

The Zhuangzi

also known as “莊子”, “Book of Master Zhuang”, “Nanhua zhenjing 南華真經”

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Entry tags: Philosophical writings, Early Chinese text, Daoism, Daoist text, Text, Religious Group, Early Chinese Traditions, Yellow and Yangzi Rivers Region

This entry explores the creation and development of the Zhuangzi (Chuang tzu), purportedly written by Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (d. 286 BCE) and his followers. The text of the Zhuangzi is traditionally divided into 33 chapters--Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters--but these divisions were created after the author's death by commentators and editors. The Inner chapters are purportedly the closest to Zhuang Zhou's original meaning. While it is unclear if a religious group or network existed during the early formation and transmission of the text, later centuries of transmitted materials and excavation sites reveal that the Zhuangzi was collected and read by elites and was considered a valuable Daoist text. Although later scholars of religion made a clear differentiation between “philosophical Daoism” and “religious Daoism,” of which the Zhuangzi belongs in the former, those are not historically accurate terms. In fact, the Zhuangzi was added to the Daoist canon (Daozang) relatively early (some say as early as the 5th century) but the earliest extant version (thus far) dates to 1445 CE and the Ming dynasty. The central tenant of the text is the concept of the Dao as a Way or path to live one's life in accordance with nature but unlike texts such as the Daodejing, the Zhuangzi is more interested in ways to pursue happiness and an ease or flow of the mind that can be realized by an individual with a change in perspective. Categorizations made by humans in an effort to understand the world around them are always inaccurate and prevent us from truly understanding the Dao. Tapping into the Dao is the only way to truly live one's life to the fullest. Making use of parables, stories, and humorous dialogues, the author(s) of the Zhuangzi expand the concept of the Dao posed by the Daodejing and how it relates to the internal world of the mind. Society and governments are not important to the Zhuangzi. The text focuses on the ideal human as a perfect Sage, but such a learned individual is not exactly the same Sage as we find in the Daodejing. According to the Zhuangzi, the Sage is happy and freely wanders the cosmos and is integrated to it in mysterious ways. Breath (qi 氣) and essence (jing 精) are basic elements to life, and understanding how we can link such life-essentials to the Dao is part of the focus of the text. Such mystical elements found in the Zhuangzi set the stage for later Daoist schools to expand longevity practices and other forms of meditation. Cultivating one's breath and essence can cause spiritual and physical transformations to a person, and in later periods of history, Daoist longevity techniques focused on how to transform oneself into an immortal using some of the concepts introduced in the Zhuangzi (e.g. fasting the mind xinzhai 心齋 and sitting in oblivion zuowang 坐忘).

Date Range: 551 BCE - 1911 CE

Region: Middle + Lower Yellow River Valley

Region tags: Asia, East Asia

Middle and Lower Yellow River Valley + Areas of
North China Plain

Status of Readership:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists

Sources and Corpora

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: 錢穆 Mu Qian. 莊子纂箋 Zhuangzi zuan jian. 東大發行 : 三民總經銷, Tai bei shi : Dong da fa xing : San min zong jing xiao, 2006.

Notes: This edition is one example of many in-line commentaries.

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/>

Notes: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has an excellent introduction to the Zhuangzi and its philosophical implications. Focusing on the text of the Zhuangzi as a philosophical treatise (as opposed to a religious text) is typical of Western interpretations of early Daoism.

Online Corpora

Relevant online Primary Textual Corpora (original languages and/or translations)

- Source 1 URL: <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>
- Source 1 Description: The CText version includes the Chinese and translation by James Legge. This is considered an outdated classical translation, but is still an important addition to English versions of the text.
- Source 2 URL: <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/rccat/en/database.html>
- Source 2 Description: The CHANT (Chinese Ancient Texts) database is first rate, but is only available through library use as it is an expensive database. The most useful aspect to CHANT's materials on the Zhuangzi is that they include excavated materials.
- Source 3 URL: <http://taolibrary.com/category/category109/c1090625.htm?pageno=541>
- Source 3 Description: Tao Library's materials include reproductions of older block-printed material, including that which is found in the Daozang.

General Variables

Materiality

Methods of Composition

- Written



Inked

- with Ink

Medium upon which the text is written/incised

- Other textile: Silk

Notes: While Warring States texts were typically written on bamboo slips, by the Han, silk was used as a medium by the very wealthy. It is more likely that the early versions of the Zhuangzi were written on such materials, but we do not have much physical evidence.

Reference: Kohn Livia. The Text. (Kohn Livia), Zhuangzi: Text and Context. Three Pines Press. isbn: 9781931483278.

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

— Other [specify]: Edited

Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

— Overwritten

Notes: The text of the Zhuangzi was compiled after the death of Master Zhuang and was longer than the first extant version (Guo Xiang's 郭象 edits cut chapters out of the earlier version).

