

# Five Visions of Yang Zhu: Before He Became a Philosopher

Carine M. G. DEFOORT\*

## Abstract

This paper traces the consecutive emergence of five important portrayals of Yang Zhu before he became a philosopher in the Republic. In the late Zhou, he was portrayed as a rival in debate and a defender of physical or personal integrity. From the Han onward, he became part of a rhetorical trope based on Mencius' portrayal. In the Wei Jin he was a prominent figure in his own right. The fourth portrayal, from the Song onward, contained reflections on his thought in the shadow of Mozi and Confucian orthodoxy. Finally, in the late Qing, Kang Youwei presented him as a minor political reformer responding to Confucius' reform plans. These layers contributed in various ways to the nowadays almost exclusive presentation of Yang Zhu as a philosopher, a defender of social tolerance, autonomy, or individual freedom. The rich variety of the portrayals has too often been sacrificed for this relatively homogeneous portrayal.

**Keywords:** Yang Zhu, Mencius, Succession of the Way, *Liezi*, Neo-Confucianism, Kang Youwei

## Pet pogledov na Yang Zhuja preden je postal filozof

### Izvilleček

Članek sledi nastanku petih zaporednih pomembnih upodobitev Yang Zhuja, preden je v času republike postal filozof. V poznem obdobju dinastije Zhou so ga v razpravi upodabljali kot nasprotnika ter zaščitnika telesne in osebne integritete. Od dinastije Han naprej je postal del retorične figure, utemeljene na Mencijevi upodobitvi. V času dinastij Wei in Jin je veljal za pomembno zgodovinsko osebnost. Četrta upodobitev, od dinastije Song naprej, je vsebovala razmisleke o njegovi misli v senci Mozija in konfucijanske ortodoksije. Končno ga je ob koncu dinastije Qing Kang Youwei opredelil kot manj pomembnega političnega reformatorja, ki se je odzval na Konfucijeve reformne načrte. Vse te plasti so na različne načine prispevale k danes tako rekoč ekskluzivni predstavitvi Yang Zhuja kot filozofa, zagovornika družbene strpnosti, avtonomije in osebnih svoboščin. Bogata raznolikost upodobitev je bila prepogosto žrtev te, razmeroma homogene upodobitve.

**Ključne besede:** Yang Zhu, Mencij, napredovanje Poti, *Liezi*, neokonfucianizem, Kang Youwei

\* Carine M. G. DEFOORT, Professor of Sinology at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven).  
Email address: [carine.defoort@kuleuven.be](mailto:carine.defoort@kuleuven.be)



## Yang Zhu Portrayals: Gaze from Nowhere; Visions from Somewhere

Yang Zhu 楊/陽朱 (Mr. Yang 楊生, Master Yang 楊子, fl. ca. 350 BC) figures as one of the earliest Chinese philosophers. Current scholarship tends to describe him as the founder of Yangism (*Yang Zhu xuepai* 楊朱學派), the influential leader of those who would not sacrifice their physical integrity or individual freedom for anything, least of all for a ruler or a state. His motto was “for oneself 為我/己”. Egoism, individualism, Epicureanism, or hedonism are modern labels for his philosophy (see e.g. Hu 1995, 155–62; Feng 2015, I, 147–56; Graham 1989, 53–64). The textual evidence for his existence, thought, and influence is, however, extremely meagre. There exists no early book under his name. “Of course Yang Zhu did not write one 楊子就一定不著”, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) once joked, “because if he had written a book for others to read, that would have made him act ‘for others’ 因為若做出書來給別人看, 便變成‘為人’了” (Lu 2005, vol. 3, 538). A few statements about Yang are dispersed in some early sources such as the *Mengzi* 孟子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Han Feizi* 韓非子, *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and—for those who consider this an early source—the *Liezi* 列子. During the twentieth century, there has been a spectacular Yang Zhu revival in the field of Chinese philosophy, accompanied by a strong tendency to take these scraps of information at face value, knead them into a coherent portrayal, and enhance this with other textual material that contains no reference to Yang Zhu at all. This modern portrayal is nowadays so current that we tend to overlook its recent emergence and downplay the wide variety of the pre-twentieth century portrayals.

The Fudan historian and Yang Zhu scholar He Aiguo has argued that the Republican Yang Zhu portrayal, even though dependent on the same ancient fragmentary sources, substantially differed from the earlier ones and responded to the needs of its own time. But he is still convinced that during the pre-Qin period a clearly identifiable Yang Zhu lineage thrived; between the Han and the twentieth century, this lineage was weakened and absorbed by Taoism (He 2015, 2–41, 87–160). The young scholar Li Yucheng is more reticent about the pre-Qin influence of Yang Zhu, but he nevertheless sees it confirmed in some early passages. He believes, however, that already after the Han “most Yang Zhu portrayals were created on the basis of needs of the times” (Li 2017, 51–60). Taking these arguments one step further, I argue that every vision of Yang Zhu, also that from the pre-Qin period, is a construction. To some extent this is the case for every master or philosopher, but with a figure who has left no written trace, the historicity of his portrayals, including the currently

dominant one, is all the more obvious. The striking dearth of textual evidence therefore makes Yang Zhu a fascinating case study of intellectual history and the layered construction of important figures. Unravelling these layers adds more to the figure of Yang Zhu than his exclusive evaluation in terms of philosophical stances.

This paper assembles “visions” of Yang Zhu preceding the current philosophical “gaze”. Donna Haraway identified as a “conquering gaze” the view that claims to be “from nowhere”, a neutral, transparent, or objective description of the facts. Her alternative is a variety of visions that are “from somewhere”, an ever growing collection of “situated knowledges”, concrete embodiments, all “ruled by partial sight and limited voice”. This alternative does not amount to a strong relativism dethroning any claim to knowledge. On the contrary, such strong relativism is itself “the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well” (Haraway 1988, 590, 584).

