

# Zhuangzi's concept of you 遊: limitless transformation along with things

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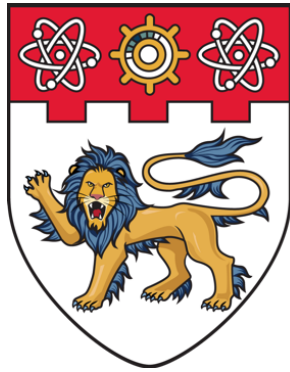
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**SINGAPORE**

**ZHUANGZI'S CONCEPT OF *YOU* 遊:  
LIMITLESS TRANSFORMATION ALONG  
WITH THINGS**

**YUKA KAMAMOTO  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES  
2022**

**Zhuangzi's Concept of *You* 遊: Limitless  
Transformation Along with Things**

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School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts

**2022**


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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	i
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	ii
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	iii
<b>PREFACE</b> .....	iv
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> <i>Neither a Profane nor Poetic Concept of You</i> .....	1
1. Introduction: Overview of <i>Xiaoyao You</i> 逍遙遊 .....	1
2. <i>You</i> 遊 means “Wandering” .....	2
3. <i>Xiaoyao</i> 逍遙 also means “Wandering” .....	5
4. Profane vs. Poetic Wandering.....	6
5. Comparative Analysis between <i>You</i> 遊 and <i>Dao</i> 道.....	11
6. Analysis of <i>You Wuqiong</i> 遊無窮.....	18
7. Two Realms of Wandering.....	21
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> <i>You-ing Two Roads</i> .....	29
1. Introduction: <i>You</i> as a Dependence on both Heavenly and earthly viewpoints.....	29
2. Analysis of <i>Tiandizhizheng</i> 天地之正.....	29
3. Walking Two Roads.....	32
4. Zhuangzi’s Concept of Heaven ( <i>Tian</i> 天) .....	33
5. Analysis of The Piping of Heaven Passage.....	35
6. Analysis of <i>Liuqizhibian</i> 六氣之辯.....	42
7. A “This” is also another’s “That”.....	45
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> <i>Cook Ding’s You-ing Knife</i> .....	51
1. Introduction: Tensions between Skilfulness and Uselessness.....	51
2. Musicality in the Cook Ding Passage.....	53
3. Analysis of <i>Yangsheng</i> 養生.....	56
4. <i>Yangsheng</i> and <i>You</i> in Chapters 1 and 2.....	60
5. <i>You</i> as Losing the Self.....	63
6. Analysis of the Cook Ding Passage.....	66
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	69
<b>CITATION</b> .....	70



## SUMMARY

*You* 遊, which is usually translated as ‘wandering’, is a central concept in the *Zhuangzi* that appears over ninety times in the text. It is generally taken to mean the ideal Zhuangzian way of life, whereby one wanders around the world freely and aimlessly without having an ultimate goal in mind. The existing scholarship mostly uses the term to refer to a non-purposive mindset or activity that is associated with the daemonic performances of the skill masters from the famous “skill stories”. However, the bulk of the text is made up of a more poetic or elevated sense of *you* 遊, in which mystical sages are often described as wandering in some other-worldly dimension. In this dissertation, I argue that *you* 遊 designates an aimless mode of life, in which one continually transcends the confines of one’s own limited perspective by appealing to both Heavenly and earthly viewpoints in order to transform into any other perspective that comes along one’s way.

## PREFACE

What makes the *Zhuangzi* such a unique philosophical work is its light-hearted, humorous, and even therapeutic approach to living in a world that is dominated by chaos, suffering and unpredictability. It is remarkable that during a period of war, poverty, and political unrest, when most schools of thought were putting forth different proposals for the proper way to rule and reform society, the *Zhuangzi* playfully refrains from giving any straight solution to rectify social disorder nor argues for it. While most philosophies attempted to unify societal divisions by affirming its own doctrine or point of view to the exclusion of all others, the *Zhuangzi* seems to celebrate and thrive on the multiplicity and plurality of different individuals and perspectives.

*You* 遊 can be taken as Zhuangzi's<sup>1</sup> sometimes light-hearted, humorous, and carefree response to the chaotic state of the world, as opposed to the common men's response of worry, seriousness, and obsession for control over one's circumstances. The term generally refers to the ideal Zhuangzian way of life. According to Victor Mair, *you* is "probably the single most important and quintessential concept in the *Chuang Tzu*" (Wandering 385). Most scholars of the *Zhuangzi* agree on the definition of *you* as "wandering" or "roaming", which refers to a kind of spontaneous and non-teleological activity or attitude that serves no further objective beyond itself. The word *you* is multifaceted and rich with various possible meanings other than just "wandering", which is of no surprise given the heavy and playful use of puns and wordplay throughout the text. On one hand, the word *you* is sometimes used in pragmatic, real-life settings, such as in the famous passage of Cook Ding butchering an ox, where Ding's knife is said to *you* freely between the ox's joints. On the other hand, the bulk of the *Zhuangzi* is made up of more spiritual or transcendental uses of *you*, in which mystical Daoist sages are often described as having supernatural powers of flight, which allows them to *you* in some higher, spiritual realm. My goal is not to argue for one interpretation of *you* to the exclusion of all others; rather, I aim to bridge both senses of *you* through my analysis and interpretation of this multidimensional concept. In this dissertation, I argue that *you* 遊 designates an aimless mode of life, in which one continually transcends the confines of one's own limited perspective by appealing to both Heavenly and earthly viewpoints to transform into any other perspective that comes along one's way.

In Chapter One of my dissertation, I will first give an overview of how the existing scholarship interprets

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<sup>1</sup> This dissertation follows the convention of using the name 'Zhuangzi' to refer to the author(s) of the *Zhuangzi*. While the current scholarship largely identifies Zhuangzi as the singular author of the Inner Chapters, and therefore takes the Inner Chapters to be the core of the text, I take a more inclusive interpretive approach towards the text as a whole by quoting textual material not just from the Inner Chapters, but also from the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, based on their consistency or compatibility with regard to the concept of *you*. See Klein 2010 for challenges to the view of the historical Zhuang Zhou as the sole author of the Inner Chapters.

the terms *you* 遊 and *xiaoyao* 逍遙 in the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, as well as highlight the tension between poetic and profane uses of *you* throughout the text. I will then compare *you* 遊 with another important Daoist concept *Dao* 道, and analyse the phrase *you wuqiong* 遊無窮, which is the first occurrence of *you* in the *Zhuangzi*. Lastly, I will point out that there are two realms of wandering that distinguishes the roaming of the paradigmatic Daoist sages and the roaming of other common men. In Chapter Two, I will dive into a deeper analysis of the phrase *you wuqiong* 遊無窮 by first explicating one of its aspects, which is to depend upon “what is true to both Heaven and to earth” (*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正), and its associated idea of “Walking Two Roads” (*liangxing* 兩行). Then I will set up an understanding of Zhuangzi’s concept of Heaven, and then demonstrate the idea of Heaven as having no causative agent in the Piping of Heaven passage in the second chapter of the text. Lastly, I will explicate the second aspect of *you wuqiong* 遊無窮, which is to depend upon the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths (*liuqizhibian* 六氣之辯), and explain Zhuangzi’s concept of a thing, which is a “this” is also another’s “that”. In Chapter Three, I mainly focus on analysing the Cook Ding passage. First, I point out the musicality in the passage that marks it primarily as a subversion of Confucian values. Next, I analyse Zhuangzi’s concept of nourishing life (*yangsheng* 養生), which is a concept that is often overlooked in most scholars’ analysis of *you* in the Cook Ding passage. I will also show that the concept of *yangsheng* has already been paired with *you* in the first two chapters of the text, long before the Cook Ding passage. Lastly, I talk about the concept of losing the self and tie up the chapter with a final analysis of the Cook Ding passage.

# CHAPTER ONE Neither a Profane nor a Poetic Concept of *You*

## 1.1 Introduction: Overview of *Xiaoyao You* 逍遙遊

The word *you* 遊 is found in the title of Chapter 1 of the *Zhuangzi*, *xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊. Within the first chapter, the phrase *xiaoyao you* does not actually appear in its entirety; the terms *xiaoyao* 逍遙 and *you* 遊 appear separately in different passages. First, I will compare how various scholars have interpreted the terms *you* and *xiaoyao* (Table 1) and identify its basic features. Secondly, I will discuss Hans-Georg Moeller’s distinction between “profane” and “poetic” uses of the term *you* to provide a framework for balancing between transcendental and pragmatic interpretations of *you*. Thirdly, I compare *you* to the conceptually similar term Dao 道 to lay the ground for Zhuangzi’s processual metaphysical framework. Next, I will analyse *you wuqiong* 遊無窮, which is I take to be the most quintessential rendition of Zhuangzi’s concept of *you*. In the last section, I will discuss two realms of wandering: common men can only roam within a confined zone, while the paradigmatic sages can roam beyond this zone; the difference between the two hinges on the concepts of dependence (*dai* 待) and borrowing (*jia* 假).

**Table 1.** Translations of *you* and *xiaoyao* in the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.

《莊子·逍遙遊》	逍遙遊	遊無窮 (1.3) <sup>2</sup>	遊乎四海之外 (1.5)	逍遙乎寢臥其下 (1.7)
	<i>Xiaoyao you</i>	<i>You wuqiong</i>	<i>You hu sihaizhwai</i>	<i>Xiaoyao hu qinwo qixia</i>
<b>Burton Watson</b>	Free and easy wandering (1)	Wandered through the boundless (3)	Wanders beyond the four seas (4)	Lie down for a free and easy sleep under it (6)
<b>A.C. Graham</b>	Going rambling without a destination (43)	Travel into the infinite (44)	Roams beyond the four seas (46)	Ramble around and fall asleep in its shade (47)
<b>Victor Mair</b>	Carefree wandering (3)	Wandering in infinity (5)	Wanders beyond the four seas (7)	Sleep carefreely beneath it (9)

<sup>2</sup> All references to the *Zhuangzi* are based on the ctext.org database. Translations are primarily borrowed from Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*; and sometimes from Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*; Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*; and Mair, *Wandering on the Way*.

<b>Brook Ziporyn</b>	Wandering far and unfettered (3)	Wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt (5)	Wandering beyond the four seas (6)	Far-flung and unfettered... dozing there beneath it (8)
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## 1.2 *You* 遊 means “Wandering”

Scholars tend to share the same or similar interpretations of *you* 遊 as “wandering”, “roaming” or “rambling”. According to Hans-Georg Moeller, the translation “roaming”, as opposed to more basic translations like “going”, “journeying” or “travelling”, designates “an *aimless* wandering that is not focused on getting from a starting point A to a final destination B” (“Rambling” 250).<sup>3</sup> This notion of aimlessness is especially striking in Graham’s translation of *xiaoyao you* as “rambling without a destination”. Throughout the *Zhuangzi*, we can find several examples of this purposeless way of moving about in the world:

- In Chapter 6, a group of Daoist friends are described as “reversing and returning, ever finishing and beginning but knowing no ultimate origins or endpoints” (Ziporyn 60).
- In Chapter 11, Vast Obscure describes his aimless way of drifting about in the world: “Drifting and floating, not knowing what seeking. Reckless and mad, not knowing where headed. It is play alone that holds the reins, enabling my prospectless gaze” (Ziporyn 95).
- Chapter 11 says that when the Great Man “is still he raises no echo and when moving he has no fixed direction” and he “takes you back and forth, a turbulence that wanders and plays without start or end, emerging and submerging unescorted, as beginningless as the sun” (Ziporyn 96).
- In Chapter 22, Zhuangzi describes himself as: “Having diffused my will, I go nowhere in it, yet I never know where I will arrive, where it will arrive. Coming, going, yet never knowing where it will come to a stop, where I will come to a stop. And when I have already come and gone in it, I still never know where it has ended, where I have ended. Soaring through the vastness, a great knowing enters into it, into me, but without knowing where it comes to a halt” (Ziporyn 179).
- In Chapter 23, Laozi advises Nanrong Chu: “Walk without knowing where you are going, stop without knowing what you are doing, slither along with all things, joining in their undulations” (Ziporyn 188).

<sup>3</sup> I have picked out translations by Watson, Graham, Mair and Ziporyn for my comparative analyses because their interpretation of *you* as “aimless wandering” is more philosophically interesting and engaging than the more basic translation, “journeying” or “going on an excursion”.

- In Chapter 32, Uncle Dim praises people who are able to wander aimlessly: “those without any abilities are free of all seeking: they eat until they’re full and then they wander around aimlessly, drifting like an unmoored skiff. Empty and aimless, they wander” (Ziporyn 260).

The interpretation of *you* as aimless wandering without a destination raises the following question: wandering nonetheless involves one being oriented toward a particular direction or goal, so how can we make sense of the concept of *you* as having no goal at all?<sup>4</sup> One way to resolve this problem is to distinguish having a final goal from having temporary goals. Then, *you* would mean to wander without being oriented towards a final goal, while still having temporary goals. However, the problem I find with this “final goal bad, temporary goal good” view is that having no final goal could still be construed as a final goal in itself, namely the goal to “have no final goal”. Granted, in the case of children, children truly have no further or final goal beyond whatever activity they are presently engaged in and can genuinely enjoy that activity for its own sake. Most adults, on the other hand, find it difficult to be fully immersed in the activity at hand while remaining undistracted by external goals, such as successfully accomplishing the task, gaining praise or reward, upholding one’s reputation, and so on. Unlike children, who have no trouble wandering without a final goal simply because they lack any final goal, adults carry the additional burden of having to first undo their deeply ingrained beliefs, values or preferences in order to return to a child-like state of wandering. However, if one tries to reach this child-like state by intentionally avoiding a final goal, it only backfires and prevents one from reaching that state, because the intention is what makes it such that one is still fixated upon a final goal: the goal to avoid having any final goal. It is like an actor on stage who purposefully tries to ignore the audience watching him, only to become more painfully aware of the audience’s presence. Hence, I argue that the nature of one’s goal—whether the goal is final or temporary, or whether a goal exists or not—is not the most defining feature of *you*. Rather, what is most characteristic of *you* is the ability to reach any goal without consciously planning, deliberating or intending to reach that goal. The lack of intention is mainly what makes it such that there is no goal.

For Zhuangzi, the infant is a paragon for this sort of nondeliberate wandering:<sup>5</sup> an infant “acts without knowing what he’s doing and moves along without knowing where he’s going, his body like the branch of a withered tree and his mind like dead ashes” (Chapter 23, Ziporyn 188).<sup>6</sup> An infant nevertheless accomplishes an action or reaches a goal, but he does so without intentionally making it happen, whereas most adults, perhaps due to social

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<sup>4</sup> This structural paradox also crops up in the Daoist concept of *wuwei* 無為, which if interpreted as “not doing” presents the following problem: not doing is still a form of acting, namely the act of not doing anything.

<sup>5</sup> The familiar motif of the infant can be found in the *Daodejing* chapters 10, 20, and 28.

<sup>6</sup> A similar phrase, making the body like “a withered tree” and the mind like “dead ashes”, is used to describe Ziqi’s trance-like state of losing the self (*sangwo* 喪我) in Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* (Ziporyn 11).

conditioning by conventional norms and values, have impaired or lost touch with this inborn ability. Zhuangzi employs the term “forgetting” (*wang* 忘) to denote the special kind of mental activity that allows one to restore this natural born, infant-like ability without involving any sort of conscious deliberation. Forgetting is the very antithesis of any kind of conscious or intentional mental activity: although one could have a desire or an intention to forget about something, one cannot have any conscious or deliberate control over what one forgets and when one forgets it; forgetting just happens on its own without one consciously knowing about it. Any attempts to deliberately forget about something only seem to perpetuate one’s memory of the object: again, think of the theatre actor who tries to unsee his audience, only to become more acutely aware of their presence. In Chapter 6, we are told that Confucius’ favourite student, Yan Hui, progresses through three stages of forgetting: first he forgets about Confucian values of humankindness (*ren* 仁) and responsible conduct (*yi* 義); then he forgets about Confucian practices of ritual (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂); and lastly, he just sits and forgets (*zuo wang* 坐忘) (Ziporyn 62). In the first two stages, Yan Hui makes some progress by forgetting values and practices that he has long held on to, but the third stage is where he makes true progress because he just “sits and forgets”: there is no specification of what he has forgotten, no object of intention here at all, suggesting that he has truly restored an infant-like ability to *you*. When one has completely forgotten about something, one has effectively lost the object without deliberately intending to do so. To *you* is to wander aimlessly having unintentionally lost one’s way or forgotten one’s goal.

Building on this interpretation of *you* as forgetting or losing one’s goal, I gather that there are two dimensions to wandering.<sup>7</sup> The first sense of wandering is spatial, which has to do with moving about in no particular direction. The metaphor of a vessel floating adrift in the ocean is helpful: there is no boatman intentionally controlling or steering it in any direction; the vessel just goes along with the unpredictable currents of the water. The second dimension of wandering is temporal, which has to do with moving about without knowing any definite starting or endpoints at any given point in time. To elaborate on the difference further, the spatial sense of wandering has to do with losing our sense of direction, like when we lose our way in the wilderness, unable to make sense of where we came from or where we are heading to. The temporal sense of wandering has to do with losing our sense of time or duration. We can imagine the scenario of being trapped for months or even years in a dark cave, losing track of how much time has passed, unable to make sense of day and night, or what season of the year it is.

I highlight these two senses of aimlessness, because the interpretation of *you* as “rambling without a destination” can potentially confuse readers—here, the spatial sense of wandering is pronounced, but the temporal

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<sup>7</sup> Chris Jochim also makes a distinction between temporal and spatial senses of wandering (p. 63).

sense is more subtle. However, if we understand aimlessness in both spatial and temporal senses, then wandering can be understood as truly involving no goal at all, because losing both a sense of space and time means that we can take any given point in time as a new beginning (loss of temporality), and thus whatever goal we have at any given point in space can be taken as another starting point (loss of spatiality). In a way, aimless wandering is a state of radical homelessness<sup>8</sup> and being lost in the world, in which one does not identify with any specific location nor point in time as one's home. Rather, one is able to feel at home anywhere they travel, like a nomad or wild animal that is not tied to any permanent home and is comfortable with making shelter anywhere. It is crucial to understand aimlessness in spatial and temporal senses, which will be important as I proceed with my following analyses of the term *you*.

### 1.3 *Xiaoyao* 逍遙 also means “Wandering”

Like the word *you* 遊, *xiaoyao* 逍遙 can also mean “wandering”. Graham does not seem to make any special distinction between the two terms, since his translations of *you* in the chapter title, *xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊, and in the phrase, *xiaoyao hu qinwo qi xia* 逍遙乎寢臥其下, are both “rambling” (Table 1). On the other hand, Watson and Mair translate *xiaoyao* as “free and easy” and “carefree” respectively. Ziporyn’s translation “far and unfettered” is by far the most unusual. To understand how these scholars have come to interpret *xiaoyao* differently, I borrow Wu Kuang Ming’s analysis of the term *xiaoyao*:

*Hsiao* is interchangeable with *hsiao*, "to dissolve" (as in water), though both *hsiao*'s mean "roaming." Wang Fu-chih read in *hsiao* (keeping the two meanings in mind) a traversing far in time, passing through series of events as one forgets them one by one (as the flight of a bird which leaves no trace behind).

*Yao* is synonymous with both "far" (*yao yuan*) and "waving" (*yao*). It is to travel far in space, traversing many horizons that keep changing. Such travel is with ease and leisure, "as an old man having an after-the-meal stroll, moving himself about for digestion. (84)

Ziporyn’s translation of *xiaoyao* as “far and unfettered” carries the notion of “far” (*yao yuan* 遙遠), or going away into a distance. This alludes to my earlier analysis of *you* as losing one’s goal by distancing from the external object to the point that it becomes so vague, unclear, and indefinite that one completely forgets about it. At a later point of

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<sup>8</sup> Hans-Georg Moeller uses this term “radical homelessness” as the ontic condition for engaging in *you*, whereby one does not commit to any geographical or social location as belonging to oneself (“Genuine Pretending” 167).



my paper, I will explain more about the feature of being “unfettered” as I go deeper into my analysis of *you wuqiong* 遊無窮. Moving on, Watson’s and Mair’s translations of *xiaoyao* accentuate the carefree and enjoyable aspect of *you* (i.e., wandering aimlessly). We can think of the experience of travelling on a holiday, as opposed to travelling on a business trip. When we travel for leisure, we need not follow any particular plan nor itinerary. We have the luxury of wandering around the streets without following a map. This gives us the pleasure of discovering interesting places serendipitously, as opposed to the potentially stressful experience of trying to get to specific tourist landmarks. According to Watson, the *Zhuangzi* uses *you* “to designate the way in which the enlightened man wanders through all of creation, enjoying its delights without ever becoming attached to any one part of it” (xii). Likewise, Mair agrees that *you* “implies a ‘laid-back’ attitude toward life in which one takes things as they come and flows along with the Tao unconcernedly” (385). This reading of *you* as a sort of relaxed and carefree attitude works well in the context of the phrase “*xiaoyao hu qinwo qi xia*” from Chapter 1, whereby Zhuangzi asks Huizi to simply “do nothing”<sup>9</sup> (*wuwei* 無為) and doze underneath a tree without any worry:

Now you have this big tree, and you’re distressed because it’s useless. Why don’t you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village or the field of Broad-and-Boundless, relax and do nothing [*wuwei* 無為] by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it [*xiaoyao hu qinwo qi xia* 逍遙乎寢臥其下]? Axes will never shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it. If there’s no use for it, how can it come to grief or pain? (Watson 6)

While a relaxed and non-teleological mode of navigation may sound like an absentminded or unpragmatic way of getting around in the world, Moeller contends that *you* “refers to a mobile form of dwelling within one’s surroundings, subject to constant change and without orientation toward a final goal...not a dumb or an inattentive state of mere vegetation but rather open and sensitive to all kinds of stimuli and environmental triggers” (“Rambling” 251). The idea here is that although the paradigmatic Daoist sage may not know exactly where he is heading to or what he is seeking, his lack of attachment to any fixed objective frees up his attention to be more receptive of whatever situation he may encounter, allowing him to respond more flexibly to any changes that he may experience in his environment.

