

Is Freedom in Necessity or in Happiness? Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's Controversial Readings of Zhuangzi's »Free Rambling«

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The opening of *Zhuangzi* 莊子¹ is subject of a long and ongoing controversy in both Chinese and Western interpretive tradition.² The most debated issue in this discussion is the nature of relationship between big things, as represented by a huge Peng bird, and small things, as embodied by a cicada and dove. This paper will work with two traditional Chinese commentaries on *Zhuangzi* that represent the earliest articulations of two opposing perspectives on this relationship, charting the battlefield for later interpreters.³ Since this study will confine itself solely to the commentaries on the first

- 1 As tradition has it, the author of *Zhuangzi* is the philosopher Zhuangzi who lived in the fourth century B.C. Today, scholars generally agree that the received and the only extant version of the text in the edition of Guo Xiang consists of several textual layers written in different times by different authors. For a detailed overview and discussion of the history of the text, see David Chai, *Early Zhuangzi Commentaries* (München: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008). Nonetheless, the authorship of the first chapter is ascribed to Zhuangzi himself.
- 2 The most recent discussion of the controversy, as well as a critique of Guo Xiang's reading was presented by Lian Xinda, »Zhuangzi the Poet: Re-Reading the Peng Bird Image«, *Dao* 8 (2009), 233–254. The present study is much indebted to Lian Xinda's article and endorses a great deal of his conclusions. However, my article differs from Lian Xinda's in its objectives. Other relevant recent works are Bryan van Norden's »Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the Zhuangzi«, *Philosophy East & West* 46 (1996), 247–268; Wu Yi 吳怡, *Xiaoyao de Zhuangzi* 逍遙的莊子 [The Free Zhuangzi] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006); Zhang Mosheng 張默生, *Zhuangzi xinshi* 莊子新釋 [A New Interpretation of the Zhuangzi] (Ji'nan: Qi-Lu shushe, 1993).
- 3 So far, not much has been done in the field of systematic study of traditional commentaries as works on their own right, and the interpretations of *Zhuangzi* are no exception. However, the situation has gradually been changing for better over the last two decades, and today we do have a modest number of studies devoted to individual commentaries or overviews of the entire interpretive tradition. The most important overview is still an appendix in Guan Feng's 關鋒, *Zhuangzi neipian shijie he pipan* 莊子

half of the first chapter, »Free Rambling« (*Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊), it does not have the ambition to comment on the faithfulness of the commentaries to the text of *Zhuangzi* in its entirety. Also, it is not my goal to advance my own interpretation of *Zhuangzi* that would provide a criterion for this critique. Instead, I will treat the commentaries rather as primary texts, trying to show that a reflection on some of their implicit commitments and assumptions can substantially contribute to our understanding of *Zhuangzi*. Specifically, through a reconstruction of arguments of both commentators in their interpretation of this limited portion of the text as well as a brief introduction to their entire commentarial projects, I seek to address two questions; one pertains to a literary aspect and the other to a philosophical aspect of *Zhuangzi*. First, what hermeneutical assumptions about *Zhuangzi* inform commentators' interpretive stance to the text? What does the conflict between these perspectives reveal about the literary quality of *Zhuangzi* itself? Second, what conceptions of 'freedom' (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) undergird these interpretations? What philosophical assumptions are behind these conceptions and what relevant implications do they have? Can this controversy give us any hint about Zhuangzi's notion of freedom?

1 Guo Xiang's Symmetrical Reading

Guo Xiang's 郭象 (d312 CE) Commentary on Zhuangzi (*Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注) includes the only extant edition of the original text as well as its first coherent philosophical interpretation, which is at the same time the only source for the reconstruction of Guo's philosophy. To be sure, *Zhuangzi* became the subject of numerous commentaries⁴ as early as during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), but these works, extant only in fragments, were limited mostly to ad hoc philological glosses and did not have the ambition to read *Zhuangzi* through the lens of a unified and all-embracing philosophical vision. After the fall of the Han, the texts of classical Daoism were reinterpreted from the perspective of Dark Learning (*xuanxue* 玄學), which unlike the correlative thought of the Han dynasty tried to find the ultimate principle of reality that is hidden beyond the realm of the phenomenal.⁵ Unlike the

內篇釋解和批判 [Interpretation and Critique of Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961). Other works are Christoph Harbsmeier, *An Annotated Anthology of Comments on Zhuangzi, (Han to Qing)*, vol. 1: »Xiaoyaoyou«, vol. 2: »Qiwulun« (Oslo: Department of East European and Oriental Studies, 1991–92); Annette Specht, *Der Zhuangzi-Kommentar des Zhu Dezhi (fl. 16. Jh.) : Zur Rezeption des Zhuangzi in der Ming-Zeit* [The Zhuangzi Commentary by Zhu Dezhi] (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 1998); Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009).

4 For a detailed discussion of the earliest commentaries on *Zhuangzi* see Chai, *Early Zhuangzi Commentaries*.

5 The transformation of patterns of thought after the fall of Han is nicely reconstructed in an article by

most famous proponent of Dark Learning, Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), who argued for ‘non-being’ (*wu* 無) as a transcendent source of all existent things, Guo Xiang insisted that there was no generative principle that would transcend the immediacy of individual things that are all ‘self-so’ (*ziran* 自然):

Once non-being has become non-being, it cannot produce being. When being has not yet begun, it cannot produce anything either. Who is it then that produces the beings in existence? They simply produce themselves spontaneously. Simply, it is a case of their producing themselves, not of our producing them. Since we cannot produce other things, and other things cannot produce us either, then we have become so of ourselves. When a thing is so of itself, then we say of it that it is naturally so [...] Therefore, everything produces itself and there is nothing by which it is created. This is the way of Heaven.⁶