Philosophy that claims a view from nowhere tends to be oblivious of its own historicity. Yang Zhu as philosopher is then presented as an identifiable pre-Qin figure, with his thought reconstructed on the basis of a selective collection of textual sources. The variety of the used sources and the unselected passages are downplayed in the service of the philosophically most convincing reconstruction. This endeavour is legitimate as one possible approach to the topic, but its current dominance over all other visions of Yang Zhu is problematic. Inspired by Haraway, this paper tries to “see” the pre-philosophical Yang Zhu “well” by describing some important portrayals of this figure preceding the current academic default. Emerging in chronological order, they all evolved and contributed to the current portrayal. The paper traces the consecutive emergence of five layers: namely Yang Zhu as a rival in argumentation (late Zhou), a heretic (Han), a prominent figure in the *Liezi* (Wei Jin), a master with deficient thoughts (Song), and a political reformer (late Qing).<sup>1</sup> Even though each portrayal has lived on into the later stages and got entangled with other portrayals, I believe that an initial attempt to disentangle them sheds new light on the figure of Yang Zhu. The twentieth century philosophical portrayal itself, with all its complexities and

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1 These topics were discussed at the KU Leuven Workshop “How to Become a Philosopher: The Many Lives of Yang Zhu” (May 30–June 1, 2019), where an early version of this paper was also presented. I thank the discussant Paul Goldin and the participants for their comments. This research was supported by the FWO project G060817N: “Mozi and Yang Zhu from Heretics to Philosophers: Caught in Another Web? The Genealogy of ‘Chinese Philosophy’ in Three Major Steps”.

variations, falls beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>2</sup> So do the early anecdotes about Yang Zhu, with their limited role in the current portrayal.<sup>3</sup>

## Yang Zhu as a Rival

If we collect the scraps of evidence that probably date from the Warring States era (475–221), the most striking Yang Zhu portrayal is that of an opponent or rival: the fact *that* Yang Zhu disagreed is better attested than *what* he argued for. Roughly simultaneously, the defence of self-preservation and resistance to any type of physical or personal sacrifice—the core of the current philosophical portrayal—became increasingly associated with him.

First, Yang as a rival is most well-known from the book *Mencius*, in which he appears three times. The shortest of these passages begins as follows:

When deserting Mo, they invariably turn to Yang; when deserting Yang, they invariably turn to the Ru.

逃墨必歸於楊;逃楊必歸於儒. (*Mencius* 7B26)

This statement suggests that the followers of Mo, Yang, and the Ru were more or less identified as groups that one could join or desert. It does not say how they were organized nor what was at stake, but adherents were clearly wanted. What follows is probably a piece of advice to his fellow Ru:

When they turn to (us), then we simply accept them.

歸斯受之而已矣. (*ibid.*)

*Mencius* criticizes the argumentative strategies used by some Ru:

Those who nowadays argue with Yang and Mo, are like chasing strayed pigs: having led them into the sty, they then also tie them up.

今之與楊墨辯者如追放豚: 既入其豎, 又從而招之. (*ibid.*)<sup>4</sup>

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2 For the construction of Yang Zhu as a philosopher in Japanese sources, see Sato 2019.

3 For example, “lodging in the inn with a pretty and ugly lady” (e.g. *Zhuangzi*, *Han Feizi*), “lamenting at a crossroads” (e.g. *Xunzi*, *Huainanzi*, *Lunheng*), as “the brother of Yang Bu who hit a dog” (e.g. *Han Feizi*), and the “cold belly 冷腸” versus the Mohist “hot intestines 熱腹” (e.g. *Yanshi jiaxun*) (Li 2017, 57).

4 I follow the dominant interpretation of *zhao* 招 (recruit) as *juan* 罾 (tie up) (Jiao 1991, 997–99).

Short and unconnected as it stands, like every passage in book 7, this fragment leaves many questions open. While the statement may reliably express the view of Mencius or of those who attributed it to him, we do not know how representative it was in his time. Its content is even less clear: What sort of people were seen as turning from Mo to Yang, and then eventually to Ru? Did Mencius insist on this specific sequence of changing allegiances, or did he merely portray a situation of continuous switches in various directions? What precisely did “turn to” mean? What was at stake? How conscious were these people of their changing alliance: did they actively choose a new label or was it attributed to them? These are some of the questions that can be asked about the alliance with Yang discussed in this passage.

The passage does contain a clue that resonates in other early mentions of Yang Zhu, namely the use of argumentation or debate (*bian* 辯). Mencius seems to agree with the policy of accepting adherents into the sty of Confucianism, but he objects to keeping them there with arguments. We know from another *Mencius* passage that he was struggling with this issue, and that he claimed to only reluctantly use *bian* as the last resort. When a disciple confronted him with his reputation of being fond of arguing, Mencius responded:

The statements of Yang Zhu and Mo Di fill the world. All statements in the world either join Yang or to Mo. (...) If the ways of Yang and Mo do not stop, Confucius' Way will not be visible. This means that wrong theories mislead the people and totally block humaneness and righteousness. When this happens, it causes beasts to eat people, and people will end up eating each other. I fear this. (...) Why would I be fond of arguing? I simply have no choice. One who is able to stop Yang and Mo with words is the follower of the sages.

楊朱墨翟之言盈天下。天下之言不歸楊，則歸墨。[...] 楊墨之道不息，孔子之道不著。是邪說誣民，充塞仁義也。仁義充塞，則率獸食人，人將相食。吾為此懼 [...] 豈好辯哉？予不得已也。能言距楊墨者，聖人之徒也。 (*Mencius* 3B9)

Other early sources also present Yang as one among the rivals associated with this contested notion of *bian*. This portrayal occurs in the *Han Feizi* (“Eight Theories 八說”) and the *Zhuangzi*, where Yang and Mo are criticized as debaters (“Ghostless Xu 徐無鬼”), whose mouths should be shut with clamps (“Ransacking Coffers 胠篋”), and who parade with useless debates on hard and white, same and different, or right and wrong (“Webbed Toes 駢拇”). What Yang Zhu argued for is unclear and seems irrelevant. Along with others, he was more criticized for

his self-confident reliance on argumentation than for the specific views that he defended.

Secondly, as for Yang Zhu's convictions, the *Mencius* attributed views to him that also appear in slightly later texts, albeit in a milder version. Two *Mencius* passages identify Yang with the motto "for oneself" (*wei wo* 為我) opposed to Mozi's promotion of "inclusive care" (*jian ai* 兼愛). In the dialogue partly quoted above, Mencius accuses them of, respectively, not respecting their lord (*wu jun* 無君) or father (*wu fu* 無父), which is something for "birds and beasts 是禽獸也", resulting in a terrifying dehumanization and a risk of cannibalism (*Mencius* 3B9). In the other passage, Mencius claims that if Yang Zhu "could have benefited the world by pulling out one hair, he would not have done it 拔一毛而利天下, 不為也", while Mozi would have sacrificed anything at all to benefit the world (*ibid.* 7A26).