#### 1.4 Profane vs. Poetic Wandering

Moeller makes a useful distinction between “profane” and “poetic” uses of *you* 遊 (“Rambling” 251). According to

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<sup>9</sup> See Watson 6; Graham 47; and Ziporyn 8. Mair translates it as “nonaction” (9).

Moeller, the former refers to the kind of aimless and attentive wandering that animals and sages concretely practise, whereas the latter refers to a more elevated or spiritual form of wandering. Moeller notes that the sages who engage in poetic wandering seem to have entered into some extraordinary state of “trance”,<sup>10</sup> and are “somewhat aloof, difficult to talk to, seemingly erratic and detached” (“Rambling” 252). They are usually described as roaming in the wilderness or some far-off place away from human society, or even in some otherworldly, spiritual realm, as shown in the following examples:

- The Utmost Person “chariots on the clouds and winds, piggybacks on the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas”<sup>1</sup> (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 19); “roam[s] where there is no sign” (Chapter 7, Ziporyn 71); and also goes “roaming through that in which all beings end and begin” (Chapter 19, Ziporyn 150).
- The Spiritlike Persons “ride upon the air and clouds, charioting upon soaring dragons, wandering beyond the four seas” (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 6).
- The sage “wander[s] beyond the dust and grime” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 19 and 21); and “roam[s] and play[s] in that from which nothing ever escapes” (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 55-56).
- The Nameless man would “ride off on a bird formed from the unkempt wisps of the air, out beyond the six extremities of the known world, roaming in the homeland of nothing at all” (Chapter 7, Ziporyn 69).
- The Great Man “wanders and plays without start or end” (Chapter 11, Ziporyn 95-96).
- A clear-sighted sovereign “wanders his way where there is nothing at all” (Chapter 7, Ziporyn 70).

On the other hand, *you* 遊 is also used more concretely in more practical, real-world settings. One example which Moeller refers to is the famous “Happy Fish” dialogue from Chapter 17:

Zhuangzi and Huizi were strolling along [*you* 遊] the bridge over the Hao River. Zhuangzi said, “The minnows swim about [*you* 遊] so freely, following the openings wherever they take them. Such is the happiness of fish.”

Huizi said, “You are not a fish, so whence do you know the happiness of fish?”

Zhuangzi said, “You are not I, so whence do you know I don’t know the happiness of fish?”

Huizi said, “I am not you, to be sure, so I don’t know what it is to be you. But by the same token, since you are certainly not a fish, my point about your inability to know the happiness of fish stands intact.”

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<sup>10</sup> A.C. Graham has made a similar remark that *you* 遊 is used rather like the “trip” of psychedelic slang in the 1960s (*Zhuangzi* 8).

Zhuangzi said, “Let’s go back to the starting point. You said, ‘Whence do you know the happiness of fish?’ Since your question was premised on your knowing that I know it, I must know it from right here, up above the Hao River.” (Ziporyn 141-142)

Moeller notes that the very same word *you* 遊—which is homonymous with the word *you* 游, meaning “to swim”—is used to describe both Zhuangzi’s and Hui Shi’s way of strolling on the bridge above the Hao River and the fishes’ way of swimming freely and happily in the river. He argues that Zhuangzi and Hui Shi are not wandering in some otherworldly dimension like the mystical Daoist sages that I mentioned previously. Instead, they are concretely and playfully engaging in “philosophical rambling” in the same earthly realm as the fishes down below them (Moeller “Rambling” 254). Another example of “profane” wandering is from Chapter 3, in the story of cook Ding who skilfully carves up an ox for King Hui of Liang. Cook Ding engages in the mundane activity of ox-butchering, not at all like the Daoist sages who engage in more supernatural feats such as riding on the wind. The term *you* 遊 is used to describe cook Ding’s knife: his knife maintains its sharp edge by freely wandering (*you*) through what cook Ding perceives as enormous gaps between the ox’s joints.

The bulk of the *Zhuangzi* is made up of the more poetic use of *you* 遊, which has led to religious or spiritual readings of the text, otherwise known as the traditional *dao jiao* 道教 approach. Rur-Bin Yang, for example, interprets *you* as “the emergence and circulation of the spiritual energy together with the world in a kind of super-experiential state” (113). Likewise, Eske Mollgaard’s interpretation of *you* is more transcendental than naturalistic; he contends that “Zhuangzi’s own experience of ‘wandering’ (*you*), which is his spiritual exercise par excellence, is very much like the experience ‘to be with God’” (12). According to Liu Xiaogan, Zhuangzi’s usage of *you* implies that:

[...] the place in which one roams freely is mysterious as well as remote. The wilderness or the “Never-never land” (*wu-he-you-zhi-xiang* 無何有之鄉) refers to such a place, far beyond the world. Moreover, the compound *you-xin* (mind’s wandering) appears repeatedly, indicating quite directly that it is the mind, rather than the body, that roams. Thus, by combining *xiao-yao* and *you*, the *Zhuangzi* depicts a free soul roaming in the boundless world of imagination where the mysterious union with Dao can be attained. *Xiao-yao* and *you* mean gaining access to the infinite panorama of a spiritual world. (54)

The *dao jiao* approach tends to take the numerous appearances of superhuman sages in the *Zhuangzi*—such as the Utmost Person who is described as being immune to the extremities of heat and cold and as having fantastical powers of flight<sup>11</sup>—literally as paragons of health or spiritual freedom. Another way of understanding these occurrences of *you* is to treat these sages as “allegorical” figures, which Michael Strickmann says they “may have intended to be” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

As Graham points out, Zhuangzi “is not thinking only of ecstatic experience; even a diplomat on a difficult mission is advised to consider only the objective conditions and ‘let the heart roam [*youxin* 遊心] with other things as its chariot, and trust yourself to the inevitable in order to nurture the centre of you” (*Zhuangzi* 8). The example that Graham is referring to is from Chapter 4, in which Confucius gives counsel to Zigao, who is psychologically burdened by the heavy mission of serving as an envoy to Qi. Here, the use of *you* is notably more specialised as it is paired together with *xin* 心, the heart-mind. Compared to other passages where *you* is used in a more poetic or spiritual sense, Confucius’ advice to Zigao on letting the heart-mind wander seems to have a more concrete, real-world application. That is, it aims to help Zigao overcome a dangerous political situation rather than to guide him toward spiritual enlightenment.

Moeller points out that the mystical Daoist sages, who engage in poetic *you*-ing, are described with and use “bolder and lyrical” language as compared to the plainer language used between Zhuangzi and Huizi in the “Happy Fish” dialogue (“Rambling” 252). He further notes that “the quite striking linguistic differences between some more prosaic passages in the *Zhuangzi*, on the one hand, and some quite mannerist passages, on the other, mirror a difference between the philosophical and religious dimensions of this text” (“Rambling” 252). Whether the *Zhuangzi* meant for poetic instances of *you* to be interpreted in an allegorical sense, perhaps as conveying philosophical discourse (secular or philosophical reading), or in a literal sense, as a practical guide for spiritual attainment (spiritual or religious reading), the use of the word *you* 遊 throughout the text appears to be multifaceted, and no one reading, secular or religious, will suffice in the various contexts that they occur. *You* 遊 appears over ninety times throughout the text, and it can carry a range of possible meanings, including:

- (1) the most basic, which is “going”, “travelling”, or “journeying” to a destination;

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<sup>11</sup> “The lakes may burst into flames around him, but this can’t make him feel it is too hot. The rivers may freeze over, but this can’t make him feel it is too cold. Ferocious thunder may crumble the mountains, the winds may shake the seas, but this cannot make him feel startled. Such a person chariots on the clouds and winds, piggybacks on the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 19).”

- (2) aimless “wandering”, “roaming”, or “rambling”; and
- (3) “playing” or “enjoying”.
- (4) In addition, it is also cognate with the word for “swimming” (*you* 游).

One story from Chapter 11 makes use of all four meanings of the term *you*, which I will summarise as follows. The story begins with Generalissimo Cloud *you*-ing 遊 (travelling or wandering) in the east where he chances upon Vast Obscure.<sup>12</sup> Vast Obscure is *you*-ing 遊 (playing or enjoying himself) by slapping his buttocks and hopping around like a sparrow. When Generalissimo Cloud asks him about his odd behaviour, Vast Obscure replies with a single word, “*you* [遊]”, without stopping his playful butt-slapping and sparrow-hopping. Much to Vast Obscure’s annoyance, Generalissimo asks him for advice on how to “combine the purest kernels of the six energies to produce nourishment for all living beings”. Vast Obscure continues on with his play and replies, “I have no idea! I have no idea!” Three years later, Generalissimo Cloud goes *you*-ing 遊 (travelling or wandering) in the east and comes across Vast Obscure again. Overjoyed, he begs Vast Obscure for advice. Vast Obscure mysteriously responds, “Drifting and floating [*you* 游, the word for “swimming”], not knowing what seeking. Reckless and mad, not knowing where headed. It is play [*you* 遊] alone that holds the reins, enabling my prospectless gaze. What more could our majesties know?”

From this passage, we can see how difficult and problematic it would be to demarcate and neatly regiment such a multidimensional text along rigid lines of secular and religious, philosophical and spiritual, allegorical and literal, or profane and poetic. Neither one reading nor the other seems to suffice here. Is Vast Obscure’s single-word response of “*you* [遊]” to be read as profane (i.e., his enjoyment in pretending to be a sparrow is the same as Generalissimo Cloud’s mundane travelling) or as poetic (i.e., him pretending to be a sparrow is a mark of his spiritual transcendence, which is why Generalissimo Cloud asks him for spiritual advice on how to combine “the purest kernels of the six energies”)? Between Vast Obscure’s down-to-earth *you*-ing of butt-slapping and sparrow-hopping and his poetic “reckless and mad” *you*-ing—which one is Zhuangzi recommending? Which interpretation of *you* should we take here? Is *you*-ing something as mundane as travelling, swimming, and playing, or something more elevated? Here, it seems that Zhuangzi intends to make the most out of the multiple possible meanings of the

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<sup>12</sup> This retelling is based on Ziporyn 93-95.

word *you*, and this rhetorical strategy is fully in line with the general playfulness, ambiguity and open-endedness of the text. Hence, it is probably better to consider all possible meanings of the term *you* and to avoid overemphasising either transcendental or naturalistic interpretations.

So far, I have shown that *you* is used not only in a mystical sense to describe extraordinary beings who roam in some higher, spiritual realm; it is also used in more concrete and mundane settings, such as Zhuangzi and Hui Shi philosophically rambling above the Hao River, cook Ding's knife wandering between the ox's joints, and Confucius advising Zigao to let his heart-mind roam in order to survive his dangerous diplomat mission. Given that *you* is used in both senses, I argue that, at the very least, spiritual or religious readings of the text by no means rule out more secular or philosophical readings of the text. Furthermore, the heavy use of puns and wordplay throughout the text suggests that the author(s) of the *Zhuangzi* probably intended to convey multiple meanings and ways of interpreting the text. Hence, I aim to identify features of *you* that are common in both senses of poetic and profane wandering, rather than to treat them as separate kinds of *you*-ing.

### 1.5 Comparative Analysis between *You* 遊 and *Dao* 道

In this section, I will compare *you* 遊 to another important Daoist term, *Dao* 道. My basis for comparing these two concepts is that they are conceptually similar and often appear together in various passages within the *Zhuangzi*. *You* 遊 and *Dao* 道 both share the same component on the left, *chuo* 辵, which signifies walking or travelling. As I have established in earlier sections, *you* can mean “to travel”, “to wander” or “to swim [*you* 游]”. According to Wu Kuang Ming, *you* originally meant “both the unrestrained flow of a banner in the wind and a fish swimming in water in playfulness” (85). From this basic meaning, we can infer that *you* has to do with constant motion or being on the move. The term *Dao* also shares the same theme of travelling, and literally means “way”, “path”, “road”, or, as Ziporyn translates it, “course”. Although *Dao* as a noun refers to a static and unchanging way/path/road/course, its verbal form refers to the very *process* of traversing a road rather than just the road itself, which implies a dynamic dimension to the concept of *Dao*. Generally speaking, movement and travel are recurring motifs in the *Zhuangzi*. The first chapter famously opens with the journey of the gigantic bird Peng from the Northern Oblivion to the Southern Oblivion. Throughout the text, the repeated imagery of blowing wind, flowing water, flying birds, swimming fishes, wind-riding sages, spinning wheels, and various vehicles such as boats, chariots, carriages, and carts all allude to the idea of constant motion or travel.

In the previous section of my paper, I mentioned that the text uses *you* in a profane sense, as in the case of

Cook Ding's mundane ox-butchering, and in a poetic sense, as in the case of Daoist sages miraculously riding on the wind. Likewise, the term Dao can be understood in an ordinary or a more elevated sense, as shown in the following excerpt from Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, where Qu Quezi asks Chang Wuzi:

I have heard the Master relating the claim that the sage does not engage in projects, does not seek benefit, does not avoid harm, does not pursue happiness, does not follow any specific course [Dao 道]. He says something by saying nothing, and says nothing by saying something, and thus does he wander [*you* 遊], beyond the dust and grime. The Master considered these rude and careless words, but I believe they are the practice of the Mysterious Course [Dao 道]. What do you think?" (Ziporyn 19)

Here, the first Dao is used in a mundane sense to refer to any definite course that is followed for the sake of some goal, such as avoiding harm, pursuing happiness, and so forth. This ordinary sense of the term Dao is originally found in early Confucian and Mohist writings, referring to a "course" of study and emulation, and its resulting set of practices, which are designed to guide one's behaviour in a way that encourages the attainment of some predetermined value, such as moral excellence or social stability (*Zhuangzi*, Ziporyn xxiii). It is also cognate with *dao* 導, which means "to lead or guide", and also "to speak", suggesting that such a course can be prescribed and communicated. When one has mastered and internalised the practices of a particular course, he or she is said to have "attained the Dao". This "attainment" (*de* 得) of the value or objective of that course is known as "Virtue" (*de* 德). The Confucians and Mohists each have their own Dao, i.e., their own set of practices and values, which in some ways contradicted one another. For example, while the Dao of the Confucians prescribed filial piety and lavish funerals, the Dao of Mohists advocated all-inclusive love and frugal funerals. Returning to the passage, the second instance of Dao is used in a more elevated sense to refer to *the* Course that is unlike any other course in the ordinary, normative sense; it is a course that cannot be emulated or transmitted through ordinary speech. As the passage suggests, practitioners of this "Mysterious Course" do not take any particular course as a model for their actions, and their manner of speaking is so inscrutable that Confucius dismisses it as "rude and careless words". Just as the term *you* 遊 has two opposing meanings—(1) to travel with the intention of reaching a specific goal, and (2) to wander *without* the intention of reaching any specific goal—the term Dao also has two meanings, one with a teleological implication and another with a non-teleological implication. In the ordinary, traditional sense of the term that originated from early Confucian and Mohist philosophy, Dao is any course that serves as a tangible and definite guide, like a clear-cut road or pathway that can be identified and followed along, to direct one towards some

specific goal. On the other hand, the mystical, Daoist sense of the term subverts this traditional meaning: it is a course that ironically does no guiding, what Zhuangzi calls “the Course that is not a Course” (*bu dao zhi dao* 不道之道) in Chapter 2 (Ziporyn 18). Dao, in this new sense, is often likened to water, the formless medium in which fishes swim and get carried along, where no discernible pathway can be taken as a guide and followed: “the fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and humans forget one another in the arts of the Course [*dao*]” (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 50). Zhuangzi often talks about *you* in relation to the wilderness, or remote and far-off places outside of human society, such as “wandering beyond the four seas” (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 6), “roam in the far-flung and unconstrained paths of wild unbound twirling and tumbling” (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 61-2), “wander in the fields of the unlimited” (Chapter 11, Ziporyn 93), “wandering in the wilds where no one goes” (Chapter 20, Ziporyn 158), and “wander only in the wilds of Xiangcheng” (Chapter 24, Ziporyn 198). The general references to the natural dwelling places where wild animals roam, and the outskirts where sages and simple countryfolk wander, point to vast and open spaces that have no strict boundaries or any deliberately carved out roads. When sages follow the guideless Dao that does not prescribe any particular course, they can *you* aimlessly in the world like a nomad or a wild animal, not intentionally picking out and following a specific path to get to their destination. Like how the trajectory of a driverless boat is determined by the watery currents, rather than by any one thing, *you* means to be unintentionally carried along by the Dao, wherever it may go.

This indefinite, non-prescriptive and non-teleological feature of Dao mainly has to do with its dynamic nature. In Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, the line, “courses are formed by walking them” (Ziporyn 15) seems to place more emphasis on the processual or dynamic dimension of Dao: this is to regard any course as something that one makes up as one goes along, as a never-ending work in progress, like drawing a sketch for no final picture. On the other hand, Zhuangzi seems to warn against a conception of Dao that regards any course as a static, definite, preconceived thing that is to be emulated: “Drawing a straight line upon this earth and then trying to walk along it—danger, peril” (Chapter 4, Ziporyn 43)! If courses are taken to be something fundamentally dynamic and unfinished, then in a sense, no one can ever be said to complete a course, which is why Zhuangzi says in Chapter 2 that “the Zhaos are not zither players” and “neither I nor anything else can be considered fully accomplished” (Ziporyn 16). Yet in another sense, precisely because of its processual and unfinished character, whichever point of my course I am presently at can be taken as the endpoint *for now*. In that case, anyone and everyone can be said to have completed a course, and so Zhuangzi also says that “the Zhaos are zither players” and “even I am fully accomplished” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 16). Using the example of drawing a picture, it is not that I can never finish drawing the picture; whatever I have sketched out for now can already be taken as the final picture. To take only one specific point of the drawing process as the final picture is to disregard that any other point can also be taken



as final. This is conceptually similar to the notion of *you* as a state of radical homelessness: one loses one's sense of time and space such that any given point in time and space can always be taken as a new dwelling place. Both *you* and Dao are dynamic concepts that do not involve any fixed starting or endpoints, any sharp boundary between one and the object of one's conscious intending, desiring, acting, etc., which act as a limiter on the motion of all things and prevents one from *you*-ing aimlessly without intending to reach a goal.

In *Daodejing* 25, we are given a metaphysical interpretation of Dao as “the mother of all under heaven”, but this metaphysical causer of all things also has a dynamic implication:

There is a thing formed from confusion and born before heaven and earth. Silent, solitary, alone and unchanging. It revolves everywhere [*zhouxing* 周行] and is never in danger. It can be the mother of all under heaven. I do not know its name, but I style it ‘the Dao’. If forced to give it a name, I call it ‘the Great’ [*da* 大]. The Great I call ‘Receding’ [*shi* 逝]. Receding I call ‘Distant’ [*yuan* 遠]. Distant I call ‘Reversing’ [*fan* 反]. Thus the Dao is great, heaven is great, earth is great, and the king is great as well. Within the realm there are four great ones, and the king sits as one among them. Men [*ren* 人] emulate earth [*di* 地]; earth emulates heaven [*tian* 天]; heaven emulates the Dao; the Dao emulates spontaneity [*ziran* 自然]. (Eno 17)

According to Ziporyn, the feature of it circulating everywhere (*zhouxing* 周行) seems to be a crucial factor for selecting the name “Dao”, since, as Ziporyn contends, the chapter highlights the most defining feature of Dao as “not its priority to heaven and earth, not its standing alone, not its changelessness, not its motherhood of the world, but its motion” (*Zhuangzi* 278). The chapter also calls it “*da* 大”. While *da* can mean “big” or “huge” to describe the immense size or vast extent of Dao, as well as “great” to denote its superiority over all other things, the chapter specifically describes *da* as going away (*shi* 逝), distancing (*yuan* 遠), and returning (*fan* 反). This emphasis on Dao's movement of going and returning suggests that its vastness or greatness is primarily marked by its dynamic nature, rather than by it having a fixed form or absolute value. The last line of the chapter in particular undermines the priority or superiority of Dao over all other things, through the movement of Dao from low to high—human beings emulate earth, earth emulates heaven, heaven emulates the Dao—eventually returning to the lowest and smallest unit: that which is so of itself (*ziran* 自然).