Reference: Victor Mair undefined. The Zhuangzi and Its Impact. (Livia Kohn, Livia Kohn, Ed.), Daoism Handbook. BRILL. isbn: 9789004391840. p.32

Reference: Fabrizio Pregadio. The Encyclopedia of Taoism: M-Z. isbn: 9780700712007. p.1298

Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

— No

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

— No

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

— No

Production & Intended Audience

Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

— No

Notes: In some cases, yes, but the text generally does not require polity funding. In the case of the Daoist Canon, the enormous collection of texts includes at least five commentaries on the Zhuangzi. While this entry is not about the history of the Daoist Canon, scholars believe that versions of the compilation were around beginning in the 5th century CE. Since the earliest extant edition we have dates to the Ming dynasty, we can say with confidence that the Daoist institutions in charge at the

time took control of such production. It was very expensive and difficult to compile such a large project, and the state had to provide aid to the compilers. In the case of the Ming dynasty edition, the Emperor had a fondness for Daoism and it was thus carried out over the course of a few years.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 221 CE - 400 CE

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

— Yes

Notes: The Zhuangzi is considered a foundational text to a complicated religion. Along with the Daodejing, it is the most important ancient Daoist text in existence. Prior to the Han, we do not have much evidence of how the text was used or by whom, but we know that students followed Daoist Masters where they learned about texts and Daoist techniques (including longevity techniques). By the Qin, Han and later, schools and other texts sprang up and the lineages developed into religious schools who considered the Zhuangzi part of their religious scripture. An excellent example of this is the Huainanzi and how its authors used the concepts introduced in the Zhuangzi to formulate their own ideas about the Dao. By the Ming, the Zhuangzi (and many commentaries) is included in the Daoist Canon as one of the religious scriptures.

Reference: An Liu undefined, John Major S., Harold Roth D., Andrew Meyer Seth, Sarah Queen A.. The Huainanzi. Columbia University Press. isbn: 9780231142045.



Is there a culture of oral recitation?

— I don't know

Notes: While I am not certain, memorization of texts was not uncommon in a culture with differing levels of literacy.



Is there a story associated with the origins of scripture?

— Yes

Notes: The story of the Zhuangzi is that the text is made up of saying and stories told by Zhuang Zhou to his students. The evidence we have is from Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian, and it is thus not an unbiased perspective to be sure. Nevertheless, it would appear that in the Spring and Autumn period, texts were passed down from teachers to students who ultimately wrote the wise words of their masters down during the ancient period.



Revealed by a high god?

— No

Notes: There is no "revelation" in the text of the Zhuangzi but there is a concept of tapping into the Dao, or the Way of Nature (or a Heavenly Way) as a means to experience true freedom. Texts such as the Daodejing use the term "dao" to represent a cosmic force (among other things), but in the Zhuangzi, it is a path one can follow to freedom.



Revealed by other supernatural being?

— No

Notes: There is no "revelation" in the text of the Zhuangzi but there is a concept of tapping into the Dao, or the Way of Nature (or a Heavenly Way) as a means to experience true freedom. Texts such as the Daodejing use the term "dao" to represent a cosmic force (among other things), but in the Zhuangzi, it is a path one can follow to freedom.

↳ Inspired by high god?

— No

Notes: The concept of a "high god" does not quite fit with the Zhuangzi, but Heaven (tian 天) is a consideration. Heaven is typically understood as related to the Dao/Way insofar as one can follow the way of Heaven in order to achieve freedom (from the constraints of society) and ultimately happiness. It may be translated as "nature" as well. It is not considered an entity, but may be viewed as a cosmic process. See the 天道 chapter of the Zhuangzi for example.

Reference: Zhuangzi, Burton Watson. The Complete Works of Zhuangzi. isbn: 9780231164757. p.98

↳ Inspired by other supernatural being?

— No

Notes: There are other types of beings in the text, including the Sage, or True Person (as well as other terms), who has successfully found a way to follow the Way and has a deeper understanding of the cosmos. They are enlightened. Moreover, this person has "powers" of longevity and flight. There is a debate as to whether the intention here is metaphorical or not, but later Daoist groups took it as literal.

↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings?

— No

↳ Originated from non-divine human being?

— Yes

Notes: Master Zhuang was a man; that said, his interaction with the Dao is complex and depicted throughout the text of the Zhuangzi as a natural path anyone can find. Unlike Laozi, Master Zhuang was not deified later in life. The text refers to Sages and Pure Ones, and clearly Zhuangzi was considered as such by his students. But a Hagiography like the one that exists for Laozi does not exist for Zhuangzi. Nevertheless, he was awarded a title (Nanhua zhenren 南華真人) in the Tang and again in the Song dynasty to Weimiao yuantong zhenjun (微妙元通真君 Perfected Lord of Subtlety and Primal Comprehension) which may be viewed as a form of deification.

Reference: Victor Mair. The Zhuangzi and Its Impact. (Livia Kohn, Livia Kohn, Ed.), Daoism Handbook. Brill. isbn: 9004112081. p.35

↳ Are the scriptures alterable?

— Yes

Notes: Historically, there were supposedly more chapters in the text of the Zhuangzi than the version we have today. There are many commentaries to the Zhuangzi from the Ming dynasty extant version of the Daozang, so one could assume that prior to this period, others existed. The Zhuangzi during the Han dynasty was much longer than the version included in the Daozang (52 chapters to our edition of 33 chapters as edited by Guo Xiang 郭象).

↳ Do the practitioners generally consider the scripture open to alteration?