These three mentions of Yang Zhu in the book *Mencius*, or perhaps in its latest layers,<sup>5</sup> thus combine the two major characteristics, namely *that* he argued and *what* he argued for. He is perceived as a rival promoting ideas that threatened Confucius' Way. The three passages attest to the emergence of rival alliances in pre-imperial China, but not quite to an intellectual scene teeming with fully fledged lineages (*jia* 家), nor to a clear division between Confucian orthodoxy and its opposition. It was the beginning of something that would gain importance over time: Yang's affiliation.

The gradual emergence of lineages was messy and is difficult to reconstruct on the basis of the extant sources. Some textual evidence suggests that there was no awareness of any lineage associated with Yang Zhu during the last centuries before the beginning of the Common Era. He is not mentioned even once in chapters that nowadays are often identified as Yangist: e.g. in *Lü shi chungiu* "Taking Life as Basic 本生", "Valuing the Self 重己", "Honouring Life 貴生", "Being Attentive to Aims 審為"; nor in *Zhuangzi*, "Abdicating the Throne 讓王", "Robber Footpad 盜跖", "Discoursing on Swords 說劍", and "A Fisherman 漁父".<sup>6</sup> Equally remarkable is his absence from early overviews of the intellectual scene such as *Xunzi* "Against the Twelve Masters 非十二子" and "Dispelling Blindness 解蔽", *Han Feizi* "Eminent Learnings 顯學", *Zhuangzi* "The World 天下", *Huainanzi* "Overview of the Essentials

5 This is argued by Bruce and Taeko Brooks. The three explicit mentions of Yang in the *Mencius* exclusively occur in books 3 and 7, as does Mencius' explicit self-designation as Ru. Brooks and Brooks (2002, 242–43) suggest that the sharp awareness of rivaling allegiances belongs to the latest layer of the book, just before the final conquest of Lu in 249 BC. Most scholars, however, read them as representative of Mencius' thought in general.

6 For this identification, see Graham 1989, 55.

要略”, *Shiji* “Preface of the Grand Scribe 太史公自序”, and *Hanshu* “Treatise on Art and Literature 藝文志”.

But lineages were taking shape: Yang Zhu valuing himself got included in some early imperial sets of rival views. The *Lü shi chungiu*, for instance, contains a list of ten personalities along with their priorities. Among them figures Mr. Yang 陽生 valuing the self 貴己 (“No Duality 不二”).<sup>7</sup> The *Huainanzi* describes an even more elaborate scene in which four masters—Kongzi, Mozi, Yangzi, and Mengzi—promote some values and attack each other. In this Han description of the intellectual past, Master Yang is said to have rejected Mozi’s “inclusive care”, “elevating the worthy 尚賢”, “supporting ghosts 右鬼”, and “rejecting fate 非命”. He is in turn attacked by Mencius for promoting “keeping one’s nature intact 全性”, “preserving the genuine 保真”, and “not allowing things to entangle one’s body 不以物累形” (“Boundless Discourses 汜論”). In another *Huainanzi* chapter, Yang occurs in a list of four who all preach just one part of the total solution seen from their particular background (“Activating the Genuine 俶真”). And when Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–18 AD) criticizes a list of seven figures, he puts Zhuang(zi) and Yang(zi) together as “wild and without rules 蕩而不法” (“Five Hundred (Years) 五百”).

The trend of associating Yang Zhu with lineages and allies continued after the Han dynasty. The strongest association—and the one that has survived the ages—was with Taoism 道家/流, whether Laozi, Liezi, Zhuangzi, Taoism, pure conversations 清談, or longevity practices 修煉. This is the case in *Liezi*’s “Yang Zhu” chapter, discussed below. The Song dynasty (960–1279) further confirmed the Taoist connection. In a response to the question as to why Mencius had not opposed Laozi, who presumably preceded the hardly known Yang Zhu and whose followers were perceived as more threatening, the standard answer was that “Yang Zhu’s learning came from Laozi 楊朱之學出於老子” and that “in refuting Yang Zhu, Mencius actually refuted Zhuangzi and Laozi 孟子闢楊朱, 便是闢莊老了” (e.g. Zhu 2010, vol. 18, 3900). Other alliances were sometimes suggested, none of which has made it into the currently dominant portrayal. Among these was the association of Mozi with the Taoists and Yang Zhu with the Confucians.<sup>8</sup> Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) also put forward an alliance with two types of Buddhism, namely Zen learning 禪學 and mendicant orders 行布施, evolving from Yang Zhu and Mo Di, respectively (Zhu 2010, vol. 18, 3924). He, moreover, rejected Cheng Yi’s suggestion that Yang and Mo derived from sub-lineages within Confucianism, from Zixia 子夏 (卜商, Shang 商) and Zizhang 子張, respectively

7 Unlike the *Lü shi chungiu* itself, the Eastern Han scholar Gao You 高誘 (168–212) connects this in his commentary to the claim in *Mencius* (7A26) that “Yangzi would not pull out one hair to save the world” (Chen 1984, vol. 2, 1127).

8 Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) e.g. was inspired by *Lunyu* 14.24 (Li 2017, 59).

(顓孫師, Shi 師).<sup>9</sup> Yet another association was of Yang Zhu with Yanzi 顏子 (= Yan Yuan/Hui 顏淵/回) living in a small alley 居陋巷 versus Mozi with Yu 禹 (and sometimes Hou Ji 后稷) passing his home three times without entering, while labouring for the people of the world. Zhu Xi considered the association of Mozi with the Great Yu partly acceptable, but not the comparison of Confucius' beloved disciple with Yang Zhu (Zhu 2010, vol. 16, 1963).<sup>10</sup>

Following the Zhou dynasty, statements about Yang Zhu's belonging to the Taoist lineage thus became increasingly elaborate. But even occasional challenges to this view shared the urge to locate him in one of the rival lineages and to take his stance "for oneself" seriously. The fact that he argued and what he argued for have become two important characteristics of the reconstructed Yangist philosophy.