When Dao is referred to as the metaphysical source of all things, we commonsensically conceptualise it as ‘nonbeing’ or ‘nonexistence’. However, once we conceptualise it as ‘nonbeing’, this ‘nonbeing’ is now a thing that exists, otherwise we would not be able to think or talk about it. Since this ‘nonbeing’ is no longer distinct from ‘being’, we must now posit something other than ‘nonbeing’ and ‘being’ in order to distinguish the source of existence from ‘being’. Even so, we still run into the same problem: what we posit as prior to nonbeing has now become a thing, which once again needs to be differentiated from the source of existence:

There is existence. There is nonexistence. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-be-nonexistence. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-not-yet-begin-to-be-nonexistence. Suddenly there is nonexistence. But I do not-yet know whether “the existence of nonexistence” is ultimately existence or nonexistence. (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 17).

Rather than taking the source of existence as something distinct from and outside of being, Zhuangzi's concept of Dao characterises the source as something that is immanent in all things. In Chapter 22, when Zhuangzi is asked where the Dao is, he responds, “there is nowhere it is not” (Ziporyn 178). When asked to be more specific, Zhuangzi says that it is in the ants and crickets. This surprises the inquirer, since he did not expect for something as exalted as the Dao to be in such a lowly, commonplace position. When repeatedly pressed, Zhuangzi points lower and lower, saying that the Dao is in the grasses and weeds, the tiles and shards, and even as low as the piss and dung. Zhuangzi is not saying that the Dao is located specifically in any one of these places; rather he assigns the Dao to these lowly positions as a way of subverting any attempts to fix it at any specific or definite location, especially one that is of an elevated position, placed above and outside of everything else. For Zhuangzi, there is nothing outside of ‘being’, i.e., no ultimate cause or ‘nonbeing’ prior to ‘being’. There is just the never-ending, cyclical process of one being transforming into another being, and no priority or privilege is given to one thing or another:

All beings are seeds of one another, yielding back and forth their different forms, beginning and ending like a circle, so that no fixed groupings apply. This is called the Heavenly Equality, the turning of the Heavenly Potter’s Wheel. (Chapter 27, Ziporyn 226)

Under this metaphysical framework of all beings constantly transforming from one thing into another—as opposed to one external and ultimate ‘non-being’ causing all things—one puzzle remains: what exactly are we referring to when we talk about ‘non-being’? In some sense, we are not just referring to ‘being’ but something different from ‘being’, otherwise there is no way of distinguishing between ‘being’ and ‘nonbeing’. In Chapter 23, ‘nonbeing’ or ‘the Dao’ is likened to a swinging door that simultaneously connects and divides up all things:

The Course runs through and connects everything precisely by its division into partial portions. But the formations these make are also destructions. What is hated about this dividing into portions is just that these portions are then taken together constitute the totality. What is really hateful about such a totality is that now some definite existence is taken as the totality[...] Beings emerge, but not from any root. They vanish, but not through any opening. What is solidly real but in no one location, what really endures but has no beginning or end, what emerges but without any opening through which to vanish, is what really has solid reality. What has solid reality but is located in no position is the whole expanse of space. What has duration but no beginning or end is the whole expanse of time. They are something through which beings are born and die, emerge and vanish, but throughout all this emerging and vanishing they show no form. They are called the Heavenly Doors. The Heavenly Doors are non-being, and it is from such non-being that all beings emerge. Beings cannot constitute their being out of being; they must come forth from non-being. But neither does there exist some entity called non-being. It is 'This' in which the sage hides himself. (Ziporyn 189-190)

The Dao refers to the connective doors found between all things. This metaphor of Dao as a pivot is especially striking in the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which refers to the Dao as "Course as axis, the axis of all courses" (Ziporyn 15) and the rotating "Heaven the Potter's Wheel" (Ziporyn 16). When the door is open, so to speak, what is on both sides of the door connects to form an undifferentiated whole. Now all things are one, allowing each thing to transform into another thing as it goes through the door. When the door is shut, it divides things into parts, giving them their unique identities. Now all things are many and distinct from one another. As long as the door is shut, transformation is halted. If we take 'nonbeing' as the doors, then 'nonbeing' refers to the empty spaces between things, and this emptiness that marks the beginning and end of every transformation is not concretely located at any specific point in space and time. The metaphysical framework of 'non-being' generating 'being'—as opposed to 'being' generating more 'being'—takes all the empty spaces between things as a totality on one side of the door, and takes all things as a totality on the other side of the door, such that 'nonbeing' is now opposed to and closed off from 'being', which does not capture the metaphysical picture of things generating more things as one thing transforms to another. Conversely, the metaphysical framework of 'being' generating more 'being' takes what is on the other side of the door as something primarily unfixed, not some definite totality call 'being' or 'nonbeing'. What is on the other side is dependent on which side of the door one is at: from my side, *you* are the one who is on the other side of the door; from your side, *I* am the one who is on the other side. In other words, what is behind the door is not any definite identity but whatever unknown transformation that comes next.

Near the beginning of this section of my paper, I referred to the conversation between Qu Quezi and Chang Wuzi from Chapter 2 to explain the difference between prescriptive courses and the “Mysterious Course” that does no guiding (Ziporyn 19). Now, I will explain the relation between the sage’s practice of the non-guiding Dao and his ability to *you* with regard to the rest of the conversation as follows:

Standing shoulder to shoulder with the sun and moon, scooping up time and space and smooching them all together, leaving them all to their own slippery mush so that every enslavement is also an ennobling—the mass of men are beleaguered and harried by it all, while the sage remains so stupid and dense that he mixes in with all these ten thousand diverse harvests but tastes a single full unmixed ripeness in all and in each. For to him each thing is just so, and through the rightness of each, the thisness of each, he lets each enfold each. (Ziporyn 19-20)

When one thing encounters another thing and regards it as a definite ‘other’—i.e., as an external object outside of one’s conscious and intentional deliberating, planning, acting, etc. —the connective door between all things (i.e., the Dao) is shut, so to speak, halting transformation and limiting one’s ability to *you* aimlessly. The sage never leaves this door shut; the door is always opening and closing, thereby facilitating transformation and *you*-ing. In the passage above, the metaphor of “standing shoulder to shoulder with the sun and moon, scooping up time and space and smooching them all together” seems to be referring to the dynamic and immanent nature of Dao, which implies that things are not inert and sharply distinct from one another. The location-less and timeless empty spaces between all things is what connects them together, allowing the sage to mix with the ten thousand things such that both him and any objects outside of his consciousness are lost in the whole. Wu Kuang Ming’s analysis of the word *xiao* 道 in *xiaoyao* 逍遙 as interchangeable with *xiao* 消 (“to dissolve”) (84) complements this idea of mixing all things together: from the viewpoint of all things are one, any distinct thing loses its definite identity by dissolving into the whole mixture of things. The passage describes the sage as “stupid and dense”, which I take to mean that he has forgotten or lost all notions of having any ‘other’, external object or goal. After becoming one with things, he can access the unique identity or flavor of each thing, i.e., its own “rightness” or “thisness”; it being “just so”. Rather than privileging one flavor to the exclusion of all other flavors, so to speak, the sage does not follow only one specific thing but goes along with “the rightness of the present ‘this’” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 15), with whatever appears on the other side of the door, which could be any thing from the entire range of things. After he transforms from one thing to the next, he welcomes the next unknown transformation. This is how one is able to *you*, to wander aimlessly in the world, to reach a goal or complete a course without consciously intending to do so.

## 1.6 Analysis of *You Wuqiong* 遊無窮

In the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, the word *you* 遊 first appears in the phrase, *you wuqiong* 遊無窮. This phrase best captures the quintessential concept of wandering aimlessly without any intentional goal. Chapter 1 famously opens with a story featuring all manner of creatures, each with their own unique way of travelling. It begins with Kun, a gargantuan fish, swimming in the Northern Oblivion. Kun transforms into a gigantic bird, Peng, which must ascend many miles up into the air for it to set off on a long journey toward the Southern Oblivion. The cicada and small birds, which can only travel short distances by leaping from branch to branch, laugh at Peng for flying so far and regard their way of flying as the utmost way. Scholars and high-ranking officials are likened to these small creatures, regarding themselves as accomplished persons because of their reputed cleverness, virtuous behaviour or political merit. Song Rongzi has no regard for his reputation; he is unperturbed by social praise and condemnation, thus surpassing these petty scholars and officials. Liezi, the mythical Daoist sage, can miraculously ride on the wind for fifteen days before returning to the ground, thereby surpassing all the humans who can only walk arduously on land. While this sounds impressive enough, there exists an even more extraordinary mode of travelling, as described in the following excerpt where the key phrase *you wuqiong* 遊無窮 appears:

若夫乘天地之正，而御六氣之辯，以遊無窮者，彼且惡乎待哉！故曰：至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。(1.3)

If he had only mounted on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless, then what would he have had to depend on? Therefore I say, the Perfect Man has no self; the Holy Man has no merit; the Sage has no fame. (Watson 3)

As for the man who rides a true course between heaven and earth, with the changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on? As the saying goes, The utmost man is selfless, The daemonic man takes no credit for his deeds, The sage is nameless. (Graham 44–45)

Supposing there were someone who could ride upon the truth of heaven and earth, who could chariot upon the transformations of the six vital breaths and thereby go wandering in infinity, what would he have to rely on? Therefore, it is said that the ultimate man has no self, the spiritual person has no accomplishment, and the sage has no name. (Mair 5–6)

But suppose you were to chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth, riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths, so that your wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt. You would then be depending on—what? Thus I say, the Utmost Person has no definite identity, the Spiritlike Person has no particular merit, the Sage has no one name. (Ziporyn 5)

Ziporyn’s translation of *you wuqiong* as “wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt” bears a resemblance to his translation of *xiaoyao you* as “wandering far and unfettered”, in that they both highlight the free and unobstructed motion of wandering. In comparison, Watson interprets *you wuqiong* as “wandered through the boundless”; Graham as “travel into the infinite”; and Mair as “wandering in infinity”—all of which interprets *wuqiong* as a noun, rather than as an adjective that qualifies *you*. This possibly leads to a more spiritual reading of *you* as they suggest that *wuqiong* is an infinite, transcendental realm where the enlightened sage does his roaming. As Graham puts it:

With the abandonment of fixed goals, dissolution of rigid categories, the focus of attention roams freely over the endlessly changing panorama, and responses spring directly from the energies inside us. For Chuang-tzu this is an immense liberation, a launching out of the confines of self into a realm without limits. (Zhuangzi 8)

The difference in interpretation lies in the way *wuqiong* 無窮 is understood. While *wuqiong* can mean “infinity” or “limitlessness”, Ziporyn points out that *qiong* is conventionally contrasted with terms such as *da* 達, meaning “reaching the goal” or “penetrating all the way through”, and *tong* 通, meaning “unobstructed” or “successful”;<sup>13</sup> this suggests that *qiong* (what *wuqiong* negates) means “obstructed”, “failing to reach one’s goal”, or “coming to the end of one’s rope, or to a dead end” (“How Many” 50).<sup>14</sup> Thus, *you wuqiong* means to wander without being obstructed, or without stopping. This reading is not entirely dissimilar from Watson’s, Graham’s, or Mair’s translation of *you wuqiong*, in the sense that “the boundless”, “the infinite”, and “infinity” also express the idea of

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<sup>13</sup> For example, in 5.4, *qiong* 窮 is contrasted with *da* 達 in the sentence, 死生存亡，窮達貧富，賢與不肖，毀譽、饑渴、寒暑，是事之變，命之行也 “Death and life, surviving and perishing, failure and success, poverty and wealth, superiority and inferiority, disgrace and honour, hunger and thirst, cold and heat—these are the transformation of events, the proceedings of fate” (Ziporyn 49). In 12.2, *qiong* is contrasted with *tong* 通 in the sentence, 不樂壽，不哀夭；不榮通，不醜窮；壽夭俱忘，窮通不足言矣 “Taking no joy in long life and finding no sorrow in early death, they feel no glory in success and no shame in failure. Forgetting both long life and early death, success and failure are to them not even worth mentioning” (Ziporyn 99).

<sup>14</sup> Franklin Perkins similarly notes that *qiong*, which means “extreme poverty”, “destitution”, “reaching a limit” or “being blocked”, is contrasted with *da* 達, meaning “to reach”, “pass through successfully” or “progress”, and *tong* 通, meaning “to pass along smoothly”, “penetrate”, “master”, or “commune with” (“Skill and Nourishing Life” 20).

that which has no end or limit. However, the idea of infinity here is best understood as a circularity (start and endpoints meet at some point) rather than a linear concept (start and endpoints never meet), as Zhuangzi says in Chapter 27, “all beings are seeds of one another, yielding back and forth their different forms, beginning and ending like a circle, so that no fixed groupings apply” (Ziporyn 226).

I argue that Ziporyn’s translation is preferable to the others, as the other scholars have interpreted *wuqiong* 無窮 as a noun rather than as an adjective that qualifies *you* 遊. As a noun, the implication is that *wuqiong* is a location where wandering takes place in (“the boundless”), rather than an essential feature of wandering (being unfettered). First, interpreting *wuqiong* as being unfettered allows for both secular and spiritual readings, whereas interpreting it as an otherworldly realm leans more towards a spiritual reading. Next, if *wuqiong* is understood as a realm outside of the everyday that is only accessible to sages, then it is not conceptually compatible with the notion of the Dao as something that is immanent in all things, which allows even the smallest, most common unit to access the Dao. Lastly, scholars generally agree with the same reading of *you* as aimless wandering without having any predetermined goal in mind. However, if we were to take *wuqiong* as a final destination that the sage is oriented toward, that would undermine even this basic reading of *you*. To wander aimlessly without heading toward any specific direction would entail having no preference for one particular destination (the transcendental realm of “the boundless”) over any other (the mundane realm of the small creatures and petty officials).

One may argue that if we interpret Peng as the embodiment of the paradigmatic sage, it too is heading toward a specific destination: the Southern Oblivion (*nanming* 南冥), which the text also calls “the Pool of Heaven” (*tianchi* 天池).<sup>15</sup> However, I would like to point out that the text seems to go out of its way to obscure the determinacy of Peng’s destination. In a retelling of the story of Peng, we are told that the starting point of Peng’s journey is a dark ocean, which is also called the Pool of Heaven.<sup>16</sup> That means that Peng’s starting point and final destination are, in a sense, the same place—it is going *nowhere*, so to speak. The circular concept of infinity, like that of a rotating potter’s wheel, is helpful: any given point in the circle can be taken as a new beginning. The Pool of Heaven is a paradoxical term indicating both low and high, both water and sky, both starting and ending points at the same time, which further obscures the exact location of Peng’s destination. So even though Peng is heading towards a destination, it is not intentionally make its way there, for it cannot have any intention towards something indeterminate. If we cannot determine where Peng is heading toward, then what makes Peng’s *you*-ing so special?

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<sup>15</sup> “The oceans start to churn, and this bird begins his journey toward the Southern Oblivion. The Southern Oblivion—that is the Pool of Heaven” (Ziporyn 3).

<sup>16</sup> “In the barren northland there is a dark ocean called the Pool of Heaven” (Ziporyn 4).

Unlike the little creatures, whose travelling is halted at the furthest distance they can leap, or Liezi's wind-riding, which can only persist for fifteen days at a time, Peng's wandering is, as Ziporyn puts it, "unfettered" and "could nowhere be brought to a halt", precisely because its destination is unknowable and indeterminate. Since the sage cannot be said to have arrived at any definite destination; he can take any goal as a new starting point, and thus his wandering goes on and on infinitely. Hence, I follow Ziporyn's interpretation of *wuqiong* as being "unfettered", rather than as a fixed destination that the sage strives for.

### 1.7 Two Realms of Wandering

In the *Xiaoyaoyou* chapter, we are told that the gigantic bird Peng must depend on thickly piled up wind in order to have enough buoyancy and power to make its journey to the Southern Oblivion:

Now, if water is not piled up thickly enough, it has no power to support a large vessel. Overturn a cupful of water in a hole in the road and you can float a mustard seed in it like a boat, but if you put the cup itself in there it will just get stuck. The water is too shallow for so large a vessel. And if the wind is not piled up thickly enough, it has no power to support Peng's enormous wings. That is why he needs to put ninety thousand miles of air beneath him. Only then, bearing the blue of heaven on his back and unobstructed on all sides, can he ride the wind and make his way south. (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 3-4)

Conversely, the little cicada and birds do not have enough power to fly as high or as far as Peng; they just plummet to the ground because they do not depend on the wind like Peng does. Liezi does depend on the wind and is described as being very good at it to the point that he can fly for fifteen days before returning to the ground. However, we are told that "there was still something he needed to depend on" (Ziporyn 5). Does this mean that one should not depend on any thing at all? But we are told that Peng is able to ascend because he depends on something—the wind. The text seems to go out of its way to explain that the more thickly piled up the wind, the more power and buoyancy one can harness for flight, suggesting that the more things one depends on, the better. Later on, the passage asks the question of what one would be depending on if one were to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*):

But suppose you were to chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth [*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正], riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths [*liuqizhibian* 六氣之辯], so that your wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt. You would then be depending on [*dai* 待]—what? Thus I say, the Utmost Person has no definite identity, the Spiritlike Person has no particular merit, the Sage has



no one name. (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 5)

The open-ended question of what one would be depending on (*dai* 待) leads to three possibilities: one could depend on (1) nothing, which I have already ruled out because Peng is depending on something (the wind); (2) one single thing, which again is ruled out because depending on more things (more wind) provides more power for Peng's flight; and following this line of logic, we can extend the range of dependence to (3) all things, which would provide maximal power for Peng to fly. The lines “chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth” and “riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths” also suggest that one must depend on all things, on any thing from the entire range of things—not just Heaven, not just earth, not just one of the six atmospheric breaths—in order to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*). By depending on different things at various times from the whole range of things, one effectively effaces any strict boundary between self and other, leading to a loss or lack of any definite identity and any distinct ‘other’. Conversely, if one were to value only a limited range of things, especially conventionally valued things such as honor, merit, or rank, which are tied to one's identity, there will always be a leftover range of things that is distinguished as ‘other’. The attachment to a definite identity is what perpetuates a fixed distinction between self and other, halting one's ability to wander far and unfettered. The theme of dependence on all things for one's flight is also found in other ‘poetic’ examples of *you*, in which Daoist sages are described as depending on air, wind, mists or clouds to fly and wander into far-off places:

- The Spiritlike Persons “ride upon the air and clouds, charioting upon soaring dragons, wandering beyond the four seas”. (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 6)
- The Utmost Person “chariots on the clouds and winds, piggybacks on the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas.” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 19)
- The Daoist sage-companions Mengzi Fan, Master Qinzhang, and Sanghu ask “Who can climb up upon the heavens, roaming on the mists, twisting and turning round and round without limit, living their lives in mutual forgetfulness, never coming to an end?” (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 59)
- The Nameless man would “ride off on a bird formed from the unkempt wisps of the air, out beyond the six extremities of the known world, roaming in the homeland of nothing at all”. (Chapter 7, Z:69)

What is notable about these examples is that wandering is not restricted to a limited domain, such as the region within “the four seas” or “the six extremities of the known world”. Hans-Georg Moeller points out that the text often draws a distinction between two realms of wandering: the mystical Daoist sages roam outside of some confined sphere, while others roam inside it (“Rambling” 252). He refers to one passage from Chapter 6 to show

that these separate realms of wandering are used to indicate the existential differences between the Daoists and Confucians (“Rambling” 252). In my following analysis of this passage, I will show that the two realms of wandering do not just specifically refer to a distinction between Daoists and Confucians, but more broadly to a distinction between those who depend on all things to *you* and those who depend on only a limited range of things. In other words, the target of critique here is not Confucians per se, but their attachment to a definite identity and their one-sided valuing of one thing or some things to the exclusion of all others.

In this story, Confucius sends his disciple, Zigong, to pay his respects to Master Sanghu, a Daoist sage who has just passed away. At the funeral, Zigong witnesses Sanghu’s friends, Mengzi Fan and Master Qin Zhang, merrily singing a song in celebration of Sanghu’s death.<sup>17</sup> Zigong, who probably was expecting them to feel sorrow and weep over their friend’s death, asks them if it is ritually appropriate to sing at their friend’s corpse. To which they laugh and ask what does Zigong understand (*zhi* 知) about the point of ritual. Zigong reports this to Confucius, asking him to explain what sort of people they are, to which Confucius replies:

These are men who roam [*you* 遊] outside the lines. I, on the other hand, do my roaming inside the lines. The twain can never meet. It was vulgar of me to send you to mourn for such a person. For the previous while he had been chumming around as a human with the Creator of Things [*zaowuzhe* 造物者], and now he roams [*you* 遊] in the single vital energy of heaven and earth. Men such as these look upon life as a dangling wart or swollen pimple, and on death as its dropping off, its bursting and draining. Being such, what would they know about which is life and which is death, what comes before and what comes after? Borrowing [*jia* 假] different things at various times, they are always lodged securely somewhere in the same overall body. They forget all about their livers and gallbladders, cast away their eyes and ears, reversing and returning, ever finishing and beginning but knowing no ultimate origins or endpoints. Oblivious, they loaf and wander [*panghuang* 彷徨] uncommitted beyond the dust and grime, far-flung and unfettered [*xiaoyao* 逍遙] in the great work of doing nothing [*wuwei* 無為] in particular. Why would they do something as stupid as practicing conventional rituals to impress the eyes and ears of the common crowd? (Ziporyn 60)

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<sup>17</sup> Exemplary Daoist mourners are often portrayed as lacking tears and feelings of sorrow. In Chapter 6, Mengsun the Prodigy did not weep when his mother died (Ziporyn 61); in Chapter 3, Graingrind Misstep only yowled three times when Lao Dan died (Ziporyn 30); in Chapter 18, Zhuangzi sang and pounded on a washtub when his wife passed away (Ziporyn 145).

