

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEING IN THE *ZHUANGZI*:
ONTOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL RECONCILIATION**

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ONTOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL RECONCILIATION**

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“The Philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*: Ontological-Existential Reconciliation” is a study on the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* as both the ontological “being in itself” that defines the ontological reality and the existential “being in human experience” that constitutes the very human existence. Addressing the problems of mysticism, skepticism and relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, it raises an alternative Chinese version of ontology that does not necessarily assume the ancient Greek pursuit of the determinate, universal and permanent truth. It argues that without any universal or transcendental Being, the *Zhuangzi* emphasizes the various manifestations of beings, through which the truth of reality and human existence are simultaneously constituted. The absolute truth of being lies *in and only in* the conditional constitution of each being itself upon its inviolably firm ontological grounding without opening for dualistic conflict with other beings. Through the ontological-existential approach to the beings, it seeks to overcome the modern Western philosophical separation between epistemology and metaphysics by revealing the intimate connection between human existence and ontological reality. In respecting the beings as the necessary and ceaseless presencing of themselves, the human being eventually reconciles himself in

the temporal unfolding of the beings in his life and accomplishes his own existence in residing in the beings as both the mission and destiny of his life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jinjing Zhu is a PhD student in the field of Asian Literature, Religion and Culture at Cornell University.

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Introduction

This study explores the philosophy of being (*wu* 物) in the *Zhuangzi*. By presenting the being in the *Zhuangzi* as simultaneously both the ontological “being in itself” that defines the truth of reality and the existential “being in human experience” that constitutes the very human existence, it seeks to bring together the study of metaphysical reality and the study of human experience in the *Zhuangzi*. In doing so, it bypasses the modern Western philosophical separation between the subject and the object, as well as the institutional creation of two distinct philosophical categories with modern “metaphysics” as the study of the truth of reality itself and modern “epistemology” as the study of the human intellectual understanding of reality. It calls for an “ontological-existential” approach to the study of being in the *Zhuangzi*, in which ontological reality and human existence are not only intimately connected but also mutually constituted. The beings in the *Zhuangzi* are not only ontological beings that constitute the ontological reality but also existential beings that defines the very existence of human life. Human existence, therefore, is also not an isolated or internalized experience of their heart-mind but is fundamentally consisted by their encountering and reconciliation of the beings in their life.

This study also seeks to raise a comparative voice from the *Zhuangzi* as an alternative to the ancient Greek philosophical assumption on the superiority of the determinate, universal and permanent truth. Rather than focusing on any mystical source of Nonbeing or any universal and transcendental concept of Being, the

Zhuangzi places greater emphasis on the various manifestations of the beings themselves. The philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* thus offers a Chinese answer to the debate between absolutism and relativism by redefining the absolute and inviolable truth of beings in the conditional constitutions of the beings themselves. The beings are fully respected in their unique and diverse expressions of themselves without appealing to any monistic conception that universalizes them all. It also presents being as both the static presence of the firmly grounded being in itself and the dynamic presencing of itself in its temporal unfolding. The truth of being in the *Zhuangzi* thus offers a considerably different alternative to its ancient Greek counterpart in its dialectic balancing between the determinate and the indeterminate, the universal and the diverse, and the permanent and the changing.

One central issue that this study addresses is the problem of duality deeply entrenched as the root of all problems of beings. Duality is raised in the *Zhuangzi* as both the human existential creation of the superior and inferior beings by their preference; and the ontological creation of the dependency and opposition of beings in their self-affirmation and mutual denial. The duality of beings in the *Zhuangzi* is also fundamentally hierarchical since it firmly establishes the two beings in the duality as the superior and the inferior respectively. Rather than addressing the problem by reversing the order of the hierarchy as with the *Laozi* or the deconstructionist philosophers, the *Zhuangzi* resolves the dualistic hierarchy by the double-affirmation of both beings in the duality and the equalization of them as non-dualistically constituted and solidly grounded ontological beings in themselves. Existentially, this double affirmation and equalization are actualized in the equal affirmation and

enjoyment of all dualistic beings in the human life, upon which the human existence is solidly constituted. As a result, the *Zhuangzi*'s ontological philosophy is not a nihilistic philosophy that denies the truth of beings but a deeply affirmative one with the inviolably firm and equal affirmation of all beings. Similarly, the *Zhuangzi*'s existential philosophy is also not a nihilistic philosophy that positions human existence as sheer illusion or emptiness but a deeply affirmative one with the solid affirmation and enjoyment of all beings in the human life.

By presenting the subtlety and sophistication of the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*, this study also seeks to address the long-standing debate on the intellectual contextualization of this text. While the Chinese commentary tradition associates the *Zhuangzi* with the *Laozi* and classifies them under the same category of Daoism, recent Western scholarship raises the close connection between the *Zhuangzi* and the Mohists text and the School of Names. With the emphasis on the importance of the various manifestations of beings, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy differs considerably from the philosophy of the *Laozi* that places greater interest in the mystical root of Nonbeing as the source of all beings. The analytic and dialectic arguments on the beings in the *Zhuangzi* also clearly indicate the *Zhuangzi* embraces the power of conceptualization and argumentation rather than relying completely on the mystical human experience of the unfathomable. The *Zhuangzi* thus clearly demonstrates a significant influence from the Mohists and the School of Names. Yet the *Zhuangzi* also differs considerably from them by its fundamental concerns in not only the truth of reality and the path of human transformation but also the deep and intimate connection between the two. Hopefully, through the study of being in the *Zhuangzi*,

we could better appreciate not only its situatedness in its intellectual context but also its unique expression of its own philosophy.

Chapter organization

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one raises the overall comparative framework. It argues that rather than reading the *Zhuangzi* as a Chinese version of mysticism, skepticism or relativism, it is imperative to reflect on the deeper philosophical assumptions behind these positions. There is the implicit ancient Greek assumption on the superiority of the determinate, universal and permanent truth over the indeterminate, conditional and changing truth, which is not necessarily also granted in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. Moreover, by the separation of metaphysics as the study of the truth of reality itself and epistemology as the study of the human intellectual understanding of reality, there comes the modern Western philosophical assumption on the dualistic divide between a rationalized human subject and an externally projected object. Recognizing the *Zhuangzi* does not rest on the same dualistic separation, I then propose the “ontological-existential” approach to the study of the *Zhuangzi* so as to reveal the deep and intimate relation between human existence and ontological reality.

Chapter two starts the exploration on the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*. Contextually positioning the *Zhuangzi* in relation to the *Laozi* and the Mohists and the School of the Names, it argues that the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy emphasizes the various manifestations of beings through a series of analytical and dialectical argumentations.

Wu 物 in the *Zhuangzi* is not externally projected as an intelligible object by the human subject but is a pervasive and constitutive element that defines not only the ontological reality but also the very human existence. I then render *wu* not as a “thing” as connotated in the modern Western dualistic divide between the subject and the object, but as a “being” that is the fundamental ontological-and-existential construct defining ontological reality and human existence simultaneously.

Chapter three examines the problems of beings in the *Zhuangzi*. I argue that there are both the existential problems of beings as created by the human beings and the ontological problems of beings as created by the beings themselves. Existentially, with the human heart-mind attaching their preference and abhorrence to the encountering of beings in their life, beings are dualistically divided and hierarchically arranged as the superiors and inferiors by the human will. Ontologically, beings generate ontological duality among themselves by their self-affirmation and mutual dependency and opposition with each other, which then results in the ontological hierarchy of the superior and inferior beings; as well as the ontological relativism and skepticism of beings with no universal and determinate truth. I then continue to argue that these two problems are different angles of the same problem since beings and human beings are mutually constitutive of each other.

Chapter four presents how the *Zhuangzi* addresses the ontological problems of beings. It argues that the key solution to the ontological problems of beings lies in the solid and non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself.” The truth of each being is firmly grounded and completely constituted in the being itself without opening itself

for dualistic challenges from other beings. With no trace of any universal or transcendental Being over the various beings in the *Zhuangzi*, I argue that the assumption on the superiority of absolutism to the inferiority of relativism is not granted in the *Zhuangzi*. The absolute truth of being is then redefined in the *Zhuangzi* in the conditional constitution of each being itself that is inviolably grounded and affirmed in itself without opening for external challenge. This absolute yet conditional truth of each being therefore lies *in and only in* itself without resulting in the dualistic confrontation and mutual conflict with other beings. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* offers an alternative ontological philosophy of being to its ancient Greek counterpart by fully embracing the unique and diverse expressions of beings themselves.

Chapter five presents how the *Zhuangzi* addresses the existential problems of beings. Stressing the indispensable role of human participation in the existential reconciliation of beings, the *Zhuangzi* actualizes the ontological equalization and connection of all beings in the human practice and experience of them. The ideal human being accomplishes and reconciles the beings in his life as non-dualistically affirmed and equalized without destructing them from connecting with each other. In respecting the beings in his life as the necessary and ceaseless presencing of themselves, the human being resides comfortably in the presencing and transformation of the beings without feeling any sense of alienation. Equally affirming and enjoying both the emergence and the termination of the beings, the human being eventually accomplishes his own existence in his residing in the beings as both the mission and destiny of his own life.

Textual issues on the *Zhuangzi*

There are various problems on the authorial, textual and contextual issues related to the *Zhuangzi*. Among them perhaps the most fundamental one is which portion of the *Zhuangzi* we could reliably take to represent the core philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. To address this question, I will provide a brief overview on the classification of the *Zhuangzi* text by referencing two highly credible scholars on this issue: Liu Xiaogan and A.C. Graham.¹

The *Zhuangzi* text is divided into three parts: The Inner Chapters (chapter 1-7), the Outer Chapters (chapter 8-22), and the Miscellaneous Chapters (chapter 23-33). Among them the seven Inner Chapters are the most literally rich and philosophically intriguing; and are generally considered to be either directly composed by or strongly associated with the historical Zhuangzi or Zhuang Zhou. Most scholars, including Graham and Liu Xiaogan, agree that we could take the Inner Chapters to be the most reliable core of the entire *Zhuangzi*. Among the seven chapters, the second chapter *Qiwulun* 齊物論 has always occupied a crucial position in the study of the *Zhuangzi*. While other Inner Chapters tend to present the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* in parables, metaphors and proses, the second chapter *Qiwulun* is filled with logically presented

¹ See A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 172-173. Also see A. C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzŭ: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-Tzŭ* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 27-28. Also see Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994). Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Zhuangzi Zhe Xue Ji Qi Yan Bian* 庄子哲学及其演变 (Beijing 北京: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she 中国社会科学出版社, 1987).

and densely packed philosophical argumentations. This dissertation will make use of all the Inner Chapters, with a special focus on the analytically and dialectically sophisticated chapter *Qiwulun*.

In contrast to the Inner Chapters, the reliability and intellectual identity of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters could be rather problematic. Both Graham and Liu Xiaogan classify them into several portions by their varying degrees of affiliation with the Inner Chapters. There is, first of all, a portion of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters that are considered to be closely related to the Inner Chapters. Graham and Liu name them as “the School of Chuang-tzu” and the “Transmitter School,” respectively. It includes chapter 17-22 of the Outer Chapters (*Qiushui* 秋水 17, *Zhile* 至樂 18, *Dasheng* 達生 19, *Shanmu* 山木 20, *Tianzifang* 田子方 21, *Zhibeiyou* 知北遊 22). These chapters are from the followers or the most immediate transmitters of the master Zhuangzi; and tend to explain and extend the Inner Chapters and resemble their literary styles. Also considered highly reliable are chapter 23-27 and chapter 32 of the Miscellaneous Chapters (*GengSangchu* 庚桑楚 23, *Xuwugui* 徐无鬼 24, *Zeyang* 則陽 25, *Waiwu* 外物 26, *Yuyan* 寓言 27, *Lieyukou* 列禦寇 32). Liu takes them to be also composed by the “Transmitter School,” as with chapter 17-22. Graham finds these chapters filled with fragments of the “ragbags of odds and ends,” which resemble very similar styles and intellectual ideas with the Inner Chapters. All these chapters are therefore considered to be the most closely related texts to the Inner Chapters; and could be strategically used to complement the Inner Chapters to provide richer elaborations on the core philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. In

fact, many of the references of this study are drawn from this portion of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, with their uses carefully qualified in relation to the Inner Chapters whenever possible.

There is a second portion of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters that still resembles considerable relevance to the Inner Chapters yet already displaying certain influence from other intellectual currents. Liu takes the latter half of chapter 11 (*Zaiyou* 在宥 11) and chapter 12-16 (*Tiandi* 天地 12, *Tiandao* 天道 13, *Tianyun* 天運 14, *Keyi* 刻意 15, *Shanxing* 繕性 16) of the Outer Chapters, and chapter 33 (*Tianxia* 天下) of the Miscellaneous Chapters to be the “Huanglao school,” which were composed by the followers of the master Zhuangzi but already displaying a heavy influence of the Huanglao current of the late Warring States. Graham also considers these chapters to be the “Syncretist” layer of *the Zhuangzi*, as they tend to incorporate the various intellectual thoughts of the Warring States period rather than confronting them. Among these chapters, chapter 33 *Tianxia* 天下 is worth special attention. Comparing and contrasting different thinkers and schools of the time, this chapter has always been crucial in the study of the history of philosophy in the Warring States period. Despite displaying a strong syncretic tendency, this chapter nevertheless points out the unique characteristics of Zhuang Zhou’s philosophy in relation to other thinkers. This study will make good use of this chapter to position the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* in its intellectual context.

There is a third portion of the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters that is further away from the Inner Chapters. Both Graham and Liu take chapter 8-10 (*Pianmu* 駢拇

8, *Mati* 馬蹄 9, *Quqie* 祛篋 10) and the upper portion of chapter 11 (*Zaiyou* 在宥) of the Outer Chapters; and chapter 28, 29, 31 of the Miscellaneous Chapters (*Rangwang* 讓王 28, *Daozhi* 盜跖 29 and *Yufu* 漁父 31) to belong to this group. Liu names them as the “Anarchist” School as they tend to counter against any form of benevolence, ritual or rulership. He considers these chapters still follows the ideas of the Inner Chapters to a certain extent, yet much has already been altered to be considerably different from them. Graham also notes the greater difference of these chapters from the Inner Chapters. He divides them into two layers: with chapter 8-10, and the upper portion of chapter 11 to be the Primitivist layer; and chapter 28-31 to be the Yangist layer. These chapters, therefore, should be used with greater caution. In fact, this dissertation does not refer to any of these chapters.

Translation and interpretation

As one of the most literarily rich and philosophically sophisticated text in early Chinese philosophy, the translation and interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* needs to be handled with a great degree of precision. In doing so, I rely substantially on Guo Xiang’s commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, since it is the most well-established commentary to the *Zhuangzi* and occupies a classic status in the entire Chinese commentarial tradition.² I also make references to three credible translations of the

² See Guo Xiang’s commentary collected in Guo Xiang 郭象, Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi ji shi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2004).

Zhuangzi, including Watson, Graham and Ziporyn.³ Eventually, based on Guo's commentary and the three translation works, I provide my own translation and interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* in this study.

The problems in the translation and interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* could be divided into two layers. First is the literal layer, which involves the handling of the semantic and grammatical issues of the text. For this layer, I rely heavily on Guo Xiang's commentary since it is the most authoritative source for these issues. Second is the interpretative layer, which involves how to make sense of the text and treat it in a philosophically meaningful way. With the extreme fluidity and sophistication of the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy, this layer could be handled with a greater degree of flexibility. It is on this layer where I often diverge from both Guo Xiang and the translators. Yet these two layers are not distinctively separable and often come together in our treatment of the *Zhuangzi*. This is because oftentimes an interpretative issue relies heavily on the technical and literal treatment of the text; and, conversely, a technical and literal treatment of the text could also make a significant impact on the philosophical interpretation of the text. The difference in the treatment of the text, therefore, is the difference on both the literal layer and the interpretative layer. In this study, I will acknowledge and explain the different handlings of my treatment from other scholars' whenever necessary.

³ See Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Graham, *Seven Inner Chapters*. Brook Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings (With Selections from Traditional Commentaries)* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2009).

I follow two basic principles in my translation of the text. Firstly, I choose to prioritize the accuracy and loyalty to the original Chinese text over the elegance of translation into the English language. When there is a discrepancy between the Chinese grammatical structure and the English grammatical structure, I try to follow the structure of the original Chinese sentence as much as possible. Although it could sound awkward for the English readers, I think it is imperative to preserve the philosophical integrity of the original sentence so as to provide the most accurate textual basis for the precise formulation of the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. Secondly, I try not to fill the omissions of the text. With classical Chinese language often containing significant omissions in-between sentences, sometimes the filling of these omissions seems to be necessary in translation. However, doing so might risk adding inaccurate content that is not necessarily in agreement with the original text. Therefore, I deliberately leave these omissions unfilled in my translation, and consider the filling of these omissions a separate task for philosophical interpretation. In places where such filling is compulsory, I will use [] to indicate it clearly.

Chapter One - The “Ontological-Existential” Approach to the *Zhuangzi*

The *Zhuangzi* text has always occupied a special position in Chinese philosophy. In recent decades, there is growing advocacy to recognize the analytic sophistication of the *Zhuangzi* text. Among them the most notable are the arguments on the mysticism, skepticism, and relativism in the *Zhuangzi*.¹ However, as most scholars have already acknowledged, the application of these Western oriented philosophical positions directly onto Chinese philosophical texts might risk the possibility of imposing a set of assumptions that do not necessarily hold in the Chinese tradition. In this regard, a deeper reflection on the fundamental assumptions and groundings of these arguments, as well as a more careful reconsideration on whether these assumptions and groundings are applicable to the Chinese philosophical text, are raised as the first task of this study. There are two main sources of Western philosophical assumptions built into the scholarship of the *Zhuangzi*: the ancient Greek assumption on truth; and the modern creation of metaphysics and epistemology with the separation of the truth of reality and human access to reality. As I will demonstrate below, these Western philosophical assumptions are not necessarily granted in the *Zhuangzi*. In doing so, I

¹ Van Norden, for example, has compiled different readings on the *Zhuangzi*, including skepticism, relativism, particularism, generalism, objectivism, etc, and argued that these different arguments might be due to the selective readings of the different portions of the *Zhuangzi*. He also points out that due to the extreme fluidity and dialectic sophistication of the *Zhuangzi*, these arguments are not necessarily incompatible with each other. Bryan W. Van Norden, “Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the ‘*Zhuangzi*,’” *Philosophy East and West* 46, no. 2 (1996), 247-268.

will also raise my own proposal to read the *Zhuangzi* through an alternative approach that explores its own voice in these fundamental groundings.

1. The ancient Greek grounding of the determinate, universal and permanent truth

Mysticism: the ineffable experience of the indeterminate source

Mysticism has been an important reading of Daoism in general and of the *Zhuangzi* specifically. There are several ways to approach the mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*. To name a few, Schwartz points out that mysticism lies in “the profound faith or knowledge in the sense of gnosis that this reality --- incommunicable in words;” and that “the ‘mystery’ is not an absence of ‘knowledge’ but a kind of higher direct knowledge of the ineffable source of all that which lends existence meaning.”² Graham takes “spontaneity” in the *Zhuangzi* not as the total indulgence of the irrational elements of the self but as a complete immersion with the reality. He argues that it is in the spontaneous experiences of the human beings rather than merely the rational activities of the mind there is “the immediate experience of an undifferentiated world.”³ Ivanhoe proposes to overcome the nihilism associated with the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* by “an alternative source of

² Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 192-195.

³ A. C. Graham, *Reason and Spontaneity* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books, 1985).

knowledge: our spontaneous intuition.”⁴ Yang Rubin emphasizes that in the *Zhuangzi*, through the mystical and religious experience of the sage, both the bodily senses of human beings and the mental and spiritual experiences of the heart-mind are connected to the metaphysical reality that is constituted of *qi* (vital energy).⁵ Roth identifies the “bimodal mystical experience” in the *Zhuangzi* to “empty out” the “normal contents of consciousness” and “come to experience a tranquility;” and then “return and live again in the dualistic world” to “spontaneously respond to whatever situation one is facing.”⁶ Yearley identifies the “intraworldly mysticism” in the *Zhuangzi* in which the mystical experience eventually enables a transformed view towards everyday dualistic world.⁷ Wayne Alt addresses the issue of mysticism around the issue of “distinction” and argues that rather than a complete denial of all kinds of distinction, the *Zhuangzi* only abandons moral distinctions while leaving some room for non-moral distinctions.⁸

As we could see from the above scholarship, mysticism in the *Zhuangzi* takes several forms. Sometimes it proposes that in the *Zhuangzi* there is only the total

⁴ Philip J. Ivanhoe, “*Zhuangzi* on Skepticism, Skill and the Dao,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 646-647.

⁵ Yang Rubin, “From ‘Merging the Body with the Mind’ to ‘Wandering in Unitary *Qi* 氣’: A Discussion of *Zhuangzi*’s Realm of the True Man and Its Corporeal Basis,” in *Hiding the world in the world: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 88-127. This is an English version of the Chinese article: Yang Rubin, “Cong ‘yi ti he xin’ dao ‘you hu yi qi’: lun Zhuangzi zhenren jingjie de xingti jichu” 從“以體合心”到“遊乎一氣”: 論莊子真人境界的形體基礎, in *Ru Men Nei De Zhuangzi* 儒門內的莊子, Yang Rubin 楊儒賓 (Taibei 臺北: Lian jing chu ban 聯經出版, 2016).

⁶ Harold Roth, “Bimodel Mystical Experience in the ‘Qiwulun’ Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Hiding the world*, ed. Cook, 16.

⁷ Lee Yearley, “The Perfected Person in the Radical Chuang-tzu,” in *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu, HI: Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, 1983), 125-139.

⁸ Wayne Alt, *Zhuangzi, Mysticism, and the Rejection of Distinctions* (Philadelphia, PA: Dept. of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 2000).

integration and immersion with the mystical metaphysical source of all beings. Other times it emphasizes that the *Zhuangzi* denies any intellectual distinction and philosophical argumentation to access the ultimate truth of reality. In this regard, I take the core of the readings of mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*, as expressed in phrases such as “the ineffable,” “the undifferentiated,” “denial of distinction,” “to empty out,” as the assumption of its deep commitment to Nonbeing or Oneness as the mystical metaphysical source of reality; and non-distinction and non-rationalization as the mystical human experience of this source. In other words, what is common in the proposals of the different versions of mysticism, is the emphasis on Nonbeing or Oneness as the primordial source of all beings; and the human experience in spontaneously connecting to this source without distinction or rationalization. That is, with the suspension of the intellectual mind, the human being could intuitively and spontaneously connect himself to the mystical source of all beings. This source is manifested in the mystical experience of Nonbeing or Oneness without any concrete distinction or any intellectual rationalization of the beings.⁹

Indeed, the mystical Nonbeing or Oneness as the source of all beings, and the preference of non-distinction and non-rationalization as the mystical human experience of this source, underscore the reading of the *Zhuangzi* as a philosophy of mysticism. There are quite a number of passages in the *Zhuangzi* that support this reading. It includes the loss-of-self parable of Nanguo Ziqi (南郭子綦) in the opening of the *Qiwulun* chapter, the parable of Yan Hui’s fasting of the heart-mind in the opening of

⁹ I will provide a more detailed elaboration on the mystical experience of Nonbeing or Oneness in the *Zhuangzi* in the chapter 5 of this study.

the *Renjianshi* chapter, the teaching of Nvyu (女偶) on forgetting about life and death in the *Dazongshi* chapter; and Huzi (壺子)’s manifestation of himself in various modes of existences in the *Yingdiwang* chapter. All these parables describe certain mystical experiences of human beings to connect to the mystical source. The argument that I want to make, however, is that while the *Zhuangzi* definitely addresses the human mystical experience of Nonbeing or Oneness, it goes further to provide us with more elaborations on the various beings fully manifested in themselves. In other words, the metaphysical picture that the *Zhuangzi* reveals to us exceeds the sheer source of Nonbeing or Oneness but extends more concretely into the various manifestation of all beings in reality. The human experience in the *Zhuangzi* also exceeds the ineffable mystical experience in connecting to the mysterious source but goes further to elaborate the various ways human beings experience through the manifestations of beings in their life. In this sense, while the *Zhuangzi* does include mysticism as part of its philosophy, its focus is placed in the philosophy of being with the full manifestations of the beings in reality and in human life.

With the clarification on the relation between the mystical and non-mystical aspects of the *Zhuangzi*, we are now ready to proceed to a further analysis on the arguments of mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*. I argue that behind the reading of the *Zhuangzi* as a mystical philosophy, there is an implicit but fundamental assumption from the ancient Greek tradition on the superiority of determinate truth over the inferiority of indeterminate truth.¹⁰ With mysticism taken as the undifferentiated,

¹⁰ Ames and Hall, for example, translate the pair of *you* 有 and *wu* 無 as the determinate and

inarticulable experience of reality, there is a deep connotation that such mystical experience - as an indeterminate and undifferentiated form of truth - is inferior to the determinate and differentiated form of truth. However, these assumptions are not necessarily granted in the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, as I will argue in the coming chapters, the beings in the *Zhuangzi* are described in a dialectic balance between the determinate and the indeterminate. The discussion on mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, will be reconsidered under the broader comparative framework.

Skepticism: the impossibility of determinate truth

The second group of scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* focuses on its philosophical position of skepticism. With skepticism being a rich Western philosophical tradition in itself, the literature on the skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* is also filled with rich elements.¹¹ For example, Ivanhoe raises four types of skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*: epistemological skepticism concerning the possibility of knowledge; sense skepticism as a particular type of epistemological skepticism on the bodily senses; language skepticism concerning language’s possibility to capture knowledge; and moral skepticism, which calls into doubt the existence of moral truth. Specifically, he argues that the *Zhuangzi* is not a sense skeptic or a moral skeptic, nor is he a strong language skeptic. He is only a moderate epistemological skeptic that doubts only “intellectual knowledge” but not

the indeterminate. In this sense, the mystical experience of the indeterminate is contrasted to the articulatable determinate beings. Roger T. Ames, and David L. Hall, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

¹¹ Ivanhoe points out that skepticism in itself is a complex position, even in the Western philosophical tradition. See Ivanhoe, “*Zhuangzi* on Skepticism, Skill and the Dao,” 639-654.

“intuitive knowledge.”¹² Similarly, Lisa Raphals distinguishes three types of skeptical strategies: “skepticism as doctrine:” “the proposition, explicit or tacit, that nothing can be known;” “skepticism as recommendation:” “an imperative to suspend judgment” without “the positive claim to, or denial of, knowledge or belief;” and “skepticism as method:” “a question or inquiry that leads to doubt” that “refutes existing claims to knowledge, including their own.”¹³

Sometimes the arguments on the *Zhuangzi*’s skepticism (and mysticism) could go so far that it completely rejects any philosophizability of the *Zhuangzi*. For example, framing the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* in relation to the Mohist canon and the School of Names, Graham proposes that ultimately the *Zhuangzi* favors spontaneity and the total suspension of reason.¹⁴ Deborah Soles and David Soles go further to argue that the *Zhuangzi* “is an epistemological nihilist who rejects, as meaningless, any talk of knowledge.”¹⁵ Yet, there are also scholars who acknowledge that skepticism is not necessarily the denial of all sorts of knowledge but only specific types of knowledge. For example, Yearley argues that the skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* belongs to the form of “not the simplistic ‘we know nothing’ but the more complex and subtle ‘we do not know if we know or if we do not know.’”¹⁶

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lisa Raphals, “Skeptical Strategies in the *Zhuangzi* and Theaetetus,” in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 28.

¹⁴ Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*.

¹⁵ Deborah H. Soles and David E. Soles, “Fish Traps and Rabbit Snares: *Zhuangzi* on Judgment, Truth and Knowledge,” *Asian Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (1998): 161.

¹⁶ Yearley, “The Perfected Person,” 125-139.

With the complexity of skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*, we want to go further to analyze the deeper assumptions behind it. What we see here is that the knowledge that skepticism denies is not all types of knowledge, but only a specific type of knowledge: i.e. the determinate knowledge, or, the knowledge that we could know for sure. In other words, all the argumentation about skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* is not about the impossibility of any truth and knowledge but only about the impossibility of the determinate truth and knowledge. In this sense, then, behind the argument on skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*, there is also the fundamental ancient Greek assumption on the dualistic divide between the determinate truth and the indeterminate truth, with the determinate truth deemed to be superior to the indeterminate truth. As a result, the notoriety of skepticism as a destructive analytical argument is rooted in the ancient Greek grounding, in which skepticism as the uncertainty of determinate truth (or, the possibility of indeterminate truth) is deemed as inferior to the certainty of determinate truth.

Yet there might be certain disagreement on the inferiority of skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*. Scholars have pointed out that skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* is offered as a powerful and constructive tool to clear our conventional thoughts and categories. Van Norden, for example, raises the “therapeutic skepticism” in the *Zhuangzi* as “the use of skeptical arguments to clear away previous convictions in order to make one more receptive to different convictions” so that “one can achieve the illumination characteristic of the sage.”¹⁷ Paul Kjellberg takes the *Zhuangzi*’s skepticism not to

¹⁷ Van Norden, “Competing Interpretations,” 258, 260.

be conclusive but to be “therapeutic” to “clear our vision and allow us to see things afresh as they naturally are.”¹⁸ In these arguments, skepticism acts as an effective and constructive tool to uncover the conventional conceptions and preoccupations for a better understanding of the world. However, despite of the positive readings, skepticism acting as the destabilizing and threatening power to established truths is still at best seen as a “deconstructive” tool rather than a “constructive” tool to establish any positive form of truth. In fact, the very effort that these scholars try to bring skepticism into constructive and positive readings could be read as a correction to alleviate the negative connotations associated with skepticism. In this sense, skepticism, as the challenge to determinate truth, is not a positive position in itself and is still considered inferior to determinate truth.

