

PhD position in Mozi and Yang Zhu Studies at KU Leuven, Sinology (Belgium) (October 2017 – September 2021)

This position is offered in the context of a research project on the creation of Mozi or Yang Zhu from “heretics” into “philosophers.” (for more details, see “Project” below) We are looking for a young Ma student in Sinology, Chinese studies, or Chinese philosophy willing to study an epoch in this creation. One’s research focus should be on one of the two figures in one (or more) epochs of the candidate's choice.

We look for a young scholar with an Ma degree:

- who is interested in the history of Chinese thought, willing to call dominant views into question, and to study the historical contingency of currently dominant views in the field of philosophy.
- with a thorough training in reading classical Chinese
- with a fine sense for modern Chinese (and preferably also Japanese)
- with a good command of English (and perhaps French or German)
- willing and able to collaborate with other scholars
- very motivated to do research, share thoughts, give advice, publish, attend conferences, check Chinese translations, etc.

We offer

- a gross salary for a full-time position is around 38.000€ per year; take-home pay depends on nationality and family situation. The exact % of employment will be decided and communicated to the candidates in July 2017.
- a small and nice environment of motivated scholars fascinated by Chinese thought.
- expertise on Mohism and Chinese philosophy.
- support in research and publication.
- seminars with staff and other PhD students on various topics related to China.
- an international workshop on the portrayals of Yang Zhu.
- classes in English in the departments of Philosophy, Religion, or European Studies at the KU Leuven.
- life in a small, safe, and cozy university-city with an age-long tradition
- a location in the center of Europe.

Interested?

- E-mail to Carine Defoort (carine.defoort@kuleuven) the following two items: (1) your updated CV; (2) a research project on the topic that you want to work on (inspired by the project below).
- Deadline: March 15, 2017.

Project

Despite their age-old twin status as heretics, the modern rehabilitation of Mozi and Yang Zhu differed. Mozi's existence and thought had been amply recorded in early texts, including a book named after him; Yang Zhu is hardly attested in the early sources and no writings have traditionally been attributed to him. What were the major stages in their eventual construction as "philosophers"? The research can focus on a selection of case-studies here presented in three major steps. Possible topics are the following suggestions or inspired by them:

1. Liberation from the Confucian paradigm (16-19th cent.)

- Mozi and Yang Zhu had been labeled heretics by the second Confucian sage, Mencius around the late fourth century BCE. When Mencius came to dominate the Confucian orthodoxy, it was quasi impossible to speak up for Mozi or Yang Zhu. The earliest crack in the orthodoxy occurred in the 16th century: Mozi was cautiously defended by some isolated scholars; Yang Zhu remained unmentioned. The modern Chinese term "philosophy" did not exist yet, but in these three centuries some scholars began to speak of the two heretics in terms of acceptable masters.
- For Mozi: A surge in textual research in the 18th and 19th century also increased interest in Mozi. The current portrayal of his thought as a consistent system of ten core ideas can be traced to that period. But what were the earliest signs of this portrayal in the 16th and 17th century? When did scholars begin to speak up for Mozi and how?
- For Yang Zhu: What were the first concrete signs of his metamorphosis from a mere heretic to the philosopher he would later become? When was he mentioned other than as a heretic? When was a more or less consistent theory attributed to him? Who took up his defense and how?

2. The construction of philosophers in the Republican era (1911-1949)

- Only in the early 20th century was the discipline of Chinese philosophy installed in China. Early philosophers were retrospectively discussed in terms of imported theories and newly coined neologisms. This new frame largely replaced the traditional view. Mozi was now variously heralded as China's first logician, scientist, utilitarian, democrat, egalitarian, and moral philosopher of ten anti-Confucian core ideas; Yang Zhu was discovered as a valuable counterpart to Western hedonism and social Darwinism.
- For Mozi, this research project focuses on the "philosopher of the ten core ideas." What were the various hierarchies that Republican scholars constructed among this set of ten? How did they use diagrams

and schemes to visualize their views on the relation among these core ideas in Mohist philosophy?

- For Yang Zhu, the project focuses on the views and arguments of the three Chinese pioneers who turned him into a philosopher: Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990), and Guan Feng 關鋒 (1919-2005). Which interpretative steps were used to turn him into a full-fledged philosopher? What were the major disagreements?

3. The Marxist portrayal in the People's Republic prior to the Open up and Reform (1949-1978)

The Marxist period in Chinese history introduced yet another portrayal of all the masters, including Mozi and Yang Zhu. They were still considered philosophers, but now seen as “idealists” or “materialists” in various respects. Even though this stage is nowadays considered outdated and irrelevant, these debates give a detailed impression of the political grasp on academia during the communist era: the variety of views that were put forward within the Marxist frame, the political factions associated with different views, the implications for the lives of some protagonists, and the resemblance to the current (obviously weaker) ideological constraints. For Mozi as well as Yang Zhu the project focuses on two important figures, Feng Youlan and Guan Feng, who positioned themselves, respectively cautiously and fervently, in the communist sphere.