When Master Sanghu was alive as a human within the inner realm, he was still depending on some definite identity as there is a distinction between him and the “Creator of Things”, a boundary between self and other. After he passes away and roams beyond the inner realm, the boundary between him and some ‘other’ becomes unclear: he now roams in “the single vital energy of heaven and earth”, which is reminiscent of the idea of depending on both Heaven and earth to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*). Furthermore, the line “borrowing [*jia* 假] different things at various times, they are always lodged securely somewhere in the same overall body” suggests that his dependence on things encompasses the entire range of things, or metaphorically speaking, it is not just limited to one part or some parts of the body, but inclusive of the overall body. The sage’s ability to “forget all about their livers and gallbladders” and “cast away their eyes and ears”, not trying “to impress the eyes and ears of the common crowd” echoes one passage from Chapter 5, which explains how regarding all things as one frees the heart-mind (*xin* 心) from its one-sided tendency to prefer a limited range of things over everything else:

Looked at from the point of view of their differences, even your own liver and gall bladder are as distant as Chu in the south and Yue in the north. But looked at from the point of view of their sameness, all things are one. If you take the latter view, you become free of all preconceptions about which particular objects might suit the eyes or the ears. You just release the mind to play [*you xin* 游心] in the harmony of all virtuosities [*de* 德]. Seeing what is one and the same to all things, nothing is ever felt to be lost. (Ziporyn 46)

In the case of the Daoist sages celebrating their friend’s death, the ability to view all things as one is more specifically applied to the subject of life and death. The metaphor of looking upon life as a wart emerging on its own, and upon death as the wart’s dropping off suggests that the sages regard nothingness, life and death as an inseparable continuum,<sup>18</sup> such that the death of a friend is not felt to be a loss but just a returning to nothingness, or just another transformation from one being to the next. This explains the sages’ bizarre behaviour of singing at their friend’s corpse “without the least change of expression”, since they do not feel any sense of loss nor sorrow (Ziporyn 60). Suppose they were to weep or practise conventional rituals as Confucians do at a funeral, it would only be done for the sake of impressing “the eyes and ears of the common crowd”—which would feel contrived and pointless from their perspective.

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<sup>18</sup> An earlier passage from the same chapter also alludes to the oneness of life and death: “Who can see nothingness as his own head, life as his own spine, and death as his own backside? Who knows the single body formed by life and death, existence and nonexistence?” (Ziporyn 58)

In the later part of this passage, Zigong asks Confucius which zone is really his homeground, to which Confucius replies that he, like Zigong, is a “casualty of Heaven” (Ziporyn 60).<sup>19</sup> A cripple named Toeless from Chapter 5 makes a similar remark that Confucius has been punished by Heaven.<sup>20</sup> This punishment refers to Confucius’ inability to “see life and death as a single string, acceptable and unacceptable as a single thread”, i.e. to view all things as one. According to Toeless, Confucius is unlike the Utmost Person,<sup>21</sup> who regards things like “a good name” as handcuffs and leg chains, indicating that Confucius’ attachment to a definite identity is what shackles him and constrains his *you*-ing to only within the inner realm. One passage from Chapter 14 suggests that the one-sided valuing of a limited range of things, especially of conventionally valued things, leads to a perceived sense of loss and gain:

Those who consider wealth to be a definite good are unable to give up their salaries. Those who consider distinction to be a definite good are unable to give up their fame. Those who love power are unable to give control over to others; they are frightened while they hold onto it and grieved when they let it go. And yet they refuse to reflect even fleetingly on what it is that makes them so unable to give it up. These people are the casualties of Heaven. (Ziporyn 123)

Singling out one thing as a definite good and its other as a definite bad—for instance, preferring wealth over poverty, or life over death—fuels one’s attachment to that thing because letting it go is perceived as a loss. On the other hand, the paradigmatic Daoist sage does not regard letting go of valued things as a loss, because he does not regard them as things to be possessed or owned in the first place. Rather, the sage only borrows [*jia* 假] them temporarily, as the following excerpt suggests:

The Utmost Persons of old temporarily took up [*jia* 假] humankindness as a way forward, entrusted themselves for a night to responsible conduct, but only so as to wander [*you* 遊] in the empty wilds of the far and unfettered [*xiao yao* 逍遙], feeding in the fields of the sketchy and approximate, finding their place in the gardens of the unborrowed. To be far and unfettered is non-doing [*wuwei* 無為]. To be sketchy and approximate is to find nourishment easily. To possess the unborrowed is to never need to pay anything back.

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<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, Watson translates Zigong’s question as “what is this ‘realm’ that you stick to,” to which Confucius replies that he is “punished by Heaven” (50).

<sup>20</sup> All references to Toeless’ comments are quoted from Ziporyn 48.

<sup>21</sup> The paradigmatic figure who is said to have “no definite identity”, “no particular merit” and “no one name” in Chapter 1 (Ziporyn 5).

The ancients called this the Play [*you* 遊] that Gathers the True.<sup>22</sup> (Chapter 14, Ziporyn 123)

If one were to borrow or possess only one thing, its other would always be left out. The solution then is *not* to borrow nothing at all, for that would still be leaving out some other (borrowing something). Rather, it is the borrowing from the entire range of things, through flexibly cycling between borrowing and giving back *any* random thing at different times, that ironically leads to a true possession of something—that is, the possession of “the unborrowed”—because everything is borrowed and nothing is left unborrowed. The temporary borrowing of different things at various times is what enables the sage to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*), because one is never dependent on just one definite identity or one standard of value, and so one is never sharply opposed from and fettered by its ‘other’. Zhuangzi’s use of the term, *deng xia* 登假, which means climbing upon the borrowed, bears a thematic resemblance to the repeated imagery of paradigmatic sages depending on all manner of things, like the air, wind, mists, clouds, sun or moon, to fly and go into the distance:

- “Someday he will just choose his day to continue off into the distance, climbing along as before on the borrowed [*deng xia* 登假] (Ziporyn 46).”
- “Such was the way their understanding was able, in its very demise, to climb along its various borrowings [*deng xia* 登假] and ascend through the remotest vistas of the Course (Ziporyn 54).”

According to Ziporyn, the term *deng xia* 登假 literally means “to climb upon the borrowed”, but can also mean “to climb into the distance”, or alternatively “to ascend upon the rosy glow of the clouds”, which is a euphemism for the death of an emperor, describing him as ascending into the distance, over the clouds (Ziporyn 51nC). This implication of ascending and journeying towards death mirrors Peng’s journey to the indeterminate Southern Oblivion, or Master Sanghu’s passing away and roaming far beyond the limited, inner realm of things. In Chapter 18, we are told that “life is a borrowing [*jia* 假]” and “what is generated and regenerated through borrowing [*jia* 假] is just so much dust and dirt” (Ziporyn 146). In Chapter 22, human beings are described as “only temporarily assuming the form of a human being, always just on the verge of returning to their source” (Ziporyn 177). Any

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<sup>22</sup> This passage shares similar phrasing with the very first passage I referenced from Chapter 6, especially the line: “Borrowing [*jia* 假] different things at various times, they are always lodged securely somewhere in the same overall body... Oblivious, they loaf and wander uncommitted beyond the dust and grime, far-flung and unfettered [*xiaoyao* 逍遙] in the great work of doing nothing [*wuwei* 無為] in particular” (Ziporyn 60).

definite identity is something that is borrowed temporarily and must eventually be given back. Death represents the inevitable return of all things to the state prior to existence, which is nonexistence: “all things throng and flourish, but each returns to its root” (Chapter 11, Ziporyn 95). However, in my analysis of the concept of Dao, I explained that Zhuangzi’s metaphysical framework is processual: there is no external thing causing being; there is just one being transforming into another being. Death does not represent some definite thing; it is not a fixed totality called “nonexistence” or “the Dao”. Rather, it represents the next transformation, whatever that might be, which could be *any* thing from the whole range of existence. When one is dependent on all things and receptive to borrowing different things at various times, one is truly open to the process of transforming and no ‘other’ thing can stop one from wandering far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*), or as Zhuangzi lyrically puts it, “to float and drift along, mounted on only the intrinsic powers of the Course—untouched by both praise and blame, now a dragon, now a snake, changing with the times, unwilling to keep to any exclusive course of action” (Chapter 20, Ziporyn 157).

In conclusion, I have built upon the basic concept of *you* 遊, which is commonly understood as an aimless wandering without a goal. I have characterised it as a kind of infant-like, nonconscious and nondeliberate mental activity that is akin to forgetting. Hence, to *you* is also to wander aimlessly having *unintentionally* lost one’s way or one’s goal. It can also be likened to a state of radical homelessness, in which one no longer identifies with any specific point in space and time as one’s home. As a result, one is able to wander freely and with ease, to feel at home anywhere in the world without being tied to anything. In addition, I have also covered two senses of the term *you*: the poetic sense refers to superhuman sages, who *you* by flying far off to some remote place or otherworldly realm; the profane sense refers to pragmatic applications of *you*, such as Cook Ding skilfully butchering an ox by letting his knife *you* between the gaps within the ox. Given that *you* is used in both senses, I try to identify common features found in both uses of the term, and take a more inclusive approach by considering spiritual readings of the text without ruling out secular or more philosophical readings. In my comparative analysis between the concept of *you* and Dao, I find two conceptual similarities. First, both concepts have a non-teleological implication. Zhuangzi’s Dao refers to the Course that does no guiding. When sages get carried away by such a course, they can wander aimlessly without intentionally picking out a definite path or course of action to reach their goal. The other conceptual similarity is that both *you* and Dao are dynamic concepts that do not involve any fixed starting or endpoints in space and time, and thus do not involve any strict boundaries between self and other. Metaphysically, Dao refers to the connective doors between all things, which simultaneously cause their formations and cause their destructions. Through its opening and closing, one’s ability to transform into another perspective could either be facilitated (opened door) or halted (closed door). To wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*) means to be able to open the doors and to transform continuously without being fettered by any opposing perspective that comes along

the way. It is only by depending on all things, by borrowing various things at different times, that one can truly become fully open to the processes of transforming, to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*), since it effaces any strict boundary between self and other, and frees one from any attachment to a definite identity.

## CHAPTER TWO *You-ing* Two Roads

### 2.1 Introduction: *You* as a Dependence on both Heavenly and earthly viewpoints

In this chapter, I further build upon my interpretation of *you* with the important idea of appealing to both Heavenly and human viewpoints in order to transform into any perspective that comes along the way. In Chapter 1 of the *Zhuangzi*, we are told that the paradigmatic sage can wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong* 遊無窮) by (1) charioting upon what is true to both Heaven and earth (*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正) and by (2) riding on the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths (*liuqizhibian* 六氣之辯). To understand how (1) and (2) are related to the idea of depending on all things, we need to take a closer look at what Zhuangzi means by these terms. First, I will explicate what the phrase “what is true to both Heaven and earth” means, by looking at different passages that use the term “true” (*zheng* 正). This phrase is also associated with the idea of Walking Two Roads, which has to do with neither letting the Heavenly nor the human perspective win out. I then establish an understanding of what Zhuangzi’s concept of Heaven is by analysing the famous Piping of Heaven passage from Chapter 2. Next, I will move on to analyse what Zhuangzi means by (2) riding on the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths. Lastly, I will look at Zhuangzi’s idea of a “this” also being another’s “that”.

### 2.2 Analysis of *Tiandizhizheng* 天地之正

First, I will explicate what charioting upon “what is true both to Heaven and to earth” (*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正) means. According to Ziporyn, the word for “true” (*zheng* 正) can be translated in two ways: (1) its more basic etymological meaning of “straight” or “aligned with”; or (2) its epistemic or moral meaning of “true” or “correct” (*Zhuangzi* 288). The phrase “what is true both to Heaven and to earth” is better understood in the first sense as “that which is aligned with both Heaven and earth”.

Within the Confucian context, the word *zheng* 正 appears in the Confucian project of *zheng ming* 正名 (“rectification of names”), which aims to secure a well-ordered society by getting people to align their behavior with their title (*ming*). The insight here is that names have prescriptive power: they are not mere descriptors of a person’s social role; they clarify what is morally required of a person in a certain social relationship and instill a set of norms for correct behavior. In *Analects* 12.11, wherein Confucius is asked about how to govern, he replies “Let the lord be a true lord, the ministers true ministers, the fathers true fathers, and the sons true sons” (Slingerland



130). Here, Confucius is saying that a ruler should fulfil the moral obligations of a ruler, in order to be the rightful bearer of the name “ruler”. This applies to all social roles—in the family, society, or state—regardless of hierarchy. Supposedly, the fitting of behavior to social roles would eventually order all of society. While the Confucians were status-oriented and obsessed with hierarchy and strict patterns of domination and subservience between ruler and subject, the Daoists were the exact opposite, as Karyn Lai succinctly puts it:

Among the early thinkers, the Daoists stand apart in their hesitancy about social order and uniformity. Daoist philosophy embraces multiplicity and plurality, often reflecting on natural kinds and events in the natural world in order to cast doubt on anthropocentric and reductive interpretations of events and processes. The Daoist philosophical texts express a sense of chaotic unpredictability in phenomena; numerous events defy attempts by humans to classify, control and manipulate. The *Zhuangzi* even seems to celebrate the messy cacophony of differences between individuals and views.” (9-10)

This radical acceptance of the multiplicity and plurality of perspectives is reflected in Zhuangzi’s use of the term *zheng* 正. In the beginning of Chapter 1 of the *Zhuangzi*, we are asked to consider the true (*zheng* 正) color of sky (*tian* 天) as viewed from down below, from the perspective of the little creatures on the earth, and also from up there, from the perspective of Peng in the sky.<sup>23</sup> Does the blue that the little creatures and Peng see align with the color of the sky? The sky itself is, in a sense, colorless, not having a color of its own. Its (apparent) color depends on which perspective one is viewing it from. Whether or not the sky objectively has an actual color (i.e., a color of its own that is independent of perspective) is not the subject of interest here. For even if the sky were to have an objective color that is outside of perspective, it is something that we, as beings trapped within our own perspective, cannot know. All we can depend on for our notion of the sky as having any color at all is our viewing of the sky from our limited point of view. However, it is not completely true to claim that the sky has no color, because from one’s viewing of it, it does indeed appear blue. Hence, to chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth (*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正) would mean to depend on both the Heavenly perspective (“the sky is colorless”) and the earthly perspective (“the sky is blue”). In his asking of the open-ended question, “Is that the sky’s true color?”, Zhuangzi is not expressing skepticism about whether or not the sky has an objective color. Instead, the question is Zhuangzi’s way of “Walking Two Roads”, expressing that it is neither of the two (i.e., neither blue nor colorless), not settling for either Heavenly or earthly perspective.

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<sup>23</sup> “And the blue on blue of the sky [*tian* 天]—is that the sky’s true [*zheng* 正] color? Or is it just the vast distance, going on and on without end, that looks that way? When Peng looks down, he, too, sees only this and nothing more.” (Ziporyn 1)

The word *zheng* 正 is also used in the discourse between Gnawgap (Nie Que) and Baby Sovereign (Wang Ni) from Chapter 2. In the first part of the discourse, they discuss the question of whether one can know (*zhi* 知) anything:

“Gnawgap asked Baby Sovereign “Do you know [*zhi* 知] what all things agree in considering right?”

Baby Sovereign said, “How could I know [*zhi* 知] that?”

Gnawgap said, “Do you know that you don’t know?”

Baby Sovereign said, “How could I know that?”

Gnawgap said, “Then are all things devoid of knowledge?”

Baby Sovereign said, “How could I know that? Still, let me try to say something about this. How could I know that what I call ‘knowing’ is not really ‘not-knowing’? How could I know that what I call ‘not-knowing’ is not really ‘knowing’?” (Ziporyn 19)

Paul Kjellberg points out that Zhuangzi’s knowledge skepticism bears a resemblance to that of Sextus Empiricus, in the sense that their skepticism is “aporetic” rather than “dogmatic” (“Dao and Skepticism” 283). The difference is that dogmatic skepticism denies knowledge, whereas aporetic skepticism merely questions it. Baby Sovereign’s question, “how could I know that”, is a careful avoidance of making the self-contradictory claim that one cannot know anything, because if we were to claim that, we would still be claiming to know something—that knowledge is impossible. The point here is one concerning meta-knowledge: even if we can know (or not know) something, how do we know whether our knowledge of that thing counts as “knowing” or “not-knowing”?

In the next part of the discourse, Baby Sovereign juxtaposes the perspective of human beings with the perspectives of other animal species:

When humans sleep in a damp place, they wake up deathly ill and sore about the waist—but what about eels? If humans live in trees, they tremble with fear and worry—but how about monkeys? Of these three, which ‘knows’ [*zhi* 知] what is the right [*zheng* 正] place to live? Humans eat the flesh of their livestock, deer eat grass, snakes eat centipedes, hawks and eagles eat mice. Of these four, which ‘knows’ the right thing to eat? Monkeys take she-monkeys for mates, elks mount deer, male fish frolic with female fish, while humans regard Mao Qiang and Lady Li as great beauties—but when fish see them they dart into the depths, when birds see them they soar into the skies, when deer see them they bolt away without looking back.

Which of these four ‘knows’ what is rightly alluring? (Ziporyn 18-19)

The question of which perspective knows (*zhi* 知) the right (*zheng* 正) habitat to live in, the right thing to eat, and what is rightly alluring echoes the previous question of how one could know anything. On one hand, it seems that none of these perspectives, human or non-human, knows the right habitat, food or mating partner: if we take any one of these perspectives as a standard for what is right, how do we know if that standard is ultimately right? On the other hand, each of these perspectives is valid, in the sense that it seems reasonable for each thing to claim that it ‘knows’ (*zhi* 知) what is the right habitat, food, or mating partner according to its own unique nature, its way of being. From a monkey’s perspective, it seems obvious that trees are the right place to live for itself, even if it is not the right place to live for anyone else. As Zhuangzi puts it: “Each thing necessarily has someplace from which it can be affirmed as thus and so, and someplace from which it can be affirmed as acceptable. So no thing is not right, no thing is not acceptable” (Ziporyn 15). Hence, there are two ways of answering the question, “which of these perspectives knows what is right”: (1) none of them, because there is no universally agreed upon knowledge of the right habitat, food, or mating partner, and (2) all of them, because every perspective can be considered right from its own point of view. Like the earlier question about the true (*zheng* 正) color of the sky, the open-ended nature of the question is Zhuangzi’s way of balancing both Heavenly (none of them knows what is right) and earthly (every one of them knows what is right) perspectives.

### 2.3 Walking Two Roads

Ziporyn associates charioting upon “what is true both to Heaven and to earth” (*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正) with the idea of “neither the Heavenly nor the human winning out over the other” in Chapter 6 (5n12):

Thus their liking of something was a oneness with it and their disliking of something was also a oneness with it; what they liked and what they disliked, their liking and their disliking, were all the oneness. Their oneness was oneness, and their non-oneness was also oneness. In their oneness, they were followers of the Heavenly. In their non-oneness, they were followers of the human. This is what it is for neither the Heavenly nor the human to win out over the other. And that is what I call the Genuine-Human. (Ziporyn 55)

Another passage from Chapter 23 makes a remarkably similar point:

Yi was skillful at hitting a target, but not at preventing others from praising him. The sage is skilled at the

Heavenly but not at the human. It is only the Whole Man who is skillful at the Heavenly and also good at the human. Only an insect can be an insect, and it is only by being an insect that it can succeed in being the Heavenly. The Whole Man hates the Heavenly, for he hates what humans take as the Heavenly [in contrast to the Human]. How much more would he hate identifying himself as ‘The Heavenly’ or ‘The human’! (Ziporyn 192)

Zhuangzi makes a distinction between the Whole Man (or the Genuine-Human) and the sage.<sup>24</sup> The sage, who is venerated by others, only depends one-sidedly on the Heavenly, whereas the Whole Man depends on both the Heavenly and the human. Following the Heavenly means to view things as one and following the human means to view things as many. Although both the sage and the Whole man share the view that all things are one, it is the flexibility to switch between viewing things as one and viewing things as many that distinguishes the Whole Man from the sage, who is fixated on viewing things as one. This flexibility to shift between Heavenly and human perspectives is what Zhuangzi calls “Walking Two Roads” in Chapter 2:

But to labor your spirit trying to make all things one, without realizing that it is all the same [whether you do so or not], is called ‘Three in the Morning.’ What is this Three in the Morning? Once a monkey trainer was distributing chestnuts. He said, ‘I’ll give you three in the morning and four in the evening.’ The monkeys were furious. ‘Well, then,’ he said, ‘I’ll give you four in the morning and three in the evening.’ The monkeys were delighted. This change brought them no loss either in name or in fact, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. He just went along with the ‘thisness,’ relying on the rightness of the present ‘this.’ Thus the Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others, and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter’s Wheel. This is called Walking Two Roads. (Ziporyn 15-16)

The monkey trainer is flexible with either arrangement: whether it is three or four chestnuts in the morning does not make any difference to him because the total number of nuts remains the same. By regarding “three in the morning” and “four in the morning” as the same, he does not experience any sense of loss, and thus he can go along with both arrangements. On the other hand, the monkeys can only go along with one arrangement, “four in the morning”, because they regard “three in the morning” as a loss.