– No

Notes: There are a few copies of the Zhuangzi included in the Daozang (Daoist Canon): they include commentaries to the text by various editors with strong opinions about interpretation. Thus, the scripture itself is not open to "alteration" per se, but commentaries to the text are still being published in the contemporary period.

Reference: Livia Kohn. Daoism Handbook. BRILL. isbn: 9789004391840. p.32

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting scriptures?

– Yes

Notes: From the Celestial Masters, to the Shangqing and Lingbao schools, and the later Daoist developments, formalized religious institutions were set in place in order to interpret texts and other ritualized methods of finding the Dao. The earliest extant copy of the Zhuangzi is in the Ming dynasty Daoist Canon and it includes around 7 copies of the Zhuangzi, each with a different commentary. From here we can see that many interpretations were in circulation by the Ming.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

↳ Can interpretation also take place outside these institutions?

– Yes

Notes: Historically this is a complicated issue because we do not have full versions of the Zhuangzi until the Daoist Canon (and there are many commentaries included). As with today, many scholars are interested in newer understandings of an ancient text and as it is not considered sacred, interpretations outside of Daoist institutions must have proliferated depending on the freedoms inspired by the state.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

↳ Interpretation is only allowed by official sanctioned figures?

– No

Notes: Historically this is a complicated issue because we do not have full versions of the Zhuangzi until the Daoist Canon (and there are many commentaries included). As with today, many scholars are interested in newer understandings of an ancient text and as it is not considered sacred, interpretations outside of Daoist institutions must have proliferated depending on the freedoms inspired by the state.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

↳ Are there common disagreements? (such as two or more different schools of interpretation?)

— Yes

Notes: There are many common disagreements. Some have to do with the intent and purpose of the text (e.g. politically motivated, about inner alchemy, etc.); some have to do with the division and organization of the chapters (Inner, Outer and Miscellaneous); some have to do with the place the text has in Daoist religion. The disagreements are historical as well--contemporary scholars are interested in textual authority and early historical resources relating to the text (which are seen as biased).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 222 CE - 2022 CE

↳ Are there methods of permanently tabling or resolving debates amongst groups of interpreters?

— No

Notes: I do not think anyone is interested in resolving debates in the strictest sense. Commentaries are welcome in elite circles. In the West, contemporary debates are academically centered on translation and interpretation debates.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

↳ Is there a select group of people trained in transmitting the scriptures?

— No

Notes: The texts that were written as a result of the Zhuangzi's influence were transmitted by specialists, but the Zhuangzi itself does not appear to fall into that category.

↳ Is there a codified canon of scriptures?

— Yes

Notes: The Daozang, or the Daoist Canon, was developed and expanded over hundreds of years. While we know of its existence in early periods like the Tang dynasty, the earliest extant version we have dates to 1445. Within that edition, there are facsimiles of Song dynasty materials, including the Zhuangzi. There are approximately 7 "editions" included in the Daozang, each with a different commentary and interpretation. The Zhuangzi was officially "canonized" in the Tang dynasty, which was also when Master Zhuang was provided with new titles of respect and power.

↳ Can the canon be altered or added to?

— No

Notes: Historically, yes, the canon was altered and added to, but at this stage, it is

viewed as a historically set group of texts and their interpretations.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE



Are additional commentaries part of the canon as it is currently understood?

— Yes

Notes: Some of the most famous commentaries on the Zhuangzi are Guo Xiang's edition (c. 300), Chen Xuanying's edition which was influenced by Buddhism (c. 600s), Lin Xiyin's gloss, Chen Jingyuan's commentary (c. 1000), and Jiao Hong's commentary and interpretation (c. 1600).

Reference: Fabrizio Pregadio. The Encyclopedia of Taoism: M-Z. isbn: 9780700712007. p.1299

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

— No

Notes: While we cannot know the original intent of a text, we can safely say that the language used in the text of the Zhuangzi is not written in a sacred manner, rather a humorous one. Nevertheless, later Daoist adepts used some of the language to develop sacred longevity techniques in the later Han dynasty. By the Tang and Song dynastic periods, the language of the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi was interpreted through sacred/religious lenses by the religious elite. Certain terms, such as "dao" and "jing" for example, were certainly imbued with sacred and religious importance.

Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

— Field doesn't know

Notes: Presumably the text was written down initially to gain an audience, but it is unclear how many audience members there were.

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

— No

Notes: There is not much evidence in the early period for proselytization or recruitment, but early lineages (made up of Master-student relationships) were focused inward rather than outward. Later historical periods saw this change a great deal: by the time Daoism became more of a religious entity, recruitment was more common as with any new religion. Eventually, other religious communities (such as Buddhism) became threatening to Daoist institutions as they were in competition for resources and respect.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

— Yes

Notes: My interpretation of this question relates primarily to the various Daoist movements that changed the religion forever. These include the Celestial Masters (originally the Five Bushels of Rice movement) from the second century CE, Ge Hong and his obsession with immortality, and the Shangqing (highest purity) and Lingbao (sacred jewel) schools. Each of these groups believed to have the true knowledge of Daoism that was unavailable to the uninitiated.

Reference: Isabelle Robinet. Taoism. isbn: 9780804728393.