In other words, there is a common ancient Greek philosophical assumption beneath the arguments of skepticism and mysticism on the dualistic divide between the superior form of determinate truth and the inferior form of indeterminate truth. With the ancient Greek commitment to determinate and fixed truth, there is no tolerance for any form of indeterminate, fluid or fluctuating truth. As a result, mysticism and skepticism as the ineffable or indeterminable possibility of truth, are rendered as inferior to the effable and determinate truth. However, to what extent does this ancient Greek assumption hold true in the *Zhuangzi*? Specifically, to what extent does the truth of beings in the *Zhuangzi* necessarily take the form of the determinate and fixed truth? Or, is there any open possibility for the beings to embrace certain

¹⁸ Paul Kjellberg, “Sextus Empiricus, *Zhuangzi*, and Xunzi on ‘Why Be Skeptical?’” in *Essays on Skepticism*, ed. Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, 16.

truth in the form of indeterminateness, fluidity and dynamics? With these considerations, the arguments on the mysticism and skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* could be redirected to these deeper philosophical groundings.

Relativism: the diverse vs. the universal

The problem of relativism is considered to be a long-standing theme in the *Zhuangzi*. According to modern scholarship, Guo Xiang’s commentary to the *Zhuangzi* already started to exhibit certain radical form of relativism in which all things are relative to each other and therefore no judgment and conclusion could be made.¹⁹ In recent scholarship, there is growing interest to take the *Zhuangzi* as embracing certain version of relativism. To name a few, Hansen argues that the *Zhuangzi* proposes a weak version of relativism (perspectival relativism) that we are all aware of the dependency of our perspectives as situated in specific contexts.²⁰ Ken Berthel argues that the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* “denies the universal applicability of any individual perspective,” and “brings to light the entrenched and limited nature of any subjective perspective.”²¹ Ivanhoe reads the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* as the claim that all knowledge is “relative to the observer’s point of view,” which then “undercut our normal standards for making value judgements”²² Allinson points out that the

¹⁹ See for example Paul J. D'Ambrosio, “Guo Xiang on Self-so Knowledge,” *Asian Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2016): 119-132.

²⁰ Chad Hansen, “Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Hiding the world*, ed. Cook, 150-152.

²¹ Ken Berthel, “Language in *Zhuangzi*: A Theme that Reveals the Nature of its Relativism and Skepticism,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 42, no. S1 (2015): 572-573.

²² Ivanhoe, “*Zhuangzi* on Skepticism,” 645.

relativism in the *Zhuangzi* attempts “to force the reader to disengage the conceptual or analytic powers of his or her mind.”²³ Huang Yong looks into the issue of moral relativism and argue that rather than as “agent relativism” (“relative to the standards of the agent or the agent group”) or “appraiser relativism” (“relative to the standards of appraiser or appraiser group”), the moral relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is better taken as “patient relativism” in which it is relative by the patient who “receives, or is affected by, my action, thinks about it.”²⁴

There is also growing attention on the relation between the skepticism and the relativism in the *Zhuangzi*. For example, Hansen argues that not only are the skepticism and the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* compatible, in fact, it is the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* that causes the skepticism in the *Zhuangzi*. Specifically, he argues that from the “weak relativism” that we acknowledge our perspectives are relatively dependent in our context, it results in the “mild skepticism” to not impose our perspectives onto others.²⁵ In contrast, Lisa Raphals points out that not only are skepticism and relativism both “open to the charge of self-contradiction” within themselves, “skepticism” would already preclude relativism,” as “a skeptical thesis holds that we cannot know anything; a relativist thesis holds that we can know, but that knowing is relative to our (individual, cultural, etc.) perspective.”²⁶

²³ Robert E. Allinson, *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation: An Analysis of the Inner Chapters* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 23.

²⁴ Huang Yong, “Patient Moral Relativism in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Philosophia* (2018): 1-18, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/10.1007/s11406-018-9959-8>.

²⁵ Hansen, “Guru or Skeptic,” 150-152.

²⁶ Raphals, “Skeptical Strategies,” 29.

My position to the whole debate on the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is that rather than searching for the traces of relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, it is more important to reflect deeper on the fundamental assumptions behind it. Indeed, despite its various expressions, relativism is fundamentally an epistemological doctrine to claim that all positions (perspectives, viewpoints) are relativistic to each other. As a philosophical doctrine, it is fundamentally constituted by its dualistic contrast to absolutism, in which truth is only granted when it is universally held in all positions. That is, only when a position is universally and unconditionally true, it will be considered to hold absolute truth. Any position that is only conditionally true but not universally true falls into the doctrine of relativism as the inferior counterpart of absolutism. As a result, relativism, in which each position is only relatively true within its own condition but not universally true across all positions, is deemed inferior to the universal truth of absolutism.

If we reflect a little further, then, the commitment to the absolute universal truth (versus relativism) and the commitment to the determinate truth (versus mysticism and skepticism) are connected with each other. They could all be traced to the ancient Greek tradition of prioritizing the determinate, universal and permanent truth as the superior form of truth over the indeterminate, conditional and changing truth as the inferior form of truth. In other words, behind the arguments of mysticism, skepticism and relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, there is the fundamental ancient Greek assumption on the dualistic divide between the determinate and the indeterminate, the universal and the diverse, and the permanent and the changing. This dualistic divide is never only a neutral divide between these two ends but always a hierarchical one that decidedly

sees superiority in the determinate, universal and permanent truth.²⁷ As a result, mysticism, skepticism, and relativism, as positions that embrace the indeterminate, diverse, and changing truth, are deemed to be inferior to the determinate, universal and permanent truth.

It is also noteworthy to point out that the three criteria of truth: the determinate, the universal, and the permanent, are closely connected with each other and could all be rooted together into the Monistic conception of unity in the ancient Greek tradition. Just as Ames and Hall point out, “in classical Western metaphysics the equivocation between ‘unity’ and ‘uniqueness’ has largely been resolved in favor of ‘unity.’”²⁸ The Monistic conception of unity is indeed the most central theme that connects all three assumptions here. To a certain extent, the superiority of the determinate over the indeterminate could be deemed as the superiority of Being as the determinate Oneness to the inferiority of Nonbeing as the indeterminate non-existence. The superiority of the universal over the diverse could also be deemed as the superiority of the unified and consistent truth over the diverse and inconsistent truth. Considering temporality, then, the superiority of the permanent truth to the changing truth is another expression of the superiority of the temporally unified and consistent truth over the temporally changing and evolving truth. On all these levels, then, the Monistic conception of

²⁷ This could be seen in the strongest critic of classical Western philosophy: Derrida, for example, “an opposition of metaphysical concepts (for example, speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of subordination.” See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 21.

²⁸ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 229-230.

unity - as the determinate Oneness (over the indeterminate Nonbeing); as the unified (over the diverse); and as the temporally unified (over the temporally changing) - is the ultimate grounding of all the ancient Greek assumptions.

However, with the increasing awareness of the “historicity” of Western Philosophy, more and more scholars have come to realize the problem of applying these Western-driven assumptions in the study of other cultures and philosophies. The superiority of the determinate, universal and permanent truth seems to be deeply challenged not only in the Western scholarship itself but also in the field of comparative philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. For example, Hansen proposes that the Daoist relativism “does not require a belief in an absolute, unchanging, eternal, single and ultimate metaphysical Tao.”²⁹ In embracing relativism as proposing multiple daos rather than one monistic and absolutistic dao, Hansen takes the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* to positively embrace the alternative of plurality rather than absolutism or monism. According to Hansen, in facing the difficulty of relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, “the ruling interpretive tradition” calls for the suspension of reason and philosophizing altogether; and draws “a dogmatic monistic conclusion,” in which “absolute reality itself has no distinction in it.” In contrast, he considers that the relativistic distinction and the denial of the universal truth do not entail the termination of reason or distinction altogether. Rather, relativism in the *Zhuangzi* implies “pluralism,” in which the plural and diverse reality is to be embraced rather than dismissed. ³⁰

²⁹ Chad Hansen, “A Tao of ‘Tao’ in Chuang Tzu,” in *Experimental Essays*, ed. Mair, 37.

³⁰ Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 268-269.

To further explore the fundamental assumptions beneath the position of relativism, let us relate it to another crucial concept in Daoism. As one of the most important Daoist metaphysical concept, *ziran* (自然 self-so; self-so-ing; thusness; spontaneity) stresses the uniqueness of each being as containing within itself its own patterns and principles that are not to be imposed or coerced externally.³¹ Yet the acceptance of *ziran* seems to necessarily result in relativism as its consequence: if we accept that each being is a *ziran* or self-so being that has its unique patterns and principles within itself, then the diversity of the different beings seems to necessarily result in the mutual confrontation and conflict among them. Indeed, with all beings having their distinct patterns and principles within themselves that are not to be imposed by external forces, the philosophy of *ziran* will imply the relative diversity and variety across beings, and their mutual difference and conflict as a result.

With the analysis on the relation between *ziran* and relativism, we could now come to explore deeper into the issue of relativism in the *Zhuangzi*. Rather than addressing the position of relativism per se, we could now reformulate and redirect our concern on the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* as follows. Without assuming any absolute principle that holds universally true in all beings, how could the diversity of beings - with each of them holding its unique and inviolable patterns and principles within itself - not run into mutual conflict with each other? Is there any possible reconciliation among the diverse and unique beings so that their mutual conflict could

³¹ For a thorough conceptual analysis of the phrase *ziran*, refer to W. A. Callahan, “Discourse and Perspective in Daoism: A Linguistic Interpretation of *Ziran*,” *Philosophy East and West* 39, no. 2 (1989): 171-189.

be successfully resolved? In this consideration, then, the task of this study is to look beyond the argument of relativism per se but to explore the fundamental groundings that could make the diverse and unique metaphysical philosophy possible.

Working in this direction, recent scholarship has provided certain modified arguments on the issue of relativism in the *Zhuangzi*. There has been certain renewed reading of the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* as perspectivism, or perspectival relativism to offer certain affirmative grounding for the relativism in the *Zhuangzi*. Specifically, for example, Chad Hansen proposes the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* to be “perspectival relativism,” in which we are all aware that our perspectives are relatively situated in our specific context.³² Each perspective, therefore, stays within its perspective without making any absolutist attempt to universalize other perspectives.³³ As a result, each perspective holds within itself certain affirmative grounding that is not to be denied simply for its lacking absolute and universal truth.³⁴ Similarly, Connolly formulates the “perspectivism” in the *Zhuangzi* as “our knowledge of the world is inevitably shaped by our particular perspectives;” and “any one of these perspectives is as good as any other.”³⁵ Ivanhoe argues for the perspectivism in the *Zhuangzi* as “the claim that all knowledge is relative to the observer’s point of view;” and, the *Zhuangzi* uses perspectivism only to “dismantle” the “traditional social norms” and to

³² Hansen, “Guru or Skeptic,” 150-152.

³³ Chad Hansen, “The Relatively Happy Fish,” in *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, ed. Roger T. Ames and Takahiro Nakajima (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i press, 2015), 70-71.

³⁴ See Hansen, “A Tao of ‘Tao,’” 39. Also see Hansen, “The Relatively Happy Fish,” 71.

³⁵ Tim Connolly, “Perspectivism as a way of knowing in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 10, no. 4 (2011): 487.

“allow an inherently existing pattern --- the *Dao* --- to emerge.”³⁶ In other words, rather than the implication of a regular version of relativism that denies all non-universal truth, perspectivism offers certain affirmative grounding for each perspective within itself. In this way, perspectivism acknowledges that despite that there is no universal truth in the *Zhuangzi*, there is certain qualified and conditioned truth of each perspective although the truth of each perspective sustains only within itself.

The argument of perspectivism, which posits a certain degree of affirmation within each perspective, opens the door for a new possibility of reading the *Zhuangzi*. In perspectivism, there is no denial of truth within each perspective itself. The denial of truth only happens when each perspective comes outside of itself and enters into mutual interaction with other perspectives. In other words, it is only upon the relational conflict among the multiple truths of diverse perspectives that universalism as a consistently held truth of all perspectives fails to apply. That is, the *Zhuangzi*'s relativism or perspectivism only fails when the internally affirmed perspectives come “externally” or “relationally” to interact with each other, in which their conflict with each other renders universal truth impossible. Within each perspective, however, the truth of the perspective is not denied. In this consideration, then, our task could be reformulated to offer considerable degree of affirmation of each unique perspective within itself while also reconciling the potential conflict when they come into mutual interaction with each other.

³⁶ Ivanhoe, “*Zhuangzi* on Skepticism,” 645.

To put everything together, I have argued that with the interpretations of the *Zhuangzi* as a certain version of mysticism, skepticism and relativism, there is the implicit ancient Greek assumption on the superiority of the determinate, universal and permanent truth. A deeper reading of the *Zhuangzi* therefore requires us to explore the potential Chinese alternative of truth that might offer a different set of fundamental assumptions from its ancient Greek counterpart. As Roger Ames points out: “The classical Western metaphysical model is based on the concept of a universal blueprint made up of unchanging formal principles that, once understood, make change predictable and logarithmic. The Chinese model allows that regularity is always attended by change, and this makes order dynamic, site-specific, and provisional.”³⁷ Before we start to explore how the alternative Chinese version of truth is presented in the *Zhuangzi*, it is very important to note that the Chinese alternative is not necessarily a straight denial of the ancient Greek assumptions. In my understanding, mapping Chinese philosophy as a straight opposite to its Western counterpart is actually a reinforcement of the Western philosophy despite taking the form of negation. In the coming chapters, I will explore how the *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy is offered as a dialectic balancing between the determinate and the indeterminate, the universal and the plural, and the permanent and the changing.

³⁷ Roger T. Ames, “Knowing in the *Zhuangzi* ‘From Here, on the Bridge, over the River Hao,’” in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger T. Ames (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 219-230.

**2. The “ontological-existential” approach to overcome the modern
“epistemological-metaphysical” separation**

The modern Western philosophical assumption in the *Zhuangzi* scholarship

I have argued that behind the scholarship on the mysticism, skepticism, and relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, there is the ancient Greek assumption on the pursuit of the determinate, universal and permanent truth. What is also important to point out, is that in the ancient Greek conception of truth, there is no separation between the truth of reality and the human experience of reality. This seamless connection, however, is broken down with the modern Western creation of the dualistic divide between human existence and the truth of reality, in which the human subject as an internally closed consciousness and object as the externally projected “thing in itself” are distinctively set apart. This duality gets its firm institutional establishment in the modern creation of “modern metaphysics” and “modern epistemology” as two distinct philosophical categories. “Modern metaphysics” as the study of the truth of “thing in itself” and “modern epistemology” as the study of the human intellectual understanding of reality are created as two separate branches of philosophical study. Under this setting, the truth of reality is considered to be independent from the human subject; and the only path whereby human beings could approximately reach reality is through their rational intellectual mind rather than any non-rational, spontaneous, or intuitive experience.

The modern scholarship on the *Zhuangzi* is decidedly influenced by these dualistic divides. For example, an anthropological reading of mysticism reveals to us

that mysticism, as the human spontaneous and non-rational personal experience to access the truth of reality, is considered to be the opposite to the intellectual and rational access to reality as prioritized in the modern Western philosophy. In this sense, then, mysticism is a label created solely in the modern Western philosophy as an alternative option to the rational and intellectual access to reality.³⁸ With this “modernized” reading of mysticism, then, the assumption behind mysticism is not only the superiority of determinate truth (as in the ancient Greek assumption), but also the superiority of the determinately rational and intellectual access to truth over the inferiority of the indeterminately non-rational and spontaneous access to truth.

The study of relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is also built on modern philosophical dualistic assumptions. Although scholars might raise different types of skepticism such as moral relativism, sense relativism, etc., I consider all arguments about relativism in the *Zhuangzi* to be fundamentally epistemologically-oriented. For example, although “ethical relativism” explicitly addresses the truth of ethical claims, its fundamental grounding is to take the truths in ethics as certain epistemological knowledge of the human beings. Therefore, despite taking different forms of expression, relativism is framed as the human intellectual understanding of the truth, regardless of whether it is ethical truth or metaphysical truth. In this sense, then, all different types of relativism are human epistemological attempts to understand the reality of the world and of themselves. As a result, under the arguments of relativism in the *Zhuangzi* there is not only the ancient Greek assumption on the superiority of

³⁸ See for example Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-colonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (London: Routledge, 1999).

universal truth but also the modern Western philosophical assumption on the epistemological-metaphysical divide between the truth of reality and the human intellectual access to reality.

In fact, the separation of the epistemological and the metaphysical approaches to the study of the *Zhuangzi* could be clearly spotted in the separation of the study of relativism and *ziran* respectively. As we have argued previously, the metaphysical principle of *ziran* as the unique and diverse expressions of all things in their pure spontaneity will inevitably lead to the epistemological conclusion of relativism that deem all things to be relativistic to each other. Yet, in the study of the *Zhuangzi*, *ziran* as the metaphysical argument and relativism as the epistemologically argument seem to be rarely explicitly addressed together. In this sense, there is clearly a divide between the scholarly attention to the metaphysical and epistemological issues in the *Zhuangzi* without connecting them together. The dissociation of the metaphysical discussions on *ziran* and the epistemological discussions on relativism is in itself a reflection of the clear impact that the modern Western philosophical categories have exerted on the study of the *Zhuangzi*.

With the creation of modern epistemology as the only path to access reality, there also comes the clear separation between the exclusively intellectual understanding of reality and other types of human experiences of reality. However, this separation could be highly problematic in the study of the *Zhuangzi*.³⁹ Indeed,

³⁹ The modern creation of the duality between subject and object is not only a comparative problem, but also a huge problem for recent Western philosophers, especially since existentialism, postmodernism and deconstructionism. For a critique of modern philosophy of

existing scholarship has identified the deeper connection between the seemingly epistemological and intellectual positions in the *Zhuangzi* and other human existential considerations in the *Zhuangzi*. Ames, for example, argues that the *Zhuangzi* challenges “the notions of discrete agency and the ‘objectivity’ of knowledge – the independence of the world known, from the knower.”⁴⁰ Yearley takes the mysticism in the *Zhuangzi* as “inwardly mysticism,” in which “one neither obtains union with some higher being nor unification with the single reality,” but “aims to see the world in a new way.”⁴¹ In this way, Yearley argues that the ultimate task behind the mystical experiences in the *Zhuangzi* is to address the human existential considerations in their encountering of the ordinary life. Scholars also realize the deeper existential concerns behind skepticism and relativism. Berthel, for example, takes skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* to be “therapeutic” and “rhetoric” and is “limited to two specific areas, namely language’s ability to exhaust the complexity of experience and the heart-mind’s ability to render universal truth.”⁴² Allinson points out that the relativistic statements in the *Zhuangzi* are “designed to break down fixed viewpoints from statements, anecdotes, paradoxes and metaphors to lead the reader to a state of spiritual transformation.”⁴³ Ivanhoe argues that the perspectivism in the *Zhuangzi*, i.e. “the claim that all knowledge is relative to the observer’s point of view” is used only to “dismantle the traditional social norms” and “for the goal of unrevealing Dao, the

subjectivity and objectivity, refer to Simon Critchley and Peter Dews, eds, *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁴⁰ Ames, “Knowing in the *Zhuangzi*,” 220.

⁴¹ Yearley, “The Perfected Person,” 127; 130-131.

⁴² See for example Berthel, “Language in *Zhuangzi*,” 564; 573.

⁴³ Robert Elliott Allinson, “Of Fish, Butterflies and Birds: Relativism and Nonrelative Valuation in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Asian Philosophy* 25, no. 3 (2015): 238.

ultimate Way.”⁴⁴ What is common in these arguments, is that behind these epistemologically oriented positions in the *Zhuangzi*, there is always deeper human existential considerations to be addressed. There are never independently existing epistemological positions in the *Zhuangzi*. Rather, these seemingly epistemological arguments are always intricately connected with some deeper human existential considerations for his personal transformation to a more enlightened state of himself.

Therefore, we find that in the *Zhuangzi* there is no completely independent epistemology as the pure human intellectual understanding of reality to be totally separated from other human existential considerations. What we see in the *Zhuangzi* is a much deeper connection between the human existential concerns of themselves and their experience of the truth of reality. In this consideration, then, it would be highly problematic if we directly map the modern philosophical duality of subject and object; and of epistemology and metaphysics, onto the study of the *Zhuangzi*. Graham, for example, seeks to bridge the dualistic divide between reason and spontaneity by arguing that the human spontaneity reveals the objective truth of reality, which, under the modern Western philosophical conception, is only captured by the rational human mind. With Graham’s repositioning, then, the intimate connection between human existence and truth of reality is not captured through the rational human mind but through the spontaneous and intuitive experience.⁴⁵ Yang Rubin, similarly, argues that the relation between human existence and truth of reality in the *Zhuangzi* is more

⁴⁴ Ivanhoe, “*Zhuangzi* on Skepticism,” 645-647.

⁴⁵ Refer to Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 6-9. Also refer to Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 387.

intimately connected than the modern philosophical dualistic settings suggest. By conceptualizing the human being in his physical constitution and transformation through the vital energy *qi* (*xingqi zhuti* 形氣主體; *qihua zhuti* 氣化主體), the human being experientially connects to other beings that are also constituted and transformed by *qi*. By conceptualizing human beings as the “wandering subject” (*youzhi zhuti* 遊之主體), he then wanders his heart-mind in the seamless connection with other beings in the entire realm. In the ultimate experience of the human subject, as Yang points out, there is no longer the dichotomy between subject and object, but only the seamless connection and simultaneous manifestation of human existence and ontological reality together.⁴⁶

Despite the effort to escape from the modern philosophical assumptions, these dualistic divides in modern Western philosophy are so deeply entrenched that scholars frequently slide back into them. For example, despite Graham’s effort to escape from these dualistic divides and to connect human spontaneity with the objectivity of things, the clear separation of reason and spontaneity as well as the clear separation between things as the object and human beings as the subject still suggest Graham’s fundamental rooting in modern philosophical duality despite taking the form of negation. Similarly, in Yang Rubin’s positioning of the human experience as seamlessly integrated with the metaphysical reality of *qi* and *wu*, he firmly establishes his study on the primacy of the human subject. In this way, his challenge to the

⁴⁶ Refer to Yang Rubin 楊儒賓, *Rumen nei de Zhuangzi* 儒門內的莊子 (Taipei 臺北: Lianjing chu ban 聯經出版, 2016), especially preface and chapter 3.

modern philosophical framework still presupposes the dualistic divide between the subject and the object despite taking the form of negation.⁴⁷ Indeed, although the scholars seek to overcome the modern philosophical dualistic divide, the very fact that they work so hard to overcome these frameworks already suggests the fundamental influence of these frameworks on their work.

The “ontological-existential” alternative to the “epistemological-metaphysical” divide

As we have demonstrated through the above scholarship on the *Zhuangzi*, there is the deep modern philosophical assumption on the separation between the metaphysical reality of “thing in itself” and the human epistemological understanding of the truth of reality. Such dualistic divide, however, conceals us from seeing a closer relation between human existence and truth of reality. If we are to recover the intimate connection between the two, we need to find an alternative way to bypass the modern Western philosophical dualistic divides. One such effort is made by David Hall and Roger Ames. According to them, we could take deconstructive postmodernism as an opportunity to rediscover a more interrelated, correlative, intimate connection between human beings and reality, which is neither a straight mapping of human reason or consciousness on the “thing in itself;” nor a completely non-rational spontaneous experience with the beings. Rather, it is a richer and more accommodating relation that includes all sorts of reason, experience, and beyond. By loosening up the relation

⁴⁷ Ibid.

between self and reality, a more vibrant, flexible, dynamic relation between the two will unfold before us.⁴⁸

Another good effort comes from the work of Mou Zongsan. As an influential Chinese scholar comparing Kantian philosophy and Chinese philosophy, Mou argues that the Kantian separation of the noumenal and the phenomenal is not granted in the Chinese tradition. According to Mou, while Kant only grants human beings the possibility of accessing the phenomenal realm (*xianxiangjie* 現象界) through their limited heart-mind (*youxianxin* 有限心), i.e. the epistemological heart-mind (*renzhixin* 認知心), the Chinese philosophical traditions grant human beings the possibility of accessing the noumenal realm (*bentijie* 本體界) of the “thing in itself” (*wuzishen* 物自身) directly through their unlimited heart-mind (*wuxianxin* 無限心), i.e. the intuition of the intellect (*zhide zhijue* 智的直覺).⁴⁹ Mou’s argument about the direct access to the noumenal realm by the human unlimited heart-mind gives us a good clue for the possibility of bypassing the modern philosophical assumptions on the epistemological access to metaphysical reality.

Moreover, Mou goes further to explicate the two complementary ways that Confucianism and Daoism access the truth of reality. While Confucianism proposes that it is through the unlimited moral heart-mind (*daode yishi* 道德意識; *ziyou wuxianxin* 自由無限心) that the human being directly accesses “thing in itself” with

⁴⁸ Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*. Part I. Metaphors of Identity.

⁴⁹ Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xian Xiang Yu Wu Zi Shen* 現象與物自身 (Taiwan 臺灣: Xue sheng shu ju 學生書局, 1975).

its moral truth and ontological truth simultaneously manifested. Daoism, on the other hand, proposes that it is through the emptying out of oneself and the silent revelation of Nonbeing as the source of all beings that the human being illuminates the ontological truth of reality.⁵⁰ Such dual-access to the truth of reality is possible because for Mou, the truth of reality is not only *metaphysically* constituted on its own but also *morally* constituted by the human moral practice. This co-presence of the moral and the metaphysical truths of reality sheds inspirational light on the conceptualization of my approach in studying the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* for a closer connection between the human experience and truth of reality.

To capture the intimate connection between human existence and the truth of reality, it requires us to overcome the modern institutionalization of epistemology and metaphysics as two distinctively separated categories of philosophical study. With this consideration, I propose to tentatively suspend the use of the modern “epistemological-metaphysical” approach to the study of the *Zhuangzi*, in which the subject and the object are clearly set apart from each other; and the only path to connect them is the intellectual route. Instead, I propose to adopt the “ontological-existential” approach to the study of the *Zhuangzi*, in which human existence and ontological reality are more intricately connected than dualistically separated.⁵¹ The

⁵⁰ Ibid, 431-436.

⁵¹ The call for the ontological-existential turn in replacement of the modern epistemological-metaphysical approach of the dualistic divide between subject and object is not merely a comparative effort, inside the Western philosophical tradition it is also highly regarded. Heidegger’s project to uncover the intimate relationship between human existence and fundamental ontology is the most renowned effort. For sophisticated scholarly interpretation on Heidegger’s philosophy of being, refer to the following books: Herman Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

key difference between these two approaches is that while modern “epistemological” approach assumes the rigid mapping of human rational reasoning onto the reality of things, the “existential” approach assumes the intimate connection and immersion of the human being with the reality of beings; and, similarly, while modern “metaphysics” is heavily constructed upon the dualistic divide between the subject and the object, the “ontological” approach reveals a more fluid and sophisticated reading of the truth of beings that is not distinctively separated from the human existence.

By using the word “ontological,” then, I am referring to the general philosophical reflection on the truth of beings in reality rather than a direct match to any specific version of Western ontology.⁵² Topics to be addressed in this study include issues such as the relation between the truth of beings themselves and the constitution of human existence; the relation between the unique expressions of beings themselves and any universalizing principles of all beings; the relation between the static ontological view of being as presence and the dynamic view of being as process; etc. Indeed, the importance of ontology in the study of Daoist philosophy is not to be underestimated. For example, David Chai points out that “the corners” of the Daoist thought is the ontological thought of “letting go and letting be so as to achieve

University Press, 1998). Also refer to Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger's Way of Being* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

⁵² In fact, the exact scope of “ontology” in Western philosophy is highly fluid and dynamic; and “being” as a Western ontological term could be taken at various levels. While traditional metaphysics and ontology since Aristotle might be concerned with substance or objects of physics; more recent “ontological” pursuits since Hegel and Heidegger seem to be more concerned with the spirit, the human being, and beings. Indeed, the fluidity and multiplicity of “ontology” and “being” is in itself a deep topic that is beyond the scope of this paper. It suffices here to say that “ontology” needs to be specifically derived in each thinker, and the meaning of “ontology” or “being” in *Zhuangzi* could only be elaborated in *Zhuangzi*'s own articulation of it.

cosmological harmony and ontological self-enrichment.”⁵³ Ken Berthel raises the importance of “process ontology” in the *Zhuangzi*, in which there is “a (non-contradictory) universe composed of real, constantly transforming actualities ... that nevertheless always escapes being captured in conventional modes of human logic and language.”⁵⁴ By raising the ontological approach rather than the epistemological approach to the study of the *Zhuangzi*, then, I am placing the priority of truth on the ontological truth of beings themselves rather than the human epistemological understanding of beings. My approach thus considers the ontological truth of beings to be structurally prior to the human epistemological understanding of reality.

By using the word “existential,” I am referring generally to any experience of the human being in the human existence. I do not intend to use this word to be connotated with any specific doctrine or any specific schools in Western philosophy. With different philosophers articulating very different versions of human existence, the full richness and fluidity of the existential philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* has to be situated and explained in the *Zhuangzi* text itself. Specifically, how the *Zhuangzi* positions human existence as constituted by the human encountering of beings in his life is what we shall explore in this dissertation.

Combining the ontological and the existential approaches to the *Zhuangzi* together in the “ontological-existential” approach, I seek to present the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* in which the truth of beings are not objectified and separated from the

⁵³ David Chai, “Daoism and Wu,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 10 (2014): 663.