The main objective of Guo Xiang’s theory, who became himself a high official at the court of Western Jin, is to reconcile the spontaneity proposed by Daoist classics with moral norms advocated by the Confucianist school, or, more precisely, to integrate naturalism and libertarianism into the framework of a systemized interpretation of the world where every individual thing has its own lot (*fen* 分) determined by a social and political hierarchy. This subsumption is mirrored in Guo Xiang’s thesis, formulated in his Preface to *Zhuangzi* («*Zhuangzi xu*» 莊子序), about the superiority of Confucius, who is considered a true sage over Zhuangzi, who is said to »have understood the root [of all things]« (*zhi ben* 知本) but whose words »were of no use« (*wu yong* 無用), and he was merely »the best of the hundred philosophers« (*bajia zhi guan* 百家之冠).⁷ Guo Xiang employs a number of elaborate concepts to endorse his major thesis,⁸ but the

Tu Wei-ming, »Profound Learning, Personal Knowledge, and Poetic Vision«, in *The Vitality of Lyric Voice*, ed. by Lin Shuen-fu and Stephen Owen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

6 The English version of Guo Xiang’s commentary gives a complete translation of his commentary to the »Free Rambling« (Birthe Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang’s Commentary to *Zhuangzi*: A Translation and Grammatical Analysis«, *Acta Orientalia* 36 [1974], 311–415). This translation, while on the whole very reliable, is occasionally modified. The original text of the commentary is given according to *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 [Collected Annotations to Zhuangzi] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961); hereafter ZZJS. 無既無矣，則不能生有；有之未生，又不能為生。然則生者誰哉？塊然而自生耳。自生耳，非我生也。我既不能生物，物亦不能生我，則我自然矣。自己而然，則謂之天然。... 故物各自生而無所出焉，此天道也。(ZZJS, 50).

7 ZZJS, iii.

8 It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a more extensive presentation of Guo Xiang’s philosophy. A reliable introduction to Guo Xiang’s philosophical project is offered in the monograph by Brook Ziporyn, *Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany: SUNY, 2003). For an excellent and condensed outline of Guo Xiang’s philosophy, see Paul Demiéville, »Philosophy and Religion from Han to Sui«, in *Cambridge History of China*, ed. by John K. Fairbank & al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 834–837. A very informative study of Guo Xiang, with special reference to the genre of traditional commentary, is provided by Dušan Vávra, »Guo Xiangüv

main drift of his theory is to assert that the way things are by themselves, without struggling for it and without realizing it, is how they ideally should be. Unawareness and the absence of deliberate trying on the part of individual things ensure that they conform to their allotted duties and thus contribute to the unhindered operation of the whole. That every single thing in the world works smoothly in accordance with its own nature and limits is guaranteed by the sage, who is thus identified with the perfect ruler.

A consequence of this general outlook is that all things, as long as they are 'self-so', are of equal value since all are equally limited and all are equally perfect. A succinct articulation of this idea opens Guo Xiang's commentary on *Zhuangzi* and becomes a guideline of his interpretation of the »Free Rambling«:

Although the small and the big are different, yet if they are released where they fulfill their inclinations, then all things follow their nature, their tasks correspond to their ability, each is suited to his lot in life, and in their freedom they are the same. How can there be any concept of superiority and inferiority between them?⁹

This important passage introduces the term *xiaoyao*, for which I reserve the equivalent 'freedom' throughout this paper. The word appears at the end of the »Free Rambling«¹⁰ but is not as frequent in *Zhuangzi* as one might expect from the fact that Guo Xiang put it in the title of the first chapter¹¹ and coined it as an important technical term.¹² Although various things do differ in their natures and inclinations, their freedom is the same as long as these are in harmony with the surrounding environment that neatly satisfies them. This is what I call symmetrical reading: from the perspective of freedom, big and small are on the same footing and their juxtaposition is devised to illustrate their underlying equality.

The symmetrical reading is readily applied to the opening image of the big Peng bird. The text of *Zhuangzi* in the rendering by Burton Watson runs as follows:

In the Northern Darkness there is a fish and his name is Kun. The Kun is so huge I don't know how many thousand *li* he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is Peng. The back of the Peng measures I don't know how many thousand *li* across and

komentář k Vnitřním kapitolám díla Zhuangzi« [Guo Xiang's Commentary to Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters] (Charles University in Prague, unpublished M.A. thesis, 2007).

- 9 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 313. 夫小大雖殊，而放於自得之場，則物任其性，事稱其能，各當其分，逍遙一也，豈容勝負於其間哉！(ZZJS, 1).
- 10 »Why don't you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village, or the field of Broad-and-Boundless, relax and do nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it?« (Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 30) »何不樹之於無何有之鄉，廣莫之野，徬徨乎無為其側，逍遙乎寢臥其下«(ZZJS, 40).
- 11 It is Guo Xiang who is credited with the names of the chapters as we have them today.
- 12 The original meaning is 'to walk in a circle'. Implying aimlessness, Zhuangzi uses this term in the meaning of 'relaxed self-possession' (*Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, 10: 893, s.v. »anxian zizai« 安閑自在).

when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move, this bird sets off for the Southern Darkness, which is the Lake of Heaven.¹³

In his gloss to this passage, Guo Xiang develops the idea of harmonious relation of individual nature with its surrounding environment. The big Peng bird is able to ascend only because its magnificent proportions are in accord with the vastness of the sea and the sky: »Only the waters of the dark seas are able to move its body, only currents of air ninety thousand *li* deep are able to support its wings. How could the reason for this be that it loves the extraordinary!«¹⁴ In the next sentence, Guo makes explicit the mutual connection between the environment and the individual thing: »It is simply due to the fact that great things necessarily produce themselves in great places, and that in great places such great things also necessarily produce themselves.«¹⁵ This necessary correspondence is a manifestation of the underlying principle that determines the spontaneous satisfaction of all things, working independently of a conscious human effort: »The principle is certainly so intrinsic, we need not worry that it should fail; how could we then establish any conscious purpose in these matters!«¹⁶

In the comment on the next passage from *Zhuangzi*, which expands on the Peng bird image, Guo tries to drive his point home and argues that the Peng bird, whose greatness seems to transcend all limits, is in fact itself limited exactly by this very greatness just as the small birds from the next passage are limited by their smallness: »With wings like that, how could it rise in no time at all or alight from a few yards! All this is a matter of necessity, and not the matter of happiness.«¹⁷ For the same reason why small cannot be big, big cannot be small. They are equal because just like the flight of the cicada the flight of the Peng bird is an instance of physical necessity. It is not an expression of its conscious effort but rather of its determination due to its close relation to its environment. This idea is reaffirmed a few lines later in the commentary:

The reason why only now he is about to head south is not that it loves the high and longs for the distant. The reason is simply that if the winds were not piled up (under it), it would be hindered and not reach its destination. This is the freedom of the Great Peng.¹⁸

13 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 29.