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

— No

Notes: The Zhuangzi went on to inspire the writing of many other texts, particularly those interested in attaining immortality (which was seen as one of the powers of the Daoist adept). Interestingly, texts themselves were also venerated and used in ritual practice in a variety of ways (eg. placed on an altar with incense burning at all times). However, there is little evidence to suggest that the text of the Zhuangzi itself was utilized in rituals in the same way that the Daodejing was, for instance.

Reference: Jihyun Kim. Daoist Writs and Scriptures as Sacred Beings. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1558/post.38025>.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

Is there material significance to the text?

— No

Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

— No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

— Yes

Notes: There are approximately 7 versions of the Zhuangzi included in the Daozang (The Daoist Canon). They include commentaries which are meant to aid the reader in understanding the original text. The version of the Daozang in use today dates back to the Ming dynasty, but also includes materials (facsimile) from the Song dynasty.



Are multiple versions viewed as proper?

– Yes

Notes: The Daozang versions of the Zhuangzi are all seen as "proper" and since the Ming edition, other commentaries have been published as well. Scholars often pick and choose which edition suits their needs, but most focus on Guo Xiang's interpretation.

↳ If multiple versions are proper, is there a differentiation among versions by any means?

– Yes

Notes: Commentaries and editions vary depending on the scholar/editor. It is agreed that the Zhuangzi contains Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters: 33 chapters in total. The unannotated edition of the Zhuangzi (in the Daozang) and is part of a collection of texts supposedly canonized by Emperor Xuanzong in 742. The other editions of the Zhuangzi all have annotations and notes.

Reference: Kristofer Schipper, Franciscus Verellen. The Taoist Canon. University of Chicago Press. isbn: 9780226721064. p.58

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

↳ Age of extant version of text?

– Yes

Notes: The earliest extant edition is from 1445, but it includes earlier works that were reconstructed in the Ming dynasty edition.

↳ Content of text?

– No

↳ Ritual purpose of text?

– No

↳ Is there debate about which version is proper?

– Yes

Notes: According to a variety of earlier sources, the original text of the Zhuangzi was much longer than the version we have today. While scholars agree that the inner chapters are associated with Zhuang Zhou himself, the outer chapters were likely compiled by his followers, the text was compiled long after his death. Guo Xiang edited the chapters down to 33 (from 52) in the 3rd century CE and is usually considered the main edition.

↳ Among debates about proper versions of the text, how is authority established?

– Yes

Notes: The main commentaries to the Zhuangzi are seen as authoritative, particularly

since they are added to the Daoist Canon. Typically Guo Xiang's edition is seen as the main commentary.

Reference: Fabrizio Pregadio. The Encyclopedia of Taoism: M-Z. isbn: 9780700712007. p.1299

↳ Age of extant version of text?

– Yes

Notes: Guo Xiang's commentary and interpretation influenced hundreds of years of scholars and religious experts and is seen as the oldest extant (complete) edition.

↳ Content of text?

– Yes

↳ Ritual purpose of text?

– No

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

– Yes

↳ Is there a sense of canonization?

– Yes

Notes: The Daoist Canon (Daozang) is an official canonization of an expansive group of core texts relating to Daoism. The texts are divided into three groupings known as the Three Caverns and include over 1500 texts. The Zhuangzi is one of the oldest texts found in the Canon, dating back to the Warring States period.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

↳ How is the authority established?

– Yes

Notes: Recognized scholars in their time were asked at various points to create a Daoist Canon. In 1406 it was Zhang Yuchu (43rd successor to the hereditary office of Heavenly Master) who was prescribed by the Emperor to collect and compile Daoist materials to present to the throne. In prior decades, the Emperor had the authority to request such compilations, but the 1445 edition is the earliest extant edition we have today.

Reference: Kristofer Schipper, Franciscus Verellen. The Taoist Canon. University of Chicago Press. isbn: 9780226721064. p.1

Specific to this answer:

↳ Can the canon be altered or added to?

— No

Notes: Previous collections of texts were compiled by authority figures (as requested by the Emperor); typically such compilations were presented to the throne and then deemed worthy to enter the canon or not.

↳ Have major debates shifted the sense of the place of the text with respect to the larger canon?

— No

Notes: As far as we know, the Zhuangzi was considered part of each of the versions of the Daoist Canon. There were approximately 6 versions of the Daoist Canon; the only extant version dates back to the Ming dynasty and even that edition had a later supplement added to it.

↳ Is the text part of a series of volumes?

— Yes

↳ How are the volumes ordered?

— Specify: The Three Grottoes (sandong 三洞): meditation, ritual, exorcism

Notes: The general logic behind this classification is to aid the Daoist adept in initiation and ordainment. Historically, they are affiliated with the texts deemed worthy by different Daoist groups (Shangqing, Lingbao, and Sanhuang traditions).

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

— Yes

Notes: The so-called Masters' Works (zishu 字書) is a Han dynasty delineation for texts compiled prior to the Han and include the Zhuangzi. These texts were of great interest to the elite particularly in the medieval period, but lost its appeal from the 5th century and onward.