⁵⁴ Berthel, “Language in *Zhuangzi*,” 564.

human existence. Unlike the modern “epistemological-metaphysical” approach in which the truth of reality and human existence are dualistically divided from each other and could only be related through the rational conceptions, the “ontological-existential” approach will place greater emphasis on the ontological unfolding of beings themselves; as well as the existential human experience in its intimate connection with the beings. Without the assumption on the modern divide between subject and object as assumed in the epistemological-metaphysical approach, the being in the *Zhuangzi* is not only the ontological “being in itself” that is the fundamental constituent of the ontological reality, but also the existential “being in human experience” that is the very constituent of the human existence. Similarly, human existence is not only the experiential existence of the human consciousness, but also fundamentally defined by its ontological constitution in its encountering of the beings in his life. Hopefully, then, the “ontological-existential” approach will enable us to see how the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* reveals the intimate connection between human existence and the truth of reality that goes beyond the dualistic framework of modern Western philosophy.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed two major sources of philosophical assumptions behind the Western scholarship on the *Zhuangzi*. I point out that behind the readings of the *Zhuangzi* as mysticism, skepticism and relativism, there is the fundamental

ancient Greek assumption on the superiority of the determinate, universal, and permanent truth. These readings are also built upon the modern philosophical dualistic divide between the subject and the object; and the institutional creation of modern “metaphysics” as the study of the truth of reality itself and modern “epistemology” as the study of the human intellectual access to reality. These two sets of assumptions, however, are not necessarily granted in the *Zhuangzi*. As I will argue in the coming chapters, the *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy of being is dialectically balanced between the determinate and the indeterminate, the universal and the diverse, and the permanent and the changing. The relationship between human existence and the truth of reality is also more intimately connected than distinctively set apart. Through the “ontological-existential” approach to the study of beings in the *Zhuangzi*, then, I hope to demonstrate how the beings are simultaneously both the ontological “being in itself” and the existential “being in human experience;” and similarly, how the human beings are also simultaneously both existential experience of himself and ontologically constituted by his encountering of the beings in his life.

Chapter Two - The Philosophy of *wu* 物 (being) in the *Zhuangzi*

It is often considered that the most important Daoist metaphysical concepts are *you* 有 (existence; Being) and *wu* 無 (non-existence, Nonbeing).¹ Schwartz, for example, points out that there is the strong element of mysticism in Daoist philosophy, in which *wu* (Nonbeing) refers to “a reality which corresponds to no determinate finite entity, relation, or process which can be named;” which then “comes to relate to the world of the determinate, the individuated and the related, or perhaps literally in Chinese, in the world of the “there is” (*yu*).”² However, a quick reading of the *Zhuangzi* reveals that a direct association of the metaphysical considerations in the *Zhuangzi* and in the *Laozi* are not well grounded. In fact, in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, there are very limited occurrences of *wu* 无 (never *wu* 無)³ as an abstract ontological concept.⁴ A

¹ The translation of these two concepts differs among scholars. For example, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall translate them as “determinate” and “indeterminate;” Hans-Georg Moeller translates them as “presence” and “non-presence;” and Franklin Perkins translate them as “being” and “nonbeing.” My translation takes the concept of *wu* 無 as the abstract Nonbeing as the source of all beings; complementarily, therefore, *you* 有 is rendered as the abstract concept of Being rather than the concrete individual beings. Refer to Ames and Hall, *Dao De Jing*; Hans-Georg Moeller, *Dao De Jing* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2007); and Franklin Perkins, “Metaphysics in Chinese philosophy,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015), accessed September 10, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/chinese-metaphysics/>.

² Schwartz, *The World of Thought*, 199.

³ According to Duan Yucai’s commentary to the classical Chinese dictionary book *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, the character *wu* 无 is more ancient than the character *wu* 無. *Wu* 無 emerged in the Qin period, and later gradually replaced the more ancient *wu* 无. Yet *wu* 无 is still preserved in texts like the *Yijing* as it is correlated to the concept of *yuan* (元 origin, source). See Duan Yucai 段玉裁 and Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuo Wen Jie Zi Zhu* 說文解字注 (Shanghai 上海: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she 上海古籍出版社, 1981).

⁴ The first occurrence is “there is *you*, and there is *wu*,” (有有也者，有无也者) (*HY* 5/2/49-50): it is contextualized in the dialectic debate between beginning and no-beginning; between *you* 有 (existence, Being) and *wu* 无/無 (non-existence, Nonbeing). The second occurrence is

closer reading of the *Zhuangzi* reveals to us that there are two other concepts that are crucial in the metaphysics of the *Zhuangzi*: *qi* 氣 (vital energy) and *wu* 物 (commonly translated as “thing,” I translate as “being.” I will explain later). By conceptualizing *qi* as the vital energy that constitutes all beings in the metaphysical reality, the *Zhuangzi* seems to share the contemporaneous trend of naturalism, in which human existence and natural patterns were brought into close connection with each other. This is seen not only in the *Zhuangzi*, but also in the texts of the *Mencius* and the “*Zhongyong*” chapter of the *Liji*, in which the Confucian texts seek to legitimate the human morality in the metaphysical grounding; as well as in the *Guanzi*, the *Lv shichunqiu*, the *Yizhoushu*, etc, in which social and state affairs are ordered in accordance with the patterns in the nature.⁵ The concerns on the metaphysics of *qi* in the *Zhuangzi* is widely discussed in the scholarly literature. The Ming philosopher Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692), for example, raises the importance of *qi* in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. In Wang’s reading of the *Zhuangzi*, human existence is intimately connected to metaphysical reality through the common constitution of *qi*.⁶ Recently,

“from *wu* to *you*, so as to reach three” (自无適有，以至於三) (*HY* 5/2/54): it is about the counting from *wu* 无/無 (non-existence, Nonbeing) to *you* 有 (existence, Being); and then to three. The third occurrence is “take *wu* as head; take life as back, and take death as body” (以无為首，以生為脊，以死為尻) (*HY* 17/6/46), in which it contrasts *wu* with life and death. There is also the occurrence of *wuyou* 无有 as a compound (in chapter 7) in describing the sage as “to wander in *wuyou*” (遊於无有者”) (*HY* 20/7/15), in which the compound *wuyou* seems to also refer to Nonbeing as the ultimate source of reality. The original Chinese text of the *Zhuangzi* references *Zhuangzi Yin De* 莊子引得 (*A Concordance to Chuang Tzu*), Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 20 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), as abbreviated as *HY* throughout this study.

⁵ For a development of the Naturalism trend in the Warring States, refer to Robin McNeal, “The Development of Naturalist Thought in Ancient China: A Review of W. Allyn Rickett’s ‘Guanzi,’” *Early China* 28 (2003): 161-200.

⁶ Refer to Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, *Zhuangzi Jie Yu Zhuangzi Tong* 莊子解與莊子通 (Taipei 臺

Chinese scholar Yang Rubin also argues that in the *Zhuangzi*, the human physical body intuitively experiences the total connection with other beings through their common constitution through *qi*.⁷

The other concept of *wu* 物 (thing; being) also occupies a central position in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, the importance of *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* comes to our attention by the very title of the *Qiwulun* chapter (abbreviated as *QWL*) itself: discourse on the equalization of *wu*.⁸ In the main text of the *QWL* chapter, we see that *wu* is not only raised as an abstract concept, but also elaborated in many concrete instances. The key theme of the chapter, therefore, is to address how the inequality of *wu* is generated, and how it could be eventually equalized and reconciled. In addition to the central importance of *wu* in *QWL*, throughout the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters we see multiple occurrences of *wu*. For example, chapter 1 *Xiaoyaoyou* elaborates one of the virtues of the daemonic man (神人) as “embracing the myriads of *wu* and making them one” (將旁礴萬物以為一).⁹ Chapter 4 *Renjianshi* describes the state of the fasting of the heart-mind (*xinzhai* 心齋) as “emptying [oneself] and waiting for *wu*” (虛而待物).¹⁰ In Chapter 4 *Renjianshi*, the alleged “Confucius” addresses the anxiety of Zigao the envoy (葉公子高) as “riding *wu* to wander the heart-mind, relying on the not-stoppable to nourish the center” (乘物以遊心，託不得已以養

北: Zhongguo zi xue ming zhu ji cheng bian yin ji jin hui 中國子學名著集成編印基金會, 1977).

⁷ Yang, *Ru Men Nei De Zhuangzi*.

⁸ I will explain the difference between my translation and other scholars' in the next chapter.

⁹ *HY* 2/1/32.

¹⁰ *HY* 9/4/27-28.

中).¹¹ In Chapter 5 *Dechongfu*, Wang Wu, the sage man with the chopped foot (兀者 王骀) is described as “discerning the non-false and not shifting with *wu*” and “taking the transformation of *wu* as destiny and holding fast to their source” (審乎無假而不與物遷，命物之化而守其宗也).¹² Chapter 6 *Dazongshi* presents one of the virtues of the true man (*zhenren* 真人) as “going along with what is fitted in *wu*, with no one knowing their ultimate limit” (與物有宜而莫知其極).¹³ Chapter 7 *Yingdiwang* describes the ideal sage ruler as “following *wu* by its self-so, without allowing personal [involvement] there” (順物自然而無容私焉).¹⁴

What we could see from the above quotations of *wu* is that it is not merely an important concept to address the metaphysical truth about reality, but more importantly also crucial to address the human experience and encountering of *wu* in their life. Indeed, the metaphysical considerations and human existential considerations of the *Zhuangzi* are never separable. In this sense, this study could be considered to bring the two groups of the *Zhuangzi* commentary traditions together. According to Yang Rubin, the commentary traditions of the *Zhuangzi* could be divided into two groups. The first group tends to focus more on issues related to human existence and experience. They tend to discuss issues on human cultivation (*gongfu lun* 工夫論) and the study of the heart-mind (*xinxue* 心學). This group includes commentators such as Cheng Xuanying (成玄英: ca. 631), Chu Boxiu (褚伯秀: ca.

¹¹ *HY* 10/4/52-53.

¹² *HY* 12/5/6.

¹³ *HY* 15/6/10-11.

¹⁴ *HY* 20/7/11.

1246), Lu Xixing (陸西星: 1520-ca.1601), Jiao Hong (焦竑: 1540-1620), Hanshan (憨山: 1546-1623), etc. The second group of commentators tends to focus more on the metaphysical considerations in the *Zhuangzi*. They address issues such as *wu* 物 and *qi* 氣, raising these concepts as the central focus of the metaphysics and the cosmology in the *Zhuangzi*. This group includes earlier commentators such as Xiang Xiu (向秀: 227-ca.277) and Guo Xiang (郭向: 253-312); as well some of the late Ming scholars such as Fang Yizhi (方以智: 1611-1671) and Wang Fuzhi (王夫之: 1619-1692).¹⁵

In this sense, it is the purpose of this study to bring together these two considerations on the *Zhuangzi* together by delineating an intimate relation between human existence and ontological reality. It is hoped that with my explication on the philosophy of *wu* in the *Zhuangzi*, it no longer stands as a pure metaphysical concept only but provides us a better picture on how the ontological reality and human existence are intimately connected and related.

1. The philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* in its intellectual context

The philosophy of *wu* 物, therefore, occupies a crucial position in the *Zhuangzi*. In this section, I want to provide a contextualized view on how the philosophy of *wu* in

¹⁵ Refer to chapter 3 of Yang, *Ru Men Nei De Zhuangzi*, 173-224. For a more detailed overview of the entire commentary tradition on the *Zhuangzi*, refer to Fang Yong 方勇, *Zhuangzi Xue Shi: Zeng Bu Ban* 莊子學史: 增补版 (Beijing 北京: Renmin chu ban she 人民出版社, 2017).

the *Zhuangzi* is situated in the intellectual condition of its time. For this I will provide a detailed reading of the *Tianxia* (天下, Under the Heaven) chapter, the last chapter in the *Zhuangzi*. Despite of the Syncretic element of the chapter, it is still considered as an important source for understanding not only the *Zhuangzi* but also other thinkers and texts of the Warring States period. It is also considered to be a reliable source to describe the characteristics of the *Zhuangzi*.

It is crucial for us to see that the *Tianxia* chapter uses *wu* as a crucial distinguishing factor on the differences between Zhuang Zhou and other thinkers of the time. The *Tianxia* describes Mo Di (墨翟) and Qin Guli (禽滑釐) as “no extravagance in a decadent age, no indulgence in the myriads of *wu*, no illumination at the numbers and measures” (不侈於後世，不靡於萬物，不暉於數度);¹⁶ Song Yan (宋鉞) and Yin Wen (尹文) as “unbound by custom, unadorned by *wu*” (不累於俗，不飾於物);¹⁷ Peng Meng (彭蒙), Tian Pian (田駢) and Shen Dao (慎到) as “equalize the myriads of *wu* and take it as primary” (齊萬物以為首);¹⁸ and Guan Yin (關尹) and Lao Dan (老聃) as “taking gentleness, weakness, modesty, and inferiority as manifestations, and taking emptiness, tenuity, not destroying the myriads of *wu* as substance (以濡弱謙下為表，以空虛不毀萬物為實);¹⁹ Hui Shi (惠施) as “broadly love the myriads of *wu*, heaven and earth are one body” (汎愛萬物，天地一體也).²⁰

¹⁶ HY 91/33/16.

¹⁷ HY 92/33/33.

¹⁸ HY 92/33/43.

¹⁹ HY 93/33/56.

²⁰ HY 93/33/73-74.

It describes the philosophy of Zhuang Zhou as “alone with the spirit of heaven and earth he came and went, yet he was not arrogant towards the myriads of *wu*” (獨與天地精神往來而不敖倪於萬物)²¹ and as “responding to transformation and resolving with *wu*” (應於化而解於物也).²² In the juxtaposition of the different thinkers’ takes on the *wu*, this chapter raises *wu* as the crucial ontological and existential issue in the human reconciliation with the world and with themselves.

Among all the thinkers, let us take a specific look at the *Tianxia*’s description of Zhuang Zhou’s philosophy in relation to Lao Dan’s (and Guanyin’s) philosophy. According to the *Tianxia*, Lao Dan “regards the Source as quintessential and beings as coarse” (以本為精，以物為粗).²³ In this way, it positions Lao Dan’s philosophy to emphasize Nonbeing as the root of all beings and not take too much interest in the manifestations of beings. In contrast, in the philosophy of Zhuang Zhou there are both the root of Nonbeing and the manifestations and responses to the various beings:

其於本也，弘大而辟，深閎而肆，其於宗也，可謂稠適而上遂矣。雖然，其應於化而解於物也，其理不竭，其來不蛻，芒乎昧乎，未之盡者。

As for the Source, it was broad, great and penetrating; deep, profound and unimpeded. As for the ancestor, it may be said [he] tuned and accommodated [himself] to it and rose up to reach it. Nevertheless, in his

²¹ HY 93/33/65-66.

²² HY 93/33/69.

²³ HY 92/33/54.

responding to transformation and his resolution with beings, its patterns are not exhaustible, its arrival is not shaken off. Abstruse! Obscure! There is never the end of it! ²⁴

According to this passage, there are both commonalities and differences between Zhuang Zhou and Lao Dan, which are supposed to be mapped to the texts of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi*, respectively. On the one hand, Zhuang Zhou shares with Lao Dan by rooting his philosophy in “the Source” that is “broad” and “deep.” Yet unlike Lao Dan, who considers the Source as quintessential and beings as coarse, Zhuang Zhou does not treat the beings with arrogance. In other words, Zhuang Zhou does not only “reach up” to the Source, but also responds and reconciles with the beings and their transformations, which is inexhaustible and endless. This passage suggests that although Zhuang Zhou shares with Lao Dan the importance of the ultimate Source, it is the manifestations and the human experiences of the various *wu* that is most characteristic of Zhuang Zhou’s philosophy. By positioning the human encountering and reconciliation of *wu* to be crucial in the human experience of themselves and of reality while also preserving the root in the Source of all of them, Zhuang Zhou creates a philosophy that is distinct of his own.

In other words, if we follow the *Tianxia*’s positioning of Zhuang Zhou in relation to Lao Dan, then we will see that the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* has both the element of the Source of Nonbeing as the root of all beings (therefore similar to the

²⁴ *HY* 93/33/68-69. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 1098-1102; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 373-374; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 283; Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 124.

Laozi); and the element of the various manifestations and experiences of beings (therefore distinguishes from the *Laozi*.) Indeed, the co-existence of both elements of the mystical source of Nonbeing and the various manifestations and experiences of beings could be supported by many parables in the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters. For example, in the *QWL* chapter, the ultimate message behind the mystical experiences of the “sitting and forgetting” (*zuo wang* 坐忘) and the “loss of the self” (*wu sang wo* 吾喪我) is not about the elimination of all vitality and life, but to hear the pipe of the heaven as expressed in the vibrant and unique pipes themselves (a metaphor for the vibrant and unique expressions of the various beings).²⁵ In other words, although the parable starts by describing the human mystical experience in engaging with the empty and silent Nonbeing, it eventually concerns with the problem of the various beings in the human life. Similarly, in the parable of *Nv Yu* (女偶) in chapter 6 *Dazongshi*, the ideal sage does not only stop at the mystical state of “no life and no-death” (不生不死), but eventually comes to the state of “there is nothing that it does not send off, does not welcome, does not destroy, does not accomplish” (無不將也，無不迎也；無不毀也，無不成也).²⁶ That is, with the mystical experience no longer binding to the duality of life and death, the human sage eventually reaches the state of going together with the coming and going of the beings, without binding himself forever to any one of them. In other words, even in the mystical experience of

²⁵ *HY* 3/2/1-9.

²⁶ *HY* 17/6/41-42.

Nonbeing, it is the experience of the reconciliation of the various beings that is the ultimate concern in the *Zhuangzi*.

In other words, what we see in these passages is that Nonbeing in the *Zhuangzi* is not sheer mysterious emptiness or non-existence that is often associated with certain version of ontological nihilism. Instead, it is the active and inexhaustible source of all beings. With Nonbeing acts as the mysterious source of all beings, then, there is indeed a very close relation between the philosophy of beings and the philosophy of Nonbeing in the *Zhuangzi*. Yet, through the emphasis and elaboration on the beings, the *Zhuangzi* is a philosophy of being that differs substantially from the *Laozi* as the philosophy of Nonbeing. The *Tianxia*, therefore, contrasts the fullness (*chongshi* 充實) of Zhuang Zhou's philosophy with the emptiness (*kongxu* 空虛) of Lao Dan's philosophy.²⁷ This contrast is drawn between the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy that places more emphasis on the fullness of the various manifestations of beings; and the philosophy of the *Laozi* that places more emphasis on the emptiness of Nonbeing as the source of all beings. Indeed, while the *Laozi* appeals to Nonbeing as the silent metaphysical source of all beings and the sage's mystical experiences of Nonbeing as the root for all metaphysical and existential knowledge; the *Zhuangzi* appeals directly to the various manifestations of beings themselves and the human experience of beings. The philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, provides a fuller and more dynamic philosophy of "being" than the more silent and empty philosophy of "Nonbeing" as in the *Laozi*.

²⁷ HY 93/33/56; 67.

Indeed, the debate on the connection and the differentiation between the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* is worth great attention. In fact, the Ming dynasty philosopher and commentator Wang Fuzhi already contrasted the philosophy of the *Laozi* as the more feminine version that is empty and silent; and the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* as the more masculine version that is full of dynamics. According to Wang Fuzhi, the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* starts with the common ground that it shares with the *Laozi*, namely, grasping the root source of all beings in emptiness and Nonbeing; yet it eventually differentiates itself from the *Laozi* by enumerating all beings in the entire realm and is reconciled with the dynamic transformations of all beings and their total connection with each other. It is in this consideration that Wang takes the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy as a philosophy of the running of the heaven (*huntian* 渾天) that is full and dynamic and is beyond the *Laozi*'s reach.²⁸

In fact, the association of the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* with the *Laozi*; and the grouping of them together under the common label of "Daoism," have become increasingly problematic in modern scholarship. Identifying the historical creation of Daoism in the Han dynasty (through Sima Tan's summary of the six schools; and the "Treatise on Literature" in the *Book of Han*), recent scholarship have raised serious doubt regarding the association and continuity between the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Complicating the issue further is the problem of the exact dating of the text of the *Laozi*. In this regard, both Graham and Hansen try to dissociate the connection

²⁸ See Wang Fuzhi's commentary to the section on Zhuang Zhou in the *Tianxia* chapter. In Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, *Zhuangzi jie* 莊子解 (Taipei 臺北: Yi wen yin shu guan 藝文印書館, 1972), 405.

between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi*; and call for the interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* in relation to other texts and thinkers of the time. Graham, for example, places his study of the *Zhuangzi* in relation to the Mohist canon, and defends that the analytic orientations in the *Zhuangzi* could be traced together with the development of the Mohist logic.²⁹ Similarly, in his serial essays on the *Zhuangzi*, Hansen rejects to associate the *Zhuangzi* with the *Laozi*, especially the *Laozi*'s absolutism, monism and mysticism; and seeks to associate the *Zhuangzi* with Neo-Mohism and the School of Names.³⁰ He stresses the influence of Hui Shi on the *Zhuangzi*, and argues that although the *Zhuangzi* and Hui Shi eventually diverge on their ultimate orientations in absolutism, they nevertheless share considerable degree of analytical and argumentative skillfulness.³¹

The association of the *Zhuangzi* with other texts and thinkers is also presented in the *Tianxia* chapter. In fact, in the *Zhuangzi*, we see the philosophy of being is presented with a high degree of analytical and dialectical sophistication, which could possibly be traced to the School of Mohist and the School of Names. For example, according to the *Tianxia* chapter, the Mohists developed powerful argumentation and logical analytics to “attack each other with disputations on ‘hard’ and ‘white,’ ‘difference’ and ‘sameness;’ and respond to each other with the discourse on the incompatibility of ‘odd’ and ‘even’” (以堅白同異之辯相訾，以綺偶不侔之辭相應).

²⁹ Refer to Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*.

³⁰ Hansen makes this point in virtually all his articles on the *Zhuangzi*. For example, see Hansen, “A Tao of ‘Tao,’” 26.

³¹ Hansen, “The Relatively Happy Fish.”

³² Correspondingly, in the parable of the three accomplished men (in *QWL*), the *Zhuangzi* deplored that they “ended up with the obscurity of ‘hard’ and ‘white’” (故以堅白之昧終). ³³ In this sense, then, the strong analytical and dialectical characteristic of the *Zhuangzi* might be positively influenced by the conceptual terminology and logical analytics of the Mohists. Moreover, one argument that the *QWL* raises is to dispute on the “rights” and the “wrongs” as articulated by the Mohists and the Confucians. Taken together, then, the influence of the Mohist philosophy on the *Zhuangzi* is clearly undeniable.

More importantly, the *Zhuangzi*'s analytical and skeptical argumentation might be well influenced by Hui Shi, who is depicted in the *Tianxia* to possess considerable degree of analytical and dialectical sophistication. A quick reading of the *Zhuangzi* immediately suggests the common concerns and analytical styles between Hui Shi and the *Zhuangzi*. For example, the *Zhuangzi*'s ironic metaphor of “leaving for Yue today but have arrived yesterday” (今日適越而昔至) ³⁴ is almost a direct use of Hui Shi's “leaving for Yue today but have come yesterday” (今日適越而昔來) ³⁵ : both utilizes the ironic conception of time. The *Zhuangzi*'s analytics that “just when there is life there is death; just when there is death there is life” (方生方死，方死方生) ³⁶ resembles Hui Shi's depiction of “the sun: just when it is noon it slants; the beings:

³² *HY* 91/33/30.

³³ *HY* 5/2/45.

³⁴ *HY* 4/2/22.

³⁵ *HY* 93/33/73.

³⁶ *HY* 4/2/28.

just when there is life there is death” (日方中方睨，物方生方死):³⁷ both are dialectic expressions on the deep intertwinement of opposite beings. The *Zhuangzi*'s dialectics on difference and sameness: “looking from their differences, [they are like] liver and gall, Chu and Yue; looking from their sameness, myriads of beings are all one” (自其異者視之，肝膽楚越也；自其同者視之，萬物皆一也)³⁸ seems to also resemble Hui Shi's dialectic on “great sameness yet different from little sameness, this is called little sameness and difference; the myriads of beings are all the same and all different, this is called the great sameness and difference” (大同而與小同異，此之謂小同異；萬物畢同畢異，此之謂大同異).³⁹ Even the *Zhuangzi*'s image of “the center of the ring” (*huanzhong* 環中)⁴⁰ seems to be relatable to Hui Shi's “linked ring could be separated” (連環可解也).⁴¹ Indeed, the power of the analytic and dialectic argumentations in the *Zhuangzi* is indisputable. In fact, the differentiating character of the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being from the *Laozi*'s philosophy of Nonbeing lies precisely in the analytically and dialectically presented argumentations on the beings.

Yet what differentiates the *Zhuangzi* from Hui Shi is that the *Zhuangzi* has the root of its philosophy in the Source; while Hui Shi gets lost in his argumentations that he eventually gets “scattered in the myriads of beings” (散於萬物) and “could not find

³⁷ HY 93/33/71-72.

³⁸ HY 12/5/7.

³⁹ HY 93/33/72.

⁴⁰ HY 4/2/31.

⁴¹ HY 93/33/73.

peace for himself” (不能以此自寧); and “chasing the myriads of beings without returning to the source” (逐萬物而不反).⁴² In this sense, then, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy infuses the strengths of both the *Laozi* and Hui Shi by tracing the root in Nonbeing as the source of all beings while fully developing the philosophy of being into its full analytical and dialectic sophistication. The philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* is eventually a philosophy that has both the full manifestation of the beings and the empty source of Nonbeing as the root.

By contextually positioning the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* in relation with its contemporaneous philosophical texts and thinkers, we are able to see that the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* has both the element of Nonbeing as the mysterious source of all; and the element of being as analytically and dialectically presented in their diverse manifestations. While we might not be sure about the exact dating of the compilation and the transmission of the *Laozi* text; and could not be sure on whether there was a direct intellectual influence of the *Laozi* on the *Zhuangzi*, there are certainly some shared concerns between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi* on Nonbeing as the mysterious source of reality and human experience. Yet the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy decidedly takes on a differentiating turn from the *Laozi* by stressing the importance of beings as diversely manifested and constituted in themselves. With the full dialectical and analytical elaborations on the beings, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy shows a clear influence from Hui Shi and the Mohists. Yet, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being clearly demonstrates its own characteristic by infusing it with deep ontological and

⁴² HY 94/33/85-86.

existential orientations that might not be present in Hui Shi and the Mohists. The remainder of this study, then, is to explore this unique version of philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*.

2. *Wu* 物 as being vs. thing: intimate connection between ontological reality and human existence

With the understanding on the importance of the philosophy of *wu* 物 in the *Zhuangzi*; and its contextualization with other philosophical texts and thinkers of its time, let us now proceed to explore the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* in more details. As I have probably made it clear, the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* is most clearly presented through the concept of *wu*, which is commonly translated as the English word “thing.” However, as a crucial concept in Western philosophy, the concept of “thing” has at least two connotations that are not shared in the *Zhuangzi*’s conception of *wu*. The first connotation of “thing” is rooted in the ancient Greek metaphysics in viewing thing as “substance” and “essence.” This substance-oriented approach to things is fundamentally rooted in the deeper assumption on the pursuit of the determinate, universal, and permanent truth of things. The second crucial connotation of “thing” is its fundamental assumption in the modern Western dualistic divide between the subject and the object, and between metaphysics and epistemology. This connotation of “thing” takes the Cartesian assumption on the dualistic separation

between human being as internally closed “subject” and thing as externally projected “object;” as well as the Kantian assumption in which the human subject could only approach the reality of things in the rational representations of their mind. With these connotations and assumptions built into the concept of “thing,” the translation of *wu* as “thing” becomes rather problematic. In fact, it is precisely how the *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* offer a fundamentally different alternative to these assumptions that this study seeks to address.

To start our exploration on the *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy of *wu*, let us first take a close look of the *Qiwulun* chapter. We immediately come to see that the various expressions of *wu* in this chapter are not necessarily compatible with the connotations of the word “thing” as associated in the modern Western philosophy. First of all, the scope of *wu* in the *QWL* chapter far exceeds merely the intelligible objects. Rather than only addressing the concrete objects such as tables or trees, the *Qiwulun* chapter raises a conceptualization of *wu* that is rather comprehensive in scope. It addresses not only “this” and “that” as basic intelligible distinctions; “self” and “other” as crucial existential identities that are fundamental to one’s moral and social conduct; “right” and “wrong” as evaluations and judgements that bear significant intellectual, moral and sociopolitical consequences; “beautiful” and “ugly” as aesthetic evaluations of the reality; “pleasure” and “pain” as fundamental emotional and existential states of the human experience; “life” and “death” as indispensable existential states in facing one’s own finitude, etc. ⁴³ In other words, *wu* in the *Qiwulun* chapter covers a

⁴³ It might be disputed that the various issues listed above are not explicitly articulated as *wu* and therefore are unrelated to the conception of *wu*. Yet the title of the *Qiwulun* chapter itself

comprehensive range of things, phenomena, and states that are fundamentally constitutive of both ontological reality and human existence.

The message that *wu* is not a concept only for external “things” but a more pervasive concept of “being” that captures all aspects of ontological reality and human existence could be spotted through the term *wanwu* 萬物 (myriads of beings). The word *wan* 萬 (ten thousand; myriad) is not a specific number but refers to the vast coverage that *wu* embraces in constituting the entire realm of existence. The term *wanwu* refers to all beings that covers from the inner-most reach of human experience to the outer-most reach of the universe. In this way, *wanwu* the phrase captures how *wu* captures all “beings” (i.e. things, phenomena, states, conceptions, experiences, etc) in the human experience of himself and of the entire realm. *Wu* therefore refers to all beings in all aspects of human experience and the world. In this sense, *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* is better rendered as “beings” that comprehensively captures all human experiences and ontological reality rather than merely as “things” as objectivized by the modern Western philosophy.

