of any random class *ci*, “this”. Taking the latter to be the class of beagles, then *bi*, “that”, would be the class of all the rest of things, i. e. the class of all things other than beagles. Logically speaking *bi*, “that”, denotes the complement or counterclass of some class *ci*, “this”, and it can therefore also be rendered as *bi* 彼, “other”.

The *Zhuangzi* proposition Z1 calls the attention to a fact that is left unconsidered in *Gongsun Longzi* G1: every class of things falling under a concept automatically defines another class, being the class of the rest of all things. Dividing up the totality of things into classes thus works in two ways at the same time. There is not merely a single but actually a dual classification at work. Thus proposition Z1 while based on *Gongsun Longzi* G1 expands on it in a decisive way:

物無非彼，物無非是。

Z1

Every single thing not only belongs to a class P (i. e. 是), every single thing also belongs to the complement (i. e. 彼) of some class Q (implied 此) (fig. 7).

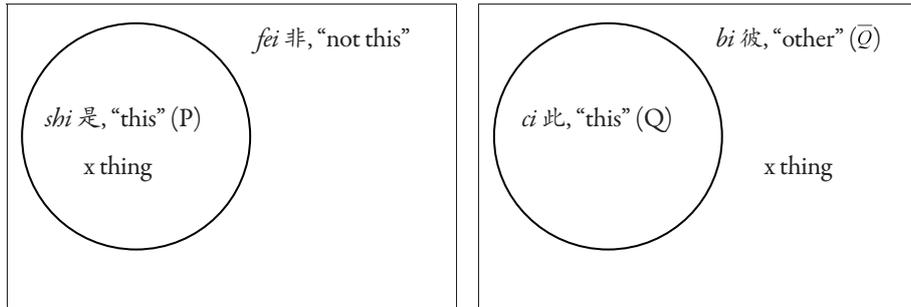


Fig. 7. Illustration of Z1

Put in a more straightforward way:

Snoopy is a beagle, at the same time it is something other than a dackel.

Formalized in logical notation:

$$\forall x \exists P Q (x \in P \wedge x \in \bar{Q})$$

Z1

In words: For each individual thing *x* there are the extensions *P* and *Q* of two concepts, so that *x* is an element of *P* and *x* is an element of the complement  $\bar{Q}$  of *Q*.

In laying out this situation I have made a point of avoiding expressions like “not” or “non-“ in order to be true to the phrasing of the text. For it is important to note the significance of the artful way in which the *Zhuangzi* employs *shi* 是, “this” (the opposite of *fei* 非, “not this”) and *bi* 彼, “other” (the opposite of *ci* 此, “this”). The difference between these two pairs is that *shi fei* 是非 (“this” / “not this”) implies an intentional bias whereas *bi ci* 此彼 (“this” / “other”) does not. This can be illustrated by an everyday example:

The local press reports on a running competition for dackels.<sup>22</sup> Other kinds of dogs may be admitted to participate, but only in a separate “class of non-dackels” (Klasse Nicht-Dackel). Nor are they eligible for the trophy, the Golden Sausage, on this occasion taken home by dackel Trudy.

Obviously in this dackel race, the distinction between class (dackel) and complement (non-dackel) is crucial. Snoopy in this situation would be considered as nothing but a non-dackel while in reality still retaining his identity as a beagle. This is precisely what is expressed by the *Zhuangzi* sentence Z1.

In considering kinds of dogs you may note a dackel (*ci* 此, “this”) for its long ears and stubby legs, distinguishing it from other dogs (*bi* 彼, “other”). So far no bias or valuation is involved, let alone negation or refusal. There are simply dackels and the other kinds of dogs.

However, once you organize a race event specifically for dackels, then there is a bias in favour of dackels (*shi* 是, “this” – what I have in mind). The rest of the dogs are no longer just “other dogs”. Rather they become “non-dackels” (*fei* 非, “not” – what I have in mind) signifying a non-qualification, a negation, and an exclusion from participating in the competition for the trophy.