Reference: Tian Xiaofei. The Twilight of the Masters: Masters Literature (Zishu) in Early Medieval China. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 126(4)

↳ Cultural with religious implications?

— Yes

↳ Behavioral literature?

— Yes

↳ Other

—Other [specify]: n/a

Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary?
(Select all that apply)

— Ritual manual

Notes: Even though the Zhuangzi might not seem like a standard manual, it is clear that over the course of the text's history, it has been used as such, particularly for early Chinese longevity experts who wanted to transform their bodies into those of a Sage or immortal.

— Vocabulary

Notes: Even though the authors of the Zhuangzi were against categorization, a certain vocabulary was in use and had to be explained through the text. This includes explaining to a reader what the dao (Way) is and how it relates to our understanding of reality. Even though vocabulary is established, the authors play with our concept of language and comprehension, disorienting us at every turn so that we do not depend too strongly on language (and biases that inevitably arise).

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

— Yes



Does the lineage involve establish a chain of authority?

— Yes

Notes: The lineage originates with the character of Master Zhuang, but most of the information we have about his life comes from another text, Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian, and is seen as biased. However, scholars agree that the original Master Zhuang lived during the Warring States period and after his death, his students added to the text of the Zhuangzi (adding outer and miscellaneous chapters). The lineage begins there.



Is the lineage defined by concrete cycles or measures of time?

— No



How is the lineage established?

— Intellectual Elect

— Student-Teacher Relationship

Does the text express a formal legal code?

— No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– No

Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: The outer chapters of the Zhuangzi mention ghosts and spirits. See 天運 Tianyun chapter; 繕性 Shangxing chapter; 達生 Dasheng chapter. The Miscellaneous chapters also mention ghosts and spirits. See 庚桑楚 Gengsang chu chapter and the 寓言 Yuyan chapter. Because the inner chapters do not mention ghosts or spirits, some consider those later concepts added to Daoist ideals at a later date.



Spirit-Mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other parts?

– Yes

Notes: In chapter 15 of the Zhuangzi (刻意 Keyi chapter), there is mention of the body and spirit as needing care but the term used for "spiritual essence" is jing 精 which can also be translated as sexual energy. In Chapter 22 (知北遊 Zhibeiyou), a famous conversation between Confucius and Lao Dan mentions the origins of the spirit: "pure spirit is born out of the Way." (Burton Watson's translation) Again, the term is "jing" which can also refer to semen. Later in the same chapter, the authors mention the "Great Return" to the Dao in the process (transformation) of death.

Reference: Zhuangzi, Burton Watson. The Complete Works of Zhuangzi. isbn: 9780231164757.



Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body?

– Yes

Notes: Spirit-mind may be trained and honed to find the Dao/Way, but it is also a part of the Dao and will eventually return to the Dao.



Other spirit-body relationship?

– No



Within conceptions of the mind: are there distinct notions of psychological states or aggregates?

– No



Do practitioners engage in debates about mind-body dualism?

– No



Are debates framed in other ways?

– No

↳ Do practitioners distinguish between a corporeal body and an incorporeal soul or spirit?

– Yes

Notes: As mentioned above, there are a few instances of a spirit or ghost discussed in the text of the Zhuangzi.

↳ Are there other sides or features of the debate?

– No

↳ What are historical mainstream and minority positions?

– Yes

Notes: Historically, the evolution of the concept of the spirit can be seen reaching an apex in the Han dynasty with the newly incorporated 魂 hun and 魄 po. But this is a later development, and during the time that the Zhuangzi was written, was not part of the vocabulary of the time. Nevertheless, the discussions about how to tap into the Dao are often related to one's spirit.

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– Yes

Notes: In the later and miscellaneous chapters there are some mention of ghosts. There is also mention of the spirit rejoining the Dao/Way after death. It is unclear what that existence is like according to the authors of the text, as they do not explain.

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group?

– Yes

↳ Afterlife in specified realm of space beyond this world?

– Yes

Notes: Later Daoist groups had a great deal to say about this, but the authors of the Zhuangzi did not.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "above" space?

– No

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "below" space?

– No

↳ Afterlife in "other" space?

– No

↳ Is the temporality of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group?

– Yes

Notes: Again, later Daoist groups had much to say about this, and many were influenced by Buddhism and the many hells and heavens introduced to China by the 2nd Century CE.

↳ Is there debate in the interpretation of the language of the afterlife?

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dictated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

– Yes

↳ As cenotaphs?

– No

↳ In cemetery?

– No

↳ Family tomb-crypt?

– Yes

Notes: There are instances in the text that describe funerals, but the examples are used as an argument against such frivolity.

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic

activities)?

– No

↳ Other formal burial type?

– No

↳ Other intensive funerary ritual

– Specify: Laughing and singing at the funeral

Notes: Chapter 6 of the Zhuangzi 大宗師 Dazongshi explores the idea of laughing or singing at a funeral as a means to mock Confucian rigorous rituals relating to the death of one's relative or teacher.

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– Yes

↳ Do these practices take place at tombs/burial sites?

– Yes

↳ Do these practices take place for the veneration OR worship of the dead?

– Yes

↳ For the worship of a deceased person(s)?

– No

↳ For the worship of a deified human?

– No

↳ For the worship of a deceased hero?