The philosophy of *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* does not only have broad and comprehensive coverage of all beings in the entire realms of human existence and ontological reality, more importantly, it captures another type of relation between human existence and ontological reality that goes beyond the modern Western philosophical framework. As I have argued previously, the modern Western

already suggests that the various issues in this chapter are raised under the general conception of *wu*. In fact, neither the *Zhuangzi* text nor most other contemporaneous Chinese texts follow a modern essay style of writing that explicitly lay out the definitions or the concepts.

connotation of “thing” is to associate things as externally projected object that is distinctively separated from the human subject; and the relation between object and human subject is rigidly set as the intellectual epistemological understanding only. This relationship between object and subject, however, is not what the *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy depicts as the relation between *wu* and human being. In fact, there is a much closer and intimate connection between *wu* and human beings as the *Zhuangzi* depicts.

The relation between *wu* and human beings is not as separately divided and rationally separated as the modern Western philosophy has assumed. With *wu* covering both the inner experience of the human beings and the outer realm of reality, the *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy of *wu* assumes no distinct separation between the beings as constituting the human experience and the beings as constituting the ontological reality. The philosophy of *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* delimits a very close connection between human existence and ontological reality. In the *QWL* chapter for example, by instantiating the various *wu* in the human experience and in ontological reality such as “this and that,” “life and death;” “self and other,” we see the *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* is conceptualized with no distinct separation between the inner experience of human beings and outer ontological reality of the world.

These deep ontological and existential messages of *wu* are also captured in existing scholars’ translation and interpretation of the term. Although usually *wu* is rendered as “thing,” sometimes the strong ontological connotation of *wu* makes the scholarly translation of the word differently. For example, Ziporyn has certainly noted

the ontological significance of the term *wu*: while most often he translates *wu* as “thing” as consistent with the scholarly convention; in other places the ontological significance of the term is certainly captured in his translation. For example, he translates one key phrase of the *QWL* chapter “物无非彼，物无非是” as “There is no being that is not ‘that.’ There is no being that is not ‘this’.”⁴⁴ This translation clearly shows the ontological message of *wu* as a concept of being that pervasively constitutes the reality. Similarly, he also translates *wu* in another crucial phrase “虛而待物” in chapter 4 *Renjianshi* as the “presence of beings.”⁴⁵ Additionally, he also translates the phrase *wanwu* 萬物 (as in the sentence 獨與天地精神往來而不敖倪於萬物 in the *Tianxia* chapter) as “creatures of the world:” because *wanwu* is so deeply connected to “the quintessential spirit of heaven and earth,” it has to be rendered as the “creatures” rather than merely “things.”⁴⁶ He also renders “應於化而解於物” in the *Tianxia* chapter as “respond to every transformation” and “liberating effect on all creatures.”⁴⁷

Indeed, with the comprehensive coverage of *wu* that embraces all kinds of human experience and ontological reality and its definitive message on the intimate relation between human existence and ontological reality, the rendering of *wu* as “thing” becomes rather problematic. Therefore, I will render *wu* as “being” rather than “thing” to capture the deeper ontological and existential message behind this concept.

⁴⁴ *HY* 4/2/27. Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

⁴⁵ *HY* 9/4/27-28. Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 27.

⁴⁶ *HY* 93/33/65-66. Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 124.

⁴⁷ *HY* 93/33/69. Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 124.

In doing so, it avoids the two connotations that the word “thing” is associated with, especially the modern Western philosophical connotation of “thing” as objective reality that is distinctively separated from the human existence. The concept of “being,” on the other hand, does not have the strong connotation in the modern Western philosophy, therefore does not rest upon the assumption on the dualistic divide between human existence and ontological reality. With the concept of being capturing both beings in human existence and beings constituting the ontological reality, it also opens the possibility for bridging human existence and ontological reality together. In this way, the philosophy of *wu* (being) in the *Zhuangzi* will be studied through the dual “ontological-existential” approach, in which beings are both “ontological” beings that constitute the truth of reality and “existential” beings that constitute the human existence. More importantly, through the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*, we will be able to reveal the deep and intimate connection between ontological reality and human existence, which is precisely the philosophical message of *wu* that the *Zhuangzi* seeks to depict.

Indeed, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of *wu* is a philosophy of beings that captures both the existential experience of human beings and the ontological truth of reality; as well as the intimate connection between the two. This positioning of *wu* is perhaps best demonstrated in the “inner sage and outer king” (*nei sheng wai wang* 内聖外王) theme, as conveyed in the *Tianxia* chapter. Emerged in the late Warring States period, with the influence from the Syncretism trend of the time, the *Tianxia* chapter (as well as some other texts such as the *Guanzi*, the *Lvshichunqiu*, the *Huainanzi*, the autobiography of the Grand Historian, etc) depicts the ideal sage-ruler as someone

who could simultaneously accomplish both the “inner sagehood” as the perfected human being and the “outer kingship” as the ruler of the entire realm. Despite of the strong syncretic tendency, it still provides us with indispensable clues to better understand the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*.

According to the *Tianxia* chapter, unlike other thinkers, who were unable to simultaneously accomplish the inner wellbeing of the human individual and the outer ordering of the entire realm, Zhuang Zhou was able to accomplish both simultaneously. According to the *Tianxia*, Zhuang Zhou “wandered with the creator of beings,” and “made friends with those for whom life and death are external; and ending and beginning are non-existent” (上與造物者遊，而下與外死生无終始者為友).⁴⁸ In other words, Zhuang Zhou addressed the inner-most existential considerations of life and death; as well as the outer-most reach of the entire realm of all beings and their origins. The *Tianxia* also depicts Zhuang Zhou as “alone with the spirit of heaven and earth he came and went, yet he was not arrogant towards the myriads of beings. He did not reject right and wrong, so as to live with the conventions of the world” (獨與天地精神往來而不敖倪於萬物，不譴是非，以與世俗處).⁴⁹ In other words, Zhuang Zhou dealt with the most abstract ontological philosophizing of beings as well as the most practical considerations in living with the sociocultural conventions. In this sense, we could take the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*

⁴⁸ HY 93/33/67-68.

⁴⁹ HY 93/33/65-66.

to care about the beings of the inner-most spiritual activity and the beings of the outer-most reach of reality without separating them into distinctive boundaries.

The comprehensive coverage of the *Zhuangzi*'s care of beings, as well as *Zhuangzi*'s seamless caring of both of them, point for us the important theme of the “inner sage and outer king” in the *Zhuangzi*. The “inner sage” is achieved through the reconciliation of the beings within the individual experience of the human being; and the “outer king” is achieved through the reconciliation of beings in the entire realm of reality. According to Qian Jibo's commentary to the *Tianxia* chapter, the *Zhuangzi*'s sage could act in a way that perfectly reconciles both the “beings of himself” and the “beings in the entire realm.”⁵⁰ In this sense, then, the “beings” that *Zhuangzi* reconciles includes both the beings in the internal experience of the human individual, and the beings in the outer realm of the entire world.

More importantly, from the “inner sage and outer king” theme, we see that in the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being, reality is not constituted by externally mapped “things” outside the human experience; and, complementarily, human existence is not separated from the “beings” in their life but are precisely constituted by their encountering of them. The ontological reality, as well as the very existence of human being, are consisted by “beings” that range from the inner-most sparkles of the heart-mind to the outer-most reach of the beings in the world. The ontological reality and human existence, therefore, are mutually and simultaneously constitutive of each

⁵⁰ Qian Jibo 钱基博, “Du Zhuangzi tian xia pian shu ji” 读<庄子.天下篇>疏记, in *Zhuangzi Tian Xia Pian Zhu Shu Si Zhong* 庄子天下篇注疏四种, ed. Zhang Fengqian 张丰乾 (Beijing 北京: Hua xia chu ban she 华夏出版社, 2009), 131.

other, and are never separable from each other. As a result, the human sage reconciles beings from the inner-most reach of his own existence to the outer-most reach of the ontological reality without any separation between them. Without the divide between the sparkles of one's subjectivity and the objectivity of external world, then, "inner sage" as the perfection of one's own existence and "outer king" as the perfection of the entire realm are deemed to be the same task; and are accomplished at the same time.

In other words, with the philosophy of being that simultaneously defines the ontological reality and human existence, we could see how the inner sage and the outer king are accomplished simultaneously. Indeed, we find that throughout the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, there are considerations on the beings that ranges from the inner-most reach of the human experience to the outer-most reach of the entire realm. From the theme of nurturing life in chapter 3 to the theme of the ultimate rulership in chapter 7, it covers from the internal spiritual nourishment of the human life to the ultimate ordering of the entire world. One specific example in the Inner Chapters that illustrates the sage's care of all beings within and without is the Aituota (哀駘它) parable in chapter 5 *Dechongfu*. Not only perfecting the beings within himself, Aituota also perfects the beings outside his own existence. Eventually, by seamlessly connecting and perfecting all the beings inside and outside himself, the inner virtue of the sage and the outer virtue of the king are accomplished simultaneously.⁵¹ Another good example could be found in chapter 7: the ideal sage ruler wanders in the realm of

⁵¹ HY 13-14/5/31-49.

the emptiness and silence, and follows and reconciles the beings without imposing his personal involvement, which then eventually leads to the ordering of the entire realm (遊心於淡，合氣於漠，順物自然而無容私焉，而天下治矣).⁵² These examples, therefore, perfectly illustrate that there is no separation between the reconciliation of beings in the inner human experience and the reconciliation of beings in the outer reach of the reality. The intimate connection between ontological being and human existence: i.e., how the beings present themselves to the human experience; and how the human being reconciles the beings in his experience, are precisely the task of this study.

In a word, *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* is not the “thing” as connotated to be the “object” in the modern philosophical divide of the subject and the object. Rather, *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* is better interpreted as a comprehensive “being” that constitute both the human experience and ontological reality with no separation between these two realms. *Wu* in the *Zhuangzi* is therefore simultaneously both the ontological being that defines the truth of reality and the existential being that constitutes the very human existence. Indeed, how the *Zhuangzi* presents the philosophy of being as both the ontological being in reality and the existential being in the human life, will be the major issue that this study seeks to explore further.

⁵² HY 20/7/10-11.

3. Conceptual clarifications on *wu* as being

I have explained why the concept of *wu* 物 is better rendered as “being” that constitutes all aspects of human experience and of reality. In this section, I am going to address the various concerns and objections that might be raised for this rendering. To start with, I want to clarify *wu* in relation to two other crucial ontological concepts in Daoist philosophy. With *wu* 物 commonly translated as “thing,” it is often considered that it is the pair of *you* 有 and *wu* 無 that raises the ontological considerations of “being” and “nonbeing” in Daoist philosophy.⁵³ Therefore, it seems to suggest that the “being” in Chinese philosophy is more appropriately expressed through the concept of *you* 有 rather than the concept of *wu* 物. However, both concept of *you* 有 and *wu* 無 exhibit certain conceptual abstractness in Daoist philosophy. As in the *Laozi*,

天下萬物生於有，有生於無。

The myriads of *wu* 物 under the heaven is generated from *you* 有; and *you* 有 is generated from *wu* 無.⁵⁴

In this passage, both *you* 有 and *wu* 無 are taken to have the generative power over *wu* 物. If we take *you* 有 as “being” and *wu* 物 as “thing,” this passage would be rendered as “things are generated from beings, and beings are generated from

⁵³ Refer to Perkins, “metaphysics in Chinese philosophy.”

⁵⁴ The *Laozi*, chapter 40.

nonbeing.” This rendering, however, is problematic, as the generation of things from beings seems to be not possible. A much more reasonable rendering would be to take *you* 有 as “Being” and *wu* 物 as “being,” with Being giving rise to the beings in the entire realm. Together, then, I take this passage to convey the message that Nonbeing (*wu* 無) as the ultimate source gives rise to Being (*you* 有), which then gives rise to all individual beings (*wu* 物).

The rendering of *you* 有 and *wu* 無 as generative sources over the various beings could be supported by the scholarly literature. According to David Chai, for example, *wu* 無 in Daoism is not merely the “ontic nonbeing” as the absence of being, which might have the connotation of nihilism; *wu* 無 is the “ontological nothingness” that acts as the source of all beings, emphasizing the creativity and cosmogony of the Dao with beings emerging from and returning to *wu* 無.⁵⁵ With this understanding, then, *wu* 無 is raised as the abstract concept of “Nonbeing” that is the source of all beings, rather than as “non-being” that is the simple negation of beings. As a result, *you* 有 as the opposite concept to *wu* 無, should also stand as an abstract concept rather than as the various individual beings. By focusing the study of the *Zhuangzi* on the philosophy of “being” rather than on the philosophy of “Being,” I am placing the emphasis on the various manifestations of beings themselves rather than on any abstract Being over the beings. I will explore the full dialectics between

⁵⁵ Chai, “Daoism and Wu.”

any abstract and transcendental concept of Being and the individual concrete beings in chapter 4 of this study.

Our second clarification on *wu* 物 is to place it in contrast with the concept of *wo* 我 (self). It might be argued that rather than capturing all aspects of human existence and ontological reality, the concept of *wu* is often raised as the opposite of *wo*, therefore is something that is outside the realm of the human self. *Wu* therefore stands externally to the human being, rather than closely and intimately connected to the human beings. In this sense, then, *wu* should be better translated as the external “object” or “thing” rather than “being.”

To address this objection, let me first accept the fact that indeed *wu* as a term in Chinese philosophy could be used in multiple ways. While most times it is used broadly as the pervasive and ubiquitous beings in both human existence and ontological reality, there are also occasions when it is used in a narrower sense to be specifically contrasted to *wo* as the human self. However, even in the context of conceptualizing *wu* as something external of the realm of the human self, there is no assumption that *wu* and self are distinctively separated. In this consideration, then, *wu* and *wo* could not be mapped as the object and the subject in the modern Western philosophy. Furthermore, both the external *wu* and the internal *wo* could be considered to be under the broader conception of *wu*, in which both *wu* and *wo* are subsumed under this broader conception of *wu*. One clear example for the broad conceptualization of *wu* to include all beings is the concept of *wanwu* 萬物 (myriads of beings), in which *wu* is taken to comprehensively capture all aspects of beings in

human experience and ontological reality. With this broad conception of *wu*, then, the human self is not excluded but is actually part of this broader conception of *wu*. As I will argue in the coming chapters, with *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* fundamentally constituting all human experiences and ontological reality, the very self of the human being is actually constituted by his encountering of the various beings in his life. In this sense, *wu* and *wo* are no longer opposite to each other, but precisely constitutive of each other in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*.

Our third clarification of *wu* places it in contrast with *xin* 心 (heart-mind). It might be argued that *wu* stands for external objects outside the human heart-mind. While *xin* captures all the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of the human existence, *wu* is something outside it. To support this reading, we see the fasting of the heart-mind (*xinzhai* 心齋) is explained as “not to listen to the heart-mind” but to “listen to the *qi*” and “waits for the *wu*” (无聽之以心而聽之以氣...氣也者，虛而待物者也).⁵⁶ In this passage, *xin* as the subjective heart-mind seems to be contrasted to *wu* as the objective things. In this case, then, rather than depicting a close and intimate connection between beings and human existence, there is a clear distinction that the *Zhuangzi* draws between *wu* and *qi* on the one hand, and *xin* on the other.

The first immediate reply to this concern is that while there could be certain distinction made between *wu* and *xin*, this distinction is not the same as positioned in the object-subject divide in the modern Western philosophy. The relation between *wu*

⁵⁶ HY 9/4/27-28.

and *xin*, rather than as an intellectual or epistemological understanding of the object by the human mind, is about a total immersive experience of the heart-mind of the beings. However, this immediate reply might not be satisfactory as the distinctive boundary between *xin* and *wu* is still present. To address this boundary, I will argue that the point of making a clear distinction between *xin* and *wu* is really to convey the message that the arbitrary and subjective wills of the human beings should not be imposed onto the necessary patterns and principles of the beings. The non-imposition of the subjective will onto the necessity of beings, however, does not mean there is no connection between *xin* and *wu*. Rather, the *Zhuangzi* presents a process of human transformation in which the human being transforms himself from the bad state of imposing his subjective wills onto the beings in his life, to an enlightened state of the self, in which the human heart-mind is harmoniously reconciled with the beings in his life. In this sense, then, although initially *xin* is contrasted to *wu* with the human subjective wills not imposing onto the necessary patterns of beings, eventually the transformed and enlightened human being will respond to the beings in a way that the human heart-mind and the beings are reconciled rather than antagonized. One such phrase is “responding without storing, therefore could triumph the beings without harming” (應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷)，⁵⁷ in which the human being responds to the beings in his life without storing them or imposing them. Eventually, therefore, there is the reconciliation between the heart-mind and the beings in the human life, and the conception of *xin* and *wu* are no longer incompatible.

⁵⁷ HY 21/7/33.

There is one more clarification on the philosophy of *wu* to make here. It is very important to note that “beings” in the *Zhuangzi* does not deploy a systematic use of terms as in the modern scholarly essays. Rather than demanding the *Zhuangzi* deploys a systematic and rigid conceptual use of *wu*, beings in the *Zhuangzi* are not only conceptualized by the term *wu*, but also expressed in the various examples of beings themselves. For example, while sometimes the *QWL* engages in abstract discussion on the *wu* explicitly, more often it enumerates the various beings without explicitly draw a conceptual definition of them as *wu*. *Wu* in the *Zhuangzi* are expressed as the “right” and “wrong” in the debates between Mohism and Confucianism; as the pair of “this” and “that” to concretely identify the contrasted identity of beings; as the pair of “life” and “death;” “beauty” and “ugliness,” etc. Also, the various human existential states in the numerous parables of the *Zhuangzi* are also beings in the human experience to be reconciled. For example, the “sadness” that the concubine feels in leaving her home country is also a “being” that is to be equalized with the “happiness” as another being that she eventually experiences.

In addition to directly elaborating the concrete examples of beings, another way to express the concept of being is through a series of related concepts to *wu*. For example, in the *Dechongfu* chapter, there are terms such as *shi* 事 (events) and *ming* 命 (destiny, order, mission) as related concepts to *wu* in elaborating the temporal proceedings of beings (事之變，命之行).⁵⁸ Another related concept to *wu* is the concept of *qi*, with *qi* acting as the vital energy that constitutes all *wu*. Through the

⁵⁸ HY 14/5/44.

elaboration of *wu* together with the various examples and the related terms, then, the *Zhuangzi* provides us a richer reading of the philosophy of being. In this way, our interpretation of the philosophy of being will not be confined in the abstract discussion on the term *wu* per se but is broadened and enriched in reading these other related parts as well.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided my initial exploration on the philosophy of *wu* 物 in the *Zhuangzi*. I point out that while the *Zhuangzi* shares with the *Laozi* the mystical orientation on Nonbeing as the source of all beings, it is the emphasis on the various manifestations of beings that is most characteristic of the *Zhuangzi*. The *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being also displays the rich analytical and dialectical sophistication that might be influenced by the Mohists and Hui Shi. I then provide an in-depth analysis on how the concept of *wu* should not be rendered as “thing,” which bears its deep connotations in the ancient Greek and modern Western philosophical assumptions. Instead, *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* is better conceptualized as “being” that captures all things, emotions, states, judgments, events, processes in all aspects of human existence and ontological reality. By explicating the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being through the “inner sage and outer king” theme in the *Tianxia* chapter, I argue that ontological beings and human existences are not only intimately connected but are actually mutually constitutive of each other. Finally, with the conceptual clarification on *wu*

with a series of related concepts and examples, we are now ready to explore the full philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* with a broader textual basis.

Chapter Three - The Simultaneous Presence of Existential and Ontological Problems of beings

In the previous chapters, I have argued that the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy has to be brought into a deeper reflection on its fundamental philosophical assumptions that are not necessarily identical to the ancient Greek preference of the determinate, universal, and permanent truth. I have also pointed out that the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* could be studied from the ontological-existential approach to reveal the more intimate connection between human existence and ontological reality that goes beyond the dualistic setting of modern epistemology and metaphysics. The *Zhuangzi*, in fact, depicts a philosophy of being with ontological reality and human existence not only intimately connected but also mutually constitutive of each other. From this chapter onward, I will proceed with closer textual analysis and interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* to further explore the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*.

Methodologically, I will adopt a close textual analysis and interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* text. Among all the chapters perhaps the most important one is the second chapter: *Qiwulun* (Discourse on the equalization of beings), hereafter abbreviated as *QWL*. As one of the most philosophically sophisticated text not only the *Zhuangzi* but also throughout the entire history of Chinese philosophy, this chapter is filled with dense and sophisticated, sometimes even circular and contradictory arguments. There is no way that we could claim a deep understanding of the *Zhuangzi* without a close reading of this chapter. My argumentation of the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, will devote a

great portion of attention to the reading of the *QWL* of the *Zhuangzi*.

Complementarily, the importance of other Inner Chapters as well as those highly related Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters is also not to be underestimated. These chapters provide not only inspiring philosophical argumentations but also vivid parables and metaphors with rich philosophical messages. The task of the coming chapters is to combine the analytical sophistication of the arguments together with the vivid and rich metaphoric parables to fully capture the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*.

While other chapters in the *Zhuangzi* might be less analytically oriented and structurally arranged, the *QWL* chapter is most known for its great philosophical sophistication. Specifically, there is a key section in the *QWL* that is filled with a series of dense arguments highly structured and organized. It starts from “great understanding is broad and unhurried, little understanding is cramped and distinctive” (大知閑閑，小知閒閒) - right after the first parable of the pipe of heaven (*tianlai* 天籟); and ends with “do not know where its coming-from: this is called preserving light” (不知其所由來，此之謂葆光) - right before the remaining parables of the *QWL*.¹ The importance of this key section to the understanding of the *QWL* and even the entirety of the *Zhuangzi* is undeniable. Yet this key section is infamously known for its difficulty for interpretation: not only are certain key phrases and key sentences hard to decipher, it is also filled with dialectical and analytical arguments that could easily run into mutual conflict with each other. For example, Allinson recognizes that

¹ *HY* 3-6/2/9-62.

in the *Zhuangzi* there are both passages that support the relativistic positions and passages that support the non-relativistic positions. He therefore points out that this reading will make the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* “either self-contradictory or ultimate unintelligible.”² Indeed, how we carefully deal with the logical structure and the dialectic fluidity of this key section of the *QWL* is the key to ensure a deep and sophisticated understanding of the *Zhuangzi*.

In the scholarly literature of the *Zhuangzi*, we often see that passages of this key section in *QWL* are selectively extracted to support certain arguments about the *Zhuangzi*. However, such extraction or selection often risks the danger of interpreting it partially. It is therefore crucial for us to take this key section of the *QWL* chapter holistically. Indeed, unlike other places of the *Zhuangzi*, where philosophical arguments are often raised as a sudden burst of prose attached to the end of the parables, this key section of the *QWL* lays out a flow of serial arguments with concrete logic and structure. The understanding of this key section, therefore, requires a very careful analysis of the entire logic and structure of this key section. In doing so, we need to take account of all the semantic and grammatic uses of the keywords and phrases, the logical connections and transitions among sentences, and the segmentation and division of the key section into different portions.

The importance of taking the *QWL* as a whole and analyzing its structural pattern is certainly shared by many scholars. For example, Wu, Kuang-ming does a close

² See Robert E. Allinson, “On the Question of Relativism in the Chuang-tzu,” *Philosophy East and West* 39, no. 1 (1989): 13-26.

textual reading of the first three chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.³ Ziporyn also adopts a step-by-step analysis of the key passages of the *QWL*.⁴ A.C. Graham not only emphasizes the importance of taking *QWL* in its entirety but goes further to point out that there is a recurring pattern in the *QWL*: the *Zhuangzi* first raises an idea; and then goes on to revise or attack it. Graham therefore suggests that it would be a completely misrepresentation to take the *Zhuangzi* as incoherent while in fact it is actually a change of the flow of the arguments.⁵ What we could take from Graham is that the *QWL* often first presents a problem or a position as the target; and then continues to offer a solution to address or even negate this problem. A partial reading of the *Zhuangzi* would risk the danger of taking the target as the final position of the *Zhuangzi*, while in fact the *Zhuangzi* only raises it as the tentative target to be addressed or negated later. In this consideration, then, a structural analysis of the *QWL* key section is crucial for us to unweave the *Zhuangzi*'s presentation of its philosophy from the problems to the solutions.

A structural analysis of the key section of the *QWL*, then, is our first step towards our holistic interpretation of the *Zhuangzi*. Here I take the *QWL* key section to be divided into three main portions. The first portion starts by presenting a series of existential problems that human beings create in their encountering of the beings in their life. Tainted by their subjective attachment and entanglement, the human beings

³ Wu Kuang-ming, *The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

⁴ Brook Ziporyn, "How Many Are the Ten Thousand things and I? Relativism, Mysticism, and the Privileging of Oneness in the 'Inner Chapters,'" in *Hiding the world*, ed. Cook, 33-63.

⁵ A. C. Graham, "Chuang-tzu's Essay on Seeing things as Equal," *History of Religions* 9, no. 2/3 (1969): 138, 148.

create a set of existential problems for the beings; and their lives are fundamentally bound in the duality and hierarchy that they create for the beings. The second portion then engages in considerable abstract discussion of beings as ontological concept. What we see in this portion is that the *Zhuangzi* starts by raising the ontological problems that beings create for themselves; and then proceeds to offer ontological solutions to address these ontological problems. This recurring pattern of “first problem and then solution” is crucial for us to read the multiple positions in the *Zhuangzi* not as incoherent contradiction but as different stages of argumentations: with the later ontological solutions seeking to address and correct the previous ontological problems.⁶ The third and last portion of the *QWL* key section then returns to the existential discussions of beings. Building upon the ontological solution and problems presented in the second portion, this third portion then seeks to offer the existential solution to address the existential problems of beings as raised in the first portion. The human being eventually reconciles the beings in his life as equalized and connected and transforms his very own existence accordingly.

In short, the key section of the *QWL* chapter follows the structure of “existential problems - ontological problems and solutions - existential solutions.” It is our task in this study to carefully read this key section of the *QWL* together with other chapters of the *Zhuangzi* to fully elaborate the existential and ontological philosophy of being in

⁶ In this second portion of the *QWL* key section, we will find that the relativistic passages and the non-relativistic passages are simply the stage of argumentations in which the *Zhuangzi* first raises the problem of relativism, and then address the problem by offering non-relativistic positions.

the *Zhuangzi*.⁷ This chapter, specifically, is devoted to present the existential and ontological problems of beings in the *Zhuangzi*. The main task is to explain how the beings as the *existential* beings that constitute the human life experience, and as the *ontological* beings that constitute the fundamental truth of reality, have a set of problems that render them irreconcilable with each other. It will present both the existential problems that human beings create for the beings in their life; and the ontological problems that beings create among themselves. It is only after we clearly lay out the problems of beings in this chapter, we will then proceed to chapter 4 and chapter 5 to see the solutions offered to address these problems.

1. Existential duality and hierarchy of beings by the “accomplished heart-mind”

(chengxin 成心)

The first portion of the key section of the *QWL* is devoted to address the human existential encountering with the beings in their life. It starts from “great understanding is broad and unhurried, little understanding is cramped and distinctive” (大知閑閑，小知閒閒) and ends in “even the divine Yu could not know, what solely could I do about it” (雖有神禹，且不能知，吾獨且柰何哉).⁸ This portion describes the human entanglement with the beings that binds them to an existential

⁷ It is worth-noting that the distinction between the existential and the ontological are heuristic. As we will soon argue, beings are always simultaneously both existential beings in the human life and ontological beings in reality.

⁸ *HY* 3-4/2/9-23.

condition that is full of confusion and misery. The understanding of this portion of the *QWL*, therefore, is crucial for us to explore the existential problems that human beings encounter in their dealing with the beings in their life.

The human existential entanglement with the beings in their life

The discussion on the human existential problems of beings begins with the presentation of the human encountering and entanglement with the beings in their life:

一受其成形，不忘以待盡。與物相刃相靡，其行盡如馳，而莫之能止，不亦悲乎！終身役役而不見其成功，荼然疲役而不知其所歸，可不哀邪！人謂之不死，奚益！其形化，其心與之然，可不謂大哀乎？人之生也，固若是芒乎？其我獨芒，而人亦有不芒者乎？

Once received his completed body, [a human being] does not forget [it] so as to wait for its exhaustion. Knifing and grinding with beings, his action exhausts like galloping, with no one capable of stopping [it] - is it not sad? Throughout entire life [he] labors without seeing any success, tied and toiled without knowing where he returns to - is it not to be lamented? People say him not dead – what good? His body transforms, and his heart-mind goes with it – can it not be called the great sorrow? ⁹ Human being's

⁹ I take this passage to describe the human encountering of beings. Therefore, I take the “subject” of the sentences in this passage to be a human being: all the pronouns (*qi* 其, *zhi* 之) in this passage are substantiated with the third person pronoun: he/his/him.

life – is it always this bewildered? Or, only I am bewildered, but others are not bewildered? ¹⁰

As the opening of the *QWL* key section, this passage describes an ordinary human being's experience of the encountering of beings in his life. With the human being “knifing and grinding with beings” (與物相刃相靡), his entire life is spent in bewilderment and sadness, with the body transforms and the heart-mind goes with it. Such bewilderment and sadness are created with the human attachment and entanglement with the beings (*wu* 物); and his entire life is wasted without success. What is most important here is that “beings” in the *Zhuangzi* are not presented as external objects that stand outside the human existence. Rather, beings in the *Zhuangzi* are the very modes and experiences that human beings encounter in their life.

Continuing describing the existential state of the bewildered human being, the next passage describes how the human beings encounters the various beings in their life, and how their bewilderment with the beings exhausts their life:

喜怒哀樂，慮嘆變熱，姚佚啟態；樂出虛，蒸成菌。日夜相代乎前，而莫知其所萌。已乎，已乎！旦暮得此，其所由以生乎！

Pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy, worry and regret, change and stagnation, levity and indulgence, stimulation and posture: music coming out of emptiness, steaming into mushrooms. Day and night they alternate

¹⁰ *HY* 4/2/18-21. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 56-61; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 38; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 51; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 11.

before [us], and no one knows where they sprout from. The end! The end!