### Yang Zhu as Heretic

When, in the Han dynasty, authors began to cite Mencius' portrayal of Yang and Mo, they picked up Yang Zhu's oppositional dimension rather than his ideas. They did not particularly engage in reflection about self-preservation versus political devotion. The combined threat of Yangzi and Mozi became a rhetorical trope used to construe the model of a courageous worthy person versus his dangerous and wicked enemies. Mencius stood for the former; Yang and Mo for the latter. Content wise, this portrayal was very meagre and negative.

The initial building blocks of the trope came from the *Mencius*: with Yang and Mo "totally blocking humaneness and righteousness 充塞仁義" and "Confucius' way not being visible 孔子之道不著", so that Mencius "simply had no choice 不得已". The true "follower of the sages 聖人之徒" had to continue their civilizing mission by his "ability to stop Yang and Mo with words 能言距楊墨". Hence, he claimed:

I also wish to correct the hearts of others, to end incorrect theories, stop biased behaviour, and banish lewd expressions, in order to carry on the work of the three sages.

我亦欲正人心，息邪說，距詖行，放淫辭，以承三聖。(Mencius 3B9)

The three exemplary figures that Mencius singled out for emulation had all restored order in the style appropriate for their age: the legendary Great "Yu

9 Inspired by *Lunyu* 11.16 (Zhu 2010, vol. 15, 1411).

10 This association had been suggested by Cheng Yi's student, Yang Shi (see below).



repressing the floods 禹抑洪水”, “the Duke of Zhou embracing the barbarians 周公兼夷狄”, and “Confucius completing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 孔子成春秋” (ibid.).

This portrayal went unheeded until the Han dynasty (Defoort 2014, 354–57). As a trope, it was fixed and enhanced by Yang Xiong, who would later gain an important position in the Succession of the Way (*daotong* 道統).

When in antiquity Yang and Mo blocked the road, Mencius spoke up and refuted them, thus opening up (the road). Since afterwards people have been blocking the road (again), I compare myself with Mencius.

古者揚墨塞路，孟子辭而闢之，廓如也。後之塞路者有矣，竊自比於孟子。 (*Fayan*, “Our Masters 吾子”)<sup>11</sup>

Some portions of this statement also became part of the often repeated stereotype, namely that Yang and Mo blocked the “road 路”, that Mencius “refuted them 闢之”, “thus opening up (the road) 廓如也”,<sup>12</sup> and that he “compared himself with Mencius 竊自比於孟子”. This last line may have been an echo of Confucius’ claim that he did not create but only transmitted, “comparing myself to our Lao Peng 竊比於我老彭” (*Lunyu* 7.1).<sup>13</sup>

Thus emerged Yang Zhu’s second portrayal, namely as a rhetorical trope. While a series of scholars claimed their place in the Confucian line of orthodoxy, Mencius and his two rivals increasingly became empty signifiers. The trope gained momentum in the Tang dynasty (916–907), with Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) as its next architect. In his eyes, Mencius had defended the Way against Yang and Mo, and Yang Xiong had been able to restore it, but then had come disaster. Echoing Mencius’ complaints about changing alliances between Mo, Yang, and Ru (*Mencius* 7B26), Han stated:

Those discussing morality either joined Yang or Mo or Lao or Fo, invariably going from one to the other.

其言道德仁義者不入于楊則入于墨，不入于墨則入于老，不入于老則入于佛。入于彼必出于此。 (Zhou 2011, 4–9)<sup>14</sup>

11 *Fayan*, 2.5/22. See Nylan 2013, 35. All quotes of Chinese masters texts refer to Lau Dim-Cheuk (1993–2002), except in the case of well-established references as for the *Lunyu*, *Mencius* and *Laozi*.

12 For this expression, “lui rendant son ampleur” (L’Haridon 2010, 20), “in this displaying true greatness” (Nylan 2013, 35).

13 Another Han example is Wang Chong 王充 (27–100 AD) in *Lunheng* 論衡 “Responding about Creating (this book) 對作”, but he did not identify with the Ru tradition.

14 See his “Tracing the Way 原道” (of 805 AD).

The addition of Lao and Fo (sometimes Shi 釋) representing Taoism and Buddhism, respectively, was neither casual nor arbitrary, since “the harm of Shi and Lao exceeded that of Yang and Mo 釋老之害過於楊墨” (Zhou 2011, 374–76). For Han Yu, Taoism and Buddhism were the real problem; he was the saviour of his own age.

I am less worthy than Mencius. He could not save [the Confucian Way] before it had become lost. And I now wish to restore it after its destruction. Alas! How poorly did I estimate my force. Now seeing the danger in which I am, nobody can save me from death. But if thanks to me this Way could be more or less transmitted, I would not at all mind to die for it.

韓愈之賢不及孟子。孟子不能救之於未亡之前。而韓愈乃欲全之於已壞之後。嗚呼其亦不量其力，且見其身之危。莫之救以死也。雖然使其道由愈以粗傳，雖滅死萬萬無恨。（“Letter to Minister Meng Jian”, in Zhou 2011, 374–76; Li 2017, 58)

At this stage, the Mencian trope had become the core of Ru orthodoxy, with new building blocks added by Han, such as “How poorly did I estimate my force 其亦不量其力”.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand Han Yu had added himself behind Mencius and Yang Xiong in an increasingly clear defence of Confucian orthodoxy. On the other hand, he had replaced Yang and Mo with worse villains.

From the Song (960–1279) onward, we encounter an increasing variation on both sides of the trope: moral heroes and wicked enemies. New courageous defenders of Confucianism were added, often by their disciples. For instance, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) was paired with Han Yu.<sup>16</sup> Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) “simply had no choice but to speak up 言不得已而云” to refute the “statements of Buddha and Laozi 浮屠老子之言” (Zhang 1985, 5).<sup>17</sup> And the same went for Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), according to Hu 胡宏 (1102–1161) (Hu Hong 1987, 161, 158). The list of opponents also increased. Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1193), for instance, gave the label “Yang and Mo” to those opportunistic office seekers who merely repeated Ru classics for the sake of passing

15 See e.g. Wang Yangming in Wang 1992, vol. 1, 78.

16 By e.g. Wang Yangming: “As for the mistakes of those two (Lao and Fo) and Yang and Mo, respectively, Mencius refuted them first, and masters such as Han (Yu) and Ou (Yang Xiu) refuted them later. 若夫二氏與楊、墨之非，則孟子闢之於前，韓、歐諸子闢之於後。” (Wang 1992, vol. 1, 862)