– No

↳ For the veneration of a deceased person(s)?

– Yes

Notes: Chapter 6 of the Zhuangzi 大宗師 Dazongshi explores the idea of laughing or singing at a funeral as a means to mock Confucian rigorous rituals relating to the death of one's relative or teacher.

↳ For the veneration of a deified human?

– No

- ↳ For the veneration of a deceased hero?
 - No

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: We can say that even in the Zhuangzi, the Perfect Man, or the Sage, is seen as god-like.

- ↳ A supreme high-god is present

– Yes

Notes: Heaven, or Tian 天 is mentioned many times throughout the text of the Zhuangzi. However, most scholars agree that it is a synonym for the Dao. The term is used to mean nature and as such, accessing the Dao via nature.

- ↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic or described in anthropomorphic terms
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld)
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god)
 - No
- ↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites
 - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good
 - Yes

Notes: I say "yes" here but Daoist concepts of good and bad are not concrete.

- ↳ Other features of the supreme high god
 - Specify: Nature. Tian holds the blueprint to accessing the Dao and it is the goal of the Daoist to attune oneself to Nature and access the Way.
- ↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs
 - No
 - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region
 - No
 - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is unrestrict outside of sample region
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
 - Yes
 - Notes: Tian can't really "see" but the implication is that Heaven or the Dao has knowledge about us and is impartial to such knowledge.
 - ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knows basic character (personal essence)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
 - Yes

↳ Has other knowledge of this world

– Yes

Notes: Heaven has knowledge about the cosmos.

↳ Has deliberate causal efficacy in the world

– No

Notes: Impartiality or an extreme separation from this world.

↳ Indirect causal efficacy in the world

– No

↳ Exhibits positive emotion

– No

↳ Exhibits negative emotion

– No

↳ Possesses Hunger?

– No

↳ Can be hurt?

– No

↳ Can be tricked?

– No

↳ Can be imprisoned?

– No

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural being other than the high god?

– Yes

Notes: In later Daoism, this question is easy to answer (Yes!), but at the time the Zhuangzi was written, we could argue that the Dao/Way is another option for people to focus on in worship.

↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature

–Specify: Extreme impartiality and detachment toward humankind.

- ↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living
 - No
- ↳ Does the text make communication with supreme high-god possible?
 - No

Previously human spirits are present

– Yes

- ↳ Human spirits can be seen
 - Yes
- ↳ Human spirits can be physically felt
 - Yes
- ↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region
 - No
 - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is unrestrict outside of sample region
 - No
 - ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
 - Yes

↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)

– Yes

↳ Know basic character (personal essence)

– Yes

↳ Know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)

– Yes

↳ Have other knowledge of this world

– Specify: No

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world

– Yes

Notes: In the chapter on Mastering Life (達生 Dasheng), there is a discussion on how ghosts can make a person ill.

Reference: Brashier K.E.. The Early Chinese Endeavor to Interpret Early Chinese Religions. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.013.18.

↳ Human spirits can reward

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can punish

– Yes

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world

– Yes

↳ Human spirits have memory of life

– Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion

– No

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion

– No

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living

– Yes

Reference: . The Complete Works of Zhuangzi. Columbia University Press. isbn: 9780231164740. p.150-1

↳ In waking, everyday life

– Yes

↳ In dreams

– No

↳ In trance possession

– No

↳ Through divination practices

– No

↳ Only through religious specialists

– No

↳ Only through monarch

– No

↳ Communicate through other means

–Specify: Illness: in the case of the 達生 chapter and Duke Huan's illness, it was caused by a ghost.

Non-human supernatural beings are present

– Yes

Notes: In the same chapter that discusses how ghosts can make a person ill, other strange creatures are present. See 達生 chapter and the conversation between Duke Huan and Guan Zhong.

↳ Supernatural beings can be seen

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can be physically felt

– Yes

- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs
 - No
 - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region
 - No
 - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
 - Yes
 - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region
 - No
 - ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Know basic character (personal essence)
 - Yes
 - ↳ Know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
 - No
 - ↳ Have other knowledge of this world
 - No
 - ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world
 - Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can reward
– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings can punish
– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings communicate with the living according to the text?
– No

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world
– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion
– No

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion
– No

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger
– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature
– Specify: There are many types of supernatural beings in the Zhuangzi including forces of nature, gods, ghosts, and miscellaneous creatures.

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

– No

Notes: Not a pantheon per se, but a plethora of creatures. Later in Daoist history a pantheon is introduced, but during the time that the Zhuangzi was compiled, there is no record of a pantheon.

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

– Yes

Notes: In this case, I am referring to the Sages, also known as Great Man, Perfect Man, and so on. These adepts are one with the Dao and as such, have powers that may be considered magical.

↳ Mixed human-divine beings can be seen?
– Yes

↳ Mixed human-divine beings can be felt?

– Yes

↳ Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living according to this text?

– Yes

Notes: The "Perfect Man" or "Sage" can be viewed as fitting into this category.

↳ In waking, everyday life?

– Yes

↳ In dreams?

– No

↳ In trance possession?

– No

↳ Through divination practices?

– No

↳ Only through religious specialists?