Morning and evening [we] get this - is it what [we] rely on to live? ¹¹

This passage elaborates the various kinds of beings that human being encounters in his life. Here we see “beings” are elaborated in concrete examples: pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy; worry and regret... These various beings in the human life, or, in other words, these various modes of living experiences, emerge and present without cessation in the human life. The ordinary human being, as a result, is totally bound to these beings without even knowing where they emerge from. With such confusing and miserable existential state of the human being, the *QWL* then proceeds to ask: is such a life - a life that is totally entangled and bewildered with the beings - what we rely on to live?

The opening of the *QWL* key section, then, firmly establishes the theme of the human encountering and entanglement with the beings in their life as the root problem for the human existential bewilderment and sadness. There is, therefore, a deep existential concern on how the human existence is wasted in their entanglement with the beings in their life. This existential theme is not only seen in the *QWL* key section but also elaborated in other chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. To give some brief examples: in Chapter 3 *Yangshengzhu* (Master of nurturing life), Cook Ding’s encountering of the structures of the ox provides a vivid metaphor of the human encountering of beings in their life. ¹² With the overall theme of the chapter as the nurturing of the human life,

¹¹ *HY* 4/2/13-14. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 51-55; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 37-38; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 50; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 10.

¹² *HY* 7-8/3/2-12.

this parable is a perfect illustration on how the difficulties of the encountering of beings could be overcome by the forgoing of the sensory capacities and following of the inherent structures of the beings themselves, which eventually leads to the accomplishment of the nurturing of human life. In Chapter 4 *Renjianshi* (In the human realm) addresses the various types of human existential difficulties, ranging from the persuasion of cruel rulers to the preservation of one's life in difficult times --- all are concrete examples on how the existential difficulties in the encountering of different modes and beings of one's life could be addressed. More specifically, in chapter 4 we also see the fasting of the heart-mind (*xinzhai* 心齋) is elaborated as listening to the vital energy (*qi* 氣), the fundamental vital energy and constituent of all beings in the early Chinese philosophy. The ideal man is supposed to listen and follow the vital energy of the beings without imposing one's own heart-mind onto them.¹³ In Chapter 5 *Dechongfu* (Virtue fills sign) and Chapter 6 *Dazongshi* (The great ancestral master), the "true insight" of the sage is about how to view the various encountering of beings in the human life, including disability, miseries, misfortune, death, etc. Chapter 7 *Yingdiwang* (Responding emperor and kings) is about how the sage interacts with the beings in his life so as to achieve the ultimate order of all beings in the entire realm.

In a word, we see that throughout the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* there is the concern on the human existential encountering of beings in their life. With the *Zhuangzi* describing the human life as a series of encountering of beings, as concretely

¹³ *HY* 9/4/26-28.

manifested in the specific beings such as life and death; fortune and misfortune, the beings in the *Zhuangzi* are not external objects that stand in sharp contrast to the human life. Rather, they are experienced in human life and therefore is fundamentally tainted by the existential coloring of the human experience of them. This intimate connection between human beings and beings, or, in other words, the deep existential taint on the beings, is one of the central concerns that the *Zhuangzi* seeks to address.

Existential duality and hierarchy of beings as created by the accomplished heart-mind (*chengxin* 成心)

After pointing out that the human existential predicament is fundamentally rooted in their entanglement with the beings in their life, the *QWL* key section then proceeds to explicate more on how the existential entanglement is experienced in the human life.

The following passage captures it brilliantly:

大知閑閑，小知閒閒；大言炎炎，小言詹詹。其寐也魂交，其覺也形開，與接為構，日以心鬪。縵者，窖者，密者。小恐惴惴，大恐縵縵。其發若機括，其司是非之謂也；其留如詛盟，其守勝之謂也；其殺若秋冬，以言其日消也；其溺之所為之，不可使復之也；其厭也如緘，以言其老洩也；近死之心，莫使復陽也。

Great understanding is broad and unhurried, little understanding is cramped and distinctive. Great saying is fierce, little saying is verbose. As for one's sleeping, the spirits exchange; as for one's awakening, the body opens. In

entangling with [one's] encountering and receiving, [one] uses the heart-mind for strife every day: the broad, the deep, the secret. Little fear is nervous and anxious. Great fear is upset and overwhelming. Its arising is like an arrow or a crossbow pellet – referring to its arbitration of right and wrong. Its staying is like an oath or treaty – referring to its defending and triumphing. Its killing is like autumn or winter – speaking of its daily deterioration. Its drowning into what it does – could not be turned back. Its sinking is like a cord – speaking of its corrupting in old age. The heart-mind that approaches death – no one could restore its vitality. ¹⁴

According to this passage, human life is filled with the encountering of beings that are positioned into dualistic pairs: “great understanding is broad and unhurried, little understanding is cramped and distinctive;” “great saying is fierce, little saying is verbose.” In other words, the beings that human beings encounter are not in a vague and vast mapping of beings that are unordered and unprioritized, but as dualistic pairs of beings that are contrasted and opposed. In other words, the duality of beings, rather than ontologically or objectively created by the beings themselves, are *existentially* created by the human experience of it.

This passage then explicates on how the existential duality of beings are created by the human beings. Specifically, in the human encountering of beings in their life, there are both the attachment to the beings so that they “stay” “like an oath or treaty,”

¹⁴ HY 3-4/2/9-13. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 51-54; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 37; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 50; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 10.

and the abhorrence to the beings so that they are “killed” “like autumn or winter.” That is, human beings deal with the beings in their life with dualistic treatment. For the beings that they like, the human beings affix great attachment to them without letting them go. In contrast, for the beings that they do not like, they wish to avoid them or terminate them as much as they could. In other words, in the human experience of their encountering of beings, they tend to attach their dualistic preference and abhorrence to the beings.

The importance of duality as an existentially created problems by human beings is clearly recognized in the scholarly literature. For example, working on the theme of mysticism in the *Zhuangzi*, Yearley points out that the ultimate goal of mystical experience in the *Zhuangzi* is to reconcile the dualism in daily life.¹⁵ Indeed, throughout the entirety of the *Zhuangzi*, we see the human being encounter the beings in their life in dualistic pairs. For example, in the dialogue between Duke Ai of Lu and Confucius in chapter 5 *Dechongfu*, we see beings in the human life are divided into dualistic pairs: death and life (死生), surviving and perishing(存亡), failure and success (窮達), poverty and riches(貧富), worthiness and unworthiness (賢與不肖), slander and praise (毀譽), hunger and thirst (飢渴), cold and heat (寒暑).¹⁶ The human encountering of beings, therefore, are polarized into existentially created dualistic pairs that the human beings attach their preference and abhorrence to. It is the

¹⁵ Yearley, “The Perfected Person.”

¹⁶ *HY* 14/5/43-44.

human existential preference and abhorrence that sets beings in the human life into dualistic opposition without reconciliation.

How, then, is the existential duality of beings created in the human experience? In other words, how exactly do the human beings experience the beings in their life and attach preference or abhorrence to the beings? The following passage then proceeds to explicate it:

夫隨其成心而師之，誰獨且无師乎？奚必知代而心自取者有之？愚者與有焉。未成乎心而有是非，是今日適越而昔至也。是以无有為有。无有為有，雖有神禹，且不能知，吾獨且柰何哉！

As for following the accomplished heart-mind and deem it as the master, who solely has no master? How necessary that [only those who] knows there is alterations and chooses by his own heart-mind has a master? ¹⁷

The fool also has [his master] there. Not yet accomplished in the heart-mind, yet [already] there are right and wrong - this is to leave for Yue today but have arrived yesterday. This is to take Nonbeing as Being. ¹⁸

Nonbeing as Being, even the divine Yu could not know, what solely could I do about [it]? ¹⁹

¹⁷ There is quite a bit of omission here in this sentence. I take *dai* 代(alteration) to be the alteration of the dualistic beings (e.g. right and wrong); and *qu* 取 (choose) to be the accomplished heart-mind chooses one of the dualistic beings (e.g. choose right or choose wrong).

¹⁸ Here I translate the contrast between *wuyou* 无有 and *you* 有 as Nonbeing and Being.

¹⁹ *HY* 4/2/21-23. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 56-62; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 38-39; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 51; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 11.

In this passage, the *Zhuangzi* roots the human existential creation of dualistic beings through their “accomplished heart-mind” (*chengxin* 成心).²⁰ Specifically, it claims that “not yet accomplished in the heart-mind, yet [already] there are right and wrong” is just as impossible as “leaving for Yue today but having arrived yesterday.” That is, the existential duality of beings (here instantiated as the presence of right and wrong) is not possible without the involvement of the human accomplished heart-mind. Without the accomplished heart-mind that is preoccupied by our existential attachment and abhorrence to beings, there would have been no duality of beings in the human life. In this sense, then, the existential duality of beings is engendered by the accomplished heart-mind attaching its preference to certain beings and its abhorrence to other beings. These two ends, therefore, consists the existential duality of beings and the human entanglement with them.

Indeed, it is in the accomplished heart-mind of the human beings that beings are dualistically paired into the preferred and the abhorred ones. This is further explicated in the *QWL* as “that right and wrong is brought into light is what makes the Way to wane. What makes the Way to wane is what makes love to be accomplished” (是非之

²⁰ Note the word “accomplish” (*cheng* 成) appeared in multiple key phrases in the *Zhuangzi*. In this first portion, it comes in the term “the accomplished heart-mind (*chengxin* 成心), in the third portion of the *QWL* key section, it comes in the pair of “accomplishment and destruction” (*chengyuhui* 成與毀) and “accomplishment and waning” (*chengyukui* 成與虧). All three occurrences of “accomplishment” (*cheng* 成) have the commonality in them: the human existential preference and abhorrence bind them to love certain beings and hate other beings in their life. They all raise the problem of the existential duality and hierarchy that human beings create for beings in their life.

彰也，道之所以虧也。道之所以虧，愛之所以成。²¹ It is with the human accomplishment of love (another more concrete expression of what the “accomplished heart-mind” does), the dualistic contrast of right and wrong is brought into light; and the Way is waned and incomplete. In a word, with the human accomplished heart-mind that attach their love and preference to certain beings and hatred and abhorrence to other beings, the beings are existentially grouped into dualistic pairs in the human life.

The existential duality that the accomplished heart-mind creates for the beings has greater impact on the human life. Not only positioning the beings into dualistically opposed pairs, the human being also categorizes them into hierarchically arranged orders:

百骸，九竅，六藏，賅而存焉，吾誰與為親？汝皆說之乎？其有私焉？如是皆有為臣妾乎？其臣妾不足以相治乎？其遞相為君臣乎？

The hundred bones, nine openings, six storing organs: complete and present there. Who should I deem more kin? Are you pleased with them all? Is there any personal favorite? If so, are they all vassals and concubines? Are the vassals and concubines not adequate to rule each other? Do they take turn to be ruler and vassal? Are there really a genuine

²¹ HY 5/2/42. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 74-76; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 41; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 54; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 14-15.

ruler present? In searching for its reality, whether [we] obtain or do not obtain [it], [it] does not benefit or harm its genuineness. ²²

With the human heart-mind affixing our preference and abhorrence to the beings in our life, the dualistically paired beings are not merely opposing each other but also determinedly affixed into the inequality of the superior ones and the inferior ones. Consequently, this sets up an existential hierarchy of beings with the superior beings and the inferior beings hierarchically ordered by the human heart-mind. In the human experience of beings, therefore, there is the inequality and hierarchy of the higher-ordered superior beings and the lower-ordered inferior beings, like the hierarchy of ruler and vassals; of vassals and concubines. Therefore, with the creation of existential duality, there also comes the existential hierarchy of beings in the human life. The human experience of beings is set in an existentially created hierarchy with some beings ranked as the higher and the superior and others as the lower and the inferior.

Therefore, the hierarchy of beings is existentially created by human accomplished heart-mind rather than a purely ontologically independent issue without human intervention. The hierarchy of beings in the human life is fundamentally rooted in the existential duality that the human accomplished heart-mind creates and bonds to the beings. It is the human preference and abhorrence to the beings that sets them into the existential hierarchy of the superior and the inferior beings. As the hierarchy is fundamentally rooted in the existential duality of beings, the key to the equalization of

²² *HY* 4/2/16-17. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 55-59; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 38; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 51; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 10-11.

the existential hierarchy of beings lies in the existential reconciliation of the duality of beings in the human life.

2. Ontological duality as the root for ontological hierarchy, relativism and skepticism

In addition to the existential problems of beings as created by the human experience of them, in the *Zhuangzi* there are also explications on the ontological problems of beings themselves. With beings present themselves and mutually interact with each other, there is also a whole set of ontological problems created by the beings themselves. In this section, I will proceed to explicate the ontological problems of beings in the *Zhuangzi* by exploring the second portion of the *QWL* key section from “as for saying, it is not blowing” (夫言非吹也，言者有言) to “the broad, the grotesque, the deceptive and the incongruous, the Way connects them into Oneness” (恢恠憭怪，道通為一).²³ In this second portion, the *Zhuangzi* presents an ontologically-oriented discussion on how the beings engender problems among themselves.

Before we start our detailed explication on the ontological problems of beings, it is helpful to recall that the second portion of the *QWL* key section is structured to present both the ontological “problems” and the ontological “solutions” of the beings. Indeed, in this portion of the *QWL*, we see that the *Zhuangzi* first raises the ontological

²³ *HY* 4/2/23-35.

problems that the beings create among themselves, and then proceeds to address these problems by offering solutions to correct and negate them. This structure is important because oftentimes there is a predominant emphasis on the ontological problems of the beings (such as skepticism or relativism). Yet, rather than stopping at presenting these problems of beings, the *Zhuangzi* actually proceeds further to offer the ontological solution and reconciliation to address these problems. That is, rather than sticking to the ontological problems of beings, the *Zhuangzi* eventually reverses these problems and raises affirmative and conclusive solutions for these problems. By recognizing this structural pattern, we will understand that the problems of skepticism and relativism are only intermediary positions rather than the ultimate conclusive positions in the *Zhuangzi*. In this section, I will start by discussing the ontological problems of beings, and I will discuss the ontological solutions of beings in the next chapter.

Transitioning from the existential to the ontological

The second portion of the *QWL* key section opens its ontological discussion of the beings in the following passage:

夫言非吹也，言者有言。其所言者特未定也。果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於鷦音，亦有辯乎？其無辯乎？道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？道隱於小成，言隱於榮華。故有儒、墨之是非，以是其所非，而非其所是。欲是其所非而非其所是，則莫若以明。

As for saying, it is not blowing. Saying says something, yet what it says is peculiarly not fixed. Are there really something in saying? Or are there not yet anything in saying? As for [those who] think it different from the sound of the fledglings – is there distinction? Or is there no distinction? In what does the Way conceal that there are genuine and fake? In what does saying conceal that there are right and wrong? ²⁴ In what does the Way go but not present? In what does saying present but not allowed? The Way conceals in the little accomplishment. Saying conceals in the foliage and flowers.

Hence there are the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists: to affirm what one denies and to deny what one affirms. Wanting to affirm what one denies and deny what one affirms ²⁵ – then nothing is comparable to use illumination. ²⁶

I position this passage as transitioning from the “existential” argumentations to the “ontological” argumentations on the beings. Specifically, it transitions from the existentially oriented problems that human beings create in their encountering of beings; to the ontologically oriented problems of beings that are created by the beings themselves. This is achieved through a series of sophisticated argumentation on the

²⁴ Both Graham and Ziporyn takes *dao* 道 (the Way) and *yan* 言 (saying) as the objects to “be concealed.” But from the grammar of the original Chinese passage I do not see the explicit “passive” tone. For this reason, I take the Way and saying to “conceal” themselves.

²⁵ “Affirm” and “deny” are the translations of the Chinese characters: *shi* 是(right) and *fei* 非(wrong), which could be translated as either the pair of nouns: “right and wrong” or the pair of verbs: “affirm and deny”.

²⁶ *HY* 4/2/23-27. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 63-65; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 39; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 52; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 11-12.

human sayings (*yan* 言), the right and wrong of arguments (*shifei* 是非), and the truth or falsehood the Way (*zhenwei* 真偽). To start with, it begins by raising concerns on the meaningfulness of human saying and words.²⁷ It raises skeptical questioning on whether human saying really expresses any concrete meanings, on whether they are different from any arbitrary animal voice, on whether they actually make any distinctions, and on whether the articulations ever existed in the first place. My main concern here is not to engage with the argument on the problem of sayings per se, but to point out how the discussion on the human saying could be taken both existentially as the “being in human experience” and ontologically as the “being in itself.” Existentially, the human words and sayings convey existential experience of human beings; and their meaningfulness is deeply embedded in the human existential concerns expressed in the words. Ontologically, the meaningfulness of words is taken as the abstract ontological beings; and the concern is on whether such “being” holds any significant and valid meaningfulness as the “being in itself.” In these considerations, these skeptical argumentations on the existence, meaningfulness, and truth of the human sayings contain both the existential considerations and ontological considerations of beings.

Following from the skeptical arguments about the human words and sayings, the passage then proceeds to an even more ontologically oriented argument. By asking

²⁷ Here I take *yan* 言 as literally and as plainly as “saying.” I do not translate it as “language” as I think the term “language” is heavily connotated with the abstract argumentations in the philosophy of language, a prevailing trend in the 20th century Western philosophy. Also, *yan* 言 is translated as “say/saying” rather than “speak/speech” as in the Chinese philosophy there is no dichotomy between speech and writing.

questions on where the “right” and “wrong” of the human saying are; and where the “truth” and “falsehood” of the Way are, this passage raises the issue of the “truth” and “falsehood” of the Way in relation to the issue of the human words and sayings. It thus bridges us from a more existentially oriented concern on beings to a more abstract discussions on the truth of the Way itself. It thus transitions us from the existentially oriented arguments on human’s sayings and their existential experience, to a more abstract and more analytically complicated argumentations on the truth of beings ontologically.

Finally, the passage instantiates the meaningfulness of human words and the truth of the Way through the dispute between Confucians and Mohists. Historically contextualized in the intellectual trend of the time, it raises issues on whether right or wrong could be made in discerning the different philosophical arguments of the different schools. The fact that both Confucians and Mohists considered themselves right and the other wrong points to the dilemma of the mutual denial of the two schools. Taken existentially, both schools were attached to their arguments and degraded the other school’s arguments, therefore existentially created the “rights” and “wrongs” for each other. Taken ontologically, “right” and “wrong” could be taken as the abstract ontological beings. The ontological issue that the *Zhuangzi* raises here is whether the rights and wrongs (of philosophical arguments, of human word and conversations) hold any truth in them; or whether they are permanently stuck in mutual opposition to each other. In other words, through the mutual denial of the rights and wrongs by Confucians and Mohists, we see “right” and “wrong” are not only existential creations of human beings in making judgment but are also abstraction

“beings” confined within themselves and raise mutual opposition to each other. In this way, then, the *QWL* key section transitions from the existentially dominated presentations of beings as experienced by the human beings, to a more ontologically dominated presentation of beings in the beings themselves.

Ontological duality

With the transition from the existential elaborations of beings to the ontological discussion of beings, the *QWL* key section then proceeds to present the ontological problems of beings as generated from the beings themselves:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。

No being is not “that,” no being is not “this.” From “that,” then (it) could not be seen; from “itself,” then (it) knows itself. Hence it is said: “that” comes from “this,” and “this” also comes from “that.” Such is the saying of just the lives of “that” and “this.” Despite of this reason, just when there is life there is death; just when there is death there is life; just when there is allowable there is unallowable; just when there is unallowable there is allowable. Go by right and go by wrong, go by wrong and go by right. For

this reason, the sage does not follow (it), but to reflect it upon Heaven. It is also to “go by it.”²⁸

In this passage, the discussion on the beings is raised with considerable degree of abstraction as the ontological beings themselves rather than as beings in the human existence. In other words, here the problems of beings are no longer presented as existential problems that human beings create for the beings but as ontological problems that beings mutually create among themselves. The focus of the argumentation therefore shifts completely from an existentially oriented reading of the beings to the ontologically oriented reading of the beings. It raises an ontological discussion of *wu* as “beings” that actively engage and interact with each other rather than passive “things” as observed by the human subject. The problem that this passage identifies, therefore, is not about how an external human observer epistemologically understand things but about the ontological problem as created by the beings themselves.

What immediately comes to our attention in this passage is that the beings are taken into dualistic pairs. In this passage, the first sentence dualistically contrasts *bi* 彼 (that) and *shi* 是 (this). The second sentence dualistically contrasts *bi* 彼 (that) and *zi* 自 (it; itself). Here I take *zi* 自 (it; itself) as equivalent to *shi* 是 (this), and both are dualistically contrasted to *bi* 彼 (that). In this way, I take the subjects of the first two sentences referring to the same pair of dualistic beings: with the dualistic beings

²⁸ *HY* 4/2/27-29. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-67; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 39-40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 52; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

of “this and that” in the first sentence to be equivalent to the dualistic beings of “it and that” in the second sentence.²⁹ Indeed, the importance of duality in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* is well recognized in the scholarly literature. Graham, for example, recognizes the dualistic thinking in the *Zhuangzi* by acknowledging its use of various pairs of terms such as “that’s it” and “that’s not.”³⁰ Comparatively, Berkson points out there is resemblance between the “problem of binary opposites” in the *Zhuangzi* and the deconstruction of Derrida.³¹

By grouping beings into dualistic pairs, the passage raises several ontological problems that beings engender among themselves. To start with, it points out the problem of the internal constraint of the beings as self-confining and restricting within itself; and the mutual denial and opposition of the dualistically paired beings. Specifically, no being is not “this” (物無非是): although “that” is taken by “this” as a “that”, it is affirmed by itself as a “this.” Similarly, no beings are not “that” (物無非彼): although “this” is affirmed by itself as a “this,” it is taken by “that” as a “that.” In

²⁹ Here my reading differs from Graham and Ziporyn. Both scholars take the subject of the second sentence as a concrete human individual: an observer that stands outside of *wu* (thing). In contrast, my reading takes the subject of the second sentence to be *wu*: the beings themselves. My reading is consistent with Guo Xiang’s commentary. In his commentary to the passage, Guo Xiang writes: “as for the partiality of beings, all of them could not see what ‘others’ see but solely know what they ‘themselves’ know” (夫物之偏也，皆不見彼之所見而獨自知其所知). Here Guo Xiang takes the subject of the second sentence (自彼則不見，自知則知之) as the *wu* (being) themselves rather than an external observer. I think this difference is fundamentally rooted in Graham’s and Ziporyn’s commitment to the modern “epistemological” approach, in which *wu* is taken as things to be observed by an external human observer; while in contrast, Guo Xiang and my reading allow *wu* to be the “ontological” being that could actively participate in relation with other beings.

³⁰ Refer to Graham translation of the *Zhuangzi*, especially the *Qiwulun* chapter. See Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*.

³¹ Mark Berkson, “Language: The Guest of Reality – *Zhuangzi* and Derrida on Language, Reality, and Skillfulness,” in *Essays on Skepticism*, ed. Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, 106-109.

other words, when taken by itself, it is the “recognized” and “affirmed” “this” (自知則知之); but when taken by its opposite, it is the “unrecognized” and “denied” “that” (自彼則不見). That is, the affirmation of the being as a “this” is defined only within itself, therefore is conditioned and constrained only within itself. In contrast, the denial of the being as a “that” is created by its opposite, therefore the pair of beings is in perpetual mutual denial and opposition to each other. In other words, looking from the angle of “this”, “this” could be seen and affirmed; looking from the angle of “that”, “this” is denied and opposed. In this way, therefore, there are both the problem of the internal confinement and limitation within each being itself, and the problem of mutual denial and opposition of the paired beings.

After elaborating the internal constraint and mutual opposition of beings, the passage then proceeds to point out another crucial problem in the relation of the paired beings: despite that the paired beings are ontologically opposing each other, they are also ontologically dependent on each other. “This” is derived from “that;” and “that” is also derived from “this” (彼出於是, 是亦因彼). In this way, then, the beings always arise in dualistic pairs, as they are mutually dependent on each other. This mutual dependency is seen in their mutual presencing and arising with each other: just with life there is death (方生方死, 方死方生); just with allowable there is unallowable (方可方不可, 方不可方可); and going by right and going by wrong (因是因非, 因非因是). These dualistically contrasted pairs of beings, despite of raising opposition to each other, also always arise together as mutually dependent pairs. In

this sense, therefore, the ontological duality of beings exhibits the co-presence of the mutual opposition and mutual dependency with each other.

Indeed, the issue of ontological duality as both dependency and opposition is raised not only in the *QWL* key section, but also in other chapters in the *Zhuangzi*. One important entry appears in the *Qiushui* chapter:

北海若曰：「以道觀之，物无貴賤；以物觀之，自貴而相賤；以俗觀之，貴賤不在己。以差觀之，因其所大而大之，則萬物莫不大；因其所小而小之，則萬物莫不小；知天地之為稊米也，知(毫)[豪]末之為丘山也，則差數覩矣。以功觀之，因其所有而有之，則萬物莫不有；因其所无而无之，則萬物莫不无；知東西之相反而不可以相无，則功分定矣。以趣觀之，因其所然而然之，則萬物莫不然；因其所非而非之，則萬物莫不非；知堯、桀之自然而相非，則趣操覩矣。」

Ruo of the Northern Sea says: “Viewing it from the Way, beings have no superiority and inferiority. Viewing it from the beings, deem superiority in itself and inferiority with each other. Viewing it from custom, superiority or inferiority does not lie in itself. Viewing it from difference: go by that which makes it big and take it to be big, then none of the myriads of beings is not big; go by that which makes it small and take it to be small, then none of the myriads of beings is not small. Know that Heaven and Earth are grains of rice, and that the tip of a hair is a hill or a mountain, then difference and quantity are seen. Viewing it from function: go by that

which makes it have it and take it to have it, then none of the myriads of beings does not have it; go by that which makes it not-have it and take it to not-have it, then none of the myriads of beings does not not-have it. Know that east and west are mutually opposed but could not do without each other, then function and distinction are set. Viewing it from inclination: go by that which makes it so and taking it to be so, then none of the myriads of beings is not so; go by that which makes it wrong and take it to be wrong, then none of the myriads of beings is not wrong. Know that Yao's and Jie's self-affirmation and mutual-denial, then inclination and integrity are seen. ³²

In this passage, we see that after raising several examples of the dualistic pairs of “superiority and inferiority” (*guijian* 貴賤), “big and small” (*daxiao* 大小), “Being and Nonbeing” (*youwu* 有無), it proceeds to point out that “know that east and west are mutually opposed but could not do without each other, then function and distinction are set.” That is, despite that beings always arise in mutual opposition to each other, their opposition is also what they depend on to give rise to themselves in the first place. In other words, ontological duality, taken in the form of mutual dependency and opposition, is both what gives rise to beings and what causes the problems of opposition and confliction among beings. In this way, therefore, ontological opposition and ontological dependency of beings will always

³² HY 43/17/29-34. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 577-579; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 179-180; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 146-147; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 71.

simultaneously come together. The ontological duality of beings does not only take the form of mutual opposition and contradiction of beings, but also the mutual dependency and simultaneous presencing of the paired beings together.

Therefore, we could conceptualize the problem of “ontological duality” of beings as follows. It is the mutual relationing of the paired beings as both dependent on and opposing to each other. In other words, the dualistic relation between beings is not only about their mutual opposition and contradiction, but also about their mutual dependency and generation of each other. Throughout the *Zhuangzi* text, indeed, we see a comprehensive list of dualistic paired beings that are simultaneously dependent on and opposing to each other. For example, “self and other” are the dualistically dependent and opposite pair of “subjects;” “it and other” are the dualistically dependent and opposite pair of “things;” “life and death” are the dualistically dependent and opposite pair of “existential states,” “pleasure and pain” are the dualistically dependent and opposite pair of “existential feelings;” “right and wrong” are the dualistically dependent and opposite pair of “normative judgments;” and “allowable and not-allowable” are the dualistically dependent and opposite pair of “permissions.” All these pairs of subjects, things, existential states, existential feelings, normative judgments and permissions could be abstracted and generalized as the dualistic “beings” of “this and that” (*bishi* 彼是) with “this” and “that” both dependent on and opposing to each other. Therefore, oftentimes in the *QWL* key section we see the *Zhuangzi* engages with abstract discussion on the paired beings of “this” and “that” as the generalized duality of all kinds of

ontological beings.³³ In this way, in the *Zhuangzi* the ontological duality is presented as the paired beings of “this and that” that are simultaneously dependent on and opposing to each other.

This conceptualization of ontological duality, then, helps us to understand the philosophy of beings in the *Zhuangzi* in a better way. First of all, it further strengthens our argument that *wu* in the *Zhuangzi* are not passive and receptive *objects* that are to be observed by the human subject; but are active *beings* that could exert considerable power to produce the dualistic dependency and opposition with each other. The mutual dependency and opposition among beings are created by the beings themselves actively participating in prioritizing themselves while degrading their opposite. In short, therefore, the beings in the *Zhuangzi* are not passively observed objects but are actively engaging beings among themselves. Secondly, with the simultaneous presencing of both dependency and opposition of beings, we also come to understand that the problem of dependency and opposition are always simultaneously presented and therefore needed to be addressed together. In this consideration, then, any solution that we later offer to address the ontological duality of beings need to address both the dependency and opposition of beings.

³³ Indeed, previous scholarship has suggested the importance of the pair of *shibi* (“this and that”, 是彼) among other pairs of duality in *Zhuangzi*. For example, A.C. Graham points out the conceptual recurrences of *shi* (是) in *Zhuangzi*: e.g. the pair of *shibi* (是彼) and of *shifei* (是非); as well as the phrases of *yinshi* (因是), *weishi* (為是), etc. In fitting these terms in his overall conceptual scheme of Chinese philosophy, Graham translates *shifei* as “that’s it” and “that’s not” and *shibi* as “it” and “other” (Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 33). Scholars have also pointed out the duality of “this and that” as the generalized form of the various oppositions in *Zhuangzi* (Yearley, “The Perfected Person,” 132; Ziporyn, “How Many,” 52).