This distinction is at the core of the reasoning in the „Qi wu lun”: As long as we are dealing with simply the classification of things in the way the *Gongsun Longzi* does, these classes are all on the same level, there is no difference in standing. The logic of classification preserves the neutrality with respect to all classes. There is no basis for negation or refusal. Only the distinction of *ci*, “this”, and *bi*, “other”, is recognized. As soon, however, as there is a bias in favour of one class (*shi*, “the one I have in mind”), then the rest of the things are not any more simply different while retaining the same status as the class in mind. On the contrary, now they are stigmatized as not belonging to the class preferred (*fei*, “not what I have in mind”). That is the moment when negation and refusal arise and the logical distinction of *ci*, “this”, and *bi*, “other”, becomes the discrimination of *shi*, “what I have in mind” and *fei*, “not what I have in mind”. That is indeed what the „Qi wu lun” identifies as the decisive step causing a distorted view of the world and obscuring its inherent neutrality.

When the *Zhuangzi* says:

物無非彼，物無非是。

Z1

Every single thing is something and at the same time it is the other of something else.

it takes the insight of the *Gongsun Longzi* G1 one step further in that every class Q automatically defines another class, the complement class  $\bar{Q}$ . At first sight this is only a logical corollary. But it is at the same time also the logical condition for the “possibility of negation”, in other words for “negativity”. Negativity in this view is not inherent in the world but arises only when subjective weighting occurs. The logical structure of class and complement is the necessary condition for negativity. The discovery of negativity in this sense is a core theme in the „Qi wu lun”.

22 “Goldene Wurst von Itzehoe”, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 07.04.2008.

After noting the similarity in phraseology of the *Gongsun Longzi* and the *Zhuangzi* sentences it now turns out that the seemingly coincidental likeness in phrasing reveals a deep connection in thought, the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition G1 being taken up and expanded to result in the *Zhuangzi* proposition Z1.

### The logic of the *Zhuangzi* proposition (Z2)

Turning now to the second one of the two propositions in the „Qi wu lun” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* showing traces of the *Gongsun Longzi*:

以指喻指之非指 不若 以非指喻指之非指也。 Z2

Using a finger to explain that a finger is not a finger is not as good as using a non-finger to explain that a finger is not a finger.

The way in which it is related to the *Gongsun Longzi* second clause G2 can be schematized as follows (fig. 8):

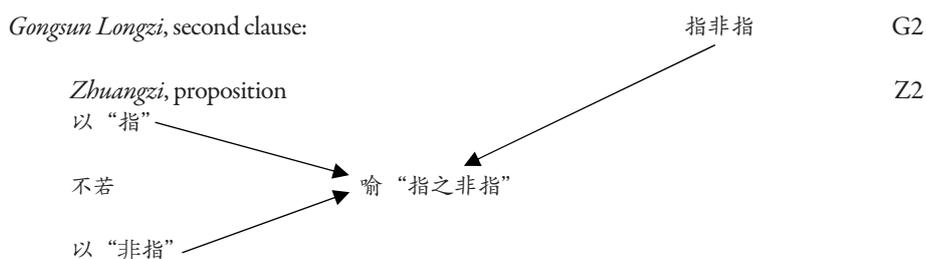


Fig. 8. The relation between G2 and Z2

In this case the *Gongsun Longzi* clause *zhi fei zhi* 指非指, “a finger is not a finger”, is quoted verbatim in the *Zhuangzi* text, transformed into a nominal phrase by the subordinating particle *zhi* 之: *zhi zhi fei zhi* 指之非指, “the not being a finger of a finger”. The rest of the sentence can be regarded as a methodical instruction of how not to misunderstand the *Gongsun Longzi* clause. It is an utterance on the meta-level concerning the clause G2. Obviously the author of the *Zhuangzi* text realizes that “a finger is not a finger” does not make sense to the ordinary reader. He understands, however, the important implications of the clause if read in the logical context laid out above. Therefore he makes a point of giving a double hint of what to watch out for in order to correctly understand it: First of all you must think about *zhi* 指, “finger”, taking on a special meaning. But that is not enough. For a full understanding of the clause you have to explore the logical implications of the predicate construction of *fei zhi* 非指, “is not a finger”. Incidentally, such is precisely the procedure employed above in elucidating the meaning of G2.<sup>23</sup>