14 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 316. 非冥海不足以運其身，非九萬里不足以負其翼。此豈好奇哉？(ZZJS, 4).

15 直以大物必自生於大處，大處亦必自生此大物。(Ibid.).

16 理固自然，不患其失，又何厝心於其間哉！(Ibid.).

17 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 318. 既有斯翼，豈得決然而起，數仞而下哉！此皆不得不然，非樂然也。(ZZJS, 4-5).

18 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 325. 夫所以乃今將圖南者，非其好高而慕遠也，風不積則天閼不通故耳。此大鵬之逍遙也。(ZZJS, 8).

The reason why Peng hovers in the wind for some time before it finally moves towards Heaven is not a decision that would follow from his subjective preference but an objective state of affairs that follows from natural circumstances.

This line of reasoning is substantially endorsed by the next passage from *Zhuangzi*, discussing the dependency of things on external conditions:

If water is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up a big boat. Pour a cup of water into a hollow in the floor and bits of trash will sail on it like boats. But set the cup there and it will stick fast, for the water is too shallow and the boat too large. If wind is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up great wings. Therefore when the Peng raises ninety thousand *li*, he must have the wind under him like that. Only then can he mount on the back of the wind, shoulder the blue sky and nothing can hinder or block him. Only then can he set his eyes to the south.¹⁹

Especially the emphatic phrase »only then« (*er hou nai jin* 而後乃今) strongly suggests Peng's dependence on outer circumstances. Therefore, Guo Xiang can draw the following conclusion: »When things of small substance do not necessarily depend on something large, then things of large substance necessarily do not accept something small in their employment. Therefore, the heavenly pattern has precise distinctions, things have their fixed limits.«²⁰ As Lian Xinda observes,²¹ the subtle rhetorical difference between *budai* 不待 ('does not necessarily') and *bude* 不得 ('necessarily does not') reveals the effort to strengthen the symmetrical reading by smuggling in an asymmetry. Guo Xiang seeks to emphasize the limits of Peng's freedom on one hand, and uplift the modest freedom of the small things on the other hand. This becomes more explicit in his comments on the small things passage that follows in *Zhuangzi*:

The cicada and the little dove laugh at this, saying, "When we make an effort and fly up, we can get as far as the elm or the sapanwood tree, but sometimes we don't make it and just fall down on the ground. Now how is anyone rising up ninety thousand *li* and flying all the way to the far south!"²²

Guo founds his reading of this passage on the satisfaction of the small with their lot: they declare, later in the text, that their flying among the trees »is the best kind of flying anyway«. ²³ Guo Xiang glosses: »When everyone has sufficient in his own nature, then even the Great Peng has no reason to consider itself more valuable than the small bird, and the small bird has no longing for the Lake of Heaven, but its ambition is more than satisfied.«²⁴

19 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 30.

20 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 322. 夫質小者所資不待大，則質大者所用不得小矣。故理有至分，物有定極。(ZZJS, 9).

21 Lian Xinda, »Zhuangzi the Poet«, 237.

22 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 30.

23 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 25. 此亦飛之至也。(ZZJS, 6).

24 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 326. 苟足於其性，則雖大鵬無以自貴於小鳥，小鳥無羨於天池，而榮願有餘矣。(ZZJS, 9).

This summary prepares ground for the most controversial point of Guo Xiang's interpretation, which comes with his gloss on the next passage:

If you go off to the green woods nearby, you can take along food for three meals and come back with your stomach as full as ever. If you are going a hundred *li* you must grind your grain the night before; and if you are going a thousand *li*, you must start getting the provisions together three months in advance. What do these two creatures understand?²⁵

Guo Xiang argues that the antecedent of the phrase »these two creatures« (*zhi er chong* 之二蟲) is not the cicada and dove, as a straightforward reading would have it, but big (kun and peng) and small (cicada and dove) things. Neither of them prepare intentionally for their journey since they simply respond to their natural inclinations and to the conditions of their environment. Their freedom lies, equally for the big and for the small, in the spontaneity and unawareness of their actions:

»The two creatures« refers to the Peng and the cicada. He juxtaposes the large [bird] with the small [insect] in order to equalize different inclinations. But how could the reason for their different ways of flying be that they knowingly differ? They both, not knowing why they are so, simply are so intrinsically. Simply to be so intrinsically means not to take action. This is the leading idea of freedom.²⁶

As agreed by many of the later commentators, this locus is one of the weakest points of Guo Xiang's interpretation.²⁷ Not only does it seem forced to claim that Zhuangzi refers to Peng here, one may also counter that according to the text Peng also needs his supplies for the long flight, namely the »breath of six months« (*liu yue xi* 六月息).²⁸ Moreover, what is discussed in this passage of *Zhuangzi* is that different kinds of journey require different kinds of preparation and not that these actions are intentional.

However, Guo Xiang's interpretation makes a neat fit with the climax of the *Xiaoyayou*, which results in a definition of sagehood²⁹. The passage presents a hierarchy of different kinds of understandings and virtues. At the bottom, quite at the level of the small things, are petty officials bound with social obligations. A level higher is Song Rongzi 宋榮子, indifferent to the praise or blame of the masses. Further above him is Liezi 列子, who, riding on the wind, is almost free from any attachments but still not entirely. Finally, on the top of the hierarchy, we find the one who »rambles without limits« (*you wuqiong* 遊無窮) and »does not depend on anything« (*wudai* 無待). Guo Xiang distinguishes between freedom in the sense of *xiaoyao* from

25 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 30.