At this point, Zhuangzi seems to be saying that viewing all things as one (the monkey trainer’s viewpoint) is better than viewing all things as many (the monkeys’ viewpoint). But note that at the very beginning of this

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<sup>24</sup> Not to be confused with other instances of the word “sage”—here Zhuangzi is referring to a specific kind of sage that is distinct from the paradigmatic figure he usually refers to.

passage, Zhuangzi criticizes the laboring of one's spirit to "make all things one". This hearkens back to the earlier point of having the flexibility to switch between oneness and non-oneness. Suppose another monkey trainer B comes along and agrees with (the original) monkey trainer A that there is no difference between three or four chestnuts in the morning. But monkey trainer B says to the monkeys, "since there is no difference, I'll give you three in the morning", which upsets them. Even though monkey trainer B is a follower of oneness, just like monkey trainer A, there is an important difference between the two: monkey trainer A is also a follower of the rightness of the present "this"; he is able to switch from the perspective of oneness to the perspective of the monkeys, whereas monkey trainer B is fixated on making things one, failing to consider the monkeys' perspective. For monkey trainer A and the Genuine-Human, "their oneness was oneness, and their non-oneness was also oneness" (Ziporyn 55). This is truly to see things as one, because even "oneness" and "non-oneness" are seen as one. Their oneness embraces and includes the opposite, non-oneness, whereas for monkey trainer B, his oneness excludes non-oneness. Ironically, his exclusion of non-oneness is no different from the monkeys' rejection of three chestnuts in the morning, which makes his oneness ultimately still a non-oneness. Hence, one can wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*), by charioting on what is both true to Heaven and to earth (*tiandizhizheng* 天地之正), to let neither the Heavenly perspective (i.e., oneness) nor the earthly perspective (i.e., non-oneness) win out. This is the flexibility to switch between following the Heavenly perspective and following the earthly perspective, never staying put in either perspective. When one is fettered by another perspective, one can efface the distinction between self and other by temporarily taking up the Heavenly viewpoint, and then transform into another perspective by shifting to the earthly viewpoint and following the perspective of the other. This is how one can wander far without being fettered by any thing.

#### 2.4 Zhuangzi's Concept of Heaven (*Tian* 天)

In this section and the next, I will explicate what Zhuangzi means by Heaven, or the Heavenly perspective. The word *tian* 天 means Heaven, but contrary to traditional Western concepts like 'God', Zhuangzi uses the word *tian* to refer to the nonanthropomorphic, nondeliberate, unconscious, amoral, and unknowable process that is involved in the generation of all beings and is also outside the control of human beings. Zhuangzi's contemporary Mencius defines Heaven as the following: "When no one does it, yet it is done—this is due to Heaven [*tian* 天]" (Van Norden 125). Although Mencius' usage of the term *tian* is similar to Zhuangzi's, in that they both use it to refer to that which happens beyond the deliberate actions of humans, Zhuangzi's understanding of *tian* does not assume any external doer, cause, or agent behind whatever happens. Mencius, on the other hand, assumes that whatever happens outside of human control must be *due to* some external thing that is acting as the cause. According to Ziporyn,

Zhuangzi's usage of *tian* is much more radical: "heaven is not merely what is beyond human control; it is that to which the notions of definitive "control" and "cause" and "determiner" do not apply at all" (On sort of knowing 117). For example, in Chapter 6, the phrase "Heavenly, skylike, that is how things are born [*tian er sheng ye* 天而生也]" is highly ambiguous: it could mean "it is Heaven and birthing", "Heaven means simply the very generating of things", "Heaven is what generates things", "Heaven is what simply produces", or "just by being Heaven, it is the very emergence of things" (Ziporyn 63nA). The ambiguity of the phrase is generated by the confusion as to whether Heaven here is being referred to as causing the generation of all things, or as something that is caused alongside with the generation of things. This implies that Zhuangzi is not asserting only one way of understanding Heaven, but saying that there are multiple ways of understanding it.

## 2.5 Analysis of The Piping of Heaven Passage

The Piping of Heaven passage from Chapter 2 shows that Zhuangzi's concept of Heaven does not assume any creator or agent behind the generation of things. Although Zhuangzi does use the term "The Great Clump" (*da kuai* 大塊) in this passage,<sup>25</sup> and elsewhere he uses anthropomorphic terms like "the Creator of Things" (*zao wu zhe* 造物者)<sup>26</sup> or "Creation-Transformation" (*zao hua zhe* 造化者),<sup>27</sup> these terms are best understood as also referring to a nondeliberate and agentless process that is *involved in* the generation of things rather than a creator acting as an *external cause* for the generation of things. This important difference will be made clearer in my following analysis of the Piping of Heaven passage.

The story starts with Ziqi, who appears to be in a trance-like state: his body is described as being made into a withered tree, and his mind (*xin* 心) like dead ashes.<sup>28</sup> He explains to Ziyou what has happened him: "I have lost me [*wu sang wo* 吾喪我]." This raises the question of whether one could know (*zhi* 知) who or what 'me' is. Ziqi then says to Ziyou, "You hear the piping of man without yet hearing the piping of earth; you hear the piping of earth without yet hearing the piping of Heaven" (Ziporyn 11). Ziqi first explains the sounds of the piping of man and the piping of earth:

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<sup>25</sup> The Great Clump also appears in Chapter 6: "The Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, rests me with death" (Ziporyn 56).

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 6, pp. 58, 60, 62, and Chapter 7, pp. 69 (Ziporyn).

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 6, Ziporyn 59.

<sup>28</sup> The retelling of this passage is quoted from Ziporyn 11-12.

When the Great Clump [*dakuai* 大塊] belches forth its vital breath [*qi* 氣], we call it the wind [*feng* 風]. As soon as it begins, raging [*nu* 怒] cries emerge from all the ten thousand hollows, and surely you cannot have missed the rustle and bustle that then goes on. The bulges and drops of the mountain forest, the indentations and holes riddling its massive towering trees, are like noses, mouths, ears; like sockets, enclosures, mortars; like ponds, like puddles! Roarers and whizzers, scolders and sighers, shouters, wailers, boomers, growlers! One leads with a “yeee!,” another answers with a “yuuu!” A light breeze brings a small harmony, while a powerful gale makes for a harmony vast and grand. And once the sharp wind has passed, all these holes return to their silent vacuity. Have you never seen all their tempered attunements, all their cunning contentions?

The breath of the Great Clump, or the wind, brings about all the different tones from the ten thousand hollows, which is a metaphor for the birthing of the ten thousand things. Upon hearing this, Ziyou gathers that the piping of the earth refers to the sound of these hollows, and the piping of man refers to the sound of bamboo panpipes. Ziqi then proceeds to explain the piping of Heaven:

It is the gusting through all the ten thousand differences that yet causes all of them to come only from themselves. For since every last identity is only what some one of them picks out from it, what identity can there be for their rouser?

The piping of Heaven is the wind that appears to be the cause or producer of the sounds coming out from the ten thousand holes—since without the wind, there would be no sound coming out from the holes. Yet in another sense, it is also the individual holes that cause the sounds on their own, because without them, there would be no particular tone produced from them. It is in this sense that the wind itself is soundless, because to speak of it as having a sound at all is dependent on all the holes, each hole picking out its particular tone from itself. This parallels with the question from Chapter 1 about the sky’s true color: the sky itself is colorless, in a sense, because to speak of it having a color at all depends on some perspective viewing it. This is why Ziqi says that Ziyou hears the piping of earth, the sounds produced from the holes, without yet hearing the piping of Heaven, which is the soundless wind that has yet to begin to have any sound. But this divide between the silence that is attributed to the wind prior to its piping, and the sounds that are produced after the wind’s piping, is really just a boundary that Ziyou has in his mind—a blockage that prevents him from hearing the piping of Heaven.

In a sense, one is already hearing the (soundless) wind, the piping of Heaven, simply by hearing the sounds

emerging from the hollows—for the (soundless) wind before its piping and the sounds produced after its piping are one and the same wind. Put in other words, the soundless wind, which appears to be the cause of the sounds that emerge from the hollows, is also *part of* those sounds, not something independent or isolated from them. It is in this sense that Heaven is immanent in all things, not something sharply distinct from all things: whatever causes the generation of all things is within the same category as all the things that are generated. Thus, to hear the Piping of Heaven is to not put any effort into differentiating between the soundless wind (before piping) and the sounds of the wind (post piping). A further consideration for hearing the Piping of Heaven is to see all the ten thousand hollows as interconnecting with each other, and all of them as connecting to the source. For if they were detached from one another, like individual pipes on a panpipe, then the source can only connect to one pipe at a time and produce only one tone at a time. But we are told that “a light breeze brings a small harmony, while a powerful gale makes for a harmony vast and grand”, suggesting that the source produces multiple tones at the same time, and these tones are harmonizing with one another—like how blowing through a harmonica can create harmonising tones in one breath. So to hear the piping of Heaven, one must not only see the holes as piping with the source of the wind, but also as connecting and interacting with one another to form a harmony, rather than creating a messy cacophony of disharmonising sounds. Likewise, what Zhuangzi means by Heaven or the Heavenly perspective is to see all things as one (all the holes are interconnected) and to not go looking for any creator up there because it is already everywhere in all things (all the holes are connected to the source).

According to Kenneth J. DeWoskin, the idea of wisdom in ancient China is often associated with having a keen ear and good hearing. He notes that both the words for “sage” (*sheng* 聖) and “sound” (*sheng* 聲) contain the ear radical “*er* 耳”, and they sound phonetically similar (DeWoskin 33). Citing the following sources, DeWoskin makes an important connection between the sage’s ability to hear acutely and his ability to pipe or connect with the Dao 道:

In Pan Ku’s *Comprehensive Discussions of Virtue in the White Tiger Hall* 白虎通德论, his discussion of the sage (*shengren* 聖人) begins with the following paragraph:

What is meant by the term *sheng* in *sheng-ren*? Sage (*sheng* 聖) is what connects things; it is the Tao [Dao 道]; it is sound (*sheng* 聲). There is nothing to which his Tao does not connect and nothing on



which his illumination does not shine. By listening to sounds, he knows the nature of things. (2.15)  
[...] In describing the sage, *the Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lu* 呂氏春秋 says, "[The sage] listens to the sound and understands the 'winds' (6.6b)." It credits the sage with the ability to hear the "soundless sound". "The sage hears the soundless (18.6a)." The Huai-nan-tzu likens the interaction of the people and their sage-ruler to a sound and its echo: "The empire follows the rule of a sage like an echo follows its sound" (9.2b). Hsu Shen's 許慎 etymological dictionary *Explaining the Graphs and Explicating Their Combinations* 說文解字 defines "sage" as *tong* 通: to pipe, connect, or canalise. (DeWoskin 32-33)

The ability of the ear to hear the soundless wind (i.e., the Piping of Heaven) is analogous to the ability of the mind to understand the Dao 道. However, the Dao is not something that can be known by means of identifying some external creator outside of all things:

The demonstration that uses no words, the Course that gives no guidance, the Course that is not a course—who "understands" these things, what could know them? If there is some kind of knowing of them, it could only be what we might call the Heavenly Reservoir: poured into without ever getting full, ladled out of without ever running out, ever not-knowing its own source. This is called the Shadowy Splendor. (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 18)

To know the Dao is to not-know the source of all things, which means to not assign any particular identity to whatever generates all things, for that would be like picking one particular tone from one selected hole out of all the sounds generated from the ten thousand hollows and calling that the Piping of Heaven. This would be a failure to see that other sounds generated from the unselected holes are also included in the Piping of Heaven, and that the unselected holes are all connected to the selected hole too. Hence, to know the Dao is to see that all things as connecting to its source and also as connecting with one another.

In one passage from Chapter 1,<sup>29</sup> Jian Wu reports to Lian Shu that he is shocked and terrified by madman Jieyu's "crazy talk", which he describes as "big", "limitless", "vast", "excessive", and having "no regard for the way people really are", suggesting that he is unable to comprehend or agree with what Jieyu has said. Lian Shu explains that just like how "the blind have no access to the beauty of visual patterns, and the deaf have no part in

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<sup>29</sup> The retelling of the dialogue between Jian Wu and Lian Shu is quoted from Ziporyn 6.

the sounds of bells and drums[...] the understanding [*zhi* 知] can also be so”. Just as the blind cannot access patterns and the deaf cannot access sounds, Jian Wu cannot comprehend madman Jieyu’s big words, because his understanding [*zhi* 知] has severed his connection with all things, preventing him from knowing the Dao. A thing that is cut off from all things and thus cut off from the Dao is what Zhuangzi calls “a small consciousness” (*xiaozhi* 小知) in the story of Peng from Chapter 1. According to Zhuangzi, “a small consciousness [*xiaozhi* 小知] cannot keep up with a vast consciousness [*dazhi* 大知]” just as “short duration cannot keep up with long duration” (Ziporyn 4). The morning mushroom has no concept of noon and the winter cicada has no concept of spring and autumn, because the scope of temporality they can know of is limited by their longevity. Drawing upon this analogy, a small consciousness cannot access the Dao, because it is limited by it having a definite perspective that is disconnected from all other perspectives.

From one’s perspective, there appears to be a “self” or an agent that is perceiving the world, thinking thoughts, feeling emotions, passing judgment, valuing one thing over another, and so forth. We might mistakenly think that there exists some definite cause or agent that is independently producing these thoughts, emotions, judgments, and values. However, just as Zhuangzi questions the idea of a rouser behind the sounds of the wind, or a creator behind the generation of the ten thousand things, he places our notion of the self under scrutiny: “We temporarily get involved in something or other and proceed to call it ‘myself’—but how can we know if what we call ‘self’ has any ‘self’ to it (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 61)?” We run into the same problem that we get when trying to identify a rouser: there is no sign of any “me” behind my perspective, no agent or controller that is independent of my thoughts, moods, values, and forth. The notion of *my* thoughts, of thoughts as belonging to *me*, still rests upon some notion of a thinker behind the thinking. We assign a definite identity, a self, to our thoughts, emotions, value judgments, etc., but Zhuangzi asks us to consider where they come from in the first place:

Joy and anger, sorrow and happiness, plans and regrets, transformations and stagnations, unguarded abandonment and deliberate posturing—music flowing out of hollows, mushrooms of billowing steam! Day and night they alternate before our eyes, yet no one knows whence they sprout. (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 12)

Where do these thoughts, emotions, values come from? The commonsensical view is that they are caused by “me”, like how each hole picks out its particular tone from “itself”. However, it would be untrue to assert that the holes are the only cause of the sounds, because without the soundless wind piping through the holes in the first place, and there would be no sounds emerging from them. To assign a thinker prior to the formation of thoughts is like saying

that the wind has sound even before it has even piped through the holes. Zhuangzi claims that thoughts are formed first, prior to our assignment of a thinker:

And similarly, if we just follow whatever completed form of our minds [*chengxin* 成心] has so far taken shape, making that our master and teacher, who could ever be without a teacher? That is something even the most ignorant are always doing without fail. It is not as if the mind [*xin* 心] is first required to know all the alternating states and then actively selects for itself from among them the one to be taken as master and teacher. For the mind [*xin* 心] to be able to do that before any completed form has already taken shape in it, to make such an affirmation or negation about which form it will regard as right and which as wrong without already having taken some shape—that would be like leaving for Yue today and arriving there yesterday. This is to regard the nonexistent as existent. The existence of the nonexistent is beyond the understanding even of the divine sage-king Yu—so what possible sense could it make to someone like me?” (Ziporyn 13)

In other words, it is not the case that there is a self that exists prior to the emergence of the contents in one’s consciousness. Rather, the contents of one’s consciousness simply emerge on their own, and then we mistakenly assign a self to these contents in one’s consciousness, as if it is the self that causes them. Just as one can hear the sounds coming out from the hollows but cannot hear the soundless wind prior to its piping, one can only ‘know’ of the contents that have already emerged in one’s consciousness, but not ‘know’ of any self that exists prior to the emergence of those contents. As Zhuangzi puts it: “What makes beings beings is no being, for as soon as a being has appeared, it is no longer prior to all beings” (Chapter 22, Ziporyn 181). If there were such a thing as the ‘self’, it would be something that is prior to and independent of the contents of one’s consciousness—but it would be impossible to ‘know’ it, since all that one can ‘know’ is what is already there within one’s consciousness; one cannot ‘know’ of anything outside of one’s consciousness. Furthermore, if there were such a thing as a ‘self’, it would not have to wait upon anything for its transformation into another perspective:

Having already transformed into some particular being, he takes it as no more than a waiting for the next unknown transformation, nothing more. For indeed, how could someone still in the midst of a transformation know anything about what he will be when done with this transformation, about what he has not yet transformed into? And how could someone who has undergone a transformation know anything about what has already transformed away, what is over and gone? (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 61)

But one can never know, anticipate, or control what is the next thought, mood, or value that is going to appear in one's consciousness and color one's perspective in some other way. If the self is the only thing that is causing thoughts, moods, or values, then it need not depend or wait upon anything else for its transformation.

Zhuangzi criticizes following a completed heart-mind (*cheng xin* 成心) and taking it as one's master or teacher (*shi* 師), because that would be to assign a definite self to the thoughts, emotions, value judgments, and so forth that have already formed in one's mind. From a human perspective, the lifespan of the morning mushroom and winter cicada seems too short, while the lifespan of an ancient tree that lives for thousands of years seems extravagantly long. One might look up to Pengzu, who is reputed for having lived several hundred years, and try to match up to him, which Zhuangzi considers "pathetic" (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 4). Here, the criticism is the taking of a value judgment that has already formed in one's mind together with its value system as a model or guide for one's actions. Zhuangzi points out that, "Shooting forth like an arrow from a bowstring: thus is our presumption as we arbitrate right and wrong... Pressed on all sides as if sealed in: such is the old drainage ditch, the rut in which we're stuck, the mind left on the verge of death with no way back to the bygone vitality" (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 12). The metaphor of a blocked drainage ditch represents how our attachment to a definite self that picks out "right" from "wrong" obstructs our ability to know the Dao. This is what Zhuangzi is alluding to when he says that "a large consciousness [*dazhi* 大知] is idle and spacey; a small consciousness [*xiaozhi* 小知] is cramped and circumspect" (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 12). A small consciousness, like that of the small cicada and birds, identifies with and depends on a definite self, whereas a large consciousness, like that of Peng, identifies with no particular identity and depends on all things. Zhuangzi also uses the similar rhetoric about blockage at the end of Chapter 1, in which Huizi fails to find any use for a huge gourd. He describes Huizi's mind as "all clogged up, occupied with its bushes and branches", alluding to the small consciousness of the little birds (Ziporyn 8).

Zhuangzi wants us to realize that attachment to a self is fueled by an over-subservience to our completed heart-mind, by raising the question of whether or not there is a true ruler among the different parts of the human body:

The hundred bones, the nine openings, the six internal organs are all present here as my body. Which one is most dear to me? Do you delight in all equally, or do you have some favorites among them? Or are they all mere servants and concubines? Are these servants and concubines unable to govern one another? Or do they take turns as master and servant? If there is a genuine ruler among them, its genuineness would have to be

of some kind that is the same whether any definite reality could ever be found for it or not. (Ziporyn 13)

Rather than taking the completed heart-mind as the true ruler, or any one body part at all, Zhuangzi asks us to depend on all of them:

A brave warrior, even if only one man facing a host of enemies, will heroically throw himself into the thick of battle. If a man's quest for glory, for mere name, can give him such self-control, imagine how much more fearless is a man who takes heaven and earth to be his own bodily organs and the ten thousand things to be his own guts, a man who is merely lodged for the moment in some particular limbs and trunk and head, a man who regards even his own eyes and ears as merely images perceived. He sees everything his consciousness knows as more of the same oneness, and thus his mind nowhere undergoes death. Someday he will just choose his day to continue off into the distance, climbing along as before on the borrowed [*dengxia* 登假]. (Chapter 5, Ziporyn 46)

The Heavenly perspective, which sees all things as one, is not found in one definite identity, not in any one organ within the body, but found within the entire body of things. By keeping all channels open, not severing one's connection to all things, one becomes receptive to depending on the entire range of things for one's own identity. This allows one to transcend the confines of one's perspective, because one is no longer depending on only one thing for one's identity, but can transform into any perspective that comes along the way.

## 2.6 Analysis of *Liuqizhibian* 六氣之辯

The air (*qi* 氣) and wind (*feng* 風), which is air in motion, are recurring motifs in Chapters 1 and 2. Peng and various mystical Daoist sages depend on air, wind, mists and clouds for their miraculous feats of flying. We are told that the paradigmatic person rides on “the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths” (*liuqizhibian* 六氣之辯) in order to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong* 遊無窮). Ziporyn notes that the usage of the word 辯 *bian*, which he translates as “back-and-forth”, is unusual as it means ‘disputation’ or ‘argument’ (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 9nC). Instead of substituting it with homonyms such as 變 (“transformation”) or 辨 (“differentiation”), he opts for the translation “back-and-forth” in consideration of its resonance with the Piping of Heaven passage from Chapter 2,

in which the different holes of the trees are anthropomorphised as noses, mouths and ears,<sup>30</sup> and the windstorm sounds resemble the sounds of various philosophers disputing and debating with one another. The “six atmospheric breaths” (*liuqi* 六氣), according to Sima Biao, are yin, yang, wind, rain, darkness and light.<sup>31</sup> Cheng Xuanying takes them to be the atmospheric conditions of dawn, high noon, sunset, and midnight, and the energies of heaven and earth generally. Zhi Daolin construes them as the four seasons and the general energies of heaven and earth. Although all these interpretations differ on the specificities of what the six breaths are, they all refer to various binary pairs, such as yin and yang, heaven and earth, day and night, and so forth. Put in the context of the debating Confucians and Mohists, who each affirms what the other denies as wrong and denies what the other affirms as right,<sup>32</sup> to ride on the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths would mean to depend on all perspectives, and to cycle between various “rights” and “wrongs” at different times.