23 Cf. page 36. Cf. also Graham 1978, 460.

Due to the close relation of the two clauses in the *Gongsun Longzi* statement G and the fact that the first one (G1) of the two clauses was confirmed, expanded and put to use in the *Zhuangzi* context in the sense analyzed here, it is justified to apply the interpretation of G2 given above also to the way it is utilized in Z2. The virtuality of classes expounded in G2 obviously fits into the argument put forth by the *Zhuangzi* author. To him it is so clear that he does not feel prompted to explain it. He simply wants to make sure it is not misunderstood by taking the clause literally.<sup>24</sup>

So, the meaning of proposition Z2 can be paraphrased as follows:

Explaining the clause “a finger is not a finger” with the help of what “finger” means here (namely “a class of things”) is not as good as explaining it with the help of what “is not a finger” means here (namely “is not an element of a class of things”).

In order not to leave anything to chance the *Zhuangzi* author even repeats sentence (Z2) in a modified version exchanging the general term *zhi* 指, “(any) class of things”, with the term for a particular class, i. e. *ma* 馬, “the class of horses”:

以指喻指之非指 不若 以非指喻指之非指也。 Z2

becomes

以馬喻馬之非馬 不若 以非馬喻馬之非馬也。<sup>25</sup> Z3

Explaining the meaning of “a horse is not a horse” with the help of what “horse” means here (namely the “class of horses”) is not as good as explaining it with the help of what “is not a horse” means here (namely “is not an element of the class of horses”).

In other words: *ma fei ma* 馬非馬, “a horse is not a horse”, means “the class of horses is not an element of the class of horses”, or, less formally: “The class of horses is not a horse.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed the class of horses like any other class is not even a thing but something virtual beyond the realm of things, as has been made clear by the *Gongsun Longzi* author. To emphasize the virtuality of classes of things, however, the *Zhuangzi* author goes one step further with the subsequent proposition:

24 Z2 alludes to the rest of the „Zhi wu lun” chapter in the *Gongsun Longzi*, which is devoted entirely to elucidating the meaning of *fei zhi* 非指, “is not a finger”.

25 *Zhuangzi* 4/2/32.

26 Some commentators and scholars take this sentence as criticizing if not ridiculing the famous *Gongsun Longzi* dictum *bai ma fei ma* 白馬非馬, “a white horse is not a horse”; e.g. cf. *Zhuangzi jinzhujinyi* 2.59. Guan Feng 關鋒 comes near to the present interpretation but stands the thing on its head by reading “a horse is not the class of horses”, cf. *Zhuangzi neipian yijie he pipan*, 134.

天地一指也，萬物一馬也。<sup>27</sup>

Z4

Heaven and earth are one (or: the same as a) finger, the ten thousand things are one (or: the same as the) horse(s).

Paraphrased in keeping with the foregoing interpretation:

Heaven and earth are nothing but a class of things, the ten thousand things are nothing but horses (as mutually equivalent elements in their class).

The author thereby radicalizes the notion of the virtuality of conceptualization and of the concomitant screen of classes as introduced by the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition G. *Tiandi* 天地, "heaven and earth", the outside world, is used here as an expression for the universal class or the universe of discourse. The myriad things have mutually in common that – simply regarded as things with no further differentiation – they belong to this class. That makes them of equal status in relation to the whole just as the horses are of equal status in relation to the class of horses by virtue of the specific properties they have in common. The emphasis the *Zhuangzi* author puts on this by formulating the statement above is called for by the fact that recognition of the equal status of things is the central theme of the whole „Qi wu lun” chapter.

Thus, again the similarities on the surface of phraseology prove not to be coincidental. Rather they are evidence of a profound link between the thinking of two authors writing in a logical context. The author of the *Zhuangzi* sentences Z1 and Z2 must have known the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition G. He must have been aware of its significance for his own reasoning in order to make use of it in the way analyzed here.