17 See Fan Yu 范育 in his preface to “Rectifying Ignorance 正蒙”.

the exams (Lu 1980, 150).<sup>18</sup> Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) “simply had no choice” but to refute “the current theories that venerate Zhu (Xi) 今日之崇尚朱之說”. (Wang 1992, vol. 1, 77)<sup>19</sup> And so did the critics of Christianity in defence of the indigenous tradition.<sup>20</sup> Their opponents were invariably associated with Yang and Mo, who were increasingly identified as “heretics” (*viduan* 異端),<sup>21</sup> an equally vague label used to identify opponents.<sup>22</sup>

This variety of new enemies was accompanied by the explicit statement that Yang and Mo were actually no longer the problem. They had been threats in the past, courageously and effectively discarded by the Second Sage, but the real problem now lay with Taoists, Buddhists, other Confucians, or Christians. The Cheng brothers, for example, repeatedly pointed out: “harms like those of Yang and Mo no longer exist in the current generation. 如楊墨之害在今世則已無之”. (Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 3) Even “the harm of theories like Taoism is in the end small 如道家之說其害終小”. “Only Buddhist learning 惟佛學” was seen as a threat, because “now everybody discusses it, abundantly and terrifyingly, so that its harm is endless 今則人人談之, 瀰漫滔天, 其害無涯”. (ibid.) The identification of the specific threat was never determined once and for all. Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), for example, was of the opinion that “while the harm of Taoism (immortals) and Buddhism was worse than Yang and Mo, the disaster of the study of the pattern was more disruptive than Taoism and Buddhism 仙佛之害甚於楊墨, 理學之禍烈於仙佛”. (Xiao 2018, 6–8)<sup>23</sup>

This Yang Mo trope does not seem to have survived the introduction of philosophy in China. At least professional academics would no longer use to it today to express their moral stance against social threats. But due to the long dominance of Confucianism, its stereotypical opposition to Yang and Mo has been so deeply entrenched in scholars’ minds that its influence has lingered. The content of Mencius’ negative vision of the two opponents may have softened, but its form has endured. The opposition of Yang, Mo and Ru has therefore continued to shape most narratives of early Chinese thought.

18 For more examples, see Li 2017, 59–60.

19 In his *Instructions for Practical Living* 傳習錄.

20 See e.g. Yang Guangxian 楊光先 (1597–1669) in *Rejecting Heresies* 辟邪論 (1659), collected in his *I Simply Have no Choice* 不得已 (1664). For this and other examples, see Yang 2013, 14–15.

21 Probably inspired by *Lunyu* 2.16. This label had been applied to Yang and Mo by Zhao Qi (趙岐, d. 210 AD) in his *Mencius Questions and Expressions* 孟子題辭. But the label only became prominent later. See Li 2017, 54, 57.

22 For the vagueness of this label, see Xiao and Zhang 2017.

23 Yan also attacks the Cheng-Zhu school and the Lu-Wang schools.

## Prominent Figure in the *Liezi*

By the Song dynasty this rhetorical trope fed into reflections about Yang and Mo. But that was preceded by a remarkable portrayal that seems largely disconnected on both ends: from the rhetorical trope as well as from the Song reflections. It occurs in the book *Liezi* (300 AD). Whether written, forged, collected, or edited and commented upon by Zhang Zhan 张湛 (d. 360 AD), this book in eight chapters gives a surprisingly prominent position to Yang Zhu no less than six centuries after his supposed lifetime.<sup>24</sup> Not only does it contain the sole chapter in the entire Chinese corpus explicitly named after him (chapter 7), it also portrays him in other parts of the book (in chapters 2, 4, 6 and 8). While there is a generally recognized breach between the pre-Qin Yang Zhu and the *Liezi* figure (e.g. Feng 2015, vol. 1, 149, 154), the latter is not easy to pin down. The stories in which he appears within the whole book, and even within the chapter named after him, convey different and sometimes even conflicting messages, so “that it may not make sense to try to fixate on excavating an original or authentic Yang Zhu”, as Erica Brindley puts it (Brindley 2019, 5, n. 4).<sup>25</sup> I therefore consider this the portrayal of “a prominent figure”, refraining from a more specific label in terms of hedonism, anarchism, Taoism, or egoism.

As a rule, the Yang Zhu figure in the *Liezi* is strikingly unconnected to the trope in which he is criticized along with Mozi (the 2nd portrayal). The only exception to this rule is, interestingly, the most often quoted statement attributed to him. It concerns Yang’s unwillingness to sacrifice one hair for the whole world. A tentative translation goes as follows:

Since Bocheng Zigao would not benefit (from?) others (material things?) at the cost of one hair, he renounced his state and retired to plough the fields. Since the Great Yu did not keep even his own person for his own benefit, he worked to drain the flood until his whole body was limping and emaciated. If men from antiquity could have benefited (from?) the world by the loss of one hair, they would not have given it; if the world had been given to them alone, they would not have taken it. If nobody would lose one hair, and nobody would benefit (from?) the world, the world would be well ordered.

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24 I bypass debates on the dates and authenticity of (portions of) the *Liezi*. The *Liezi* editor, Yang Bojun 杨伯峻 considered it a post-Han text, while A. C. Graham identified a mix of pre-Han and post-Han material. See Liu and Li 2018, and Graham 1990, 12.

25 She identifies some degree of consistency in chapter 7’s Yang Zhu figure concerned with life and death, reality versus pretense, the internal versus the external, and between human nature in relation to fate (Brindley 2019, 9).

