

the author declaring what pre- or early-historic actors *must have* done, seen, felt, meant, thought, or concluded while, at the same time, wondering to himself why evidence is either in short supply or in conflict with the self-evident – e.g. “These massings of planets ... would surely have impressed observers throughout the ancient world, although no other ancient records of their sighting from either Egypt or Mesopotamia have so far been found” (p. 195) – and rejecting contradictory declarations by other scholars as simply “subjective” or “overstated” (e.g. pp. 61 n.45, 75 n.62, 106, 159 n.23, 206 n.28, 337–40, 379).

From the perspective of a historian of astronomy, there are elements of this book that stand out as grossly outdated. Amidst discussion of divination, iconography, funerary culture and astral lore, for example, the author frequently pauses to arbitrate on what is and is not “science” (e.g. pp. 5, 28–9, 57, 157, 217, 254, 301). Throughout his work one also sees an uncritical reiteration of the old sinological axiom that the astral sciences were practised by a small guild/cabal of professionals in secret government laboratories (pp. 246–51, 300, 422) – a yarn which has, in the last two decades, been thoroughly refuted and which, even more to the point, contradicts the author’s own statements concerning universal access to and knowledge of seasonal indicators (pp. 95, 154, 257), the popular currency of omenology (pp. 311–3), and indeed the very existence of the wealth of archaeological materials that are the subject of his study in the first place.

Of course, to hold a book like this by the standards of another field is not only unfair, it misses the very point: it is interpretive, and it is speculative, but there is an elegance to the hubris with which this book weaves together six millennia of history, prehistory and future and, so too, an infectiousness of the beauty and imagination that brims from its every page.

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BERNARD S. SOLOMON:

*On the School of Names in Ancient China.*

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This study of two of the key groups of texts derived from the School of Names, one of the many branches of philosophical learning that, flourishing in the centuries prior to the unification of China in 221 BCE, represents the culmination of many years of research. Professor Solomon provides an extremely detailed linguistic analysis of first the paradoxes of Huizi cited in the *Zhuangzi* and then five selected chapters of the *Gongsun Longzi*. (It is not entirely clear why these particular chapters were chosen from the six that make up this book or why they are presented here in a different order from how they appear in the original text). In each case, the text is given in parallel translation with annotations and is followed by a lengthy discussion of the philosophical significance of each section. For the *Gongsun Longzi* chapters, the author also provides an extensive comparison with half a dozen earlier translations of the same texts in both English and French. Several of these chapters have been published already in the journal *Monumenta Serica*; they are now collected here into a single volume. Given that a large number of prior translations into English exist for both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Gongsun Longzi*, perhaps the

most significant contribution to the discussion of these notoriously difficult texts is the author's insistence that the major barrier to our understanding is not any intrinsic incomprehensibility: there is considerable evidence that people at the time of its writing were happy to engage in debate and argument about these texts. It is through a combination of textual corruption and loss of context that they have been reduced to near-gibberish, but that is our problem and should not be regarded as reflecting upon the original authors' intentions. However, although some of the problems of textual corruption can perhaps be solved, it is not evident how we are to approach the difficulties of overcoming this difference in context; these texts are after all more than 2,000 years old. Furthermore, given that this is the author's contention, it would have been useful to see some discussion of early engagement with these texts, showing how they were understood by a contemporary audience.

Solomon's sensitive analysis of the linguistic pyrotechnics found in these School of Names texts is excellent, but probably of greatest interest to other scholars of early Chinese philosophy and language. This narrow focus means that the historical background against which these texts were produced is largely ignored, as is their context within the history of ideas; both of these are aspects which might have broadened the appeal of this book to a much wider audience. The problems that this causes are particularly evident in the analysis of the Huizi Paradoxes from the *Zhuangzi*. Paradox eight (pp. 50–51) concerns the linked rings which can be separated. While it might be correct to concentrate the analysis on the juxtaposition of two incompatible concepts, it would be helpful at least to mention the single most famous story from ancient China concerning the separation of linked rings: when the widowed Queen of Qi was sent a jade chain by the future First Emperor of China, the links were carved from a single piece of stone and she was asked to separate them – she then hit them with a hammer until they broke. Faced with this demonstration of the Queen Dowager's determination and resolve, the First Emperor decided that such a woman would be an excellent administrator of her kingdom, and as a result he decided not to invade Qi until after her death. (This story can be found in the *Zhanguo ce*.) It is hard to imagine that this tale was not somewhere at the back of the mind of the author of this paradox. Likewise, in the case of the tenth paradox (p. 37), where the centre of the world is described as being at once both north of the northern kingdom of Yan and south of the southern kingdom of Yue, the author considers this to be a negation of the ethnocentric conception of China as the "Middle Country" and a denial of the concept that the word "centre" can be restricted to a single concretization. However, if this paradox is interpreted in the light of understanding the earth as a globe, it represents an interesting philosophical attempt to comprehend the nature of centrality in a situation where, if you carry on going for long enough, you will end up where you started.

Although *On the School of Names in Ancient China* represents an impressively detailed analysis of some of the most significant and famous texts associated with this branch of philosophy, it is not easy to read. In part this is due to the difficulty of explaining the precise meanings of the Chinese characters in the specific context in which they are being used, particularly given that these texts are works of philosophy concerning linguistic usage, but sometimes it is due to the author's convoluted style of writing. On at least two occasions there are sentences which run to more than fifteen lines of printed text; it would have been an act of kindness on the part of the publishers to have broken these paragraph-long sentences into a more manageable form. It is a triumph on the part of the proofreaders that the book is as free from errors as it is.

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