26 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 328. 二蟲，謂鵬蝸也。對大於小，所以均異趣也。夫趣之所以異，豈知異而異哉？皆不知所以然而自然耳。自然耳，不為也。此逍遙之大意。(ZZJS, 10).

27 This critique is most clearly expressed in a gloss by Yu Yue 俞樾 (ZZJS, 11) and became widely accepted by a number of later interpreters.

28 ZZJS, 4.

29 The passage runs from ZZJS 16 to 17.

freedom in the sense of *wudai*: »For, in being free and happy, if one is attached to certain spheres, then though one is released and free to ramble, there will still be occasions when one suffers exhaustion. One is not yet capable of independence.«³⁰ The distinction between *xiaoyao* and *wudai* converge with the difference between things and the sage. The sage, ruling over things, is essentially different from them: »the one who unifies small and big is the one who is neither small nor big.«³¹ In his independence, he ensures that all things are dependent in a way that is in accordance with their nature. The distance between the sage and things is an argument for symmetrical reading. In comparison with the sage, the Peng bird is no freer than the cicada since its freedom equally depends on external conditions.

2 Lin Xiyi's Asymmetrical Reading

Guo Xiang's commentary on the »Free Rambling« introduces the main tenets of his interpretation of *Zhuangzi*, which was the authoritative reading of *Zhuangzi* until the Song dynasty (960–1279) and is still influential today. The first to reject Guo Xiang's theory was the Buddhist master Zhi Daolin 支道林 (314–366).³² Although his Discussion on the Xiaoyao (*Xiaoyao lun* 逍遙論) is extant only in fragments, we are familiar today with the basic ideas of his theory. Zhi Daolin was well aware of the dangerous implications of Guo's identification of spontaneity with morality, a move that might justify a great deal of violence and moral indifference:

How so would you have us believe that all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds so long as Peng is the Peng and the cicada and cicada, the saint a saint and the wicked the wicked, because such is their lot? If this were so, then the tyrant Chieh and the bandit Chih would have been paragons of virtue because it was in their nature to do wrong. A fig for that social order bred by Confucianism! Let us escape into the infinite, like the Peng in its prodigious flight, like the Buddhist who frees himself from the world.³³

For Buddhist ethics, centered on the assumption of the possibility and desirability of human improvement, Guo Xiang's determinism was hardly acceptable. Therefore, in response to Guo's reading of *Zhuangzi*, Zhi advances a radically different course of interpretation marked by a shift from things to mind: Zhi states that »*xiaoyao* illuminates the mind of a perfect person« (夫逍遙者，明至人之心).³⁴ The big and the small are read as allegorical expressions of a mind that is not really free (*xiaoyao*):

30 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 329. 若夫逍遙而繫於有方，則雖放之使遊而有所窮矣，未能無待。(ZZJS, 11).

31 統小大者，無小無大者也。(Ibid.).

32 The best discussion of Zhi Daolin's life and work, including his interpretation of *Zhuangzi*, is provided by Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 116–137.

33 Quoted from Demiéville, 834. See also Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 129.

34 ZZJS, 1.

»Peng's way of life is vast, therefore he fails to fit with what is outside of his body; the quail ridicules what is far on the basis of what is near, therefore its mind is proud and competitive.« (鵬以營生之路曠，故失適於體外；鷦以在近而笑遠，有矜伐於心內)³⁵. Although Zhi Daolin's reading departs significantly from Guo Xiang in the underlying focus on mind, as for the relation of big and small, Zhi's interpretation is also symmetrical: While for Guo, both big and small are equally free, for Zhi they are equally not free since their ways of life are in some way defective.

The alternative course of Zhi Daolin's exegesis did not really threaten the hegemony of Guo Xiang's interpretation, which still determined the discourse of philosophical interpretations of *Zhuangzi*. This changed only in the thriving intellectual milieu of the Song dynasty, when new perspectives on the reading of classical texts emerged. In the case of *Zhuangzi*, the commentators were generally bent on paying more attention to the appreciation of the rhetorical and literary qualities of the text and less to the rigor of philosophical discourse. The 'extraordinariness' (*qi* 奇), refused explicitly by Guo Xiang in connection with Peng, became the most valued quality about *Zhuangzi*. Confucian and Buddhist concepts were freely read into the text to reinforce its authority and express the commentators' original point of view. The author of the most important commentary of this period, Yanzhai's Annotation and Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*,³⁶ which influenced all later Song and Ming interpretations of *Zhuangzi*, was a Neo-Confucian scholar Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (1193-1270?). As we learn from Lin Jingde's 林經德 preface to Lin's commentary, his commentarial project is explicitly based on an opposition against Guo Xiang:

I wanted to wash away the filth of Xiang-Guo [commentary³⁷] from the Old Immortal from Nanhua, but since I had to turn around to make my living, I did not have time to shut my door and write the book. Since the time I have been worried because of my dismissal, [by writing] I expelled anxiety and rejoiced in my old age; now the book is fortunately completed.³⁸

There is a close link between Lin's repudiation of Guo and his proclaimed motivation to write his own commentary on *Zhuangzi*. Unlike Guo Xiang, who wrote his commentary as a coherent and ambitious philosophical project with serious political implications, Lin Xiyi declares that for him the commentary is rather a private

35 Ibid.

36 All references are according to a modern typeset edition: Lin Xiyi 林希逸, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai kouyi jiaozhu* 莊子麴齋口義校注 [Yanzhai's Annotation and Commentary on the *Zhuangzi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997).

37 *Xiang-Guo* is a common way to refer to Guo Xiang's commentary, which was probably written as a revision of a commentary by Xiang Xiu 向秀 (?227–?272). The extent of Guo Xiang's original contribution to Xiang Xiu's work is a subject of discussion. Traditionally, Guo Xiang is mostly credited only with minor editorial changes. More recent studies tend to rehabilitate Guo Xiang's merit.