楊朱曰：伯成子高不以一毫利物，舍國而隱耕。大禹不以一身自利，一體偏枯。古之人損一毫利天下不與也。悉天下奉一身不取也。人人不損一毫，人人不利天下，天下治矣。（*Liezi* 7, 41/18–20; see also Graham 1990, 148–49）

I refrain here from discussion about this statement's date (between late Zhou and Wei Jin), authenticity (whether or not reflecting the historical Yang Zhu's thought), and interpretation ("benefit" versus "benefit from").<sup>26</sup> While echoing the Mencian portrayal, Mencius is not mentioned. Compared to the trope, there are important differences: the author takes Yang Zhu seriously, opposes him to Mo rather than to Ru, provides him with a defence, and locates him in a clear lineage. This is apparent in the immediately following debate between some Yangists and Mohists about the willingness to sacrifice body parts. It concludes with a stalemate between the two views in terms of distinct lines of allies: on the Mohist side, Great Yu 大禹 is a model, Mo Di 墨翟 a master, and Qin Guli 禽滑厘 a disciple and master (Qinzi 禽子). On the other side, Bocheng Zigao 伯成子高 figures as model, Yang Zhu as master, Mengsun Yang 孟孫陽 as disciple, with Lao Dan 老聃 and Guan Yin 關尹 as authorities.<sup>27</sup>

In general, the prominent figure of Yang Zhu in the *Liezi* stands out as rather disconnected from earlier as well as later portrayals. The only exceptions are these passages about sacrificing hair have some connection with both: they echo Mencius' portrayal and are quoted by Song and Ming scholars, although very rarely (e.g. Zhu 2010, vol. 16, 1962). Whenever the latter happens, it is again in line with the rhetorical trope, not the new content initiated in the "Yang Zhu" chapter. Interest in the *Liezi*'s Yang Zhu figure only emerged in the late Qing evidential research (the 5th portrayal) and moved to the centre stage in the Republican era.

## Yang Zhu as a Master

When the Mencian trope eventually gave rise to a variety of reflections in the Song dynasty, most scholars showed no particular interest in Yang and Mo but used them to defend and refine their interpretation of the Confucian Way.<sup>28</sup> Bud-

26 For this last debate, see Defoort 2008, 173–76. For the former debates, see note Liu and Li 2018.

27 This vision of two elaborate lineages is one of the reasons I tend to agree with a Wei Jin date for at least this portion of the "Yang Zhu" chapter. For another argument in favor of a Wei Jin dating, see Defoort 2018, 175–77.

28 Lyell (1962, 92) considers this the second stage in the Neo-Confucian use of the Yang Mo symbol, namely for the sake of the "systematization of beliefs". He calls the first stage the "assertion of orthodoxy", coinciding with what I identified as the rhetorical trope.

dhism was an important trigger for the emergence of this new portrayal of Yang Zhu; Mohism was a necessary detour. To make a long story short: influenced by Buddhist ideals of supporting the sentient beings, some early Neo-Confucians expressed the notion of humanness (*ren* 仁) in terms that resonated with the Mohist ideal of “inclusive care”.<sup>29</sup> Some believed even that after the decline of Mohism, Mozi’s ideal had survived in the Buddhist notion of “great compassion 大悲” (Zhu 2010, vol. 18, 3953). The ensuing debate ended up entailing Mo Di’s twin heretic Yang Zhu.<sup>30</sup>

The twins Yang and Mo did not arouse equal interest. While Yang Zhu was consistently paired with Mozi, the latter sometimes independently triggered reflection and discussion, with the former following suit. The dominant interest in Mozi appeared, for instance, when Yang Shi 楊時 (Guishan 龜山, 1053–1155) expressed his admiration for Mozi who “simply did not want his supplies to be scant 濟不欲寡而已”. Yang Shi argued that this altruistic ambition resembled the generally praised Great Yu and Hou Ji (Lord of Millet), who respectively suppressed the floods and fed the hungry. He then briefly added the less pregnant parallel case of Yang Zhu resembling Yan Hui living a simple life (in Zhu 2010, vol. 7, 743–44; see also Zhu 2010, vol. 14, 635–36). A second example was triggered by Han Yu’s praise for Mozi in his short text “Reading *Mozi* 讀墨子”. More specifically, he had stated that Mozi’s “inclusive care” resembled and supported Confucius’ “all-round care and loving humaneness, acting as a Sage by broadly supplying for the sentient beings 泛愛親仁以博施濟衆為聖” (Zhou 2011, 35–36, 37–38). This was a disturbing statement from the Song Confucians’ hero.<sup>31</sup> Neither totally agreeing nor disagreeing, Cheng Yi pointed out that Mozi was indeed very—perhaps too—dedicated to humaneness 仁, while his heretic counterpart had an equally strong sense of righteousness 義 (e.g. Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 231–32). Such examples give the impression that discussion of Yang Zhu was initially somewhat steered by the Neo-Confucian attempt to position themselves in relation to Mohism.

The new portrayal was accompanied by an increase in textual evidence. While Mencius’ three Yang Zhu passages still constituted the major textual material,

29 See his claim in “Sincere and enlightened 誠明” that “knowledge must be all-round, care must be inclusive 知必周知, 愛必兼愛” and his “Western Inscription 西銘” about “The people and I being one family, others and I joined together 民吾同胞, 物吾與也”. See, respectively, Zhang 1985, 21, 62. For the discussion, see Feng 2015, vol. 2, 744–46.

30 For example, between Cheng Yi and Yang Shi. See Lyell 1962, 46–47. Another, secondary Buddhist inspiration may have been the perceived similarities between some types of Buddhism and Yang Zhu’s supposed support for hermits and non-worldliness.

31 This praise was indeed some sort of dissonant in Han Yu’s generally negative and standard mentions of Mozi along with Yang Zhu. For this schizophrenic portrayal, see Defoort 2015, 224–27.

there existed also a *Mozi* edition.<sup>32</sup> Cheng Yi sometimes refers to it, e.g. when pointing out that “the book *Mozi* is not all that much about inclusive care 墨子之書未至大有兼愛之意” (Cheng and Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 171).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, some other passages from the *Mencius* and the *Lunyu* triggered reflections on Yang, even though they did not mention him. There exists one *Mencius* dialogue discussing Mohism independently from Yang Zhu, in which the master accuses the Mohists of using “two roots 二本” rather than one 一本 (*Mencius* 3A5). This dialogue may have inspired the recurrent Neo-Confucian claim that Mencius had attacked Mozi—and Yang Zhu in his tracks—at the roots.<sup>34</sup> Other inspiring *Mencius* passages were his claim to understand the hidden intricacies of four kinds of speech 知言 (ibid. 2A2), and the disdain that he shared with Confucius for the morally mediocre “village worthy 鄉原” (ibid. 7B37). Among the *Lunyu* passages were “To work on *yiduan*, this causes real damage 攻乎異端斯害也已” (*Lunyu* 2.16), “As for Shi, he overshoots the mark and as for Shang, he falls short 師也過商也不及” (ibid. 11.16), “While curbing oneself, return to rituals 克己復禮” (ibid. 12.1), “Learning for oneself 學者為己” versus “learning for (the eyes of) others 學者為人” (ibid. 14.24), “The six statements and six delusions 六言六蔽” (ibid. 17.7), and “The village worthy is virtue’s thief 鄉原德之賊也” for stealing the appearance of worthiness (ibid. 17.11).<sup>35</sup> This cluster of textual references fed reflection on Yang Zhu as a master with his own, even though deficient, ideas.