Ontological inequality and hierarchy

With the problem of ontological duality (both dependency and opposition) of the paired beings, the *QWL* key section then proceeds to present a series of problems that follow from it. Ontological duality is not only a problem in itself but also the root cause for various other problems of the beings. The most immediate problem following from ontological duality is the ontological inequality or hierarchy among beings. This is most explicitly articulated in the *Qiushui* (Autumn Flood) chapter:

北海若曰：「以道觀之，物无貴賤；以物觀之，自貴而相賤；以俗觀之，貴賤不在己。...

Ruo of the Northern Sea says: “Viewing it from the Way, beings have no superiority and inferiority. Viewing it from the beings, deem superiority in itself and inferiority with each other.”³⁴

This passage presents the problem of ontological hierarchy as generated from the ontological duality of beings. According to this passage, from the angle of each being (以物觀之), it holds superiority to itself and projects inferiority to the other (自貴而相賤). In other words, ontological duality is expressed in the self-affirmation of beings themselves as the superior; and the mutual denial and degrading of their opposites as the inferior. What the duality of beings eventually leads to, is the inequality and

³⁴ *HY* 43/17/ 29-30. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 577-579; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 179; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 146-147; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 71.

hierarchy of beings with the affirmed and superior being on the top; and the negated and inferior being at the bottom. The ontological duality, therefore, is not merely a problem of dependency and opposition among beings, but also creates the far-reaching consequence of ontological inequality or hierarchy in which beings are set into a hierarchically ordered system of superiors and inferiors.³⁵

In fact, the importance of the inequality of beings could be seen by the very title of the *QWL* chapter itself. The title “the discourse on equalizing beings”³⁶ is a strong indication of the problem of the inequality of beings and the need to equalize the inequality of beings. Indeed, the central theme of the *QWL* is precisely to present a discourse on how the inequality of beings arises; and then, how the inequality of beings could eventually be equalized. Now, with ontological duality as the root cause for the problem of ontological inequality, the problem of the ontological inequality of the superior and inferior beings becomes the problem of the ontological duality of beings in their mutual dependency and opposition. In this sense, then, the theme of the *QWL* chapter, becomes how to reconcile the ontological duality of beings in their dependency and opposition, which will then reconcile the problem of ontological inequality and hierarchy as a result.

³⁵ As this passage suggests, the ontological duality and inequality could eventually be resolved with the perspective of the Way (*dao* 道), in which all beings are equalized with no being superior to other (以道觀之，物无貴賤). I will explore the ontological solution to the problems in the coming chapters.

³⁶ The rendering and interpretation of the *QWL* title differ among scholars. Feng Youlan renders it as “On Equality of Things”; Graham as “The Sorting Which Evens Things Out”; Schwartz as “On Seeing Things as Equal”; Ziporyn as “Equalizing Assessments of Things.” My rendering and interpretation of the chapter is “discourse on the equalization of beings.” The reason why I translate it in this way is explained in the main text.

Ontological relativism

Following from ontological duality and hierarchy, there comes the third problem: the ontological relativism among beings. Because beings are always only affirmed within itself and mutually dependent and opposite to each other, no being is granted with any permanent or universal truth. All beings are confined within themselves and are only relatively true within themselves. They are mutually denying and opposing each other so that no being holds any ultimate universal truth in it. In short, there is the problem of ontological relativism, in which all beings hold only relatively truth within themselves without any universal or permanent truth among all beings.

It is important to note here that the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is a specific one. It is not a generic version of relativism in which beings are un-hierarchically relativistic to each other, which could easily result in the nihilistic claim of “anything goes” or “anything is equal.” Rather, the version of relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is fundamentally a hierarchical version of relativism, as it rests deeply on the dualistic hierarchy that beings create among themselves. That is, the version of relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is built upon the ontological dualistic hierarchy that beings create to take itself as the superior and the opposite being as the inferior. In other words, relativism only results from the ontological duality and hierarchy that each being creates for itself and its opposite being. The root problem for ontological relativism, therefore, is not any generic relativism but rather the deeply dualistic and hierarchical ontological structure by the relative mutual positioning of the beings themselves. Therefore, the key to

resolve the problem of relativism eventually rests on how to address the ontological duality and hierarchy of beings at the more fundamental level.

Because the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is built upon the ontological duality and hierarchy of beings, it is a deeply “ontological” one rather than an “epistemological” one. This is considerably different from many other scholars’ approach to the relativism in the *Zhuangzi*. For example, Hansen treats the problem of relativism (or perspectival relativism) in the *Zhuangzi* as an epistemological position. For him, “relativism,” or “dependency relativism,” is taken to be the dependency of our perspectives on the context that we rely on to make these perspectives.³⁷ Also, in Connolly’s argument on perspectivism as the specific version of relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, he points out that it is about how “our knowledge of the world is inevitably shaped by our particular perspectives” so that “any one of these perspectives is as good as any other” and “any claims to objective or authoritative knowledge are consequently without ground.”³⁸ In these examples, then, relativism or perspectivism in the *Zhuangzi* refers to certain version of human epistemological knowledge of the reality. These epistemologically-oriented readings of relativism, as I have pointed out in the first chapter, is built upon the modern Western epistemological-metaphysical divide that is not necessarily assumed in the *Zhuangzi*.

My argument on the relativism in the *Zhuangzi*, in contrast, is a deeply “ontological” one. I argue that the ontological relativism among beings is generated

³⁷ Hansen, “Guru or Skeptic,” 150.

³⁸ Connolly, “Perspectivism as a way,” 487.

from the ontological duality and hierarchy of beings themselves. My reading of the philosophy of beings in the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, considers any issue of the beings as fundamentally and primarily located in the beings themselves. Ontological relativism, therefore, results from the ontological dependency and conflict among beings themselves, rather than from any epistemological or intellectual human understanding of the beings and things in reality. Consequently, then, with the problem of relativism in the *Zhuangzi* an ontological one, any solution to address the ontological problem of relativism also has to be an ontological one. That is, both the problem and the solution of relativism have to ontologically address the beings themselves rather than the human epistemological understanding of beings. In this way, the ontological problem and solution among beings themselves are philosophically prior to any epistemological problem and solution that human beings offer to their understanding of the beings. ³⁹

Ontological skepticism

With the problem of ontological relativism, there also arises the problem of ontological skepticism on whether any determinate truth could be identified for the beings. To see how ontological skepticism arises from ontological relativism, let us proceed to the next passage in the *QWL* key section:

³⁹ In my reading of the *Zhuangzi*, any epistemological relativism, i.e. human understanding of beings as relativistic, is derivative from the fundamental the ontological relativism among beings. That is, the ontological truth of beings among themselves is prior to the human epistemological understanding of beings.

是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？

果且無彼是乎哉？

This is also that; that is also this. This is also a right-and-wrong. That is also a right-and-wrong. Are there indeed this and that? Are there indeed no this and that? ⁴⁰

This passage starts with a reiteration of ontological duality and relativism of beings. “This” is also “that”; and “that” is also “this” (是亦彼也，彼亦是也). In each of the beings (both “this” and “that”), there are both the affirmed “right” and the denied “wrong” (彼亦一是非，此亦一是非). ⁴¹ In this way, it presents the ontological duality and ontological relativism between “this and that” and between “right and wrong,” in which the dualistically paired beings are always mutually dependent on and opposite to each other; and are always relative to each other. It then proceeds to raise the next question: with beings always both affirmed within themselves and denied with each other, is there any ultimate and determinate conclusion that we could make on whether there is really any affirmed “this” or any denied “that” in the beings. With the ontological relativism that beings mutually create

⁴⁰ HY 4/2/29-30. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-69; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 53; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

⁴¹ The two dualistic pairs of “this and that” (*shibi* 是彼) and “right and wrong” (*shifei* 是非) are closely related through the common word *shi* 是. In the first pair, “this” (*shi* 是) identifies a being that is closely identified or affiliated; and is contrasted to a remote “that” (*bi* 彼) that is further away or less affiliated. In the second pair, “right” (*shi* 是) refers to the affirmation of the being; and is contrasted to “wrong” (*fei* 非) as the denial of the being. More explanations on the uses of *shi* will be addressed in the next chapter.

among themselves, then, there arises the problem of ontological skepticism, in which no determinate truth of beings could ever be identified in the beings. In this way, we see ontological skepticism is generated from the ontological dualistic relativism of beings: because of the dualistic dependency and opposition of beings and the relative positioning of beings, there is no determinate ontological truth that could be identified for the beings.

In our argument, therefore, the problem of skepticism is generated from the problem of relativism. Indeed, this causal relation from relativism to skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* is well recognized in the scholarship. Yearley, for example, points out that the skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* arises from the relativism that “the fact that many different discourses are possible and that what is good inside one discourse, from one perspective, may be bad inside another discourse, from another perspective.”⁴² Hansen also argues that from the “weak relativism” that we acknowledge that our perspectives are relatively contextualized in the dependency of our perspectives, there is the “mild skepticism” to not to impose our perspectives onto other people’s.⁴³

What is worth reiterating here is that just like the problem of relativism is a deeply ontological one, the problem of skepticism, though seemingly an epistemological one, is also treated with ontological primacy in the *Zhuangzi*. Just like the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is about the relativistic truth of beings themselves rather than the relativistic human understanding of beings, the skepticism in the *Zhuangzi* is

⁴² Yearley, “The Perfected Person,” 126.

⁴³ Hansen, “Guru or Skeptic,” 150-152.

also about whether there is any determinate truth of the beings themselves rather than any determinate human epistemological understanding of the beings. The truth of beings is fundamentally prior to any epistemological understanding of the beings by the human beings. Therefore, both problems of ontological relativism and ontological skepticism are fundamentally rooted in the dualistic hierarchy that beings create among themselves, therefore both need to be addressed fundamentally on the ontological level.

Therefore, the fundamental ontological problem that the *Zhuangzi* identifies, is the problem of ontological duality, in which each being is constrained and affirmed within itself while also mutually dependent on and opposite to each other. With their mutual dependency and opposition, then, each being is taken as the affirmed superior within itself and the denied inferior by the other, which eventually results in building an unequal hierarchy of the superior and inferior beings. The ontological duality and hierarchy eventually result in the relativism among beings in which the truth of beings only holds within themselves but not universally across all beings; and the skepticism in which no determinate truth could be identified for the beings. With ontological duality as the fundamental root problem for all these problems, therefore, the key to resolve the problems of ontological inequality, relativism, and skepticism lies in the reconciliation and solution to address ontological duality as the mutual dependency and opposition among beings.

3. The simultaneous presence of the existential and the ontological problems of beings

In our previous writing, we addressed the human existential duality and hierarchy of beings as created by the human experience; as well as the ontological duality and hierarchy of beings as generated by the beings themselves. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* depicts both the existential duality and hierarchy of beings due to the human preference and abhorrence of them; and the ontological duality and hierarchy of beings due to the internal confinement and mutual relation among themselves. Not only do we have the existential reading of duality and hierarchy that is engendered by human imposition onto the beings; we also have the ontological reading of duality and hierarchy that is engendered by the conflict and contradiction among the beings themselves. In other words, the *Zhuangzi* presents the problem of the duality and hierarchy of beings simultaneously as the human existential attachment to beings and as the ontological limitations and mutual positioning among beings themselves.

Now, recall that in the previous chapters, we have argued that ontological beings and human existence are not only intimately connected but also mutually constitutive of each other. In this sense, then, the existential entanglement that human beings have with the beings and the ontological confliction of beings themselves are complementary aspects of the same problem. The mutual dependency and opposition among beings themselves is a reflection of the mutual dependency and conflict that human beings experience the beings in their life. The ontological confusion and duality of beings themselves is a mirroring image of the existential entanglement and

duality that human persons create for the beings. Conversely, the human existential creation of beings into dualistic pairs is also a reflection of the ontological mutual duality among beings themselves. Therefore, the existential likes and dislikes of human beings create for the beings is also a mirroring image of the ontological dependency and confrontation among beings themselves. In this sense, the existential problems of beings as created by human entanglement with them and the ontological problems of beings as engendered among beings themselves are two complementary aspects of the same issue rather than two separate issues.

Not only ontological duality and existential duality are complementary expressions of the same problem, ontological hierarchy and existential hierarchy are also complementary expressions of the same problem. The ontological hierarchy of taking the beings themselves as the affirmed superior and other beings as the denied inferior is a perfect mirroring parallel of the existential hierarchy of the human beings create in taking their liked beings as the affirmed superior and their disliked beings as the denied inferior. At this level, then, again, the ontological hierarchy of beings in reality and the existential hierarchy of beings in the human life are sourced upon the same set of the recognition of the affirmed superior on the one hand and the denied inferior on the other. In this sense, the ontological problems of beings and the existential problem of beings are the two complementary aspects of the same set of problem.

By underlying the deeper equivalence of the ontological problems of beings and the existential problems that human beings create for beings, we could now proceed to

raise a deeper argument on the relation between human existence and ontological beings. According to what we have already explicated in chapter 2, ontological beings and human existence are not only deeply connected with each other but also mutually constitutive of each other. Here in this chapter, with the ontological problems and existential problems rooting in the same set of problems, we could now proceed further to argue that both the beings and the human beings are simultaneously both ontological and existential. Speaking from the “beings:” beings are simultaneously both ontological beings that constitute the truth of reality and existential beings that constitute the existence of human experience. Speaking from the “human beings:” human beings are simultaneously both human existences filled with life experiences and ontological beings whose very existence is fundamentally constituted by the presencing of the beings that fills his life. In other words, beings are not merely ontological beings that constitute reality but also existential beings that constitute the human existence; and, human beings are also not only the human existences but also ontological beings as constituted by the presencing of beings in their life.

One possible way to see to why beings in the *Zhuangzi* are not merely ontologically defined but also existentially defined is through the comprehensive and active positioning of beings in the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy. All beings in the *Zhuangzi* are not external and passive objects that are to be intellectually understood by the human subject; rather, they are the pervasive beings that fills the entire human experience and are the very active constituent of the human experience. In this sense, then, the activeness of beings guarantees that beings are never passive objects but are actively engaging beings that constitutes the human existence fundamentally.

Therefore, beings are simultaneously both ontological beings in themselves and existential beings that are experienced by the human beings.

To see how the human beings are not merely existentially defined but also ontologically defined might be a bit more difficult. Perhaps here we could refer to Graham's argument. According to Graham, the human being "withdraws inward towards a viewpoint from which even his own body is perceived as external;" and "the withdrawal is not an exploration of inward experience" but "uncompromisingly extroverted."⁴⁴ By treating the human experience as "externalized" and "uncompromisingly extroverted," I take Graham's argument to help us explain the ontological constitution of human existence. The human existence is not merely an inward experience or existence of oneself, but fundamentally also projected as a being in the ontological reality. With the very existence of human being fundamentally constituted by the chain of the presenting of beings in his life, the human being himself becomes a grand ontological "being" that is collectively constituted by the numerous beings in his life.

In this sense, then, not only the boundary between ontological being and human existence is broken down, they are in fact mutually constitutive of each other. The existence of human being is not merely defined by the human experience per se but also simultaneously constituted by the presenting of beings in their life. Similarly, the beings are also not merely defined as ontological beings in reality but also existentially constituted by their positioning in the human experience. It is only after we grasp this

⁴⁴ Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 198-199.

mutual constitution of ontological being and human existence we then see the ontological problems and the existential problems of beings are the same problems with different manifestations.

4. The “illumination” (*yiming* 以明) that triumphs the existential and ontological problems of beings

In the above sections, we have presented the existential and ontological problems of beings in the *QWL* key section. As I have discussed previously, a holistic reading and a structural analysis of the *QWL* key section will reveal to us that the *Zhuangzi* does not stop at presenting the problems of beings but goes further to offer solutions to these problems. It always proceeds to offer solutions to address the problems and negate the positions as presented in the problems. Eventually, it is in the solutions rather than in the problems that the ultimate positions of the *Zhuangzi* are presented.

Before I proceed to offer the full-scaled exploration of the solutions to these problems in the coming chapters, I want to point out the structural indications in the *QWL* key section that marks the decisive turn from the problems to the solutions. Specifically, the phrase “to use illumination” (*yiming* 以明) appeared multiple times in the *QWL* key section as the indication to switch from the problems to the solutions. In this section, I will give a brief overview on how the *Zhuangzi* offers solutions to the problems through the three occurrences of “to use illumination.” Through the

structural analysis on how “to use illumination” is positioned in the passages of the *QWL* key section, we will see how the *Zhuangzi* establishes solutions to negate the existential and ontological problems of beings and offer solutions to these problems.

The first occurrence of “to use illumination” (*yiming* 以明) in the *QWL* key section appears in the opening passage of the second portion, in which the *Zhuangzi* makes a transition from the existential problems of beings to the ontological problems of beings:

道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？道隱於小成，言隱於榮華。故有儒、墨之是非，以是其所非，而非其所是。欲是其所非而非其所是，則莫若以明。

In what does the Way conceal that there are genuine and fake? In what does saying conceal that there are right and wrong? In what does the Way go but not present? In what does saying present but not allowed? The Way conceals in the little accomplishment. Saying conceals in the foliage and flowers. Hence there are the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists: to affirm what one denies and to deny what one affirms. Wanting to affirm what one denies and deny what one affirms – then nothing is comparable to use illumination. ⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *HY* 4/2/24-27. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 63-65; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 39; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 52; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 11-12.

We have cited this passage in our previous sections. The opening of the passage is where it makes the transition from the presentation of the existentially originated problems of beings to the ontologically oriented problems of beings. Elaborating on dualistic beings of right and wrong, this passage transitions from presenting beings from existentially created problems of human beings to the ontologically oriented problems of dualistic dependency and opposition. However, the passage does not just stop at presenting the problems of beings. It proceeds further with a concluding sentence: “Wanting to affirm what one denies and deny what one affirms - then nothing is comparable to use illumination” (欲是其所非而非其所是，則莫若以明). Ending the passage with this sentence is a turning point, in which the *Zhuangzi* negates the problems that it previously presented and offers a solution to address these problems.

To see how this structural turning is made requires us to analyze several keywords in the last sentence. The first and most immediate phrase is “not comparable” (*moruo* 莫若). I take “not comparable” as an indication that the problems of beings as presented in the first half of the sentence is inferior to the second half of the sentence: to use “illumination.” That is, all the problems of beings are “not comparable to” or “inferior to” the solution of the “illumination.” In other words, the phrase “not comparable” clearly indicates that there is the superiority of the “illumination” that acts as a solution offered to the problems presented. The second word that indicates this structural change is the transitional word “but” (*ze* 則). The word *ze* 則 is the transitional word that connects the first half and the second half of

the sentence. There are two ways that this transitional word might be rendered. It could be interpreted either as a straight follow-up of the first half of the sentence (therefore rendered as “then”); or as a negative transition from the first half of the sentence (therefore rendered as “but”). Together with the phrase “not comparable”, then, I take *ze* 則 as a negative transition of “but” to indicate the negation from the first half to the second half of the sentence. Taken together, I render the last sentence of this paragraph as that “the affirmation of what one denies and denial of what one affirms” is *not comparable to* “to use illumination.” While the first half of this sentence (as well as the previous sentences in this passage) summarizes the existential and ontological duality of beings, the second half of this sentence points out that these problems are not comparable to, or inferior to the illuminating truth that the *Zhuangzi* is going to substantiate later. In other words, there is a negation stated in this last sentence that the problems presented previously are not the final positions of the *Zhuangzi*. Rather, it is the “illumination” that will act as the final solution to the problems previously stated. In other words, through this first occurrence of “to use illumination,” this paragraph points a direction in the *Zhuangzi*: rather than staying forever in presenting the problems of beings, it will offer the “illumination” as the solution to address these problems of beings.

The second occurrence of “to use illumination” appears in a core passage of the second portion of the *QWL* key section, in which both the ontological problems and solutions are presented. A structural analysis of the passage will help us identify the decisive turn from presenting the problems to offering the solutions:

是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？

果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。

This is also that; that is also this. This is also a right-and-wrong. That is also a right-and-wrong. Are there indeed this and that? Are there indeed no this and that? This and that could not get its opposite - it is called the hinge of the Way. With the hinge, [one] starts to get to the center of the circle, so as to respond to the non-exhaustible. Right is a non-exhaustible. Wrong is a non-exhaustible. Therefore it is said: nothing is comparable to use illumination. ⁴⁶

A structural analysis of this passage will reveal the transition from the ontological problems to the solutions. As I have analyzed, the opening sentences of this passage present to us the ontological problems of duality, relativism and skepticism of beings. The second half of the paragraph then proceeds to offer the solutions to these problems by calling for an end to the dualistic takes on the beings. With the sentence “this and that could not get its opposite,” it calls for a non-dualistic positioning of beings as the solution to address the ontological problems as rooted in the ontological duality. It also offers various images such as “the hinge of the Way” and “the center of the circle” to metaphorically explain the solution. (I will analyze the details of the solution in chapter 4.) The passage finally concludes with the sentence

⁴⁶ HY 4/2/29-31. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-69; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 53; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

“therefore it is said: nothing is comparable to use illumination” (故曰莫若以明). With the “illumination” referring to the non-dualistic positioning of beings, it is offered as the ontological solution to address the ontological problems of beings. With the phrase “not comparable,” it points out the inferiority of the problems to the superiority of the solutions offered to address these problems. By concluding this passage with the last sentence, then, it clearly indicates the decisive turn from the problem to the solution, and the solution as the superior position to address the inferior problems.

The third occurrence of “to use illumination” appears in the third portion of the *QWL* key section, in which the *Zhuangzi* offers existential solutions to the existential problems:

昭文之鼓琴也，師曠之枝策也，惠子之據梧也，三子之知幾乎！……
若是而可謂成乎，雖我亦成也。若是而不可謂成乎，物與我無成也。
是故滑疑之耀，聖人之所圖也。為是不用而寓諸庸，此之謂以明。

Zhao Wen’s playing of the zither, Music Master Kuang’s propping of the stick, Huizi’s leaning on the sterculia, the wisdom of the three men were almost there! …… Can things like this be called accomplishment? Even I also accomplish. Can things like this not to be called accomplishment? Neither others nor I accomplish. For this reason, the brightness of chaos and doubts is what the sage targets at. For this reason [he] does not use

[accomplishment and waning] but to reside in experience. This is called to use illumination.⁴⁷

The third occurrence of “to use illumination” occurs after a discussion on the stories of the three accomplished men, in which the *Zhuangzi* raises dialectic and skeptical arguments about whether these three men really obtained any “accomplishment” (*cheng* 成). These stories, as I will demonstrate in full details in chapter 5, elaborate the human existential entanglement with beings and their failure to reconcile with the beings in their life. Towards the end of this passage, then, it makes a transition from presenting the existential problems to offering the existential solutions. This transition is made explicit through the last sentence: “for this reason [he] does not use, but to reside in experience. This is called to use illumination” (為是不用而寓諸庸，此之謂以明). There are three keywords in this sentence that marks the transition. First, through the phrase “for this” (*weishi* 為是),⁴⁸ it refers to the existential problems that human beings create in their entanglement with the beings (as presented by the stories of the three accomplished men.) “For the reason” that human beings create the existential problems of beings, the passage proposes “not to use” these problematic existential treatments to the beings. In this way, through the phrase “do not use,” it actually gives a denial to the existential problems that human beings create for the beings. Through the word “but” (*er* 而), the passage then makes

⁴⁷ HY 5/2/43-47. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 75-79; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 42; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 54-55; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 15.

⁴⁸ There are some complications regarding the phrase *weishi* 為是. I will explain it in later chapters.

the transition and proceeds to offer “to reside in experience” (*yuzhuyong* 寓諸庸) as the solution to address the existential problems of beings. The existential solution of “to reside in experience,” therefore, “is called to use illumination” (此之謂以明). In this way, by calling for not to use the existential problems that human beings create for the beings and offering the existential reconciling solution of “to reside in experience,” the third occurrence of “to use illumination” offers the existential solution to address the existential problems of beings.

The three occurrences of “to use illumination”, therefore, point out a structural pattern in the *QWL* key section. Rather than stopping at presenting the problems of duality, inequality, relativism and skepticism of beings, it always proceeds further to offer solutions to these problems. While the first occurrence of “to use illumination” gives us a general direction that the “illumination” serves as the solution to the problems of beings, the second and the third occurrences of this phrase offers the specific ontological and existential solutions to the ontological and existential problems of beings respectively. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* explicates how the “illumination” could triumph the existential and ontological problems of beings.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted a holistic reading of the *Zhuangzi* and especially the *Qiwulun* chapter. I have argued that beings in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* are

simultaneously both the *existential* beings in the human life that constitutes the human existence and the *ontological* beings in themselves that defines the truth of reality. Existentially, human beings create the existential duality and hierarchy of beings by their “accomplished heart-mind” attaching their preference and abhorrence to the beings. Ontologically, beings create the ontological duality and hierarchy among themselves through their self-affirmation and mutual dependency and opposition, which then leads to the problem of ontological relativism and skepticism with no universal and determinate truth possible for the beings. Moreover, the existential and ontological problems of beings are complementary readings of the same set of problem. The beings are not only ontologically constituting reality but also defining the very human existence. Conversely, human beings are also not merely the existences of themselves but also the ontological beings constituted by the presencing of beings in their life. Furthermore, by pointing out the structural transition in the *QWL* key section from presenting the problems to offering the solutions, we see the *Zhuangzi* offers the “illumination” as the ontological and existential solutions to the problems we raised above. The task of the remaining two chapters will be to explore how these ontological and existential solutions are offered specifically to address the problems raised in this chapter.

**Chapter Four - The Non-dualistic and Absolute Affirmation
of the “being in itself”**

In the previous chapter, I have raised the existential problems of beings as created by the human heart-mind as well as the ontological problems of beings as created by the mutual dependency and opposition of beings themselves. I have also pointed out that rather than stopping at these problems, the *Zhuangzi* actually proceeds further to offer reconciling solutions to these problems. From this chapter onwards, then, I will explore how these solutions are offered to address and reconcile the problems. In this chapter, I will first explore the ontological solution to the ontological problems. As I have argued, at the root of all the ontological problems is the problem of ontological duality, in which beings are confined within themselves; and are mutually dependent on and opposing to each other. Therefore, the key task for the *Zhuangzi* to address the ontological problems would be to address the ontological duality of beings. As I will argue, by grounding the truth of beings in each “being in itself,” each being is solidly and non-dualistically affirmed in itself without opening itself for dualistic challenge from its opposite, thereby resolving the problem of ontological duality and ontological hierarchy. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* raises an alternative version of ontology, in which the truth of being is absolutely grounded in the conditional constitution of the being in itself without resulting in the mutual conflict among beings, thereby offering a solution to the problems of relativism and skepticism of beings.

1. “To go by it” (*yinshi* 因是) as the ontological solution

To start our discussion on the ontological solutions offered to the ontological problems of beings, let us recall the structure of the *QWL* key section again. The first portion raises the existential problems that human beings create for beings, and the third portion offers the existential solution to the existential problems of beings. In both of these two portions, the logic is relatively straight-forward: it is either to present the problem or to offer the solution. The second portion of the *QWL* key section, however, is a little more sophisticated. Structurally, we see that the *Zhuangzi* presents both the ontological problems and the ontological solutions in the same portion. As I will analyze below, most of the passages in this portion starts by presenting the ontological problems and then transitions to offer the ontological solutions to address these problems. The structural pattern of the second portion of the *QWL* key section needs to be constantly reminded for us to interpret the solutions and the problems respectively. Since we have already presented the ontological problems in the previous chapter, in this chapter I will focus on analyzing and interpreting the ontological solutions to address and reconcile the problems. Let us start by quoting this paragraph in the second portion of the *QWL* key section:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。

No being is not “that,” no being is not “this.” From “that,” then (it) could not be seen; from “itself,” then (it) knows itself. Hence it is said: “that” comes from “this,” and “this” also comes from “that.” Such is the saying of just the lives of “that” and “this.” Despite of this reason, just when there is life there is death; just when there is death there is life; just when there is allowable there is unallowable; just when there is unallowable there is allowable. Go by right and go by wrong, go by wrong and go by right. For this reason, the sage does not follow (it), but to reflect it upon heaven. It is also to “go by it.”¹

This passage begins with presenting the ontological problems of beings and ends with a conclusion to offer a corrective solution to address the problems. Structurally, from “no being is not ‘that,’ no being is not ‘this’” (物無非彼，物無非是) to “go by right and go by wrong, go by wrong and go by right” (因是因非，因非因是) it raises the ontological problems of beings; and the last sentence of the paragraph: “for this reason, the sage does not follow (it), but to reflect it upon heaven. It is also to ‘go by it’” (是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也) is the solution offered to address the problems. That is, “for the (reason)” that the beings themselves always create the problems of mutual confrontation and hierarchy, which also results in the confusion of relativism and skepticism, the sage “does not follow” (*buyou* 不由) these problems of beings. Through the transitional word “but” (er 而), it makes the decisive turn from

¹ HY 4/2/27-29. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-67; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 39-40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 52; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

the problems of beings to offering the option of “to reflect upon heaven” as a solution to address these problems. Therefore, through this passage, we see that “for the reason” that the ontological problems of being always result in problematic state of the beings themselves, the sage “does not follow” the problems (聖人不由), but to reflect it upon the heaven (照之於天).

Indeed, the ontological solution is offered in the last part of the passage: “... to reflect it upon heaven. It is also to ‘go by it’” (照之于天，亦因是也). Here we see that rather than continuing offering the solution by “the heaven,” it then makes a further substantiation of “to reflect upon the heaven” by the phrase “to go by it” (*yinshi* 因是). This substantiation is made through the grammatic structure of “it is also...” (*yi...ye* 亦...也). By defining and substantiating “to reflect upon heaven” as *also* (*yi* 亦) “to go by it” through the affirmative keyword *ye* 也, the *Zhuangzi* suggests that “to go by it” is an equivalent substantiation of “to reflect upon heaven.” As a result, then, the ultimate solution to address the ontological problems of beings now becomes “to go by it” (*yinshi*).