In addition to the meaning “air”, *qi* 氣 also refers to “breath”, and by extension the “life force” that sustains the life of all living creatures. In Chapter 1, Peng is described as a living creature (*sheng wu* 生物) being blown about by the breath of air:

「鵬之徙於南冥也，水擊三千里，搏扶搖而上者九萬里，去以六月息者也。」野馬也，塵埃也，生物之以息相吹也。(1.1)

When Peng journeys to the Southern Oblivion, the waters ripple for three thousand miles. Spiraling aloft with the whirling winds, he ascends ninety thousand miles into the sky, availing himself of the gusting breath of the midyear to make his departure. It’s a galloping heat haze!” “It’s a swirl of dust!” “It’s some living creature blown about on the breath of the air!” (Ziporyn 3)

In an alternative translation, *sheng wu* 生物 is not referring to Peng, but living beings in general, and the breath of all living beings is what Peng rides upon to power his flight:

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<sup>30</sup> “The bulges and drops of the mountain forest, the indentations and holes riddling its massive towering trees, are like noses, mouths, ears...” (Ziporyn 11)

<sup>31</sup> The different interpretations of *liuqi* are quoted from Ziporyn 9nC.

<sup>32</sup> “Hence we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and Mohists, each affirming what the other denies and denying what the other affirms” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 14).

When the P'eng makes his seasonal migration to the Southern Sea, the waters are roiled [by his great wings] for three thousand *li*. He gathers together a swirling column of air and soars upward on it, ninety thousand *li*. His going is the air-motion of the six-month winds, the shimmering heat, traces of dust, the air-motion in which living things share breath. (DeWoskin 38)

DeWoskin's translation emphasises more on the idea of air as the "life force" that sustains all living beings, which is implied by the term *sheng wu* 生物, meaning "living creature(s)" or "birthing things". This interpretation is more reminiscent of the Piping of Heaven passage, in which we are told that the Great Clump belches forth *qi*. Here, *qi* means more like "vital breath" rather than just "air", because it is referring to the life force that births and sustains the ten thousand things. Furthermore, the same word *nu* 怒 is used to refer to both the violent surge of wind that gives Peng its power of flight, and that which rouses forth the different hollows in the Piping of Heaven story (Cook, Harmony and Cacophony, 69).<sup>33</sup> Tying all of this together with the interpretation of *liuqizhibian* 六氣之辯 as the back-and-forth of the bickering philosophers disputing one another: the back-and-forth breath of all living beings that is generated as each thing affirms what the other negates and negates when the other affirms is also the same vital breath that births them and makes each thing so. This idea of affirmation and negation as life-generating can be found in the following excerpts from Chapter 6:

When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, blowing on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd be better off forgetting them both, letting their courses melt away in their transformation. (Ziporyn 56)

Fish create [*zao* 造] fish in water, and humans create humans in the Course. Those who create and are created in the water just dart past each other through the ponds and their nourishment is provided. Those who create and are created in the Course simply do nothing for one another, do nothing for any particular goal, and the life in them becomes stable. Thus it is said, the fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and humans forget one another in the arts of the Course. (Ziporyn 60)

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<sup>33</sup> Comparing the use of *nu* 怒 in “鵬之背，不知其幾千里也；怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲。” (1.1) and “夫大塊噫氣，其名為風。是唯无作，作則萬竅怒呿。” (2.1)

Although the word *zao* 造 is often interpreted here as “meet each other”, it also means “create” as used in the terms “the Creator of Things” (*zao wu zhe* 造物者)<sup>34</sup> and “Creation-Transformation” (*zao hua zhe* 造化者),<sup>35</sup> which are found in the same chapter (Ziporyn 60n33). The debating Confucians and Mohists, who affirm what the other rejects and reject what the other affirms, are in the same situation as the fishes that desperately attempt to keep each other alive by spitting on each other. I highlight the following line from the Piping of Heaven passage: “A light breeze brings a small harmony, while a powerful gale makes for a harmony vast and grand. And once the sharp wind has passed, all these holes return to their silent vacuity (Ziporyn 11-12).” The more heated the debate, the grander the harmony, because the more air each hole takes in, the more pronounced the tone it selects from itself, but the more pronounced the tones coming out from the other holes too. The Confucians and Mohists are really just nourishing one another by affirming what the other negates and negating what the other affirms. By affirming oneself, one is also affirming (i.e., nourishing) the other, because that which births one’s perspective and makes one right (from one’s viewpoint) is also whatever that births its other’s perspective and makes the other right (from the other’s viewpoint). It is in this sense that things are already nourishing one another, just by virtue of each thing existing.

## 2.7 A “This” is also another’s “That”

For Zhuangzi, any thing (*wu* 物) can be categorized as either a “this” (*shi* 是) or a “that” (*bi* 彼). This is the most fundamental form of all binary pairs, which can include anything from emotions (e.g. joy and sorrow), temporal concepts (e.g. day and night, life and death), spatial concepts (e.g. great and small), value concepts (e.g. right and wrong, benefit and harm, usefulness and uselessness), to social concepts (e.g. self and other, servant and lord), and so forth. The word for “this” (*shi* 是) can also mean “right”, when contrasted with its other antonym, *fei* 非, which means “wrong”. It is this double meaning of *shi* 是 that Zhuangzi plays with in the following passage:

There is no thing that is not a ‘that.’ [*bi* 彼] There is no thing that is not a ‘this.’ [*shi* 是] One is oneself also a ‘that,’ an other, but this is not something one can directly see. Rather, it is known through the understanding, which thus says ‘Thatness’ emerges from ‘thisness,’ and ‘thisness’ follows from ‘thatness.’ This is its theory of the simultaneous generation of the ‘this’ and the ‘that.’ However, by the very same token, it can say that their simultaneous generation means also their simultaneous demise, and vice versa. When it [i.e., the understanding] affirms either one, it simultaneously finds it has denied it; when it denies

<sup>34</sup> See Ziporyn 58, 60, and 62.

<sup>35</sup> See Ziporyn 59.



either one, it simultaneously finds it has affirmed it. By going along with the affirmation it goes along with the denial [*fei* 非]; by going along with the denial it goes along with the affirmation [*shi* 是]. (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 14)

We cannot posit a “this” without also positing a “that”; and we cannot posit a “that” without also positing a “this”. Once we posit a “this”, its other, a “that” is simultaneously generated by way of contrast, and vice versa. Thus, “this” and “that” generate each other and are mutually dependent on one another. There is no thing that can exist independently of its other. Each thing cannot escape its other, so to speak, and Ziporyn illustrates this point with a helpful metaphor of slicing a magnet:

It is like a magnet that always has both a positive and a negative pole, no matter where you slice it: when you slice off the negative pole, a new negative pole is created in whatever portion of the magnet is left. So everywhere you may go, there is this inescapable division, contrast, opposition between "this" and "that." (“Zhuangzi as Philosopher”)

Returning to the original passage, I highlight the line: “One is oneself also a ‘that,’ an other, but this is not something one can directly see. Rather, it is known through the understanding, which thus says ‘Thatness’ emerges from ‘thisness,’ and ‘thisness’ follows from ‘thatness.’” This line implies that a thing has subjectivity, in the sense that it is a perceiving entity that can recognize the existence of other perspectives, while also recognizing that other perspectives see itself as an other. For if things were inanimate objects and nothing more, if each thing has no perspective at all, then the notion of oneself as another’s “that” would not exist at all. Ziporyn distills this idea even further to say that “a thing *is* a perspective” (“How Many” 46). Each thing is a “this” from its own perspective, but it is also a “that” from the perspective of its other. It cannot know that oneself is a “that” by *directly* seeing from the other’s perspective, since it can only be seeing from its own perspective. Nevertheless, from its own perspective, it is able to derive the concept of itself as a “that”, which must mean that every “this” already includes a “that”. Otherwise, any notion of oneself being another’s “that” would have to come from outside one’s perspective, but as we have already established, one cannot be seeing from another perspective. In other words, even though one is always trapped in one’s own partial, time-bound perspective, with no direct access to other perspectives out there, it nonetheless knows that it is not the only perspective that exists, that there are other alternative ways of seeing, and one knows this from *its own lodged perspective*, not outside of it. Thus, a thing must always have its other hidden within itself; every “this” must already include a “that”. Hence, Zhuangzi says, “to be a ‘this’ is in fact also to be a ‘that,’ and every ‘that’ is also a ‘this’” (Ziporyn 14).

Since a “this” is also a “that”, whatever “this” affirms as right is simultaneously being denied by its other as wrong. Conversely, whatever “this” denies as wrong is simultaneously being affirmed by its other as right. In simpler terms, what appears to be true from one’s perspective can always appear to be false from some other perspective. Any assertion of rightness proceeds from an angle, a particular way of seeing the world, and can always be challenged by another perspective, whose seeing is angled differently. Conflict seems to be the default condition of mortality. Things cannot have a universal agreement on what “right” because what is “right” is dependent on one’s perspective: for instance, humans, eels and monkeys cannot universally agree on which is the right place to live. Zhuangzi makes a salient point about the nature of disagreements: “If right were ultimately right, its differentiation from not-right would admit of no debate. If so were ultimately so, its differentiation from not-so would admit of no debate.” (Ziporyn 21). Indeed, a state of universal agreement produced by evidence that is so clearly indisputable would make debate totally unnecessary, because there would be no work left for it to do. However, such a state of universal agreement is (almost) impossible, since we are each lodged in our own limited perspective, and any assertion we make can always be challenged by another person who occupies a different perspective. In Chapter 2, we are asked to consider if disagreements can ever be straightened out (*zheng* 正):

Suppose you and I get into a debate. If you win and I lose, does that really mean you are right and I am wrong? If I win and you lose, does that really mean I’m right and you’re wrong? Must one of us be right and the other wrong? Or could both of us be right, or both of us wrong? If neither you nor I can know, a third person would be even more benighted. Whom should we have straighten out [*zheng* 正] the matter? Someone who agrees with you? But since he already agrees with you, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with me? But since he already agrees with me, how can he straighten it out? Someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with both of us? But since he already agrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? So neither you nor I nor any third party can ever know how it is—shall we wait for yet some ‘other’? (Ziporyn 20)

Zhuangzi questions if any one party winning a debate truly settles the matter: it could be the case that it was actually the opposing party that was right, or both parties were right or both wrong. Then, could a third party adjudicate either one to be right, or both parties to be right, or both wrong? Zhuangzi draws an analogy between the experience of waking up from a dream and the experience of one’s perspective transforming into another. When dreaming we are so sure that we are awake, yet when we wake up, we realise we were not truly awake in our previous state, and

our awakened state now becomes true. But a further awakening might reveal that even now we are still dreaming. Similarly, things may seem true from a particular perspective, but a shift in perspectives immediately casts doubt on our previous position and now our new position seems true. If we were to take this new position as ultimately right, then it would be like assuming that one is already awake. As the dream analogy suggests, even if a third party decides on who is right, it could very well be the case that a further awakening would reveal otherwise. Both parties and even the third party, who is supposed to play the role of adjudicator, could all be dreaming. If neither debaters nor adjudicator can agree on who is right, Zhuangzi asks if we should “wait for yet some ‘other’ [*dai bi* 待彼]”. At first, this passage seems to suggest the grim picture that disagreements are hopelessly irreconcilable, and that we cannot ultimately arbitrate which view is right. An adjudicator could decide one of the perspectives as right, but that only temporarily marks the end of a debate, like a bell that marks the end of a round in a boxing match. It does not truly settle the matter. However, Zhuangzi hints at another way of settling disagreements: in consideration of the debating Confucians and Mohists, who each affirms what the other denies and denies what the other affirms, Zhuangzi says, “if you want to affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 14). In the following passage, Zhuangzi explains what he means by the Illumination of the Obvious:

Thus the Sage does not proceed from any one of these alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven. That is also a way of going along with the rightness of each ‘this,’ going along with ‘thisness’ itself. For to be a ‘this’ is in fact also to be a ‘that,’ and every ‘that’ is also a ‘this.’ ‘THAT’ is then itself already both ‘this’ and ‘not-this,’ both a right and a wrong. But ‘THIS’ is also itself already both ‘this’ and ‘not-this,’ both a right and a wrong. So is there really any ‘this’ as opposed to ‘not-this,’ any right as opposed to wrong? Or is there really no ‘this’ as opposed to ‘not-this,’ no ‘right’ as opposed to ‘wrong’? A state where ‘this’ and ‘not-this’—right and wrong—are no longer coupled as opposites is called Course as axis, the axis of all courses. When this axis finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of ‘rights,’ and an endless supply of ‘wrongs.’ Thus I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious. (Ziporyn 14-15)

Rather than allowing only one standard of rightness to settle the disagreement, Zhuangzi “lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven”. The metaphor of illumination corresponds with the following quote from the same chapter: “Once upon a time ten suns rose in the sky at once, and the ten thousand things were all simultaneously illuminated. And how much better are multiple virtuosities than multiple suns (Ziporyn 18)?” According to the *Huainanzi*, during the time of the sage-king Yao, there were ten suns in the sky, which dried up the crops and killed

the plants. Yao later shot down nine of the suns. The point of the story is that multiple standards of rightness, like too many suns, is a bad thing. Rather than allowing only one sun to shine, only one party to be right, Zhuangzi allows all parties to be right, letting there be multiple suns for more illumination. On the other hand, the Confucians and Mohists only allow for one standard of rightness to the exclusion of all others. They can only go along with their own rightness, whereas Zhuangzi can go along with anyone's rightness.

As I mentioned earlier, a "this" includes its other, a "that", and a "that" also includes a "this". Since a "this" is also a "that", it is both a right and a wrong. Since a "that" is also a "this", it is likewise both a right and a wrong. In one sense, "this" and "that" are distinct things because what "this" affirms as "right", "that" denies as "wrong", and what "this" denies as "wrong", "that" affirms as "right". Yet in another sense, "this" and "that" are indistinguishable because both are a right and a wrong. Put in other terms, my perspective includes some other perspective; every affirmation of rightness I make entails the other denying it as wrong. The other's perspective also includes mine; every affirmation of rightness the other makes entails me denying it as wrong. Both cannot agree with one another on what is ultimately "right". This is what makes us distinct identities, what makes us clashing perspectives. "The Illumination of the Obvious" refers to the obvious fact that all perspectives oppose one another, and this fact is what settles debates. It is settled because there is nothing to resolve in the first place: since I am already right from my perspective, and you are already right from your perspective, then both are already right. There is no need to go on affirming what the other denies and denying what the other affirms. This is what Zhuangzi is referring to when he talks about the scenario of fishes spitting on one another to keep each other alive: rather than trying to prove to each other that one is right and the other is wrong, it is better to just "forget one another in the arts of the Course", i.e., to allow each other to be right because both are already right (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 56 and 60). The sense in which all of them are right is the Heavenly perspective from which all things can be viewed as one, which is what Zhuangzi calls "Dao-Axis" (*dao shu* 道樞). We are told that "when this axis finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of 'rights,' and an endless supply of 'wrongs' (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 15)". To use "the illumination of the Obvious" is to use the obvious fact that perspectives oppose one another to equalise all perspectives:

Thus the Radiance of Drift and Doubt is the sage's only map. He deploys no single definition of what is right, but instead entrusts it to the everyday function of each thing. This is what was meant by "using the Illumination of the Obvious" (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 16).

The obvious fact that opposing perspectives affirm what the other denies and deny what the other affirms entails

that each perspective is already affirmed from its own perspective. To use this fact is to follow no one standard of rightness to the exclusion of all others, but to follow the rightness of whatever perspective that appears for the present:

He just went along with the ‘thisness,’ relying on the rightness of the present ‘this.’ Thus the Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others, and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter’s Wheel.” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 16).

The imagery of the potter’s wheel provides an idea of how one can go about harmonizing with other perspectives. When throwing a pot, one needs to locate the center of the wheel in order to shape the clay evenly. The center position represents the Dao-Axis, or the Heavenly perspective from which all things are viewed as one. When one aligns with the middle of the wheel, one can smooth out all the uneven bumps of the clay by feeling the clay. Similarly, when one accords to the Heavenly perspective, one can respond to any perspective that one encounters, according to whatever “right” it affirms, thus equalising all perspectives. In this way, one can never be obstructed by any perspective that one encounters, and so one can go about wandering far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*).

In conclusion, I have further built upon my interpretation of *you* with the important idea of depending on both Heavenly and human viewpoints in order to transform into any perspective that comes along the way. The Heavenly viewpoint is the viewing of all things as one by contemplating on the nameless Dao that both exists *prior* to the generation of all things and circulates everywhere *in* all of the ten thousand things. But being too fixated on this Heavenly viewpoint is ultimately the view that things are not one. As the idea of “Walking Two Roads” suggests, being fixated on the view that all things are one is ultimately a view of non-oneness, since one has created a division between oneness and non-oneness. Rather than just appealing to the Heavenly, what is crucial is the flexibility to switch between the Heavenly and the human perspective. Like the motion of Dao as a distancing and also a returning, one first appeals to a greater perspective, a greater cause behind the generation of things, which makes them all one; but after that one returns to the ground, to the smallest unit, the thing itself which makes it so that a “this” and a “that” are both right. Hence, one can take any “this” as a new starting point whenever they come to a conflict with another perspective, transcending the confines of one’s own limited perspective, and transforming into any new perspective that comes along the way.

## CHAPTER THREE Cook Ding's *You-ing* Knife

### 3.1 Introduction: Tensions between Skilfulness and Uselessness

In this chapter, I will look at how various scholars have interpreted the term *you* 遊 in the Cook Ding passage. This passage is of particular interest because scholars often associate the concept of *you* with the “skill” passages throughout the *Zhuangzi* that depict the daemonic performances of skill masters. In addition to cook Ding who butchers an ox without hacking in Chapter 3, there are other skill masters in the Outer Chapters, such as the swimmer who swims in treacherous waters and woodworker Qing who carves beautiful bell stands in Chapter 19. According to many interpreters of the *Zhuangzi*, these skill stories exemplify an activity, mindset or way of life that is spontaneous and non-purposive. The famous passage of cook Ding, in particular, is heavily referenced as the paradigmatic example of *you* being concretely practised in a real-world setting. The cook's skilfulness and success at ox-carving is said to stem from his *you* attitude. Watson, for instance, says:

To describe this mindless, purposeless mode of life, *Zhuangzi* turns most often to the analogy of the artist or craftsman. The skilled butcher, the skilled swimmer does not ponder or ratiocinate on the course of action he should take; his skill has become so much a part of him that he merely acts instinctively and spontaneously and, without knowing why, achieves success. (xi-xii)

This spontaneous way of acting is contrasted with action that proceeds from deliberating over how one is going to act. One's attention is directed to the situation at hand, towards the object (the ox, the bell stand) itself, without latching onto any specific guide on how the task should be carried out. As Graham puts it:

People who really know what they are doing, such as a cook carving an ox, or a carpenter or an angler, do not precede each move by weighing the arguments for different alternatives. They spread their attention over the whole situation, let its focus roam freely, forget themselves in their total absorption in the object, and then the trained hand reacts spontaneously with a confidence and precision impossible to anyone who is applying rules and thinking out moves. (6)

Some scholars have compared this experience to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on the experience of “flow”.<sup>36</sup> Csikszentmihalyi himself has discussed the story of cook Ding in his chapter on “Work as Flow” (150-151). The key characteristic of flow experiences is “autotelic”, meaning that it is “intrinsically rewarding rather than tied to

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<sup>36</sup> See Chris Jochim's, “Just Say No to ‘No-self’ in *Zhuangzi*”, and James D. Sellman's “Butcher Ding: A Meditation in Flow”.

any future goal or benefit” (Jochim 63). Csikszentmihalyi defines Zhuangzian *you* as having this characteristic: “Chuang Tzu believed that to Yu [*you* 遊] was the proper way to live—without concern for external rewards, spontaneously, with total commitment—in short, as a total autotelic experience” (150). Flow occurs when one is concentrating on the activity at hand. During the experience of flow, goal-consciousness, awareness of daily troubles and frustrations, and “concern for the self” disappears (Jochim 63). In a similar vein of thought, David Machek analyses the role of disruptive emotions in the *Zhuangzi*, such as the desire for a particular outcome and feelings of fear about not achieving that outcome, in distracting us from being fully absorbed in the activity and enjoying it for its own sake (“Skill and Emotions in the *Zhuangzi*” 37-39).