A detailed study of all the Song-Ming reflections concerning Yang Zhu would lead too far into the intricacies of Neo-Confucian thought. One idea was that Yang and Mo were not as terrible as Mencius had claimed, but that his harsh criticism was nevertheless warranted in order to stop their disastrous influence.<sup>36</sup> Mozi was appreciated for his altruism, goodness or humaneness, while Yang Zhu was consistently—but somewhat less elaborately—attributed a sense of right or righteousness (Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 231–32). These similarities to Ru values made them all the more alluring and hence threatening to Confucianism. Wang Yang-ming, for instance, argued that

32 Respect for the Song taboo on *kuang* 匡 (of the first Song emperor, Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (927–979)) suggests that the *Mozi* was included in the now lost Song *Daozang*.

33 He also refers to the book *Mozi* when checking Mencius’ claims. See also Cheng and Cheng (1981, vol. 1, 231), where he slightly misrepresents Mencius, since the latter made his claim Mohist Yi Zhi, not about Mozi.

34 See e.g. Hu Hong about Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180), in Hu 1987, 339.

35 I do not go into the long tradition of interpreting and translating all these statements. See also in Li 2017, 59, and Xiao and Zhang 2017.

36 For Hu Hong’s initial puzzlement at Mencius’ criticism, see Hu 1987, 281–82.

the two masters were also worthies of their time. If they had lived in Mencius' days, he certainly would also have considered them worthies. Mozi's "inclusive care" simply overshot the mark in implementing goodness while Yang Zhu's "for oneself" simply overshot the mark when implementing rightness.

二子亦當時之賢者。使與孟子並世而生，未必不以之為賢。墨子兼愛行仁而過耳楊子為我行義而過耳。(Wang 1992, vol. 1, 77)

Echoing *Lunyu* 11.6, some Neo-Confucians argued that while Mozi had overshot the mark, Yang Zhu had fallen short (e.g. Zhu 2010, vol. 7, 392–93). An implication of this archery metaphor was the conviction that even a minor deviation at the beginning (e.g. in Yang and Mo's own deeds or words) could lead to an increasing and disastrous divergence of paths (their later or unworthy followers).<sup>37</sup> Only Mencius was alert enough to hear the germinating sounds of disaster in what seemed like very attractive variations of his own beliefs (Cheng and Cheng 1981, vol. 1, 231). This speculation allowed some Neo-Confucians to avert the major blame from Yang and Mo to their later followers (e.g. *ibid.*, 171).

These are only some hints of the wealth of reflections engendered by one clichéd portrayal. Some Song opinions have shaped the modern views of Yang and Mo, such as their respective association with "humaneness" and "righteousness". But not much of the Song debates have survived in current Yang Zhu research, probably because the Song focus of interest was not Yang Zhu to begin with. Most Song reflections were replaced by the tsunami of Western notions such as individual rights and liberty, and which rescued Yang and Mo from their traditional predicament as mere heretics or deficient masters.

## Yang Zhu as Reformer

The Western reading of Yang Zhu in the Republican era was preceded by one more portrayal shaped by Qing scholars' textual studies or "evidential research" (*kaozheng/ju* 考證/據). I focus here on someone who was influenced by Western thought, but not yet abundantly in the explicitly comparative and borrowing fashion of the Republic, namely Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927). He shaped the last important portrayal of Yang Zhu on the verge of the creation of Chinese philosophy (He 2015, 13; Wei 2017, 40). In his eyes, the Confucian *daotong* corpus of Old Texts was based on the fabrications of Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 BC–23 AD)

37 This metaphor connects nicely with early Yang Zhu passages presenting him weeping at the crossroads because minor decisions can have major results.



in support of the political system of Wang Mang's 王莽 (45 BC–23 AD) short-lived Xin 新 dynasty (9–23 AD). Fortunately, according to Kang, Confucius had hidden a reformist ideal in the original New Texts, waiting to be decoded. His *Confucius as a Reformer* 孔子改制考 (1897), written when Kang was himself also preparing fundamental reforms for China, contained a fleshed out portrayal of Yang Zhu as one of the less important Zhou masters objecting to Confucius' suggestions for political reform and a “doctrine” or “religion” (*jiao* 教).

Kang's novel views reshuffled all the previous Yang Zhu portrayals. Those closely connected with the Succession of the Way—the rhetorical trope and Neo-Confucian reflections—lost their dominance. But Kang's Yang Zhu portrayal preserved traces of the heretic promoting “for oneself” in opposition to “inclusive care”, as well as reflections on extreme views that overshoot or fall short in either humaneness or in righteousness. The oldest portrayal of Yang Zhu as an opponent fitted nicely in Kang's argument that all masters responded to Kongzi's reforms. Hence, the lively Zhou debate among masters began to overshadow the age-long opposition between *daotong* and heresy. Finally, thanks to evidential research supplanting Song Ming speculations, an impressive array of textual sources, including the *Liezi*, contributed to this portrayal.<sup>38</sup> Its two major characteristics were Kang's insistence on Yang Zhu's institutional vision and his belonging to an intellectual lineage.

Kang argued that Yang was one of the many reformers who all attributed their projects to the exemplary past. “Yang Zhu made ‘for oneself’ a core rule; what he said about indulging in desires was the task, as well as not pulling out one hair to benefit of world. He attributed them all to antiquity 楊朱以為我為宗旨; 所言以縱欲為事, 拔一毫利天下不為而皆托之於古.” (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 41) Kang's identification of Yang Zhu with “for oneself” and with the unwillingness to sacrifice even one hair was inspired by the *Mencius*, further elaborated upon in the *Liezi*, which is also the source of his supposed hedonism. Examples of “Yang Zhu changing the system 楊子改製” were that “like Mozi he was in favour of frugal burials 與墨子薄葬同” and that “he sang when presiding at a funeral, which did not accord with Confucius' system 臨喪而歌, 必非孔子之製”, but rather with Laozi (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 25).<sup>39</sup> Together they

38 Along with its precedent *Study of Xin Learning as Forgeries* 新學偽書考 (1891). *Confucius as a Reformer* contains a remarkable variety of early references to Yang Zhu, weeping at a crossroads, singing at a burial, describing the vagueness of the past, denying the importance of a reputation, etc.

