Unlike most of the recent books on Zhuangzi, both in China and in the West, which focused either on certain themes or are merely textual studies, YANG Guorong takes a holistic approach toward the text and explores almost all the important themes in the *Book of Zhuangzi* such as nature, the human world, logic, language, self and others, individual and society, time and history, and life and death. The many insightful and exciting discussions in the book can surely benefit and inspire not only readers who are interested in the *Book of Zhuangzi*, but also readers who would like to probe the problems of their lives in general.

Instead of arguing about the exact authorship and dating of the formation of the text, this book claims, at the outset, that its strategy of dealing with the text is to concentrate on the unity of the ideas that are consistent and coherent in all three parts of the *Book of Zhuangzi*. The *Book of Zhuangzi* was edited the way it has been by XUANG Xiu 向秀 and GUO Xiang 郭象 centuries after Zhuangzi passed away in the fourth century BCE. This is perhaps the reason that controversy of the authorship of the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters, even the Inner Chapters lately, has become more and more of an issue among scholars since the Tang Dynasty. In the Introduction of his book, Yang traces the history of this controversy briefly and points out that there is hardly any substantial proof of which chapter or section is authentic or inauthentic. He proposes that we should not confine our reading by separating or isolating chapters but rather cope with the text as a whole. By doing so, one can discover Zhuangzi’s consistent and coherent ideas with less difficulty and confusion. This holistic approach shows its effectiveness in systematically working out Zhuangzi’s essential ideas, some of which have long been ignored, simply because those chapters were thought to be “inauthentic.” Here, Yang implicitly rejects the skeptical or even cynical attitude held by many contemporary scholars, who, obsessed by the so-called “historical proof” of the authenticity or authorship of the text, ignore possible meanings of the text and their real significance in Chinese intellectual history as well as in the popular culture of over two millennia.

I agree with Yang completely. How much does it really matter if a chapter was written by Zhuangzi’s hand or somebody else’s? What difference would it make if we found out that the Zhuangzi we have known for over two thousand years was not the actual or factual
Zhuangzi? How much would it really help us to understand what the book has to say if we could verify the actual date of every section by tearing apart the entire text? By these questions, I am not rejecting serious studies of history which are, without doubt, crucial for the fruitful study of classics. Yet we must also be aware that the historicity of a text lies more in the effects of the text in history rather than in who wrote it. The author is dead. The text, if it is still alive, speaks autonomously after it is composed; it either creates or recreates the contents and meanings through time regardless of what the author intended to write, or simply dies with the author. It is more important to ask why a text like the Book of Zhuangzi has been read, commented on, and criticized by so many readers in so many ways for so many centuries. We may not find enough evidence to prove the original author of the text, but we do know that the text is out there with unfathomable profundity of thought. Is not it a fact? Is not the authenticity proven by the history of ideas? Readers may have different accounts of some specific passages in the Book of Zhuangzi that may have been added by some writers other than Zhuangzi and are not quite compatible with the philosophical arguments made in most part of the Inner Chapters. However, this should never be the excuse for doubting the authenticity and originality of this great text as a whole.

According to the author, there are two central themes from which all the other themes proceed. The first is the argument of the relationship between tian (heaven or nature) and ren (human; tian ren zhi bian 天人之辯), which displays a metaphysical orientation in Zhuangzi’s meditation on Dao. The Dao, pondered metaphysically, manifests itself through the unification of the way of heaven (tiandao 天道) and the way of man (rendao 人道). For the author, what Zhuangzi is concerned with is actually the relationship between the Being of all beings and human existence (17). On the one hand, Zhuangzi stresses that in order to live an authentic life one should not be enslaved by things (yi wu yi xing 以物易性; 17). Here Zhuangzi seems to care very much about the meaning of human existence, the Being that transcends the limit or confinement of material things (wu 物) to reach the state of human existence based entirely on human nature. It sounds as if he is humanistic. On the other hand, he stresses the world of ziran (自然) or tian: in order to reach the unity or harmony between tian and ren one must overpower any human effort that interferes with the course of nature (wu yi ren mi tian 無以人滅天).

Are the two themes incoherent? Not really. This perhaps evoked Xunzi’s accusation that Zhuangzi was “too much overwhelmed by the concept of tian to have any idea of ren.” Xunzi’s criticism was followed by many later commentators to attribute a kind of naturalism to Zhuangzi. Yang implies in the book that Xunzi’s accusation is not completely correct. What actually underlies the façade of naturalistic articulation of tian or nature in the Book of Zhuangzi was an anxious and utmost concern over the human condition and the meaning of life. Zhuangzi advocates the idea of tian as the essential nature of human beings as opposed to an artificial human nature manufactured by language, morality, knowledge, and self-centeredness that separates and estranges humans from tian, i.e. their spontaneity, authenticity, and vitality. This part of Zhuangzi has not been emphasized enough by Zhuangzian scholars. By disclosing a “humanistic” or even “existentialist” characteristic of Zhuangzi, Yang is able to posit that the relationship between Zhuangzi and Confucianism is somewhat intimate rather than hostile. This again blows a fresh breath on the field that was used to characterizing Zhuangzi as a rival or antagonist of Confucianism.

What is most special about this book is that the author points out, as I did a few years ago, the significance of the concept of tong 通 or throughness (as I translated it) in the Book of Zhuangzi. As he stated, in order for people to realize the ultimate unification of tian and ren, Zhuangzi sets forth his idea of “equalizing all things” (qiwu 齊物) and puts emphasis

Springer