On the other hand, Eric Schwitzgebel is skeptical of the traditional view in scholarship that Zhuangzi values spontaneous skilful activity. He argues that Zhuangzi criticises skill more than he praises it, and almost all celebrations of skill are found in the Outer Chapters while the Inner Chapters criticises skilfulness as much as celebrating it (101). One example that Schwitzgebel identifies as a criticism of skill is from a dialogue between Zhuangzi and his favourite sparring partner, Huizi, in Chapter 1. In this dialogue, Huizi says that Zhuangzi’s words are big and useless, like Huizi’s huge tree that is too gnarled and bent to be crafted into any useful thing.<sup>37</sup> Zhuangzi responds wryly that wildcats and weasels fall prey to and end up dead in traps and nets, precisely because they are so skilled and useful at catching rats, whereas yaks are only good at being big and useless at catching rats, which is why they remain unharmed. Zhuangzi then tells Huizi to simply do nothing (*wuwei* 無為), and be “far-flung and unfettered” (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) while dozing under his big tree, since nothing will ever harm such a useless tree. Schwitzgebel argues that Zhuangzi seems to be celebrating the yak’s “loafing, lazy bigness and *lack* of skills” and “doing nothing [*wuwei* 無為]”, rather than the weasel’s “spontaneous skilful activity” (105).

While I agree that Zhuangzi may not be celebrating skill in general, I do not think that he is criticising skilfulness per se. Rather, he seems to criticise only instances of skilfulness that are pursued and cultivated for the sake of gaining a name, becoming accomplished at something or for some other valued objective. Take for example the little birds in Chapter 1 who think of their skilfulness at flying from branch to branch as an accomplishment. On the other hand, Cook Ding does not appear to be going after a good name in his butchering of an ox. Nevertheless, from Schwitzgebel’s analysis, I acknowledge the difficulty of trying to reconcile the seemingly contradicting notions of “uselessness” and “skilfulness” in the text. On one hand, Zhuangzi seems to advocate passivity, especially

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<sup>37</sup> This retelling quotes from Ziporyn 8.

with the concept of “doing nothing” (*wuwei* 無為), and even his concept of *you* 遊 could be interpreted as a carefree laziness. David Machek observes that the standard view of *you* as purposeless wandering designates a carefree, relaxed, and even lazy activity that does not require any particular skill or method (Beyond Sincerity 63). Yet, in the skill stories which most scholars attribute *you* to, such as the cook Ding story in Chapter 3, the skill masters exhibit “supreme control and discipline” (63). This mirrors the tension between poetic and profane uses of *you*. As Chiu Wai notes, “*You* is the word used by Ding to describe the motion of his knife, and elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi* it reflects an ideal way of living one’s life. However, this way is special: while the skills of carving oxen, making bell stands, and swimming, for example, would have been originally developed for particular goals (preparing meat, making music, and surviving in water), the way of *you* is not fixed and has no determined goal” (*Skill and Mastery* 10). The notion of mystical Daoist sages’ *aimless* wandering seems to clash with Cook Ding’s intentional activity of ox-butchering.

### 3.2 Musicality in the Cook Ding Passage

I read the Cook Ding passage as primarily a critique of the Confucian idea of Dao, which is a guide that can be preached and followed, especially within the context of rulers, who are morally obligated to follow a specific guide to cultivate their own moral character and also to nourish and serve their citizens well. King Hui praises Cook Ding’s skill of ox-butchering, but the cook replies that what he loves is the Dao, which goes beyond mere skill. Here, the Dao he is referring to is the guideless guide that leads him to perform with such miraculous skill:

The cook was carving up an ox for King Hui of Liang. Wherever his hand smacked it, wherever his shoulder leaned into it, wherever his foot braced it, wherever his knee pressed it, the thwacking tones of flesh falling from bone would echo, the knife would whiz through with its resonant thwing, each stroke ringing out the perfect note, attuned to the Dance of the Mulberry Grove or the Jingshou Chorus of the ancient sage-kings. The king said, “Ah! It is wonderful that skill can reach such heights!”

The cook put down his knife and said, “What I love is the Course [Dao 道], going beyond mere skill. When I first started cutting up oxen, all I saw for three years was oxen, and yet still I was unable to see all there was to see in an ox. But now I encounter it with the imponderable spirit [*yu* 神] in me rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. For when the faculties of officiating understanding [*guan zhi* 官知] come to rest, imponderable spiritlike impulses [*shen yu* 神欲] being to stir, relying on the unwrought perforations [*tian li* 天理]. Striking into the enormous gaps, they are guided [*dao* 導] through those huge hollows, going along



in accord with what is already there and how it already is. So my knife has never had to cut through the knotted nodes where the warp hits the weave, much less the gnarled joints of bone. A good cook changes his blade once a year: he slices. An ordinary cook changes his blade once a month: he hacks. I have been using this same blade for nineteen years, cutting up thousands of oxen, and yet it is still as sharp as the day it came off the whetstone. For the joints have spaces within them, and the very edge of the blade has no thickness at all. When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play [*you* 遊] of the blade. That is why my knife is still as sharp as if it had just come off the whetstone, even after nineteen years.

“Nonetheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to *do* [*wei* 為] anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then whoosh! All at once I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. I retract the blade and stand there gazing at it all around me, both disoriented and satisfied by it all. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away.”

The king said, “Wonderful! From hearing the cook’s words I have learned to nourish life!” (Chapter 3, Ziporyn 29-30)

The first point that I think most scholars overlook is that cook Ding’s ox-butchering is likened to a musical performance—albeit an unconventional one since he is using his knife as a musical instrument.<sup>38</sup> In the beginning of the passage, cook Ding’s ox-carving is described as having a musical and rhythmic quality, as if he were performing the ritual dance of the Mulberry Grove or the Jingshou Chorus of the ancient sage-kings.<sup>39</sup> It is probably no coincidence that such an emphasis on musicality or reference to ancient religious rituals were made. Cook Ding’s “musical” ox-butchering could be read as a parody, meant to subvert the Confucian values of ritual (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂). In the Confucian setting, only morally superior men (*junzi* 君子) and sage-kings engage in the creative role of music, whereas the common men are passive listeners whose characters are to be moulded by the music of these superior men (Park, On Sound 9). Here a lowly cook, not a noble musician, is creating music with his knife and its contact with an animal carcass, and King Hui, who has a higher social standing, is being influenced by the

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<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere in chapter 18, Zhuangzi sings and drums on his overturned washtub, an unconventional musical instrument, upon the death of his wife—a very ritually inappropriate thing to do from a Confucian perspective (Ziporyn145).

<sup>39</sup> According to Sima Biao, the Mulberry Grove (Sanglin) was the name of a sacrificial musical piece of King Tang of the Shang dynasty. According to sources quoted by Qing dynasty scholar Sun Yirang, this musical piece was performed for the king as he offered himself in sacrifice while praying to the spirits at Sanglin for relief from the drought that was crippling his state. See Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, p. 104. Jingshou, according to both Sima Biao and Xiang Xiu (ca. A.D. 221-300), was the name of a movement within the composition Xianchi, associated with the legendary sage-ruler Yao. (Cook, *Carving* 551)

cook, subverting the hierarchy of influence. As Scott Cook observes, King Hui's response to Ding's performance, "Wonderful! Can skill attain to such a state as this?" resonates with a line from the *Analects* 7.14, "I had no idea that the making of music could attain to such a state as this!" (539). The latter is attributed to Confucius, who for three months had forgotten the taste of meat after having heard the Shao music of the sage-king Shun. While Confucius extols on the morally transformative music of the sage-kings, the skill that Cook Ding exhibits is a humble one, since from a Confucian perspective, butchering an ox hardly qualifies as an art (*yi* 藝) on a level with ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy or mathematics, in which the superior man was trained.

Another point regarding musicality is that the structure of the Cook Ding passage bears a resemblance to the structure of the Xianchi music story in Chapter 14.<sup>40</sup> As Park So-Jeong points out, both passages represent the process of losing oneself, i.e., being united with Dao, in three steps (2). Comparing the two stories, we can find similar descriptions of emotional experiences transitioning from fear to weariness and from weariness to confusion. In the Xianchi passage, Northgate Cheng<sup>41</sup> is described as being terrified at first, then exhausted, and lastly confused by the three respective musical movements of the Yellow Emperor's Xianchi music. In particular, the confusion he felt at the end is described as being "cast into chaos, speechless, unable to get a hold of myself", indicating the indescribable state of losing oneself (Ziporyn 119). Likewise, when cook Ding encounters a clustered tangle in the ox,<sup>42</sup> he first restrains himself as if terrified, then his activity slows. His blade moves slightly and all at once the ox is already dismembered. What is noteworthy about Ding's explanation is that he does not directly attribute the act of butchering to himself, nor does he describe his knife as making any actual contact with the ox. He only describes the sound of flesh and bone being separated. After the ox is butchered, Ding looks all around him, disoriented, as if the butchering happened all on its own. This state of confusion—not being aware that he was the one that did the butchering—is much like Cheng's state after listening to the Xianchi music: it is the state of losing oneself.

In the Confucian context, there is also some association between music and the theme of forgetfulness. In the aforementioned example from the *Analects* 7.14, Confucius forgets the taste of meat for three months after being enraptured by the music of the sage-king Shun. Music is one of the internal goods of the Confucian Dao, which frees one from his preoccupation with external goods of material comfort, rank, and reputation. On the other hand, the Xianchi passage takes the idea of forgetfulness even further—music effaces any boundary between self and other, between oneself and any external objects of one's conscious valuing, acting, deliberating, and so forth. In the

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<sup>40</sup> The Xianchi story also bears resemblance to the Heavenly Piping story, Fasting of the Mind, and Sitting and Forgetting stories.

<sup>41</sup> The character *cheng* 成 meaning fully formed is used for his name. In Zhuangzian context *cheng* represents a fully formed blockage that obstructs wandering.

<sup>42</sup> I take this to be a metaphor for *cheng* 成.

Xianchi story, the Yellow Emperor explains that he ends the music with confusion because “that is what brings the foolishness. When the foolishness comes upon you, you are coursing in the Course [Dao 道]. For then the Course can carry you along, keeping you right there with it wherever it goes” (Chapter 14, Ziporyn 121). The Dao here is not referring to any specific course—not the Confucian Dao, nor the Dao of the sage-kings—but “the Course that is not a course” (Chapter 2, Ziporyn 17). Cheng’s forgetting of his self is this non-attachment to any particular guide, whereas the Confucians’ adherence to the Dao of the ancient sage-kings further reinforces one’s clinging onto a fixed identity.

### 3.3 Analysis of *Yangsheng* 養生

The other point that most scholars seem to overlook is the very last phrase of the passage, in which King Hui exclaims that he has learnt how to nourish life (*yangsheng* 養生). In many influential discussions about the concept of *you* as a kind of skilful activity or mindset, not much significance is placed on this last line about the nourishing of life.<sup>43</sup> Granted, it is unclear how Cook Ding’s ox-butcherer has anything to do with the subject of nourishing life. However, I think that it is worth looking at Zhuangzi’s concept of nourishing life, since that seems to be the main takeaway for King Hui after hearing Cook Ding’s explanation of how he is able to skilfully butcher the ox.

First, I would like to point out that it is unclear if King Hui is talking about nourishing one’s own life, or nourishing the life of others. The phrase *yangsheng* also appears in Chapter 19 and 28 of the *Zhuangzi*, and in both cases, it refers to self-preservation rather than the nourishment of others. In Chapter 19, *yangsheng* refers to the preservation of one’s life by avoiding internal ailments and external corrupting influences from society (Ziporyn 152). Similarly, in Chapter 28, *yangsheng* is used with keeping the body undamaged (*wanshen* 完身) (Ziporyn 231). These cases of *yangsheng* as self-preservation seem to be an incorporation of Yang Zhu’s philosophy, which is strongly rebuked in the *Mencius* for its egoist doctrine of “each for oneself” (*weiwo* 為我).<sup>44</sup> Graham suggests that Yang Zhu’s doctrine does not necessarily imply selfishness, but advocates “nurturing and harmonising the vital tendencies and spontaneous inclinations which Heaven instilled in us when we were born” (*Later Mohist Logic* 17). The Yangist conception of nourishing one’s life has more to do with keeping one’s nature (*xing* 性) intact by avoiding external factors, such as taking office or ruling an empire, which damage one’s original nature, so that one

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, David Machek, “Beyond sincerity and pretense”; Chris Fraser, “Wandering the Way”; and Alan Levinovitz, “The Zhuangzi and You 遊”.

<sup>44</sup> In *Mencius* 7A26.1, Mencius sets up Yang Zhu as an egoist: “Yang Zhu favored being ‘for oneself.’ If plucking out one hair from his body would have benefited the whole world, he would not do it (Van Norden 178).”

can live out one's Heavenly given years (Graham, *Disputers of the Dao* 56-56). Likewise, in the *Zhuangzi*, nourishment is almost always used within the context of avoiding of politics, especially in Chapters 28-31 where Yangist thought is most prominent. For instance, in Chapter 28, the management of one's own body is given the highest priority, followed by the management of one's own community and family; the governance of one's country is given the lowest priority, because it runs against the keeping of the body intact and the nourishing of life (*wanshen yangsheng* 完身養生) (Ziporyn 231).

In contrast to *Zhuangzi*'s usage of *yangsheng* as self-preservation, Confucians often use the term *yang* 養 in reference to caring for others, in particular caring for one's parents and providing nourishment to citizens. For example, *Analects* 2.7 talks about treating one's parents with reverence on top of providing them material nourishment. *Analects* 5.16 talks about the four virtues of the superior person (君子 *junzi*): one of them being kindness in caring for the common people (*yang min* 養民). In the *Mencius*, the phrase *yangsheng* 養生 appears twice, and in both cases, it is paired with providing an adequate funeral. In *Mencius* 3.3, Mencius says that with proper governance, the common people will not have any regrets as there will be enough resources for them to nourish the living and provide adequate burials for the dead. In 4B13, Mencius says, "Caring for the living (*yangsheng* 養生) is not sufficient to be considered a great task [i.e. being filial to one's parents]. Only sending off the dead may be considered a great task (Van Norden 106)." Here, the idea is that merely providing material nourishment for one's parents is not enough to count as filial piety. Hence, in the Confucian context, the term *yang* is often used to denote caring for others rather than for oneself, whereas the *Zhuangzi* attacks this very notion of *yang*, especially if it comes at the cost of one's own self-preservation. In Chapter 28, the Confucian moral exemplar (*junzi* 君子) is criticised for sacrificing their bodies and lives for the sake of external things (Ziporyn 231). In Chapter 11, a similar criticism is made about the legendary sage-kings Yao and Shun<sup>45</sup> for "wearing away the flesh of their thigh bones and the hair of their calves in their efforts to nourish the bodies of all the people of the known world" (Ziporyn 91). Also in the same chapter, when the Yellow Emperor asks Master Guang for advice on how to "collect the purest kernel of heaven and earth to assist the growth of the five grains, so as to nourish the people [*yang min ren* 養民人]... to put the yin and yang into service so as to bring all living beings to maturity", the master refuses to give him any advice (Ziporyn 92). However, after withdrawing from society and giving up his kingdom, the Yellow Emperor seeks Master Guang again, but this time he asks how he should govern his own body so that it

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<sup>45</sup> Moral exemplars greatly revered by Confucius.

may long endure. Master Guang regards this as a good question and readily responds. This implies that even for a ruler, who is morally obligated to care for his citizens more than himself, the nourishing of the self still takes priority over the nourishing of others.

Despite the Yangist strands in the text, Zhuangzi probably meant to include both the nourishment of oneself and others in his conception of *yangsheng*. After all, it is not only cook Ding's knife that is being kept in pristine condition, the ox's joints are undamaged as well—the cut between the ox's joints is so precise that the ox comes apart cleanly, as opposed to less skilful butchers who damage the ox by hacking away at its bones. In the passage preceding the cook Ding story, Zhuangzi not only talks about self-preservation, such as maintaining our bodies (*baoshen* 保身), keeping the life in them intact (*quansheng* 全生) and fully living out our years (*jinnian* 盡年), he also includes the nourishing of those near and dear to us (*yangqin* 養親). While this seems out of place in the *Zhuangzi* given the heavy emphasis on nourishing the self elsewhere, I argue that Zhuangzi's aim is to subvert the concept of nourishment as traditionally understood in the Confucian context, i.e., as caring for others, in particular for one's parents and one's countrymen. In the following excerpts, Zhuangzi's concept of nourishment rejects the Confucian value of humankindness (*ren* 仁), and its usage extends far beyond the human realm, applying to the ten thousand things (*wan wu* 萬物) or ten thousand generations (*wan shi* 萬世):

It is thus that if a sage uses force, he may destroy a nation without losing the hearts of its people. Or his bounty may enrich ten thousand generations, but not because he harbors any love for mankind [利澤施於萬物 · 不為愛人]. Hence he who takes active delight in helping beings reach success is not a true sage. He who favors his intimates lacks true humankindness [*ren* 仁]. (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 54)

My teacher! My teacher! He destroys all things, but he is not being just. His bounty reaches all things, but he is not being kind [澤及萬世而不為仁]. He is an elder to the remotest antiquity, but without being old. He covers and supports heaven and earth and carves out all forms, but without being skillful. It is all the play of his wandering, nothing more. (Chapter 6, Ziporyn 62)

This teacher of mine! This teacher of mine! Grinding up all of the ten thousand things, yet without being

violent! Spreading nourishment to ten thousand generations, yet without being kind [澤及萬世而不為仁]!  
Older than the highest antiquity, yet without being long-lived! Supporting and covering Heaven and Earth, shaping and carving the myriad forms, yet without being skillful! This is what is meant by the music, the joy, of Heaven. (Chapter 13, Ziporyn 110)

Zhuangzi uses the word *ze* 澤 instead of the term *yang* 養, but the meaning is the same, which is “nourishment”.<sup>46</sup> All three excerpts share the idea of nourishing the ten thousand things or generations “without being” (*buwei* 不為) kind. The term *buwei* 不為 is almost the same as *wuwei* 無為: both *bu* 不 and *wu* 無 are negative prefixes that negate *wei* 為. *Wei*, which is being negated, can mean “to act”, “to be”, “to become”, “to make”, “to deem [X as Y]”, and “for [the purpose of]” (Ziporyn 287). *Wuwei* can be translated in multiple ways as “effortless action”, “non-deeming”, “non-purposive action”, or “non-conditioned action” to specify what kinds of acting or deeming is being denied.<sup>47</sup> According to Ziporyn, “what is denied here is not motion or action per se, but the doing of deeds in the sense of consciously taking action “for” (*wei*) some specific purpose, deliberate and intentional teleological action, such that one would deem oneself and other things as having, or make oneself and others have, specific definite identities relative to that purpose” (Ziporyn 287). Hence, what Zhuangzi is denying in the above excerpts is not the nourishing of others per se, but the nourishing of others “for” (*wei* 為) the purpose of being kind toward others. In a story from Chapter 19, we are told that the ruler of Lu chances upon a bird and tries to nourish it with the finest human foods. The bird is confused and refuses to eat them because after all it is a bird, and birds would rather eat worms. Although the ruler of Lu has good intentions and intended to nourish the bird out of kindness, he fails to nourish the bird because he is trying to nourish it with what nourishes himself. To understand what is problematic about this formulation of nourishment, I refer to the story of Nanrong Chu in Chapter 23, who is plagued by the following dilemma: “If I’m not kind [*ren* 仁], I harm others, but if I am, I bring trouble to myself. If I don’t behave responsibly [*yi* 義], I hurt others, but if I do behave responsibly, I burden myself” (Ziporyn 187).<sup>48</sup> The problem is that only one party can benefit from this arrangement: either I am nourished at the expense of others, or

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<sup>46</sup> In addition, *ze* 澤 can mean “rain”, “water”, as well as “swamp”, “marsh”, or low areas where water tends to flow toward to and gathers—all senses of the term culminate to indicate that which provides fertility and nourishment to the myriad things.

<sup>47</sup> Slingerland translates it as “effortless action” in “Effortless Action: The Chinese Spiritual Ideal of Wu-wei”. Hansen suggests the translations “non-deeming”, “non-purposive”, “spontaneous action” (A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought 214)

<sup>48</sup> To solve this dilemma, Nanrong Chu seeks Laozi’s counsel on how to preserve the life in him (*wei sheng* 衛生), which is yet another Zhuangzian term for *yangsheng* (nourishing life).

others are nourished at the expense of myself. But this problem only exists if one sees a fixed boundary between oneself and others. If one can be like the monkey keeper from Chapter 2, who can see things as one and thus go by the rightness of the present “this”, then one will not experience any sense of loss when nourishing others. The monkey keeper sees no difference between giving three and giving four chestnuts to the monkeys in the morning, so he can go along with what satisfies and nourishes the monkeys, which is to give them four chestnuts in the morning. Conversely, if he were to feed the monkeys four chestnuts for the sake of “being kind” to the monkeys, he may feel a sense of loss because he is martyring himself for the sake of some other.