With *yinshi* 因是 (to go by it) as the ultimate ontological solution offered to address the ontological problems, we shall proceed with a very careful interpretation of the term. Let us first analyze the word *shi* 是 in the phrase. There are two ways that *shi* could be used in classical Chinese. The first way is to use *shi* for the identification of something close by, and in this sense could be translated as “this” or “it.” This first use of *shi* is seen in the phrase *shibi* 是彼 (this and that): with *shi*

(“this”) as the identification of something close by, and *bi* (“that”) as the identification of something remote. In this sense, the dualistic beings of *shibi* (this and that) is consistent with the dualistic beings of *zibi* 自彼 (it and that). The opening of this passage, by demonstrating the mutual dependency and opposition of the beings of “this/it” (*shi* 是, *zi* 自) and “other” (*bi* 彼), points out the problems of ontological duality between the two beings of “this” and “that.” The second use of *shi* in classical Chinese language is the affirmation of something. In this second use, *shi* is contrasted with *fei* 非 as the denial of something. In this sense, *shi* is usually translated as “right” and *fei* is translated as “wrong.” In this passage, we also see the dualistic contrast between the ontological beings of *shi* (right) and *fei* (wrong) presented as ontologically dualistic beings in their mutual dependency and opposition.

Therefore, *shi* as a word is used as both identification (this, it) and affirmation (right). These two uses are not unrelated. In fact, there is a close connection between these two uses: the identification of something is often associated with the affirmation of something, as taking something as “this” rather than “that” is often associated with taking something as “right” rather than “wrong.” Graham for example, notices the common use of *shi* in these two phrases and renders his translation to reflect the common use of *shi* in the two pairs. He translates *shifei* as “that’s it” and “that’s not” and *shibi* as “it” and “other.” By using the common word “it” throughout these two phrases, Graham tries to recognize the use of *shi* as both the identification and the affirmation. My translation of these two phrases, however, opts for a more straightforward translation of *shifei* as “right and wrong” and *shibi* as “this and that.” The

main reason for this translation is to emphasize the dualistic contrast of the two pairs of beings in a more straight-forward way: with “this and that” referring to the ontological duality of the close and the remote beings; and “right and wrong” referring to the contrast of affirmation and denial as ontologically dualistic beings. While not emphasizing the common use of *shi* in these two pairs of beings, my rendering of the terms does not deny the deep connection between them.

With the clarification on the two uses of *shi* in the *Zhuangzi*, let us now proceed to interpret the compound *yinshi* 因是 in the passage. There are two occurrences of *yinshi* in this passage; and my translation of them differ considerably. In the context of the contrast between *yinshi* and *yinfei* 因非, I translate the first *yinshi* as “to go by right” that is contrasted to *yinfei* as “to go by wrong.” By juxtaposing “to go by right” and “to go by wrong”, the first *yinshi* is contextually contrasted to *yinfei* to demonstrate the ontological duality of the beings of right and wrong. The second occurrence of *yinshi* is rendered differently from the first occurrence. As the ultimate substantiation of the ontological solution of “to reflect it upon heaven,” the second *yinshi* is not dualistically contrasted or opposed to any other beings such as “that” or “wrong.” In this way, I take *shi* as “it,” i.e. the identification of each individual being; without opening it for dualistic contrast with any other “that” or “wrong.” By rendering *shi* as “it,” I take the *shi* here to be the generalized concept to refer to any being in any dualistic pairs of beings. Not only any of the “this,” “that,” “right,” “wrong,” but also any other beings existing in reality and in human experience could be an “it.” Taken together, by taking *shi* as each individual being of “it” and *yin* as the

verb “to go by,” I render the compound *yinshi* as “to go by it” or “to go with it.” As I will demonstrate soon, the ultimate solution that the *Zhuangzi* offers here through the compound *yinshi*, is “to go by each being” as an ontological “being in itself” with its own pattern and course to be fully respected rather than enforced.

My rendering of *yinshi* is significantly different from other scholars’. For example, recognizing the importance of this phrase, Graham offers a highly technical and specialized rendering of the term. He takes *yin* as “circumstance” and *yinshi* as “by circumstance that’s it” or “that’s it which goes by circumstance.” Now it is important to point out that Graham’s translation of the phrase is contextualized in his reading of two terms: *weishi* 為是 and *yinshi* as two contrastive modes of dealing with the problem of “things” in the *QWL*. In one of his earlier essays, Graham translated these two phrases as “adaptive shih” and the “contrived shih.”² In his later translation, he eventually rendered the two phrases as “that’s it’ that goes by circumstance” and “that’s it’ that deems.”³ In doing so, Graham takes *weishi* as the universal “that’s it’ that deems” to be applied universally to all things; and *yinshi* as the “circumstantial ‘that’s it’” in which each thing is tailored in its particular circumstance. With this treatment, Graham is able to argue that the universal “that’s it’ that deems” is not supported in the *Zhuangzi*, as there is no universal truth across things agreed in the *Zhuangzi*. Rather, the *Zhuangzi* offers the “circumstantial ‘that’s

² Graham, “Chuang-tzu’s Essay on Seeing,” 143.

³ A. C. Graham, “Textual Notes to Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters,” in *A Companion to Angus C. Graham’s Chuang Tzu*, ed. Harold D. Roth (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 14. Originally published as A. C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzū: Textual Notes to a Partial Translation* (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1982).

it” as the affirmation of the things in their own circumstances. With this rendering, Graham eventually argues that it is “the circumstantial ‘that’s it’” (*yinshi*) rather than “the universal ‘that’s it’” (*weishi*) that is the ultimate position in the *Zhuangzi*.

Graham’s rendering and works on the *Zhuangzi* are so influential that his translation of these two terms made a decisive impact on later scholars’ translation of the terms. For example, responding to Graham’s interpretation of the two terms, Peterman offers the modified translation by rendering *weishi* as “inflexible, non-contextual ‘that’s it’” and *yinshi* as “flexible, contextual ‘that’s it.’” With this translation, Peterman argues the *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy promotes the affirmation of the flexible, context-dependent “that’s it” (*yinshi*) rather than the inflexible, non-contextual “that’s it” (*weishi*).⁴ Together with Graham, then, Peterman also considers these two terms to be contrasted to each other. For both Graham and Peterman, it is through the “circumstantial” or “contextual” reading of the term *yinshi* that they argue that it is the conditional and contextual truth rather than universal truth that is the ultimate position of the *Zhuangzi*.⁵

Hansen’s translation of *yinshi* also has the Graham impact in it. He translates *yinshi* as the “dependent” *shi* that is “based on prior or enacted commitments, gestalts orientations, and inner processes;” and *weishi* as the “deemed” *shi* that is the “arbitrary posited.” By interpreting *yinshi* by emphasizing the dependency that each “this” is in;

⁴ James Peterman, “Why *Zhuangzi*’s Real Discovery is One That Lets Him Stop Doing Philosophy When He Wants to,” *Philosophy East & West* 58, no. 3 (2008): 372-394.

⁵ Despite of the different technical handlings of the term *yinshi* 因是, ultimately I agree with Graham and other scholars that there is no universal pattern or principle for all beings (or things) to be found in the *Zhuangzi*. Rather, it is in the unique and diverse patterns of each being itself that the problems of beings are eventually reconciled.

and *weishi* as the “arbitrarily deemed or posited” “this,” Hansen raises the “relativity of normative dependence,” in which “we are naturally influenced by others’ evaluations, their judgments of our choices and their behavioral virtuosity.” This relativism of dependency then gives rise to *Zhuangzi*’s “skepticism” to “doubt any transcendent or allegedly perfect, totalistic epistemic access to nature’s inexpressible normative know-how.”⁶ In this way, just like Graham and Peterman render the two phrases, Hansen also treats them as a contrastive pair, with *yinshi* as the preferred position to *weishi* as the non-preferred position in the *Zhuangzi*.

As we could see, all the above renderings of the two phrases seem to be rooted in Graham’s technical and conceptual treatment of the two terms of *weishi* and *yinshi*. However, it is worthwhile to pause for a while to rethink whether his rendering of the two terms are well grounded in the *Zhuangzi* text. In fact, in Graham’s rendering of the two terms, he draws evidences from both the Inner chapters and the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, as well as other contemporaneous texts such as *Lvshi Chunqiu* and the Mohist Canon. However, there are several problems in Graham’s argumentation that makes his translation not sufficiently well-grounded. First, given the authorial problem of the entire *Zhuangzi* text, it would be problematic to assume that the Inner Chapters necessarily deploy the same usage of words and terms as with the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. This assumption becomes more problematic when he assumes the same usage of words and terms across the *Zhuangzi* and other texts such as the *Lvshi Chuqiu* and the Mohist canon.

⁶ Chad Hansen, “Zhuangzi,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014), accessed September 10, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/>.

Second, it has the problem of confusing compound phrase with single character word. There is a difference between *yinshi* and *weishi* used as compounds, and *yin* and *wei* used as individual words. By citing multiple evidences (from the *Lyshi Chunqiu* and from the Mohist canon rather than from the *Zhuangzi* itself) that *yin* and *wei* are used as a contrastive pair, it does not immediately follow that *yinshi* and *weishi* are also used as a contrastive pair of terms. Third, it has the problem of assuming parallelism between different pairs of phrases. The parallelism between *yinshi* and *weishi* with other pairs of phrases such as *gongshi* 公是 and *yishi* 移是 (as Graham seems to assume) do not necessarily hold. Lastly, and perhaps the most important problem, is the insufficient grounding to render the term *weishi* with such a degree of conceptual abstractness and technical specialty. Even granted that *yinshi* does embrace strong degree of conceptual abstractness and technical specialty, it does not necessarily follow that *weishi* also has the same level of abstractness and specialty, especially when the contrast between *yinshi* and *weishi* is not as firmly established as Graham has argued.

Indeed, despite of Graham’s significant influence on treating these two terms, not all scholars offer the same rendering of the terms. For example, Ziporyn does not take the two *yinshi* in the passage as completely the same. While he translates the first *yinshi* as “circumstantially right” as contrasted to *yinfei* as “circumstantially wrong,” he translates the second *yinshi* as “going by the rightness of the present ‘this.’” In this way, Ziporyn agrees with Graham that the first *yinshi* should be

rendered with the element of “circumstantial,” but he renders the second *yinshi* (the more crucial one) without the “circumstantial” element in it. ⁷

My reading of the phrases of *weishi* and *yinshi*, therefore, does not rest upon Graham’s translation, and therefore differs significantly from the above treatments. First of all, I do not find *weishi* acts as a specialized term in the *Zhuangzi*. In fact, the two phrases of *yinshi* and *weishi* occur in different passages rather than in the same passage to be contrasted with each other. In places where *weishi* appears in the *QWL*, they are better rendered as “for this” or “for this reason,” a more straightforward and literal translation of the phrase. ⁸ Without treating *weishi* and *yinshi* as two contrastive phrases, my rendering of the phrase *yinshi* also opts for the more straightforward and literal reading. While *yin* could be rendered as either “to go by”, a verb to indicate action; or as “circumstance”, a noun to describe certain condition or phenomenon, I do not find *yin* in the context of the *Zhuangzi* (and specifically in the context of the *QWL* passage here) particularly suits Graham’s reading of “circumstance.” Instead, I find the rendering of *yin* as “to go by,” “to follow” makes better sense. Together as a phrase, rather than taking *yinshi* as the “by circumstance that’s it,” in which *yin* acts as the modifier to *shi*, I take *yin* as a verb, meaning “to go by” or, “to follow;” and *shi* (it, each being) as a noun and as the object of the verb *yin*. Together this phrase is a simple compound consisted of a verb and an object: “to go by it,” “to go with each being.” Indeed, as I will explain in the remainder of this chapter,

⁷ Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

⁸ The phrase *weishi* already occurred in a passage cited in the last section of chapter 3 of this study. It will also occur in passages in chapter 5 of this study. I will offer the detailed explanation of the phrase in chapter 5.

the full philosophical sophistication of *yinshi* and its importance as the ontological solutions in the *Zhuangzi* do not necessarily require a highly technical treatment of the phrase. Rather, a straight-forward literal translation could entail great philosophical message, as I will explain soon.

My reading could be supported by multiple sources of evidence. My first support could be drawn from the traditional commentator Guo Xiang. As one of the earliest and most classical commentary to the *Zhuangzi*, Guo Xiang’s commentary offers a reliable source on the semantic meanings and grammatic structures of the *Zhuangzi* text. Guo Xiang’s commentary to the second *yinshi* phrase in this passage is as follows:

夫懷豁者，因天下之是非而自無是非也。故不由是非之塗而是非無患不當者，直明其天然而無所奪故也。

As for those with an open mind, [they] go by the right and wrong under the Heaven and then there is naturally no right or wrong. Therefore as for those who do not go with the ways of right and wrong yet there is no worry about no appropriateness of right and wrong, [they] directly illuminate their heavenly-so without depriving them.⁹

As we could see from Guo Xiang’s commentary, *yin* is not rendered as “circumstance” or “circumstantial” at all. Rather, it is about how the human being “goes by” the “right” and “wrong” under the heaven. In this way, Guo Xiang also

⁹ Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 67.

takes *yinshi* as to go by each being without depriving its own heavenly-so. That is, Guo Xiang takes *yinshi* as the “illumination” to follow each being itself without imposing any external force on it.

More support for reading *yin* as a verb “to go by” or “to follow” could be drawn from the established and well-respected dictionary book *Explaining Patterns and Analyzing Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字). According to the author Xu Shen (許慎), *yin* 因 is equivalent to the verb *jiu* 就 (to go by, to accord, to follow). In Duan Yucui’s classical commentary to the dictionary (段玉裁《說文解字注》), he goes further to equate the three verbs: *yin* 因, *ren* 仍, and *jiu* 就 to have the common meaning of “to go by,” “to follow.” In doing so, Duan cites the text of the *Zhongyong* 中庸, a contemporaneous text to the *Zhuangzi*: “As for heaven’s generation of beings, it definitely goes by the talent of the beings and firmly sticks with it” (天之生物，必因其材而篤焉). In this sentence, *yin* 因 is clearly “to go by” and “to follow” the “talent of the being,” i.e. the pattern and the course of the beings themselves without imposing external force.¹⁰ In this way, as we could see from these evidences, *yin* is better rendered as the verb “to go by” and “to follow” as a literal and straight-forward translation of the word.

Furthermore, I will also explain more on my rendering of *shi* as “it,” “each individual being,” or “each being in itself.” By translating *shi* as “it,” it is not used as a

¹⁰ Note this idea in the *Zhongyong* seems to resemble what the *Zhuangzi* seeks to express here, suggesting a possible connection between the *Zhongyong* and the *Zhuangzi* or a commonly shared intellectual theme in the Warring States period.

weak pronoun but a highly specialized term in the *Zhuangzi* that refers to the identification of each ontological being. Each “it” is an ontological being that could refer to any of the beings in any dualistic pairs. By “to go by it,” the *Zhuangzi* raises a highly specialized ontological proposal of following and respecting each being’s own pattern and course without imposing any external force onto it. *Shi* is not translated as “this” or “right” because *shi* here is not dualistically contrasted to either “that” or “wrong.” Rather, *shi* could refer to any of the individual beings without the dualistic casting. Indeed, *yinshi* as “to go by it” offers the solid affirmation of each being in itself with its own pattern and course not to be imposed and enforced by other powers. By affirming and respecting each being in itself in *yinshi*, the *Zhuangzi* offers the ultimate ontological solution to triumph the problem of ontological duality eventually.

In this section, we have argued that in the second portion of the *QWL* key section, there is a transition from presenting the ontological problems of beings to offering the ontological solutions to the problems. Specifically, the ontological solution is “to reflect upon heaven,” which is then further substantiated as “to go by it.” In this way, “to go by it” (*yinshi* 因是) is raised as the ontological solution to the problems of beings by following or respecting each being in its own pattern and course without imposing or enforcing it with other powers. How exactly the *Zhuangzi* explicates “to go by each being,” and how it works as the solution to address the problems of ontological duality and relativism, will be the task we shall explore in the next section.

2. “The hinge of the Way” (*daoshu* 道樞): the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself”

In the previous section, I have pointed out that “to go by it”, i.e. the affirmation of each being that has its own pattern and course, is the ultimate solution that the *QWL* key section offers to address the ontological problems of beings. The next question is: how does the affirmation of each being in itself act as the solution to address the problems of ontological duality, inequality, relativism and skepticism of beings? As we have pointed out in the previous chapter, among all the problems, the key root problem is the ontological duality of beings: i.e. the mutual dependency and opposition among beings when they interact with each other. The key solution that the *Zhuangzi* offers, as I will argue, is the non-dualistic affirmation of each being in itself. To see how it is achieved, let us proceed to the next passage in the *QWL* key section:

是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？
果且无彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。…… 故曰「莫若以
明」。

This is also that; that is also this. This is also a right-and-wrong. That is also a right-and-wrong. Are there indeed this and that? Are there indeed no this and that? This and that could not get its opposite - it is called the hinge

of the Way... ...¹¹ Therefore it is said: nothing is comparable to use illumination.¹²

Immediately following the passage of “to go by it,” this passage provides a further explication of “to go by it” as the ontological solution to the problems. Already quoted in the previous chapter in the second occurrence of “to use illumination,” this passage follows the recurring structural pattern that starts with the ontological problems and ends with offering the solution of “the illumination.” Therefore, by offering further explanation of what “to go by it” means, the passage offers “the illumination” as the ontological solution to the problems. That is, through the affirmation and explanation of each “being in itself,” it offers the ultimate illumination to triumph the ontological problems.

How, then, does this passage further explain “to go by it” (*yinshi* 因是) as the ontological solution? It is explained by the metaphor of “the hinge of the Way” (*daoshu* 道樞):¹³ when “this” and “that” could not get its opposite, it is called “the hinge of the Way” (彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞). That is, “the hinge of the Way” is offered as a metaphor of the ultimate reconciliation of beings, in which the beings do

¹¹ There is another important metaphor in this passage: the center of the circle (*huanzhong* 環中). In contrast to the “static” ontological affirmation of each being as offered by the metaphor of “the hinge of the Way,” “the center of the circle” metaphor raises the dynamic aspect of the ontology in the *Zhuangzi*. I will address the dynamic aspect of beings in the next chapter.

¹² *HY* 4/2/29-31. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-69; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 53; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

¹³ There could be two ways to interpret *daoshu* 道樞. It is either “the *shu* of the *dao*” (thereby translated as “the hinge of the Way); or “the *dao* as the *shu*” (thereby translated as “the Way as the hinge”). Though literally different, they both express the importance of *daoshu* in the reconciliation of beings.

not run into ontological duality with each other. When beings are “non-dualistically” positioned with each other, they are no longer dependent or opposing each other in their mutual positioning, therefore fundamentally addressing the ontological problem of mutual conflict in the first place. Indeed, when each being is no longer dualistic, i.e. no longer in their mutual dependency and opposition with other beings, all the ontological problems will be resolved accordingly.

While the above argument may sound too philosophically naïve by offering a simple negation of the problem as the solution, the *Zhuangzi* actually does offer something here. In this argument, we see that the reconciliation of duality only lies in the resolution of the duality itself. That is, the resolution of the conflict among beings is addressed only in the non-dualistic positioning of the beings themselves rather than by any external arbitrator exercising its power onto the beings. It is only resolved by walking through the duality of the mutual dependency and opposition of beings rather than bypassing it. In other words, the problems of beings are only addressed by walking through the non-dualistic take of each individual being in itself. In this consideration, therefore, how each being is positioned in a non-dualistic manner without the dependency and opposition with other beings, is the key to address all the ontological problem among beings.

Indeed, the importance of non-dualistic take in the *Zhuangzi* is well recognized by the scholars. For example, Watson thinks “the realm of nondualistic thinking” is the key to the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* and is what the *Zhuangzi* “persistently urges

the reader to join him.”¹⁴ Yet, the claim on the non-dualistic take of each being in itself that does not run into confrontation with other beings may seem to be too good to be ever actualizable. When both the conception of our minds (existentially) and the truth of reality (ontologically) are so deeply entrenched into dualistic settings, non-dualism seems to be a sheer logical impossibility. Yet, it is precisely the fundamental duality at both the existential and ontological levels that the *Zhuangzi* seeks to address here. In this sense, therefore, the *Zhuangzi*'s argument on the non-dualistic take of beings should not be taken as a sheer logical statement, as a reductive logical rendering of the argument will make it sound like complete non-sense. Rather, it is offered as a fundamental ontological proposal on the beings themselves. The ultimate ontological solution the *Zhuangzi* offers here is not a simplistic and reductive logical proposal but a fundamental ontological proposal on the non-dualistic truth of the beings themselves.

Yet, the ontological manifestation of the non-dualistic “being in itself” still sounds too difficult to be actualizable. Even with the metaphor of “the hinge of the Way,” it seems to be too abstract and too absurd to be realizable. Luckily, the *QWL* key section does offer us more elaborations on how the ontological actualization of the non-dualistic beings could be made:

以指喻指之非指，不若以非指喻指之非指也。以馬喻馬之非馬，不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也。天地一指也，萬物一馬也。可乎可，不可乎

¹⁴ Burton Watson, “Forward,” in *Experimental Essays*, ed. Mair, xiii.

不可。道行之而成，物謂之而然。惡乎然？然於然。惡乎不然？不然於不然。物固有所然，物固有所可。无物不然，无物不可。

To use finger to show a finger is non-finger is not comparable to use non-finger to show a finger is non-finger. To use horse to show a horse is non-horse is not comparable to use non-horse to show a horse is non-horse.

Heaven and earth are one finger, the myriad beings are one horse.

Allowable lies in allowable. Not-allowable lies in not-allowable. The Way is accomplished by walking it, beings are so by being called. From what so? So lies in so. From what not-so? Not-so lies in not-so. Beings firmly have that which is so, beings firmly have that which is allowable. No being is not so. No being is not allowable. ¹⁵

This passage is a highly argumentative substantiation on how each being is affirmed in itself without prone to dualistic dependency and opposition with other beings. As I will demonstrate in the following of the analysis, through a gradation of three layers of arguments, it shows how each being is solidly affirmed as a non-dualistic “being in itself” that is not prone to external dualistic confrontation.

The first two sentences of this passage open the abstract argumentation on the beings: “to use finger to show a finger is non-finger is not comparable to use non-finger to show a finger is non-finger. To use horse to show a horse is non-horse is not

¹⁵ *HY* 4/2/31-34. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-71; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 53; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 13.

comparable to use non-horse to show a horse is non-horse” (以指喻指之非指，不若以非指喻指之非指也。以馬喻馬之非馬，不若以非馬喻馬之非馬也)。 As one of the most debated sentences in the early Chinese philosophy, these two sentences - the analytics about *zhi* 指 (finger) and *ma* 馬 (horse) - attract great attention from the scholars.¹⁶ There are several issues that are often raised. First is the consideration on whether and to what extent the *zhi* and *ma* discourse here in the *Zhuangzi* are contextualized with and comparable to the chapters of *Zhiwulun* (指物論 “Discourse on finger and being”) and *Baimalun* (白馬論 “Discourse on white horse”) in the *Gongsun longzi* (公孫龍子). Second issue often discussed is whether the two words: *zhi* and *ma* literally refer to the concrete finger and horse or refer to more abstract concepts and meanings. While there are scholars who take these two words as more abstract conceptions, there are also scholars who offer a more straight-forward rendering of these two words as simply “finger” and “horse.” Third, regardless of how we interpret *zhi* and *ma*, there is a consideration on whether the negation of the two words as *feizhi* 非指 and *feima* 非馬 only offer simple negations of *zhi* and *ma* or entail some other argumentations as implied by the chapters in the *Gongsun longzi*.

¹⁶ For a brief overview and analysis of this issue, refer to Ernst-Joachim Vierheller, “Language and Logic in the ‘Zhuangzi’: Traces of the ‘Gongsun Longzi,’” *Oriens Extremus* 50 (2011): 29-46. Also refer to Cheng Chung-Ying, “Reinterpreting Gongsun Longzi and Critical Comments on Other Interpretations,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 34, no. 4 (2007): 537-560. For a good compilation of Chinese scholars’ commentaries and interpretations on these two sentences, refer to Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Zhuangzi Jin Zhu Jin Yi* 莊子今注今譯 (Taipei 臺北: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan 臺灣商務印書館, 1975), 66-69.

In my rendering and interpretation of these sentences, I try to keep my translation as literal and straightforward as possible without going too deep into the contextual questions. This is because even though there is a clear influence from Hui Shi to Zhuang Zhou, the influence of Gongsun long on Zhuang Zhou is not as well established. Also, even granted that the *Zhuangzi* is aware of the *Gongsun longzi*, there is no guarantee that the *Zhuangzi* deploy the words and phrases by the same level of abstraction and technicality and with exactly the same logic of argumentation as with the *Gongsun longzi*. Therefore, even if we could provide a perfectly lucid explanation of the issue of *zhi* and *ma* in the *Gongsun longzi*, we still have to interpret the two sentences here in the context of the *Zhuangzi*.

Yet with the controversy of these two sentences in the entire scholarly literature, it seems to be compulsory that I should first provide some representative interpretation of them before proceeding to my own. With this consideration, I am offering Guo Xiang’s commentary to these two sentences here. Given the classical status of Guo Xiang’s commentary, many later Chinese commentators interpret the two sentences in ways that are somewhat related to Guo Xiang. As we will see below, without delving too much into the relation between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Gongsun longzi*, Guo Xiang went ahead to offer his “relativistic” reading of these two sentences:

夫自是而非彼，彼我之常情也。故以我指喻彼指，則彼指於我指獨為非指矣：此以指喻指之非指也。若覆以彼指還喻我指，則我指於彼指復為非指矣：此以非指喻指之非指也。將明無是無非，莫若反覆相喻。

As for affirming itself and denying other, it is the normal state of “this” and “that.” Therefore, to use “this finger” to show “that finger,”¹⁷ then “that finger” as compared to “this finger” is singularly non-finger: this is “to use finger to show a finger is non-finger.” If, reversely, to use “that finger” to show “this finger,” then “this finger” as compared to “that finger” is again non-finger: this is “to use non-finger to show a finger is non-finger.” This is about to show that to illuminate no right and no wrong, it is not comparable to the mutual showing [of this and that].¹⁸

In Guo Xiang’s interpretation, “to use finger to show a finger is non-finger” is explicated as “to use ‘this finger’ to show ‘that finger’ is non-finger;” and “to use non-finger to show a finger is non-finger” is explicated as “to use ‘that finger’ to show ‘this finger’ is non-finger.” In this way, Guo Xiang interprets the two sentences as offering the relativism between “this finger” and “that finger” with the two fingers mutually and relatively denying each other. Guo Xiang then offers this version of relativism as the “illumination” to solve the problem of duality by a nihilistic claim that there is “no right and no wrong.” However, if we take a close look, we see that Guo Xiang actually infuses the two sentences with a highly specialized interpretation of his own. While the original sentences in the *Zhuangzi* do not differentiate “finger” into the dualistic settings of “this finger” and “that finger,” Guo Xiang arbitrarily

¹⁷ The contrast of *wo* 我 and *bi* 彼 is literally “self and that,” referring to the contrast between the identity of a being and its dualistically opposite counterpart. When combining them with *zhi* 指, they now constitute the dualistic contrast of “this finger” as the identity of the finger itself and “that finger” as the dualistically contrasted one.

¹⁸ Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 69. Translation is my own.

appoint his own mapping to label the same and single word “finger” as either “this finger” or “that finger.” In this way, he is then able to raise his version of relativism through the juxtaposition and the mutual denial of the two opposing fingers.

My interpretation of the opening two sentences tries to avoid too much additional modification to the text and is based on a literal reading of the original *Zhuangzi* itself. In my reading, the two clauses “to use finger to show a finger is non-finger” and “to use non-finger to show a finger is non-finger” are connected by the comparative phrase “not comparable” (*buruo* 不若). In this sense, rather than considering the two clauses as comparable and parallel to each other, as what Guo Xiang has offered here with a pure version of relativism, the more literal reading of the text offers a clear directional judgment that the second clause stands as a superior position to the first clause. Through this key comparative phrase “not comparable,” then, what this sentence conveys is as follows: rather than using “finger” to show “non-finger,” i.e. the denial of “non-finger” by “finger,” it is *better* to use “non-finger” to show “non-finger,” i.e. the affirmation of “non-finger” by “non-finger.” That is, the reason that “non-finger” is “non-finger” is not defined by its opposing “finger,” but precisely by constituting itself as the “non-finger” in itself. Similarly, the reason that “non-horse” is “non-horse” is not defined by its opposing “horse,” but precisely by constituting itself as the “non-horse” in itself.

In this way, rather than raising the issue of the relativism among beings, I take the argument here to be the non-dualistic constitution and affirmation of each being in itself. My interpretation of this sentence is that each being - no matter it is the

identified and affirmed being (finger, horse) or the opposite and denied being (non-finger, non-horse) - has certain truth in itself that is indisputably constituted and affirmed in itself and is not challengeable by its opponent. That is, the truth of each being as “being in itself” lies precisely in the very constitution of itself rather than defined by its opposite being. The very constitution and truth of the being itself is not ontologically challengeable by any negation from its opposite being in the dualistic pair. In this way, through this first two opening sentences, the passage starts the ontological discussion on how each being is constituted and affirmed in itself rather than defined by its dualistic dependency and opposition with other beings. The truth of the being, therefore, is firmly established by the “being in itself” without opening itself to dualistic challenges from its opposite.