38 余嘗欲為南華老仙洗去向郭之陋，而逐食轉移，未有閉戶著書之日，憂患廢退以來，隨以此紓憂娛老，今書幸成矣。(Lin Xiyi, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai kouyi jiaozhu*, 4).

enterprise, a favor to his friend Zhuangzi that he was happy to provide after he retired from his official position. This personal and informal stance is expressed by a relaxed literary style marked by vivid colloquial language and terminological looseness as well as liberal ideological assumptions. On one hand, Lin has no coherent philosophy that he would like to attest and develop through the reading of *Zhuangzi*. On the other hand, he feels free to read *Zhuangzi* from the position of his Neo-Confucian worldview, strongly influenced by Buddhism. If his commentary should be a personal appreciation of the text, it is only natural to appreciate it from the perspective of his own worldview. And since Lin represents the Song intellectual openness that was prone to synthesize different philosophical schools, his reading of *Zhuangzi* is a perfect example of a syncretizing interpretation.

This shows clearly in the introductory commentary on the »Free Rambling«. From Lin's interpretation of 'rambling' (*you* 遊), the debt to Zhi Daolin's Buddhist interpretation is obvious: »'Rambling' is the heavenly rambling in one's mind.« (*you zhe, xin you tian you ye* 遊者，心有天遊也).³⁹ Freedom is glossed as 'rambling as one wants' (*yonyou zizai* 優游自在) and further explained as 'happiness' (*le* 樂). This interpretation is supported by references to Confucian classics and Laozi: »When disciples in *Analects* describe their master, they [use] only one word: "happiness". [...] This is what is called 'free rambling', equal to what *The Book of Songs* and the *Analects* call 'happiness'«. ⁴⁰ This equation is further developed in the following gloss on the Peng bird passage:

This paragraph only describes the vast happiness in one's chest and construes this metaphor, roughly saying that what people see is small, and therefore there are unending and numerous quarrels of the vulgar world. If they knew that outside of the heaven and the earth there is such a world, they would consider themselves [so small] that even [a metaphor of] a grain in the Great Granary would not suffice to illustrate it. ⁴¹

The interpretation of freedom as internal happiness, contingent on the overcoming of limited perspectives, sharply opposes Guo Xiang's view. Peng's flight is not just an instance of physical necessity and dependency on external circumstances but the image of spiritual ascent that is marked through an elevated state of mind. Lin does not comment on whether the Peng bird's journey necessarily follows from the circumstances of its environment but insists that it does have a passion for what is high and what is distant. The Peng bird Peng is happy because it transcends the vulgar world and pertains into another dimension that is far beyond the notion of the ordinary.

39 Lin Xiyi, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai konyi jiaozhu*, 1.

40 論語之門人形容夫子只一樂字 [...] 此之所謂逍遙遊既詩與論語所謂樂也。 (Ibid.).

41 此段只是形容胸中廣大之樂，卻設此譬喻其意蓋謂人之所見者小，故有世俗紛紛之爭。若知天地之外有如許世界，自視其身雖太倉一粒不足以喻之。 (Lin Xiyi, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai konyi jiaozhu*, 3).

This perspective determines Lin's view on the relation between the big and the small, straightforwardly formulated in his gloss on the small things passage: »This means that the scope of the people with shallow views is small and narrow, they do not realize how great the world is.«⁴² While the cicada and the dove are unable to lift over their shabby worlds and therefore cannot achieve true freedom, Peng is a metaphor of a sage that is free from any attachments and happily rambles without limits. The juxtaposition does not imply the relativist symmetry of the big and the small but the superiority of the big perspective over the inferiority of the small and limited outlook.

How does this interpretation fare if compared to Guo Xiang? It does seem to make a better fit with Zhuangzi's tendency to focus more on the difference of the big and the small rather than on their equality: the whole discussion of their relation concludes unequivocally with a summative »such is the difference between big and little« (*ci xiao da zhi bian ye* 此小大之辨也).⁴³ Moreover, this difference appears to be a main structural motif of the whole chapter: the long-lived trees contrast with short-lived mushrooms, Hui Shi's narrow-minded handling of the big gourd opposes Zhuangzi's big understanding; a big useless tree that would never be cut down contrasts with the small animals that die in traps. All these cases seem to illustrate the privileged perspective of the big over the small rather than the symmetry of the two perspectives. This is also strongly implied by Zhuangzi's statement that »little understanding cannot come up to great understanding« (*xiao zhi bu ji da zhi* 小知不及大知).⁴⁴

As for the passage exploring Peng's dependency on the wind, which fuels Guo Xiang's interpretation, Lin does not seem to have any difficulty in acknowledging this dependency. Instead of pointing to Peng's limitations, he focuses more on how the big things that Peng depends on underline, rather than limit, his bigness: »The wind of ninety thousand *li* can then be called a thick wind, and only such a thick wind is able to carry the Peng's wings. "Only then can he mount on the back of the wind" says that which flies high. "Nothing can hinder or block him" means that he has no obstacles.«⁴⁵ Unlike Guo Xiang, who reads the statement about Peng's unhindered movement as an implicit reference to the danger of hindrances that Peng would experience were he not supported by the wind, Lin Xinyi understands it simply as an argument for Peng's freedom from any attachments. This freedom distinguishes him from the cicada and the dove that are hindered by their meager abilities, which can even fail to bring them to the nearest tree.

42 此意謂淺見之人局量狹小，不知世界之大。(Lin Xinyi, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai konyi jiaozhu*, 4).

43 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 25.

44 Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 24.

45 九萬里之風乃可謂之厚風，如此厚風，方能負戴鵬翼。背負青天，言飛之高。莫之夭閼，無障礙也。(Lin Xinyi, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai konyi jiaozhu*, 3).