### 3.4 *Yangsheng* and *You* in Chapters 1 and 2

Returning to the Cook Ding passage, the subject of nourishment seems to come out of nowhere when King Hui exclaims that he has learnt how to nourish life after hearing Cook Ding’s words. This makes it difficult to establish any link between the concept of *yangsheng* and Cook’s Ding *you*-ing knife, which is described as wandering between the enormous gaps of the ox’s joints. In this section, I will show that Zhuangzi has already alluded to the idea of nourishment in conjunction with the concept of *you*, long before the appearance of the term *yangsheng* in the Cook Ding passage. First, looking at the Peng story from Chapter 1, I point out that Zhuangzi makes a subtle reference to the subject of nourishment when he compares a small to a large consciousness:

If you’re only making an outing to the nearby woods, you can bring along your three meals for the day and return with your belly still full. If you’re traveling a hundred miles, you’ll need to husk grain for the journey the night before. And if you’re traveling a thousand miles, you’ll need to save up provisions for three months before you go. What do these two little insects know? A small consciousness cannot keep up with a vast consciousness; short duration cannot keep up with long duration. (Ziporyn 4)

Prior to this excerpt, Zhuangzi explains the science of Peng having to rely on thickly piled up wind in order to get enough power for his flight, like how a large vessel needs to be supported by deep waters in order to float. Moreover, the wind that Peng depends on is also the back-and-forth breath of living beings, i.e., the vital life force that sustains the life of all living beings. The idea of hoarding up enough food to sustain a long journey suggests that Peng must depend on more things, not only for its flight, but also for its own nourishment in order to sustain its long journey to the Southern Oblivion. At the end of the story, we are told that one can only wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*) by charioting on what is true to both Heaven and to earth, and riding on the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths, which suggest that the dependence on all things is what provides endless nourishment for one to *you* and transform along with whatever that comes ceaselessly.

The relation between the subject of nourishment and *you* can also be found in another story from Chapter 1, in which Jian Wu reports to Lian Shu about madman Jieyu's depiction of the mysterious Spiritlike Persons (*shenren* 神人). Here, the word *you* appears for the second time in the *Zhuangzi*, in the phrase “wandering beyond the four seas” (*you hu sihai zhiwai* 遊乎四海之外):

There are imponderable Spiritlike Persons who live on distant Mt. Guye with skin like ice and snow, gentle and yielding like virgin girls. They do not eat the five grains, but rather live by breathing in the wind and drinking in the dew. They ride upon the air and clouds, charioting upon soaring dragons, wandering beyond the four seas. They just concentrate their spirits [*shen* 神] and straightaway all things are free from sickness and the harvest matures. (Ziporyn 6)

Further down the passage, Lian Shu contrasts these Spiritlike Persons with rulers who actively try to manage and govern the world:

Such [Spiritlike] persons, or the virtuosity [*de* 德] in them, would be spreading everywhere through the ten thousand things until all are made one, while the current world is busy groping toward its own chaotic order—why would they wear themselves out fretting about the world as if it were something to be managed? Such persons are harmed by no thing. A flood may reach the sky without drowning them, a drought may melt the stones and scorch the mountains without scalding them. From their dust and chaff you could mold yourself a Yao or a Shun. How could they consider any particular thing worth bothering about? It is like a ceremonial cap salesman of Song traveling to Yue, where the people shave their heads and tattoo their bodies—they have no use [*wu suo yong* 無所用] for such things. After Yao brought all the people of the world under his rule and put all within the four seas into good order, he went off to see four of these masters of distant Mt. Guye at the bright side of the Fen River. Astonished at what he saw there, he forgot [*sang* 喪] all about his empire. (Ziporyn 7)

The passage draws a distinction between two realms of existence: the territory within the four seas represents the central states, where rulers struggle to manage the empire, whereas the Spiritlike Persons wander beyond this territory. *Zhuangzi* alludes to the idea of nourishment in his description of the Spiritlike Persons: they avoid the five grains and miraculously depend only on wind and dew for sustenance. Although they themselves do not eat the five



grains, they are able to make the crops ripen. They are also miraculously unaffected by natural disasters of floods and droughts. One way to interpret this is to take the Spiritlike Persons as literally possessing some sort of mysterious spiritual power that protects them from natural disasters and keeps them alive despite them living on only the wind and dew. On the other hand, we can also interpret their immunity to floods and droughts as coming from their abstinence from the five grains, which are a symbol and product of agriculture and the civilised world.<sup>49</sup> Since they do not depend on the staple food of commoners and their social practices, they are unconcerned about floods and droughts, and political matters about how to manage the world.

The subject of nourishment is also hinted in an earlier passage, in which Yao went to cede his empire to the hermit Xu You. Yao suggests to Xu You that he is more suited for the throne by using an analogy between the governing of people and the cultivation of crops:

To keep the torches burning in broad daylight would be making needless trouble for oneself. To continue watering one's garden during a heavy rainfall would be pointless labor. Now you, sir, so much as appear in the world and at once it is well ordered. And yet here I am, playing the host and master [*shi* 尸], acting like I control it all. I feel I am greatly deficient. Please accept the rulership of this world from me. (Ziporyn 6)

Yao does not regard himself as the true ruler of the world; he likens his effort at governance to the needless watering of a garden during a heavy rainfall, indicating that Xu You is the one who is truly ruling the world. The metaphor of caring for crops also suggests a connection between a ruler's candidacy and his competency to nourish his citizens. Like how Xu You's presence alone is sufficient to order the world and nourish the people, the Spiritlike Persons provide nourishment to the people without any active efforts to manage them: they simply concentrate their spirits (*shen* 神) and all things are free from illness and the harvest ripens. This goes back to the idea of nourishing without doing so for the sake of others (*wuwei*): Xu You and the Spiritlike Persons do not make any special effort to nourish others, and yet they are able to nourish all things. Since things are already nourished, they have no use for rulership, like a ceremonial cap salesman of Song travelling to Yue, where the people shave their heads and tattoo their bodies. The reference to the ceremonial cap and the people of Yue again points to the contrast between the civilised human world within the four seas and the wilderness outside of it, where animals and nomadic tribes wander. Wild animals and hunter-gatherers have very different eating patterns from agricultural societies: "The tailorbird lives in the

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<sup>49</sup> In the *Wang Zhi* 王制 chapter of the Liji, some of the 'barbaric' tribes living outside of the Middle states did not eat grains, some ate raw foods, and some tattooed their bodies.

depths of a vast forest, but uses no more than a single branch to make his nest. When the beaver drinks from the river, he takes only enough to fill his belly” (Chapter 1, Ziporyn 6). Animals and hunter-gatherers only seek food when they are hungry and source just enough food to fill their bellies, whereas agriculture-based societies tend to reap a large harvest of grains and other crops at a time and hoard them. Animals will always have enough food (and leave enough food for others) because they see the entire world as the source of their nourishment, whereas agricultural societies suffer from famine at times, because they depend only on their crops for food, which require a lot of labor and are subjected to uncontrollable weather conditions. Hence, the paradigmatic sage nourishes himself (and others) in the same way as animals: not by hoarding, i.e., dwelling in one definite identity, but by looking to the entire world as the source of his nourishment, i.e., by depending on all things. This way, he always has enough nourishment to nourish anything that comes along the way, by responding to various rights and wrongs from his endless supply of perspectives.

### 3.5 *You as Losing the Self*

We are told in the passage about Spiritlike Persons that the sage-king Yao makes a transition from managing his empire within the four seas, to travelling to the far-off realm of the Spiritlike Persons, where he forgets (*sang* 喪) about his empire. The word *sang* 喪 is also used in the beginning of Chapter 2, in which Nanguoziqi says “I have lost me [*wu sang wo* 吾喪我]” (Ziporyn 11), suggesting that he has lost himself after hearing the Piping of Heaven, i.e., after seeing all things as one. The negative phrasing of *losing* one’s empire and *losing* one’s self suggests a thematic connection with the final line of the *you wuqiong* passage, which is also expressed in negative terms: “the Utmost Person has *no* definite identity, the Spiritlike Person has *no* particular merit, the Sage has *no* one name” (Ziporyn 5). The ability to wander far and unfettered (*you wuqiong*) has to do with losing one’s self, and this includes giving up one’s attachment to valued things like merit, reputation, or rulership over a territory, which are tied to one’s definite identity. One passage from Chapter 22 draws a parallel between giving up one’s rulership over a state and losing the self.

In this passage, the marquis of Lu confides in Yiliao of Marketsouth that he is distressed because he is still plagued by misfortunes even though he has utterly devoted himself to studying and practising the way of the former kings.<sup>50</sup> Yiliao likens the marquis’ situation to that of foxes and leopards with valuable hides: no matter how cautious and skilled these animals are at hiding themselves, they cannot escape from falling into a trap because it is their beautiful hides that make them constant targets for hunters. Yiliao advises the marquis to abandon the state of

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<sup>50</sup> This retelling is based on Ziporyn 158-159

Lu (his hide, metaphorically speaking) and go “wandering [*you* 遊] in the wilds where no one goes”, in a place called the Land of Embedded Virtuosities. Yiliao depicts the people living there as “stupid and simple, having few private concerns and desires, knowing how to work but not how to hoard, giving everything away without seeking any return”. They know nothing of Confucian values of duty (*yi* 義) and ritual (*li* 禮). Their movement is described as “heedless and wild, they go their reckless way, with each step dancing on through the Vast Ambient”, which resembles the aimless wandering of Vast Obscure from Chapter 11.

When the marquis comments that he has neither the boat nor carriage to traverse such a long and dangerous course over the rivers and mountains, Yiliao advises him to “let nothing unbending take shape, retain no fixed dwelling, and these will be your boat and carriage”. The marquis then comments that he has no companions on such a dark, long and lonely course, and no provisions and food to sustain him on his journey. With regards to the lack of sustenance, Yiliao advises him to minimise his spending, reduce his desires so that he will always have enough. As for the lack of companionship, Yiliao makes the following point:

You will wade through the rivers and float on the seas, until no shorelines can be found in any direction. The further you go the less you will know of any endpoint. Those who sent you off will all long have turned back from the shore and headed home, so far away from them will you be. For if you exert ownership over others they will entangle you, and if others exert ownership over you they will grieve you... If a person is floating on his two-hulled craft across a river and an empty boat bumps into his, he does not get angry no matter how petty-minded a person he may be. But if there is a person in the other boat, he will shout out, demanding that it be steered clear. If the first shout is not heard, he will shout again, and then again, and by the third shout his tone will have become abusive. In the former case there was no anger, but in the latter case there is, because in the former case the boat was empty and in this case it is full. When a person can wander [*you* 遊] through the world emptied of self, what can harm him? (Ziporyn 159)

Here, the idea of distancing from others is not referring to a withdrawal from human society. Zhuangzi is referring to the process of losing the self: one does that by losing one’s sense of belonging in a definite self, as if one has lost one’s home or preferred dwelling place. The more one distances from one’s home, i.e., the weaker one’s hold over a definite identity, the closer one is to being lost, to lose a definite self. When one has lost oneself, it is as if one has become a driverless boat being carried along by the currents: there is no one controlling the boat, no intentional activity directed at a goal, no desiring of external objects. The passage shows that this mode of existence is what

protects one from harm: when one is emptied of the self, it appears to others as if they have encountered a driverless boat. If the boat clashes with them, they do not react in anyway, because they do not feel any ownership being exerted upon them.

The metaphor of the driverless boat corresponds to the process of the fasting of the mind (*xinzhai* 心齋) that is found in Chapter 4. In this story, Confucius's disciple Yan Hui is about to embark on a journey to Wei to transmit Confucian values and convince Wei's tyrannical ruler to abandon his autocratic ways. Confucius says that that would only put Yan Hui in danger of getting himself killed. Instead, he recommends Yan Hui to fast his mind, so that he will not plague the ruler and get himself executed. The process of fasting the mind is described as the following:

Yan Hui said, "What is the fasting of the mind?"

Confucius said, "You have so single-mindedly focused your will that you have been constantly hearkening to it, not with your ears but with your mind, and not only with your mind but even with your vital energy. Instead let your hearkening stay positioned at the ears, your mind going no further than meshing there like a tally. The vital energy is then a vacuity, a waiting for the presence of whatever thing may come. The Course alone is the gathering of this vacuity. This vacuity is the fasting of the mind."

Yan Hui said, "When I am not yet able to make something happen in the actual world, I regard myself as this person named Hui. But just where something is actually made to happen there, this Hui has not yet begun to exist. Can that be what you mean by vacuity?"

Confucius said, "Exactly. I tell you truly, this way you can go roam around in his cage without feeling the pull of reputation, the pull of all the names... Consider the gaps and cracks and hollows in things: it is in the empty chambers that light appears, and all auspicious things come to roost only where there is stillness. Whenever you fail to find such stillness for even a moment, you're just 'galloping around even while sitting.' Instead, allow whatever is brought by the ears and eyes to enter into you without obstruction, kept always outside of the mind's understanding, and even the ghosts and spirits will seek refuge in you, not to mention human beings! (Chapter 4, Ziporyn 38)

In the beginning, Confucius seems to be implying that Yan Hui is exhausting his vital energy (*qi* 氣) in trying to reform the tyrannical ruler. This is reminiscent of the metaphor of the fishes spitting at one another to keep each other alive: Yan Hui exhausts his own source of nourishment by going along with his completed heart-mind, affirming what the ruler negates and negating what the ruler affirms. Confucius tells Yan Hui to let his listening go

back only as far as his ears, so that the completed heart-mind does not control what the ears hear. In this way, the ears would no longer be listening to things in an intentional manner, guided by the heart-mind; the ears simply listen to whatever things that they happen to hear. One's vital energy becomes connected with all things and there is no longer a definite identity (Yan Hui) that is sharply distinct from all things, i.e., Yan Hui has lost himself. The vital energy is now a vacuity that receives whatever thing that comes along. This is to find stillness at the centre of Heaven the Potter's Wheel, i.e., the Heavenly perspective from which all things can be viewed as one. A failure to find this stillness for even a moment will stir the heart-mind into action, i.e., into differentiating "this" from "that" and "right" from "wrong". When one finds stillness at the centre of Heaven the Potter's Wheel, the heart-mind is fasted and functions like a mirror: "rejecting nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing" (Chapter 7, Ziporyn 72). In this way, one can welcome any perspective that comes along, rejecting none, transforming from one perspective to another without staying put in any one.

### 3.6 Analysis of the Cook Ding Passage

The Cook Ding passage represents this losing of the self. At first, when Cook Ding looked at the ox, all he could see was an intact ox. But years later, he is able to see the spaces within the ox, where the knife can follow along:

I encounter it with the imponderable spirit [*shen* 神] in me rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. For when the faculties of officiating understanding [*guan zhi* 官知] come to rest, imponderable spiritlike impulses [*shen yu* 神欲] being to stir, relying on the unwrought perforations [*tian li* 天理]. Striking into the enormous gaps, they are guided [*dao* 導] through those huge hollows, going along in accord with what is already there and how it already is. So my knife has never had to cut through the knotted nodes where the warp hits the weave, much less the gnarled joints of bone[...] For the joints have spaces within them, and the very edge of the blade has no thickness at all. When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play [*you* 遊] of the blade. That is why my knife is still as sharp as if it had just come off the whetstone, even after nineteen years.

Nonetheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then whoosh! All at once I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. I retract the blade and stand there gazing at it all around me, both disoriented and satisfied by it all. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away. (Chapter 3, Ziporyn 30)

Letting the faculties of officiating understanding come to rest means to not let a completed heart-mind be the ruler or controller of the rest of the body parts. In this case, it is to not let the eyes follow a completed heart-mind as its master, otherwise one will have a one-sided tendency to recognise the ox in its intact form. The resting of the faculties of officiating understanding is what Confucius calls “stillness” in the “fasting of the mind” passage:

Consider the gaps and cracks and hollows in things: it is in the empty chambers that light appears, and all auspicious things come to roost only where there is stillness. Whenever you fail to find such stillness for even a moment, you’re just ‘galloping around even while sitting.’ Instead, allow whatever is brought by the ears and eyes to enter into you without obstruction, kept always outside of the mind’s understanding, and even the ghosts and spirits will seek refuge in you, not to mention human beings! (Chapter 4, Ziporyn 38)

When the faculties of officiating understanding comes to a rest, the spiritlike impulses are activated. Here, the spiritlike impulses probably do not refer to any notion of a causative agent. Notice that nowhere in Cook Ding’s explanation does he refer to himself as doing the cutting. He only refers to *the knife* as doing the cutting. Furthermore, the line, “Then whoosh! All at once I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground” sounds as if the butchering happened all on its own, which suggests that the spiritlike impulses refer to some sort of agentless, nonconscious, nonintentional, or spontaneous mental state. We are told that these spiritlike impulses rely on the unwrought perforations (*tian li* 天理), which are the natural lines in the flesh of the ox along which it is most easily cut. The word *tian li* also appears in the Xianchi music passage:

I performed it by means of what is distinctively human but attuned it to the Heavenly, advancing it in terms of ritual responsibilities yet rooting it in the Great Clarity. For perfect music—which is perfect joy—must start out by resonating with human affairs while according with the inherent structures of the Heavenly [*tianli* 天理]. It must run its course through all the Five Virtues but still accord with what is unforced in things, their spontaneous self-affirmations. Only then can it concordantly adjust the four seasons within it, bringing all things into its great harmony. (Chapter 14, Ziporyn 120)

Perfect music begins with a human perspective while attuning it to the Heavenly, going with the inherent structures of the Heavenly (*tianli*). This corresponds with Cook Ding’s progress: first he starts out from a human perspective, only able to see the ox in its intact form; later on, he takes on a Heavenly perspective, able to see the spaces between the ox’s joints as enormous gaps. From a human perspective, the spaces between the ox’s joints are too cramped

and the edge of the knife is too thick. No matter how carefully one butchers the ox, both the ox and the knife will be damaged. From a Heavenly perspective, the spaces between the ox's joints and the thickness of the edge of the blade are equalised: the spaces between the ox's joints are infinitely vast and the edge of the blade is infinitely narrow. However, this does not mean that Cook Ding can carelessly hack away at the ox and get away with a pristine knife and a cleanly cut ox. He still has to attend carefully to the ox itself, for there are constraints set by the bones of the joints that limit how far the knife can deviate from the center of the gaps. Near the end of the passage, Cook Ding acknowledges that he must proceed carefully whenever he comes to "a clustered tangle". First, he restrains himself as if terrified until his seeing comes to a complete halt. This means to find stillness at the center of Heaven the Potter's wheel, i.e., the Heavenly viewpoint from which all things are viewed as one. This is to let the faculties of officiating understanding come to a complete rest, so that the heart-mind does not rouse into action, and the spiritlike impulses are activated. He can now see the gap between the ox's joints as enormous and the edge of the blade as narrow, but he must also accord with the rightness of the present "this". That is, he must see the gap between the joints as just wide enough and the edge of the blade as just narrow enough such that the knife can go through right in the middle of the gap without damaging the knife nor the bones. If the gap between the joint is perceived as too wide or the knife is perceived as too narrow, then Cook Ding may not be able to accurately locate the center of the gap and cut apart the ox cleanly. Hence, his blade moves ever so slightly as he closely attends to the ox and pinpoints the center of the gap between the joints. Once he locates it, in one spontaneous whoosh, the ox is dismembered.

In conclusion, I have shown that the Cook Ding is primarily a critique of the Confucian Dao, which preaches a guide that is taken up by rulers as a course of study to cultivate their own moral character, and also a way to nourish his citizens. But this guide is unsustainable, while also exhausting the ruler's own vital life force, one's *qi*, and puts him in danger even though he is nourishing his citizens out of goodwill and kindness. Zhuangzi's concept of *yangsheng* is both a nourishing of oneself and of others, because his Dao is one that does not impose on any guide on how to order the world nor any purposive action to nourish all things. Rather than following some higher guide or Heavenly viewpoint, Zhuangzi asks us to return to the lowest unit of each thing, and to follow along with the present "this". This is reflected in the Cook Ding passage, which can be read as a subversion of the Confucian Dao. While the Confucian Dao asks the lowly citizens to emulate the way of the noble sage-kings, in the Cook Ding passage, it is someone of a higher status, King Hui, who has learnt something from someone of a lower status, Cook Ding. While King Hui is suppose to have learnt the art of nourishing life from the Dao of the sage-kings, he has ironically learnt it from a butcher.

## CONCLUSION

At the start of my dissertation, I point out that the major difficulty with interpreting *you* 遊 is that it is sometimes used in the profane sense, such as in the famous Cook Ding passage, where Ding's knife is said to *you* freely between the ox's joints. But for the most part, the text is made up of more spiritual or transcendental uses of *you*, in which mystical Daoist sages do their *you*-ing in some other-worldly dimension. *You* is a multifaceted term brimming full of possible meanings, and there is no singular way of reading it. The way it morphs from one meaning to the next is almost reminiscent of Dao, which circulates everywhere from one thing to another. Rather than arguing for either a profane or poetic reading of *you*, I have distilled the concept of *you* down to its most quintessential features: it is an aimless wandering that is characterised by a radical loss of spatiality and temporality; it is the transcendental feat of losing a definite self by depending on the Heavenly viewpoint of all things as one; yet it is also very much grounded with the earthly perspective, as the emptied self receives any perspective that comes along the way. It is in this way that the paradigmatic Daoist sage wanders (*you*) aimlessly without being stopped by any perspective that it encounters, keeping the Heavenly Potter's Wheel rotating by continuously emptying oneself and fitting oneself to the present "this". *You* appeals to neither transcendence nor facticity but both. It is not only the sage that can achieve this: even lowly cooks can *you* simply by following the Dao, the birthing of all things that can also be found everywhere in all things.



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