39 He also enhanced older attempts to identify less known figures in relation to Yang Zhu, such as Yang Ziju 陽子居 in the *Zhuangzi*, Yuan Rang 原壤 in the *Lunyu*, Zi Sanghu 子桑戶 in the *Shuoyuan*, or Mengsun Yang 孟孫陽 and Xin Duzi 心都子 in the *Liezi*. See Kang 2007, vol. 3, 72–73.

stood for self-care 為我 (from Yang Zhu) and “inhumaneness 不仁” (from Laozi).<sup>40</sup>

The content of Yang Zhu’s thought was thus closely connected to his belonging to the Taoist lineage against not just Confucianism, but even more against Mohism. Based on *Mencius* 7B26 Kang portrayed Yang and Mo as two legs of a tripod:

Since they saw Confucius as creating and installing a doctrine/religion, Yang and Mo stood in a tripod relation with him. Hence they simply had some followers deserting and others turning to them.

以其為孔子創立之教，楊墨鼎立。故其門下有逃有歸耳。(Kang 2007, vol. 3, 88)

This threefold connection moved away from the Mencian cliché since Kong stood closer to Mo than to Yang. Kang saw “Mozi as coming from Confucius’ followers 墨子本孔子後學”, while “Yang Zhu was a disciple of Laozi 楊子為老子弟子” (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 16). The former two supported “humaneness” and wanted to rescue their age, like Kang in his own days; the latter two promoted the opposite (*ibid.*, 58). “Even though forming three (lineages), they actually were two 則雖三而實為二焉.” While “Ru and Mo had flourished in the Warring States era 在戰國儒墨最盛”, in “the early Han, Laozi was the most flourishing, Confucians did well, and Mohism had disappeared 至於漢初，老氏最盛，儒學駸駸其間，而墨亡矣”. The competition between the two survivors eventually caused Confucianism and Taoism to live on (Kang 2007, vol. 3, 206), as it was “thanks to this after-effect of Yang Zhu that Lao learning could spread over the world 楊朱得此後勁，老學所由遍天下哉” (*ibid.*, 59). For Kang, Yang was not just one of Laozi’s disciples, but the leader of his worst sub-lineage, representing egoistic hedonism leading to social disruption.

Even though inspired by previous portrayals and based on an exceptionally wide variety of extant sources, Kang’s portrayal was again very different. As Wei Yixia points out, Kang was not interested in getting to know Yang Zhu for his own sake, but in establishing a variety of responses to Confucius’ proposal of a state religion 國教. Yang’s thought and affiliation remained both secondary to this aim.

From his specific position and need to establish Confucius’ *jiao* as a state religion, Kang Youwei never discussed Yang Zhu out of interest for Yang Zhu. Placing Yang Zhu in the midst of the pre-Qin masters and schools was secondary to his vision with regard to Chinese and Confucian learning, and served the theoretical

40 See *Laozi* 5 about “Heaven and Earth 天地” as well as the “sage 聖人” being “inhumane 不仁” and using others as “strawdogs 芻狗”.

purpose of establishing Confucius' *jiao* as a state religion (Wei 2017, 45). Indeed, Kang did not even pretend to objectively and coherently interpret Yang Zhu as a philosopher, a portrayal that was soon to be born.

### Envoy: Yang Zhu the Philosopher

The five selected portrayals of Yang Zhu constitute a dense cluster of historical and partial visions. More portrayals could be analysed and connections between them further elucidated. The quantity and diversity of visions of such a minor figure, one with hardly any textual testimony, is truly remarkable. Some of their characteristics have better survived than others. Yang Zhu's label "for oneself", his unwillingness to sacrifice even one hair, and his oppositional stance in debate date from the Zhou dynasty. The rhetorical trope reinforced this opposition, even though it has lost its traditional function of defending a moral stance. Aside from presenting the figure of a hedonist (not discussed in this paper), the *Liezi* defended Yang Zhu in his own right and established him in a respectable lineage. Little new content has been transmitted from the many Song Ming views about Yang. Finally, Kang Youwei's reinvigoration of the pre-Qin layer, his use of much textual evidence, his attempt to knead it into one view, and his further elaboration of Yang's lineage, have also contributed to the booming field of Republican philosophical portrayals.

Aside from Kang, I believe that the *Mencius* and *Liezi* have contributed most to current portrayals of Yang Zhu as a philosopher: the former negatively and heavily supported by a long Confucian tradition; the latter positively by considering and defending Yang Zhu against Mohists. Specialists of Taoism and Yang Zhu's philosophy understandably prefer the latter. From the Republican era date the views that the original Yang Zhu did not resist "benefitting" the world but "taking benefit from" it, that the *Liezi* passages predate Mencius and were misrepresented by him,<sup>41</sup> along with an insistence on the authenticity of the book *Liezi*, the historicity of both Yang Zhu and Liezi as figures of the Taoist lineage, etc.<sup>42</sup> These traits, among others (discussion of which goes beyond the limits of the current paper), characterize much of the current portrayal of Yang Zhu.

If Yang Zhu as philosopher is presented as one more "vision", namely one that fits the twentieth century and feeds from older portrayals, I have nothing to object to. But when it is presented as the only authentic, historical figure, we end up with

41 For these argument by scholars such as Men Qiming 門啟明 and Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, see Defoort 2008, 173–76.

42 For an example of this trend, see Liu and Li 2018.

a philosophical “gaze”. One selective mixture is made with various ingredients from different sources and periods. Many insights then become irrelevant, such as the fact that Mencius’ portrayal was unheeded before the Han dynasty, or the initially merely rhetorical use of his view. On the other hand, the pre-Qin dating of the *Liezi*’s “Yang Zhu” chapter has become an almost religiously defended dogma. Even though taken separately, these views are worth considering, their clustering in the philosophy department has led to one flat and exclusive portrayal. It is as if one first takes away all the different tastes from a rich meal by cooking them into one stew, then adding exotic—in this case, Western philosophical—herbs to give it back some flavour.

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