On the other hand, Lin Xiyi has difficulties in establishing a clear link between the big-small passage and the dependence-independence passage. If the sage does not depend on anything, Peng seems to be somewhere on the level of Liezi, since he rides on the wind and is not bound by the world but cannot do without the support of the wind. If Peng illustrates the perfect mind, why is it explicitly distinguished from the highest spiritual ideal of independence?

From the brief view on the commentaries on the beginning of the »Free Rambling«, it seems that Lin's interpretation does less violence to the text if one reads it without the need of establishing an elaborate philosophical thesis but pays less attention to the coherence of philosophical reasoning that the text might display. This divergence is not accidental. In the comparison of Guo's and Lin's reading, we can see two different interpretational strategies with different patterns of their strong and weak points. Guo Xiang tries to provide a discursively consistent reading, even at the price of bending the text where it resists his line of reasoning. Lin Xiyi, on the other hand, does not have to produce forced interpretations, but this is mainly because he has no ambition to defend his definite philosophical theses that would integrate different passages of the text. In the following part of the paper, I will pay attention to some broader assumptions about the nature of *Zhuangzi* that underlie the both commentarial projects and the way these assumptions might inform our present understanding of this text.

3 *A Discursive and Poetic Reading of Zhuangzi*

The most important difference between Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's interpretational assumptions is in their understanding of the main objective of *Zhuangzi* and the means its author employs to attain it. Guo believes that *Zhuangzi*'s aim is to describe reality through a consistent articulation of a single central philosophical idea that underlies it. Therefore, he declares that for him the question of the real existence of things in the employed literary images is not fundamental. What is important is how the images illustrate *Zhuangzi*'s philosophical ideas and how they contribute to the coherence of his philosophical discourse. Once the readers grasp the meaning of the main idea, they can—even should—afford to ignore what is instrumental to its expression:

The real existence of the peng and the kun is a question of which I have made no detailed study [...]. Broad-minded readers should seek the overall and true meaning of this idea, ignoring the imagery in which it lodges. There is no point in meticulously providing fresh explanations for everything; in so far as it does not impair the main argument, one may pass over these things lightly.⁴⁶

46 Arendrup, »The First Chapter of Guo Xiang's Commentary...«, 314. 鵬鯤之實，吾所未詳也。...。達觀之士，宜要其會歸而遺其所寄，不足事事曲與生說。自不害其弘旨，皆可略之耳。
(ZZJS, 3).

Lin Xiyi, in contrast, has no doubts that the Peng bird and *kun* are fictive inventions and should not be explained as real phenomena. The assumption that *Zhuangzi* construes a fictive world is fundamental for Lin's interpretation. In the preface to his commentary, he states that unlike the Ruist scriptures, *Zhuangzi*'s speech often 'exaggerates' (*guodang* 過當) in order to 'stimulate' (*gumu* 鼓舞) his readers and bring them to sudden insights, similarly to the methods of Chan Buddhist dialogues.⁴⁷ When *Zhuangzi* expands on the Peng image in the form of a quotation from a book called *Qi Xie* 齊諧, Lin Xinyi glosses:

Qi Xie is the name of a book. What this book records are all strange and abnormal events, like today's book *Shanhai jing*. But this book surely not necessarily exists. *Zhuangzi* creates this saying and quotes this book it in order to prove that he is right. This is again his playful moment.⁴⁸

The awareness of creative literary force behind *Zhuangzi* ties in with the attention Lin Xiyi constantly pays to the literary and rhetorical aspects of the text. As formulated in the preface to the commentary, his proclaimed familiarity with the 'blood and veins of the text' (*wenzì xue mai* 文字血脈), which is deemed a major prerequisite for an accurate understanding of the text, privileges his reading over those of earlier commentators. Lin is not committed to the view that *Zhuangzi* is a systematical treatise advocating a certain philosophical doctrine in a coherent manner. Rather, he is fascinated by its existential spirit, where what the text says cannot be disconnected from how it is said: hence his implicit conviction that the images themselves are more than instrumental illustrations of a philosophical discourse. They do not illustrate but rather express. The message of the text is not beyond these images but becomes actualized in the experience that the reader has when overwhelmed by their expressive force. In this assumption the influence of Chan Buddhist *gong'an* 公案, which sought to awaken the adepts by peculiar images that break the patterns of discursive thought, can be detected. If one does not pay sufficient attention to the imagery itself but clings overly to an alleged philosophical doctrine, one is not sensitive enough to the therapeutic effect of the text and thus fails to read it according to the intention of its author, who did not want to establish an argument but to liberate the mind.

One of the reasons for the immense influence that both commentaries exerted on later interpreters might be a match between the views they attributed to *Zhuangzi* and the literary form they used to formulate these views. Once Lin Xiyi perceives *Zhuangzi* as a poetic fiction construed to stimulate and inspire the readers, his commentary on it does not need to be discursively coherent. According to his assumptions, the accurate interpretation of this text will naturally try not to integrate all parts of the text within one philosophical framework but rather reveal how the poetic force of the text in every particular passage is achieved. In contrast, since Guo

47 Lin Xinyi, *Zhuangzi Yanzhai konyi jiaozhu*, i.

48 齊諧書名也。其所志述皆怪異非常之事，如今山海經之書。然此書亦未必有。莊子既撰此說又引此書以自證。此又是其戲劇處。(ibid).

Xiang assumes that *Zhuangzi* gives an overall and principal interpretation of the world, his commentary, marked by the doctrinal authoritative diction, has the form of a philosophical discourse about the underlying principle of reality that determines every single event in the world. We may conclude that the discursive and poetic readings of *Zhuangzi* represent two basic methodological approaches to the text, and Guo Xiang with Lin Xiyi are their main proponents in the exegetical tradition of *Zhuangzi*.⁴⁹

4 Two Perspectives on Freedom

The controversy between Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's interpretation of the »Free Rambling« is also a significant contribution to philosophical discussions on freedom. Although this article cannot fully unfold the implications that this debate might have for Western philosophical discourse, I will try to develop the views of Guo Xiang and Lin Xiyi into clearly articulated positions that represent two possible takes on the issue of freedom. As mentioned earlier, Guo Xiang distinguishes between the freedom of things (*xiaoyao*) and the freedom/independence of a sage (*wudai*). In the following, I will confine myself to the freedom (of things). There are two reasons for this restriction: First, a discussion of *wudai* would require an introduction into Guo Xiang's complicated and often fairly opaque conception of sagehood. Second, there is no urgent need to address *wudai* in order to establish the comparison in the framework of *xiaoyao*.