### The role of language

Concepts are identified by *ming* 名, "names". Names are words belonging to a language. Thus the classification of things is connected with language. The *Gongsun Longzi* is aware of this when it says that the virtuality of classes of things has to do with things each having a name:

天下无指者，生於物之各有名，不为指也。<sup>28</sup>

Z4

That there are no classes in the world is based on the fact that each thing having a name does not create classes.

While recognizing that things have names, nothing is said in the *Gongsun Longzi* about the origin of names. The *Zhuangzi* author, however, makes the relationship between things and names explicit:

道行之而成，物謂之而然。<sup>29</sup>

Z5

A way is made by walking on it, the things are so by naming them.

27 *Zhuangzi* 4/2/33. Cf. Graham 1978, 460.

28 *Gongsun Longzi* 3.21.

29 *Zhuangzi* 4/2/33.

Names, this statement says, are put on things by the human intervention of *wei* 謂, “naming”, thereby qualifying things. By calling a thing a horse, all – and nothing but – the *shi* 實, “specific properties”, of a horse are attributed to it making it *ran* 然, “so”, abstracting from the rest of individual peculiarities the thing might have. Thus, every member of the linguistic community will know what the thing is. Furthermore, as the concepts underlying the names for things are formed within the community speaking the same language, the classification is valid only among the members of this community. Other communities may classify things in a completely different way. Classification through language is based on an intersubjective understanding. It is a convention and therefore arbitrary except for the members of a language community who are bound to it.

All that is implicit in the above laconic statement Z5. Language, the text implies, is an arbitrary and virtual reconstruction of the world. Language produces a view on the world through a double screen of classes and their complements or counter-classes. While classification does not represent reality, it is not incompatible with reality since intrinsically it does not put different weights on classes. It just provides a kind of low resolution view of the world. It thereby serves a purpose of orientation and intersubjective communication as long as it is restricted to the outside world common to the perception of all.<sup>30</sup>

Problems arise, however, when weighting occurs as with *shi fei* 是非, “this/not this”, judgments grounded in the positive/negative attitudes of an individual person. That leads to a distorted view of the world by which the logical equality of things and the ultimate neutrality of being is obscured. With the aim to undo this obscurity the „Qi wu lun” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* was written.

## Conclusion

The last considerations form part of the entire argument of section 2 of the „Qi wu lun” chapter, which is the source of the propositions examined here for their relationship with the *Gongsun Longzi*. The purpose was to show that similarities in phraseology of both the *Gongsun Longzi* and the *Zhuangzi* are not only superficial but reveal deep relations in content of thought and can be seen as a key to understanding this specific section as a whole.

In conclusion I will once more call to mind the three sentences that have been the object of this study, this time in a nonliteral rendering based on the results arrived at:

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30 This function of language as it is seen by Zhuangzi has been emphasized by Jean Francois Billeter. Cf. Billeter 2006, 155.

物莫非指 而 指非指。	G
Every single thing is an element of a class of things forming the extension of a concept, but the extension itself is not an element of a class of things and therefore something outside the world of things.	
物無非彼物無非是。	Z1
Every single thing is indeed an element of a certain class of things pertaining to a concept but at the same time it is also an element of another class which is the complement of the extension of some further concept.	
以指喻指之非指不若以非指喻指之非指也。	Z2
In order to appreciate the significance of the clause “a finger is not a finger” as a statement that a class of things is not itself an element of a class of things, it is essential to understand not only the special use of “finger” in the sense of “class of things” but also – and more importantly – to recognize the logical particulars of the expression “is not a finger” as stating “is not an element of class pertaining to a concept”.	

Apart from showing the admirable terseness of the classical Chinese original this rendering demonstrates the intimate relationship between the sentences and also the philosophical thinking behind them.

At the outset the formal structure of the text in question was shown to be a three-part treatise: exposition of a problem followed by an analysis in two parts, each headed by one of the two sentences with traces of the *Gongsun Longzi* sentence G (fig. 9).