– No

↳ Only through monarch?

– No

↳ Other?

–Specify: No

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

– No

Notes: As previously mentioned, ghosts and spirits are cited in the text of the Zhuangzi. There is no mention of a supernatural being made manifest using this text.

Are other categories of beings present?

–Other [specify]: THE DAO: can we refer to the dao as a "being?" It has been referred to as a presence, a force, an all-encompassing reality, and many other definitions. Part of the purpose of the Zhuangzi is to define and clarify the incomprehensibility of the Dao and how we can find the path toward a freedom of the mind.

Does the text guide divination practices?

– No

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– No

Notes: Not strictly, but tapping into the Dao is a reward in and of itself.

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?

– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

– No

Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

– Yes

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

– Yes

Notes: The text of the Zhuangzi uses the ideas and arguments of other philosophers to make points about the error of their ways, and point adepts to the Dao/Way and away from any other conventional wisdom. The authors of the text take great care to explain to the reader why Confucius, for instance, has a wrong conception of the world and the nature of humanity. There are many examples of famous minds of the time having non-sense arguments that are meant to break our minds free of conventions and tap into the Dao.



What is the nature of this distinction?

– Present & clear

Notes: Even though Zhuangzi's ideas for how to live life are expressed as different from other philosopher's at the time, there are instances where Zhuangzi uses the voices of those he criticizes to explain how to locate the Dao. This can be confusing to readers: a good example is Confucius's soliloquy in Chapter 4 of the inner chapters.

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the text?

– Yes

Notes: We could call such norms "moral," or we could say that they are "natural" as in following the course of Nature, and the Dao.

↳ Specifically moral norms are implicitly linked to vague metaphysical concepts

– Yes

↳ Moral norms are explicitly linked to vague metaphysical entities

– No

↳ Linked to impersonal cosmic order (e.g. karma)

– Yes

Notes: The Dao

↳ Linked in some way to an anthropomorphic being

– No

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked explicitly to commands of anthropomorphic being

– No

↳ Specifically moral norms are have no (sic: have no?) special connection to the metaphysical

– Yes

↳ Moral norms apply to (select all that apply)

– All individuals (any time period)

Notes: All individuals have the potential to reach the Dao and understand all that the Way has to offer.

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

– Yes

Notes: Philosophers like Confucius was more interested in virtue than Zhuangzi. Nevertheless, virtue is

discussed in the text. See the Robber Zhi [盜跖] chapter of the Zhuangzi, but note it is meant to be amusing.

↳ Honesty/trustworthiness/integrity
– Yes

↳ Courage (in battle)
– No

↳ Courage (generic)
– No

↳ Compassion/empathy/kindness/benevolence
– No

Notes: Benevolence and righteousness is cited as against nature and is therefore not worth our time. The Zhuangzi does include instances where compassion and kindness is displayed, but as a rule, it is seen as problematic. See the 駢拇 Webbed Toes chapter.

↳ Mercy/forgiveness/tolerance
– No

↳ Generosity/charity
– No

↳ Selflessness/selfless giving
– No

↳ Righteousness/moral rectitude
– Yes

Notes: All is linked to finding the Dao: ones morals and righteous behavior should be in accordance with nature.

↳ Ritual purity/ritual adherence/abstention from sources of impurity
– Yes

Notes: There is a famous section in the Zhuangzi that refers to a Pure One avoiding grains for consumption: this is one of the original instances that groups interested in immortality honed in on for use in later texts.

|

↳ Respectfulness/courtesy

– No

Notes: This is one of those examples where the Zhuangzi thinks such social negotiations are useless in one's path to find the Way.

↳ Familial obedience/filial piety

– No

Notes: Again, this is seen as a distraction from the true path of Heaven.

↳ Fidelity/loyalty

– No

↳ Cooperation

– No

↳ Independence/creativity/freedom

– Yes

Notes: Freedom of the mind is a major focal point in the Zhuangzi: finding the Dao and becoming one with it will set one's mind free.

↳ Moderation/frugality

– Yes

Notes: In the chapter on Robber Zhi (盜跖 Daozhi), moderation is discussed as a means to develop one's "inborn nature" and cultivate it appropriately.

↳ Forbearance/fortitude/patience

– Yes

Notes: Finding the Dao does not come easily. An adept needs patience to achieve their goals.

↳ Diligence/self-discipline/excellence

– Yes

Notes: One's diligence and self-discipline allows a person to tap into the Dao and become one with Nature.

↳ Assertiveness/decisiveness/confidence/initiative

– No

Notes: There are instances in the text where the authors mock those who have assertiveness or decisiveness (such as Confucius), preferring instead to wander freely in nature.

↳ Strength (physical)

– No

↳ Power/status/nobility

– No

Notes: The text of the Zhuangzi focuses on those who are considered outsiders in society (or shunned by society): those without power such as lepers, disabled people, women, etc.

↳ Humility/modesty

– No

Notes: In the chapter Discussion on Making All Things Equal (齊物論 Qiwulun), modesty is used as an example of a categorization of the world around us that is unhelpful for finding the Dao.

↳ Contentment/serenity/equanimity

– Yes

Notes: Finding the Dao and following it to become one with Nature will create contentment and equanimity for an adept.

