

Because the Happy Fish is not Happy
Political Joke in Disguise of Philosophical Dispute

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Despite the exchange between Zhuangzi and Hui Shi on the bridge above River Hao is found in the Outer Chapters, an allegedly “unauthentic” part of the *Zhuangzi*, it has received much attention in the study of Chinese philosophy. One reason is that the content of the exchange is widely considered as bearing strong resemblance to Western philosophy, epistemology in particular. The other reason is that it is puzzling how Zhuangzi can outwit Hui Shi by his uncanny final remark. Many attempts have been made to explicate Zhuangzi’s and Hui Shi’s epistemic viewpoints and how Zhuangzi dismisses or triumphs over Hui Shi’s arguments. These attempts, as I will argue in this essay, either fail to make good sense of the exchange or unable to contextualize it on intratextual as well as intertextual levels. I therefore propose a political interpretation and explain how this interpretation can avoid the failures and solve the puzzle.