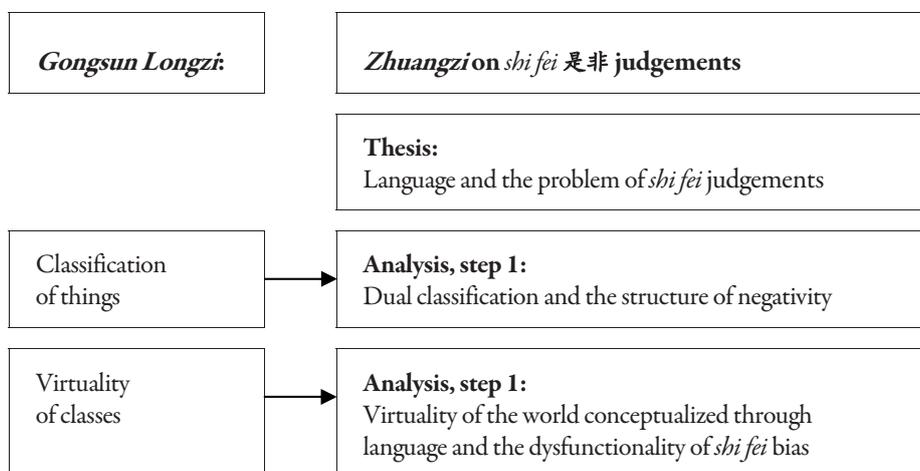


Fig. 9. The overview of the argument

How the findings fit into the context of the section of the „Qi wu lun” to which they belong can be roughly summarized<sup>31</sup> in the following way:

Part 1 = Thesis:

The *shi fei* 是非 judgments grounded in the positive/negative attitude of an individual and leading to undecidable controversy are without foundation in the world of things.

Part 2 = Analysis, step 1:

The condition for the possibility of the positive/negative dichotomy (negativity) lies in the dual – class and complement – ordering of things which is derived from the single, positive classification recognized by the *Gongsun Longzi* and inherent in the use of language.

Part 3 = Analysis, step 2:

The relevance of the positive/negative dichotomy inaugurated by classification is, however, nullified by the fact that classes, as again observed by the *Gongsun Longzi*, are merely a virtuality. The positive/negative weighting of things or classes is therefore without foundation in reality and so are the *shi fei* judgments based thereon.

The *Gongsun Longzi* text is seen to provide vital material on which the *Zhuangzi* author can build in order to deal with the problem posed in the „Qi wu lun” chapter. The key notions expressed in the *Gongsun Longzi*, which are the exhaustive classification of things and the virtuality of this classification, are both taken up by the *Zhuangzi* author and expanded to yield the duality of classes and complements as well as the virtuality of the conceptualized world as a whole. Thereby the *Gongsun Longzi* notions are adapted in the way shown above to support an argument put forth in the second section of the „Qi wu lun”. Consequently the traces of the *Gongsun Longzi* in the „Qi wu lun” chapter and their effect thereon can be ignored only at the cost of the coherence of its interpretation.

Seen from a more general vantage point the author of the *Gongsun Longzi* proposition is a logician, one of those stepchildren of Chinese intellectual tradition. But his ideas are brilliant and far ahead of his time and age. The author of the *Zhuangzi* text on the other hand recognizes and appreciates their potential not only in the domain of logic but in a much wider range of philosophical problems one of which he is studying in the „Qi wu lun” chapter. Using and developing the logician's ideas, the *Zhuangzi* author succeeds in establishing not only the logical foundation, but also the ontological status and the psychological cause of the philosophical problem he is engaged in. And in doing so he makes no use of what Bertrand Russell once called “comforting fairytales”. At the core of the „Qi wu lun” he organizes a well-structured, coherent, and precise train of thought at the end of which he simply states: “This is meant by use clarity” or, as we would say: *quod erat demonstrandum*.

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31 A full interpretation of section 2 of the „Qi wu lun” is beyond the scope of the present study.

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