↳ Joyfulness/enthusiasm/cheerfulness

– Yes

Notes: Too much joy can be harmful (see Chapter 11 在宥; Chapter 16 繕性) because it keeps a person from living a carefree life. Nevertheless, Nature fills us with great joy (see Chapter 22 知北遊) and the Pure Man or the adept can find "Heavenly joy" (see Chapter 13 天道).

↳ Optimism/hope

– No

↳ Gratitude/thankfulness

– No

↳ Reverence/awe/wonder

– Yes

Notes: Wonder and awe at Nature and the Dao is a theme throughout the Zhuangzi.

↳ Faith/belief/trust/devotion

– Yes

Notes: Faith in the Dao/ the Way of Heaven/ Nature as the path to freedom is a theme throughout the Zhuangzi.

↳ Wisdom/understanding

– Yes

Notes: I argue that wisdom comes from the Dao, but more traditional wisdom (such as from Confucius) is rejected.

↳ Discernment/intelligence

– No

↳ Beauty/attractiveness

– No

Notes: The Zhuangzi is known for citing outcasts of society as Sages.

↳ Cleanliness (physical)/orderliness

– No

Notes: Wasting time on one's appearance keeps you from tapping into the Dao. Moreover, dirt and mess is typically a child-like quality, and a childlike wonder or perspective is very much an ideal to the authors of the Zhuangzi.

↳ Other important virtues

– Yes

Notes: Humor is an important aspect of the Zhuangzi and keeping one's humor is a way to stay on track. Humor also allows a person to recognize the falsehood of categorizing the world around us. In a sense, it helps us break free from society's binds over our minds.

Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Notes: Some scholars on the Zhuangzi point out that the term "jing 精" can mean semen and thus the text could be read as an early example of sexual practice (for men). In later examples of Daoist Body Cultivation texts, releasing "jing" is seen as problematic for the Daoist adept because it throws off the balance of yin and yang (yang being the "male" energy). Thus, the Zhuangzi could be viewed as the start of the sexual practice and immortality texts we find in larger numbers by the Han.

Reference: Kohn Livia. Daoist body cultivation : traditional models and contemporary practices. Three Pines Press. isbn: 9781931483056.

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

Notes: Not exactly, but scholars cite the Zhuangzi as one of the original Body Cultivation texts which have strict instructions on what to eat and when. Immortality is hard to come by, and what we ingest can help transform our bodies.

Reference: Livia Kohn. Daoist Dietetics. Three Pine Press. isbn: 9781931483148.

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– No

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– No

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– No

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– Yes

Notes: Humor in the Zhuangzi is a huge element of the text and allows the reader to enjoy the deeply philosophical work on many levels. Humorous anecdotes and conversations between people and inanimate objects; mockery; word games and puns; all this is to reject conventional categories and values.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE



Drama?

– Yes

Notes: A good example of a dramatic story is the one about Cook Ding in Chapter 3 (養生主) and how he cares for life. The language of the text is playful and dramatic while it describes how Cook Ding butchers the body of an ox while tapped into the Dao. "砉然騞然" is translated by Burton Watson as "Zip! Zoop!" and indeed is meant to express the smooth sounds of an adept cutting through flesh.

Specific to this answer:

Date Range: 551 BCE - 2022 CE



Comedy?

– Yes

Notes: A great example of comedy is Chapter 2 (齊物論) where the authors include conversations between historical people, invented people, and shadows. This chapter has a great deal to do with perspective and how much it affects our minds, but there are many amusing anecdotes in this chapter as well.

↳ Tragedy?

– Yes

Notes: The deaths of loved ones may appear tragic to us, but the text is attempting to show the reader that death and life are all part of the same "transformation of things."

↳ Epic entertainment?

– Yes

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– No

Institutions & Production Environment of Text

Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– Other

Notes: Master Zhuang's students compiled the final version of the text.

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

– A Faith Elect

Are there specific elements of society involved with the destruction of the text?

– An empire

Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

— No

Other forms of welfare?

— Yes

Notes: The "welfare" in the Zhuangzi is related to the mind and freeing oneself from the rules and hindrances of society in order to access one's true nature.

Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

— Yes

Notes: Once the Zhuangzi was added to the Daoist Canon, it was taught in Daoist institutions to the monks and nuns who were involved in temple life and to laypeople. But within the text itself, teacher-student relationships were routine and Master Zhuang saw that as problematic. Teachers could pass on incorrect information to their students.

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

— No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

— No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

— No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

— No

Is education gendered according to the text?

— No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

— No

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

— No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

Public Works

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

Taxation

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

Notes: Taxation is seen as an arm of society that crushes the spirit. See chapter Xu Wugui 徐无鬼.

Warfare

Does the text mention warfare?

– Yes



Does the text dictate how to control an institutionalized military?

– No

Notes: Military force is looked down upon in the Zhuangzi.



Does the text restrict/advocate for participation in exogenous military organizations?

– No



Does the text celebrate/bemoan protection/subjugation by an exogenous military force?

– Yes

Notes: The text bemoans subjugation of any sort whether it be from a military or other structures of society that crush the spirit.

Food Production

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– No

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