For Guo Xiang, freedom is a state of satisfaction understood as the smooth 'fulfilling of one's inclinations' (*zide* 自得). This satisfaction, however, is not a result of a conscious effort and does not give rise to any consciously experienced pleasure. Since it is rather an activity of the 'employing of one's nature' (*renxing* 任性), it is a spontaneous process and any deliberate trying as well as any reflection of one's activity is a sign or a cause of a mismatch between one's inclinations and one's place in the world. In his commentary to the sixth chapter,⁵⁰ Guo Xiang uses a metaphor of the body to illustrate the immanent harmony of the world. Every organ of the body spontaneously fulfills its function without realizing it; any awareness of this organ is a signal of its malfunction. The synchronization of the organs is guaranteed exactly when each of them only minds their own business and 'merges with its limits' (*mingji* 冥極). A lack of conformity with these limits always necessarily implies an interference with other organs. Similarly, Peng and the cicada spontaneously find their satisfaction in flying within the limits of their realms, depending on specific

49 Although this cannot be considered a clear-cut distinction, one may say that all later interpretive (e.g. not purely philological) commentaries on *Zhuangzi* incline either to discursive reading in the tradition of Guo Xiang. Perhaps the most important is the one by Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) or literary reading in the tradition of Lin Xiyi (Lin Yunming 林雲銘, ?1628-?1697) or Xuan Ying 宣穎 (fl 1721).

50 ZZJS, 225 *passim*.

circumstances determined by the specific conditions. The nature of the small is in a lucky accord with the modest dimensions and resources of their tiny world between the trees, while the inclinations of Peng match the thick wind and the open sky.

Since this freedom can be articulated as a close correspondence of the outer conditions with the inner inclinations, it is not premised on any form of indetermination or looseness. On the contrary, to be free means to »match one's lot« (*dang fen* 當分). If things stick to what has been allotted to them by Heaven, their inclinations will never be hindered or frustrated. However, if they disregard their lot or revolt against it, they will interfere with the natural order of the world and meet with misfortune. Being free in this way, things can achieve everything they want. However, they also want, by default, only those kinds of goals that conform to their lot, and that they thus will be able to achieve. Their inclinations are satisfied by their environment, but this happens only because this very environment predetermines these inclinations. In this sense, one can indeed talk about the deterministic mechanism of freedom, which lies in the smoothness of spontaneous necessity in which Heaven operates. The link of freedom with necessity is established through spontaneity: to be free, according to Guo Xiang, means to act spontaneously, but to act spontaneously is nothing else than to act fully in accordance with the nature that compels us to act in a certain way.

The convergence of concepts of freedom, spontaneity, and necessity makes it clear why Guo Xiang emphasizes the importance of unawareness (*buzhi* 不知). One acts fully spontaneously only as long as one is not aware of one's actions. However, not to be aware of one's actions means not to be able to control them and thus submit to the natural necessity. This unawareness is a mark of accord: As long as everything works smoothly, one does not realize it. And vice versa, as long as one does not scrutinize what one does or what one should do, things go well. Any awareness or deliberation always implies unease and interference with the natural order. Any realization and reflection on one's limits stimulates the desire to overcome them. Ignorance of other realms beyond the one that has been allotted to us, reliably satisfying our modest needs, ensures warmth and the innocence of primordial unawareness.

This conception has philosophical merit. In order to be free, one does not have to be without limits. Guo flips over this conventional perspective: on the contrary, to be free one needs to be determined by the limits because these limits guarantee a certain necessary level of unawareness and satisfaction. Without the limits, the accordance of inclinations with the environment could not be sustained and contention among things could not be averted. This freedom is primarily rather freedom *from* than freedom *to*. It does not mean that one is free to do (or even want!) whatever one wants but that his limits ensure the satisfaction of natural desires and prevents frustration. Indeed, when the limited perspectives conceal potential objects of one's desire but satisfy all the needs one has, it surely frees one from any

pathological affections that might be caused by the voracity of unfulfilled desire. Unawareness can indeed plausibly guarantee a certain kind of freedom.

For Lin Xiyi, however, the limited perspective of the cicada and the dove represents the superficiality of the vulgar world. In order to be free, one should not accept the shabbiness of the small world of the masses but rise to a realm without limits. But this does not necessarily mean that one physically ascends to a different world or decides to live as a recluse. Lin Xiyi points out that Peng is a metaphorical image of a free mind: to be free means to ramble through Heaven in one's mind. This is why Lin can read the image of Peng through the reference to Confucius. Even though Confucius spent his life immersed in the social world and emphasized the importance of social ranks and divisions, in Lin's view he was free by the virtue of his spiritual state, by the virtue of his 'happiness' (*le* 樂). This emphasis on happiness fully reveals the contrast with Guo Xiang's understanding of freedom. First, one cannot be really happy without being aware of this happiness. This is the substantial difference between *zide* and *le*, since one can after all fulfill one's inclinations without being happy: Peng's flight is surely *zide*, but as we learn from Guo's commentary, it is not *le*. Moreover, this happiness is sustained not by ignorance but on the contrary by the awareness of the immense world which transcends the narrow perspectives of ordinary people. The sage is like Peng because he sees things in the world below from the cosmic perspective and is thus not overly attached to them. Having this distance, he does not let himself get involved in petty quarrels of the vulgar world and rambles freely.

While Guo Xiang's freedom is within limits, Lin Xiyi's freedom is beyond limits. However, since their underlying stances on the interpretation of Zhuangzi are far apart, their notion of limit is also quite different. Guo Xiang's interpretation is naturalistic, while Lin Xiyi's interpretation is psychological. Guo assumes that *Zhuangzi* discusses freedom as an intrinsic feature of the nature of all things; Lin understands freedom as an ideal, embodied by the state of mind of a sage. Consequently, for Guo having limits to a positive value of objective parameters of the natural environment constitutes different natures of individual things. By contrast, for Lin they have the significance of mental attachments that should be discarded. To break the limits in the latter sense does not mean to interfere with the natural order of the world but to liberate the mind.

5 Conclusions

On the basis of the close reading of Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's commentaries on the »Free Rambling«, I venture to draw two tentative conclusions about *Zhuangzi* itself. The first one pertains to the literary nature of *Zhuangzi*. It seems that *Zhuangzi*'s force cannot be exhausted by its reduction into a set of philosophical theses, but it likewise seems that the text displays a well-balanced combination of coherence and fluidity that irresistibly challenges its readers to develop a discursive reading. *Zhuangzi* invites

one to establish a solid philosophical argument but also discredits it once the argument puts too much pressure on the text. Therefore, both Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's commentaries can be considered both legitimate and insufficient. Guo Xiang shows a lack of sensitivity for the literary aspects of the text and does not see that discursive inconsistency often works positively in favor of its poetic vigor. Lin Xiyi, on the other hand, is often too distracted and superficial, limiting his commentary to ad hoc glosses to particular passages without an effort to yield philosophical questions lurking behind the complex structural relations among *Zhuangzi's* images. This comparison suggests that the most appropriate approach to *Zhuangzi* is to oscillate between these two perspectives, always following one in order to fully unfold the other. Only in an effort to provide a coherent reading can one fully appreciate the resistance of the poetic force that transcends it, and attention to the poetic aspects reinforces rather than diminishes the philosophical implications of the text. Lian Xinda, who argues strongly in favor of the poetic perspective throughout his paper, finally comes with a conclusion that I can only second:

The image of the Big Peng turns out to be the first test on a *Zhuangzi* reader's sincerity to embrace the recklessness of its author, and the first reward once he passes that test. One may say that in the Peng image there coexist in contentious harmony two possibilities, or two sets of potential values. One is the philosophical proposition it may represent or is expected to represent; the other, the poetic beauty with which it is imbued. [...] The two sets of values sometimes may appear at odds with each other, but a better way to put it is to say that the two negotiate with each other and supplement each other. It is the productive ambiguity and positive »inconsistency« resulting from such interaction that contribute to the rich meaning of the opening chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.⁵¹

The second conclusion pertains to the notion of freedom advanced in *Zhuangzi*. In Chinese tradition, interpretation of a text is always closely connected with the view on the personality of its author. In the vein of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (?145–85 BCE) biographical sketch, reporting the anecdote about *Zhuangzi's* refusal of the offer to become a minister in the name of his personal liberty, *Zhuangzi* was often portrayed as a libertarian eccentric that despises all conventions, doing whatever he wants.⁵² It should be noted, however, that this biographical stylization does not necessarily fully converge with the notion of freedom as expressed in *Zhuangzi* and the »Free

51 Lian Xinda, »Zhuangzi the Poet«, 253.

52 »Chuang-tzu was fishing in P'u river. The King of Ch'u sent two grandees to approach him with the message: "I have a gift to tie you, my whole state." Chuang-tzu, intent on the fishing-rod, did not turn his head. "I hear that in Ch'u there is a sacred tortoise", he said, "which has been dead for three thousand years. His Majesty keeps it wrapped up in a box at the top of the hall in the shrine of his ancestors. Would this tortoise rather be dead, to be honoured as preserved bones? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud?" "It would rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud." "Away with you! I'll drag my tail in the mud."« Quoted from Angus Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 174.

Rambling« in particular. This problem can be articulated with the help of a distinction: to what extent does Zhuangzi's notion of *freedom*, understood in the meaning of *xiaoyao* as we know it from the first chapter, overlap with *liberty*, understood in the meaning of doing whatever one wants?

The controversy between Guo Xiang and Lin Xiyi helps us to shed some light on this question. For, in spite of the discussed divergences, both commentators share the basic broad assumption about the nature of this freedom. Given the fact that these two commentaries represent two main interpretive approaches to *Zhuangzi* in the tradition, there is a considerable chance that the point of their concurrence will reveal something substantial about *Zhuangzi* itself. What it seems to reveal in this case is that Zhuangzi's freedom differs from liberty, although both concepts are not necessarily incompatible. It has been said that Guo Xiang's freedom is within limits, while Lin Xiyi's freedom is beyond limits. However, even if their understanding of these limits is entirely different, for both freedom rather lies in the *absence of hindrances* than in an indetermination of one's decision or outer circumstances. Both agree that Peng embodies freedom, and both agree that the image of Peng is, in the first place, an image of unhindered movement. For Guo, to be hindered means to be unable to satisfy natural desires, not to conform to natural necessity; for Lin, to be hindered means to be enslaved by the shabbiness of one's intellectual perspective. From the perspective of these commentaries, the freedom in the »Free Rambling« seems to be different both from the conventional libertarian perception of Zhuangzi and from the concept of free will that has dominated since the early Middle Ages in discussions on freedom in Western philosophy. Whether the freedom from hindrances means to merge unconsciously with one's limits and to become a part of the necessary spontaneous natural movement or to attain a self-possessed happiness of the one who knows is an open question. In any case, from the perspective of the discussed commentaries, Zhuangzi's freedom is not primarily libertarian. However, this does not mean that the libertarian perspective on *Zhuangzi* runs counter to the philosophical drift of the text. On the contrary, the personal liberty to be able to do only the kind of things that do not make one unhappy, such as not to let oneself be bound by an official duty, does seem to be an important attribute of sageliness according to *Zhuangzi*. Nonetheless, in the light of this convergence of Guo Xiang's and Lin Xiyi's interpretation, liberty appears to be a secondary consequence of a more fundamental freedom.

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