If my interpretation of the opening sentences of this passage is not fully convincing enough as a solid support for the non-dualistic reading of beings, the remainder of the passage offers more explicit and stronger support for this reading. Going further down the lines of this passage, there is the further support to the non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself.” Through “allowable lies in allowable, not-allowable lies in not-allowable” (可乎可，不可乎不可), it continues to argue that the being “allowable” is constituted and affirmed in itself rather than by opposing the being “not-allowable;” and the being “not-allowable” is also constituted and affirmed in itself rather than by opposing the being “allowable.” That is, each being is defined and affirmed by its own constitution rather than by opposing its dualistically contrasted being. Through “from what so? So lies in so. From what not-so? Not-so lies

in not-so” (惡乎然? 然於然。惡乎不然? 不然於不然), it continues to argue that the being “so” is constituted and affirmed in itself rather than by opposing the being “not-so;” and the being “not-so” is also constituted and affirmed in itself rather than by opposing the being “so.” In this way, through the second layer of argumentation of the passage, it further elaborates how the truth of the being is constituted solely and firmly in the “being in itself” rather than challengeable by any externally derived dependency or opposition. In other words, no matter the being is the affirmed being (allowable; so) or the denied being (not-allowable; not-so), there is certain firm affirmation of the “being in itself” that constitutes the truth of the being in itself without opening it susceptible to the challenges from its opposite. In this way, therefore, each being is firmly and non-dualistically affirmed as a “being in itself” without opening itself to the threat and opposition from its dualistic opposite.

The next sentence of the passage further elaborates the argument on the constitutive affirmation of each “being in itself:” “beings firmly have that which is so, beings firmly have that which is allowable.” (物固有所然，物固有所可). This sentence directly points out that there is certain firm truth in each being itself. By using the word “firmly” (*gu* 固), ¹⁹ the *Zhuangzi* grants each being with strong and firm grounding of its ontological truth without opening it to external challenges. In this way, therefore, each being is taken in the *Zhuangzi* as the firmly grounded and affirmed being that holds its ontologically truth completely in itself. This strong and

¹⁹ *Gu* 固 is taken as “must” by Watson, “inherently” by Graham, and “necessarily” by Ziporyn. I take *gu* 固 literally as “firmly.”

firm affirmation of the beings is further strengthened by the next sentence: “no being is not so” and “no being is not allowable” (无物不然，无物不可). Each being, therefore, is affirmed and is allowable upon the firm grounding of its own constitution as a “being in itself.” There is no being that is not affirmed or not allowed. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* gives an explicit and strong proposal on the undeniability of each being with its firmly grounded ontological truth in itself. The firm affirmation of each “being in itself,” therefore, is fully granted in the *Zhuangzi* without opening itself susceptible for dualistic oppositions from other beings.

Taken together, then, through the gradation of the three-level argumentation, this passage offers us an ontological philosophy in which each being is taken as the firmly constituted and affirmed “being in itself” that is not open for any external confrontation or opposition. In this way, each being is a “being in itself” that is firmly affirmed and not dualistically dependent on or opposable by any other being. Therefore, each “this” is “this” precisely because it is firmly constituted and affirmed as “this in itself” rather than opposing to or opposable by “that.” Similarly, each “that” is “that” precisely because it is firmly constituted and affirmed as “that in itself” rather than opposing to or opposable by “this.” In this way, the *Zhuangzi* cuts each being from the mutual dependency and opposition with other beings. The affirmation and the truth of each being holds in the being itself without dualistically depending on or opposable by any other beings. Each being has its ontological affirmation fully grounded in itself and is not challengeable by external confrontations, thereby leaving no room for dualistic opposition from the other being in the dualistic pair.

In this way, we see that the solution that the *Zhuangzi* offers here to address the problems of duality and hierarchy is to affirm both beings in the duality without running them into dualistic conflict. The *Zhuangzi* does not address the problem through nihilistically denying both beings in the duality (as with Guo Xiang’s version of relativism that we explained above). Nor does it address the problem by reversing the dualistic hierarchy by raising the inferior being in the duality to be the new superior, as the *Laozi* seems to do in its repositioning of the inferior and the superior. Comparatively, the *Zhuangzi*’s solution is also vastly different from the deconstructionist philosophers, who, for the purpose of undermining the classical hierarchies of Western philosophy, seek to reverse the order of the superior and the inferior. The *Zhuangzi*’s philosophy of beings therefore lies in the affirmative ontological grounding of both beings in the duality. This affirmative ontological reading echoes what Xiong Shili has pointed out as the solid and firm ontological grounding in Chinese philosophy,²⁰ in which all beings that constitute the ontological reality are considered to hold solid and firm truth in them. Moreover, the double-affirmation of both sides of the duality also echoes what Wang Fuzhi has raised as his reading of “double walking” (*liangxing* 兩行) as the double-affirmation of both sides of the duality.²¹ With the double-affirmation of both beings in the duality, the ontological philosophy that the *Zhuangzi* offers here could sound too

²⁰ Xiong Shili 熊十力, “Ti Yong Lun” 體用論, in *Xiong Shili Quan Ji* 熊十力全集, Xiong Shili, vol 7 (Wuhan 武漢: Hubei Jiao Yu Chu Ban She 湖北教育出版社, 2001), 14.

²¹ Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, *Zhuangzi Jie Yu Zhuangzi Tong* 莊子解與莊子通 (Taipei 臺北: Zhongguo zi xue ming zhu ji cheng bian yin ji jin hui 中國子學名著集成編印基金會, 1977), 33.

elusive to the logical mind trained in Western philosophy. In this sense, the ontological philosophy that the *Zhuangzi* offers here is not a simplistic straight denial of the Western philosophical assumptions but a completely alternative version of them.

The theme of the non-dualistic constitution and affirmation of each “being in itself” without opening for external challenge or confrontation is not only elaborated in the *QWL* key section, it also appears in multiple occurrences in other places of the *Zhuangzi*, with different metaphors and argumentations. In the following of this section I shall give more examples on how the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself” is elaborated in these examples. One readily available example is the famous parable of Cook Ding’s cutting-up of the ox:

方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軀乎。

As of now, I encounter it with spirit and do not look with eyes. Senses and understanding stop, while spirits²² and wanting run. Accord with the heavenly principles, strike the big gaps, guide the big hollows. Go by that which is firmly so. Ligament or tendon I do not yet touch, not to mention big bones.²³

²² I translate *shen* 神 as spirit. For a detailed study on the notion of *shen* in the *Zhuangzi*, refer to Michael J. Puett, “‘Nothing Can Overcome Heaven’: The Notion of Spirit in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Hiding the world*, ed. Cook, 248-262.

²³ *HY* 7/3/6-7. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 119-122; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 50-51; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 63-64; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 22.

The crucial message of the parable as quoted in the above passage is to explicate how the human beings, rather than imposing their sensory organs or intellectual mind onto the beings, follows the “heavenly principle,” in which all beings have their own patterns to be followed rather than challenged. Notice the common use of *gu* 固 in this parable and in the *QWL* passage we just analyzed. The phrase “go by that which is firmly so” (因其固然) in this passage and the sentence of “beings firmly have that which is so, beings firmly have that which is allowable” in the *QWL* passage share the same keyword “firmly (*gu* 固). They both express how the patterns and principles in each being are firmly established and affirmed in itself and are not challengeable by other beings. These firmly established patterns and principles of the beings, therefore, constitute the “being in itself” that is not confrontable by any external force. It is this ontological affirmation and firm grounding of each “being in itself” that is ultimately raised as the ontological reconciliation to resolve the problem of duality of beings.

The theme of the firm affirmation of each “being in itself” is also elaborated in the chapter of *Yuyan* in the Outer and Miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi*:

有自也而可，有自也而不可；有自也而然，有自也而不然。惡乎然？
然於然。惡乎不然？不然於不然。惡乎可？可於可。惡乎不可？不可
於不可。物固有所然，物固有所可，无物不然，无物不可。

There is that which going by itself it is allowable; there is that which going
by itself it is not-allowable. There is that which going by itself it is so;
there is that which going by itself it is not-so. From what so? So lies in so.
From what not-so? Not-so lies in not-so. From what allowable? Allowable

lies in allowable. From what not-allowable? Not-allowable lies in not-allowable. Beings firmly have that which is so, beings firmly have that which is allowable. No being is not so. No being is not allowable.²⁴

This passage actually repeats several sentences of the *QWL* passage. By repeating “from what so? So lies in so. From what not-so? Not-so lies in not-so;” “beings firmly have that which is so” and “no being is not so”, this passage reiterates the message that the firm affirmation of the being comes in itself rather than by opposing its dualistically contrasted being. Additionally, the passage goes further to provides more explanations. By opening the passage with “there is that which going by itself is it so; there is that which going by itself it is not-so” (有自也而然，有自也而不然), it further explains how the firm affirmation of each “being in itself” is achieved in itself. Each being is constituted and affirmed in itself rather than defined by its opposite being. The being “so” is made “so” by “so” itself; and the being “not-so” is made “not-so” by “not-so” itself. Through this further explanation, the *Yuyan* passage echoes the *QWL* passage and strengthens it by the explicit articulation on the constitution and affirmation of the being in itself.

Moreover, in these two opening sentences of this *Yuyan* passage we see the compound *ziran* 自然 (self-so; self-so-ing; so-of-itself; so-of-themselves). By connecting *zi* 自 and *ran* 然, the *Zhuangzi* points out the theme of *ziran*, in which the affirmation of the being (*ran* 然, so) comes from the being itself (*zi* 自). Each

²⁴ *HY* 75/27/6-8. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 949-951; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 304; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 114-115. Graham does not offer translation for this passage.

being is constituted and affirmed in itself without opening itself to external coercions and challenges. Each being is not imposed by external principles or patterns but always allows its own patterns and principles to be fully developed in itself. The being, therefore, is firmly grounded upon its own being without opening to external challenges. This unchallengeable truth of the being is therefore firmly grounded in itself and not susceptible to the problems of ontological duality and relativism.

In this sense, our concept of “to go by it” (*yinshi*) as the firm affirmation of each being in itself echoes very well with the concept of “self-so” (*ziran*) as the spontaneous patterns and principles of the being in itself. By elaborating how each being is non-dualistically constituted and affirmed, therefore, we also address how the spontaneous patterns and principles of beings by themselves are affirmed in the beings without opening them for dualistic confictions. Each being with its own spontaneous patterns and principles, therefore, is firmly and non-dualistically grounded in itself without opening itself for external challenges or confrontations. As we will argue subsequently, the non-dualistic affirmation of each being in itself in its spontaneous patterns and principles will eventually address the problem of duality and relativism among beings. The beings will manifest themselves in their full uniqueness and diversity without necessarily conflicting each other.

Moreover, the firm and inviolable grounding of each “being in itself” as non-dualistically affirmed without opening for confrontations from other beings is also supported by other passages in the *Zhuangzi*:

何謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦无辯；然若果然也，則然之異乎不然也亦无辯。

What does it mean by “harmonizing with the heavenly distinction”? Treat “not right” as “right.” Treat “not so” as “so.”²⁵ If “right” is indeed “right,” then its differentiation from “not right” is not to be distinguished. If “so” is indeed “so,” then its differentiation from “not so” is not to be distinguished.²⁶

In this passage, each being is affirmed as the non-dualistically positioned “being in itself” that is not open for dualistic challenge from other beings. Each “right” (*shi* 是) is “right in itself” without any disputation of its difference from “not right” (*bushi* 不是); and each “so” (*ran* 然) is “so in itself” without any disputation of its difference from “not so” (*buran* 不然). Similarly, then, each “not right” is also affirmed “in itself” without any disputation of its difference from “right”; and each “not so” is affirmed “in itself” without any disputation of its difference from “so.” In this way, then, “right” and “not right” are both affirmed “in itself,” and “so” and “not so” are both affirmed “in itself” without mutual dualistic conflict. Each being is affirmed as

²⁵ Note here my translation of “是不是，然不然” as “treat ‘not this’ as ‘this’ and treat ‘not so’ as ‘so’” is a reiteration of my argument of the non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself.” My translation is consistent with Graham’s (“Treat as ‘it’ even what is not, treat as ‘so’ even what is not”); but differs from Ziporyn’s (“It means ‘right’ is also ‘not right,’ and ‘so’ is also ‘not so.’”) The translation and interpretation of this sentence and other similar ones, are indeed fundamentally rooted in our different takes on the philosophical message of these passages rather than as a matter of grammatic or semantic accuracy. The contexts of the following sentences of this passage does support my way of reading.

²⁶ *HY* 7/2/90-91. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 108-110; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 48-49; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 60; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 20.

the non-dualistic “being in itself” without challengeable by any other opposing beings or itself challenging any other beings. It is in this way the firm affirmation of each “being in itself” is achieved and leaves no room for dualistic confliction with its opposite.

In this section, we have presented how the illuminating ontological solution of *yinshi* 因是 is further explicated in the metaphor of “the hinge of the Way” (*daoshu* 道樞), i.e. the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each being in itself. Each being as a “being in itself” is fully constituted and affirmed in itself without opening for dualistic challenges from other beings. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* offers the non-dualistic ontological affirmation of each being in itself as the solution to reconcile the ontological duality (and hierarchy as a result of duality) of beings. Through the double-affirmation of both beings in the duality, the *Zhuangzi* also raises its own version of ontological philosophy in which all beings hold their firm and inviolable ontological truths in themselves.

3. Being vs. beings: the impossibility of absolute truth

We have explicated how the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself” acts as the ontological solution to address the ontological problem of duality. Each “being in itself” is firmly constituted and affirmed in itself without opening itself for challenges from its opposite. Yet in order to be assured that this is indeed a

successful solution, we need to ask a further question: namely, how could the non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself” successfully address the problem of relativism as a result of duality? That is, how could the non-dualistic “being in itself” relate to other beings without running into the contradiction that relativism implies?

Rather than directly delving into how the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each “being in itself” addresses the problem of relativism, let us analyze relativism as a philosophical position first. To see how the non-dualistic being in itself could offer a solution to relativism, we need to take a deeper reflection on the assumptions, connotations, and consequences of relativism. In the Western philosophical tradition, relativism is contrasted to absolutism. Take absolutism in the ontological aspect, absolutism means there is universal truth across all beings. In relativism, in contrast, there is no universal truth across all beings. With the commitment to the superiority of absolute truth, then, relativism is deemed inferior because it fails to locate the universal truth across all beings, thereby resulting in the contradiction and conflict among the different and relativistic “truths” of beings. In the *Zhuangzi*, with the problem of ontological duality, in which the beings are mutually dependent and opposing each other, the beings are always relatively affirmed within themselves and relatively denied by the other beings. Consequently, it results in the mutual conflict and contradiction among beings; and the failure to locate universal truth across all beings.

While the Western philosophy deems absolutism to be superior to relativism, whether the same assumption also holds in the Chinese philosophy, and specifically,

in the *Zhuangzi*, remains a question. To look for any potential version of absolutism in the *Zhuangzi* would require us to look for concepts that could address the broad considerations on the generalization and universalization of beings.²⁷ Among them two most relevant candidates would be the concept of *you* 有 (existence, Being) and *tian* 天 (heaven), since both seem to be abstract concepts that raise certain degree of generalizability across all beings. Yet as we have discussed in the opening of chapter 2, there are very few occurrences of *you* in the *Zhuangzi*. As a result, the task of looking for any potential version of absolutism as the universal truth across all beings falls on the concept of *tian*, which appear quite frequently in the *Zhuangzi*.

Before proceeding for a specific interpretation on the arguments related to *tian* in the *Zhuangzi*, it is important for us to first explain how *tian* is articulated in early Chinese philosophy generally. As an abstract metaphysical or religious concept in early Chinese philosophy, there are two ways that *tian* is used in early Chinese philosophy. Firstly, latest from the Western Zhou period onwards, *tian* was taken to be an anthropomorphic or semi-God concept that is closely related to the human beings and explicitly exerts decrees and orders onto the human beings.²⁸ This conception of *tian* also takes a deep religious connotation in which *tian* acts as a supreme or elevated Being (in the anthropomorphic sense) that governs the individual beings in the entire

²⁷ According to Neville, the methodology of comparative philosophy (of religion) is to first delimit vague and broad areas of concerns, and then proceed to look for concepts and arguments under the vague areas. This is also how we approach here. See Robert C. Neville, ed., *Ultimate Realities: A Volume in the Comparative Religious Ideas Project* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), especially the preface and the introduction.

²⁸ See for example Bernard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950).

realm. Secondly, starting from earlier time and gaining growing popularity in the Warring States period, we see *tian* became naturalized as a much more neutral and impersonal concept. This naturalized conceptualization of *tian* is more distant from the human affairs as compared to the anthropomorphic conception of *tian*. It could act as a completely natural force that orders the realm of the natural world without involving in the human affairs at all; or acts as certain kind of neutral and impersonal force on the human affairs but without any personal association with any individual. With this second conception, *tian* could be considered as a metaphysical construct that runs as the ultimate source of all beings; an ethical or meta-ethical construct that originates and regulates the human conducts; or as holding both the metaphysical and the ethical orientations in it. For example, the philosophy of the Mohists opts for a version of *tian* that runs on its own order of the natural world and does not interfere with the human affairs. The philosophy of the *Mencius*, on the other hand, appeals to *tian* as the overarching supreme source for human morality.

No matter it is the personified and religious heaven that acts as a supreme being that oversees the human affairs, or the impersonal neutral heaven that acts as the objective metaphysical principle or meta-ethical source for human morality, in all of these conceptualizations of *tian* we see it is conceived with certain degree of abstraction as the superior, universal, and transcendental force that rules over the beings in the entire realm of the world. In this sense, the concept of *tian* encapsulates both the idea of generalization and universalization across all beings, and the idea of transcendence and supremeness over the beings. Therefore, the concept of *tian* in the

Chinese philosophy embraces both the universalizing and transcendental elements in it.

In this sense, *tian* could be considered as the concept of Being that acts as the universal and transcendental source of all beings. That is, *tian* in Chinese philosophy is both the universalizing Being that generalizes from the individual beings; and the transcendental Being that is the ultimate supreme source of the individual beings. Here some clarification is needed. First of all, what I mean by transcendence here is that *tian* acts as an elevating and supreme Being that originates and regulates all the beings. Transcendence is taken as the notion of elevation, to surpass, go beyond, and rule over the individual beings. There is also certain level of independence built into the notion of transcendence: that is, if there is any transcendental principle over the beings, it is also independent from the concrete beings themselves. With *tian* acting as the transcendental and independent Being over all the beings, it then also holds the element of universality in it. The universal *tian* is the universal principle or pattern that is held consistently across all beings. What matters in the conception of universality, is whether the principle or pattern could be held universally and consistently in all the beings without them running into contradiction or confliction. In this way, by embracing both the transcendental and universalizing elements, *tian* could be taken as the Chinese conception of Being that acts as the abstract conception for a supreme and universal Being that orders all the individual beings. In this sense, then, absolutism in the Chinese context could be defined as the existence and legitimacy of *tian* as the transcendental and universal Being that rules over all the beings.

The scholarly discussion on the existence of the transcendental and universal Being in Chinese philosophy diverge significantly. Schwartz points out the transcendental element of Chinese thought in both the sociopolitical “yawning abyss between the ideal social order and the actual state of affairs” and the moral “transcendence inwards” in the human subject’s capability for “inner moral perfection.”²⁹ In contrast, Ames and Hall argue that there is no “strict transcendence” in the concept of *tian* as there is no independent and transcendental force from the phenomenal world. Rather, *tian* is “wholly immanent” and the relation between *tian* and reality is of “interdependence.”³⁰ The interdependence between Being and beings is also emphasized by some Chinese scholars. Xiong Shili argues that there is no separation between the transcendental and universal Being and the various manifestations of beings in Chinese philosophy. Similarly, Mou Zongsan argues that the concept of *tian* is simultaneously both transcendental and immanent, with the transcendental element stressing the religious aspect and the immanent element stressing the moral aspect of Chinese philosophy respectively.³¹

While the scholars all have their own points of emphasis, most of their arguments are derived from the philosophies of the Confucian thinkers and texts. To see what the *Zhuangzi* offers its ontological philosophy on the relation between Being and being, and whether it displays any version of absolutism, we need to explore the

²⁹ Benjamin I. Schwartz, “Transcendence in Ancient China,” *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 61; 63.

³⁰ David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 204-208.

³¹ Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Zhongguo Zhexue De Tezhi* 中國哲學的特質 (Hong Kong: Jen-sheng chu ban she, 1963), 16, 20.

Zhuangzi text itself. To do so, let us start by recalling the passage on *yinshi* that we have cited previously:

物無非彼，物無非是。……是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。

No being is not “that,” no being is not “this.”…… For this reason, the sage does not follow (it), but to reflect it upon heaven. It is also to “go by it.”³²

As we have analyzed previously, this passage transitions from a presentation of the ontological problem to offering the ontological solution of “to reflect it upon *tian* (heaven),” which is then further substantiated by the solution of “to go by it.” That is, rather than offering any solution from *tian* directly, the *Zhuangzi* raises the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each being in itself as the solution to address the ontological problems. In doing so, it addresses the relation between *tian* as the transcendental and universal Being and each of the individual beings. It argues that the solution to the problems of beings lies only in the beings themselves rather than in any independently transcendental or universally ordering Being. That is, even if we grant the existence of an elevated notion of Being here, it has to be elaborated through the various manifestations of the beings themselves. The weight of the ontological philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, is clearly placed on the various manifestations of the beings themselves rather than on any transcendental and universal Being ruling over the beings.

³² *HY* 4/2/27-29. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 66-67; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 39-40; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 52; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 12.

This position is also articulated in other places in the *Zhuangzi*. One example is the opening parable of the *QWL* chapter. Immediately before the analytics of *QWL* key section, the parable of the pipe of heaven articulates the relation between *tian* and the individual beings. The key philosophical message of the parable is expressed as follows:

子游曰：「地籟則衆竅是已，人籟則比竹是已，敢問天籟。」

子綦曰：「夫吹萬不同，而使其自己也，咸其自取，怒者其誰邪！」

Ziyou said: “The pipes of earth, they are the various hollows. The pipes of human beings, they are the bamboo panpipes. I dare to ask about the pipe of heaven.”

Ziqi said: “As for the myriads of blowing, they are different; making them on their own selves. All choose by themselves - who is there to impel them?”³³

The key theme of this parable, as expressed in the passage above, is that there is no pipe of heaven that acts as the supreme transcendental authority or universal overarching order that rules overall all the individual pipes. It is only in the full expression of all the individual pipes themselves that the pipe of heaven is constituted. The full expression of the pipe of heaven is nothing but each pipe expressing themselves, without any external force expelling them or enforcing them. With the

³³ *HY* 3/2/8-9. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 49-51; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 37; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 49; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 9-10.

metaphor on the dialectic relation between the pipe of heaven and each individual pipe, this parable depicts for us the dialectic relation between *tian* as the transcendental and universal Being on the one hand, and each individual being on the other hand. *Tian* as the supreme and universal Being has to be expressed through each being in itself. There is no independent or higher Being that acts as an external and higher authority or the universal order that rules over the individual beings. In this sense, the ontological grounding of Being has to be firmly grounded in the various manifestations and expressions of each being in itself.

The ontological grounding on the manifestations of beings rather than the abstract conception of Being is not only elaborated in the *QWL* chapter but also in many other chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. Let us revisit the passage from Chapter 3

Yangshengzhu:

方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軻乎。

As of now, I encounter it with spirit and do not look with eyes. Senses and understanding stop, while spirits and wanting run. Accord with the heavenly principles, strike the big gaps, guide the big hollows. Go by that which is firmly so. Ligament or tendon I do not yet touch, not to mention big bones. ³⁴

³⁴ *HY* 7/3/6-7. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 119-122; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 50-51; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 63-64; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 22.

We have analyzed this parable of the Cook Ding’s cutting-up of the ox in the previous section. As I have pointed out previously, the key message of the parable is to stress that each being is firmly grounded in itself. What I have not yet explicated in detail is that the firm ontological grounding of each “being in itself” is also first articulated as the “heavenly principle.” Indeed, “to go by that which is firmly so” (因其固然) is offered in this passage as the explanation for “to accord with the heavenly principles” (依乎天理). By arguing that the heavenly principles lie precisely in the “firmly so” of each “being in itself”, the *Zhuangzi* posits that there is no independently higher and universally ordering heavenly principle or Being that rules over the firm and diverse expressions of the various beings. Therefore, even if there is any higher and universal Being over the beings, it could only be seized through the various manifestations and actualizations of the beings themselves. Each being unfolds and presents itself fully as the “being in itself” without any imposition from any transcendental or universal Being.

In all the above passages from the *Zhuangzi*, the concept of *tian* does not exist as the transcendental and universal Being that orders and rules over all the beings. While the concept of *tian* does embrace certain degree of supremeness and generalization from the beings, the actualization of *tian* has to be realized in the immanent and diverse manifestations of the beings themselves. This argument echoes very well with what Xiong Shili has argued for Chinese ontology. According to Xiong Shili, while the concept of Being (*ti* 體: body, essence, Being) is not non-existent in Chinese philosophy, there is no independent or transcendental concept of Being that is

distinctively separable from the diverse manifestations of the beings themselves (*yong* 用: use, function, manifestation).³⁵ What Xiong stresses is that while the concept of Being acts as a crucial conceptual apparatus to endow certain level of supreme elevation and universalizing power over the beings, its realization and actualization has to be through the immanent presence of the beings themselves.³⁶ This same idea of ontology could be said to the *Zhuangzi*. While the concept of *tian* holds certain degree of supremeness and generalizability over the beings, it has to be firmly actualized in the manifestations of the various beings themselves. The philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* thus focuses on the rich and diverse manifestations of beings rather than any transcendental or universalizing Being that is separable from the manifestations of beings.

By ruling out the possibility of the transcendental and universal Being from the various manifestations of the beings themselves, we could come to conclude that absolutism, as the position for the universal and transcendental truth across all beings, does not hold in the *Zhuangzi*. Because there is no independently transcendental and universally consistent Being that rules over all the beings, there is no “absolute” truth in the *Zhuangzi*. With the *Zhuangzi*'s ontology not approving absolutism, then, any

³⁵ For more discussion on the issue of *ti* and *yong*, refer to Cheng Chung-Ying, “On the Metaphysical Significance of *Ti* (Body–Embodiment) in Chinese Philosophy: *Benti* (Origin–Substance) and *Ti–Yong* (Substance and Function),” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (2002): 145-161.

³⁶ Xiong Shili offers this version of ontology only to Confucian philosophy. He considers the philosophy of Daoism to place too much emphasis on Nonbeing rather than on the beings. See Xiong Shili, “*Ti Yong Lun*,” 5-6. Also see Xiong Shili 熊十力, “*Qian Kun Yan*” 乾坤衍, in *Xiong Shili Quan Ji* 熊十力全集, Xiong Shili, vol 7 (Wuhan 武漢: Hubei Jiao Yu Chu Ban She 湖北教育出版社, 2001), 501.

attempt to seek any universal and transcendental truth as a solution to relativism will be ungrounded. Indeed, as Connolly points out, there is no “objective or authoritative knowledge” possible in perspectivism or other versions of relativism in the *Zhuangzi*.

³⁷ The relative conflict among the beings could not be resolved through any external, transcendental and universal Being to triumph and reconcile them all but only through the reconciliation among the beings *themselves*.

4. Defining “the absolute” in “the conditional”

With the failure of locating universal and transcendental truth across all beings in the *Zhuangzi*, the conflict among the beings seems to be inevitable. Indeed, with no universal principle that is consistently true across all beings, it seems to necessarily entail the consequence of the mutual contradiction and conflict among the beings. In this regard, the real question on the ontological solution in the *Zhuangzi* now becomes whether the *Zhuangzi* could still address the problem of relativism and the resulting conflict among beings without appealing to any absolute universal truth. As we have pointed out in section 2 of this chapter, the ontological solution to address the problems of duality and relativism of beings is in the firm and non-dualistic affirmation of each being itself. In this case, then, our real question now becomes how the firm and non-dualistic grounding of the beings could successfully address the

³⁷ Connolly, “Perspectivism as a way,” 487.

conflict among them without appealing to any universalizing and absolute Being; or, in other words, whether there is an alternative version of ontological truth of the beings that could accommodate the diverse manifestations of the beings without running them into conflict with each other.

Indeed, the dissociation of relativism and universalism in the *Zhuangzi* is well supported in the existing scholar literature. Hansen, for example, decidedly severs the relativism in the *Zhuangzi* from any form of absolutism. He argues that different from Hui Shi, who derives the conclusions of absolutism and monistic mysticism from his relativism arguments, the *Zhuangzi*'s relativism results in no attempt to make any absolutism appeal. If, we could find a way to reconcile the mutual opposition and conflict among beings, then we could possibly find a way to dissociate universalism from the absolute truth of beings. In other words, if we could offer an ontological solution that could address the mutual conflict among beings without risking them into mutual conflict, it might be possible to articulate an alternative version of ontological truth of being that is not necessarily associated with the criterion of the universal.

With these considerations, I propose to make a fundamental shift of our mind on what could consist the absolute truth of being. While the Western assumption legitimates absolute truth only in the universal truth and dismisses any conditional and relative truths, the ontology in the *Zhuangzi* calls for a shift of the entire ontological paradigm. In the *Zhuangzi*, rather than locating the absolute truth of beings in the universal truth across all beings, it is relocated in the conditional constitution of each “being in itself” instead. As we have argued, the truth of the being is firmly and non-

dualistically constituted and affirmed in its conditional constitution of itself. The truth of the being, therefore, is firmly grounded upon its own conditional constitution without opening itself for external challenge and confrontation. This conditional affirmation of the being that is immune to external challenge and confrontation, therefore, is the firm and inviolable ontological grounding of the being that redefines the absolute truth of beings. To be more explicit, if we disassociate the connection of the absolute truth from the universal truth of beings, we could then argue that despite of its conditional constitution, each being is firmly affirmed on an ontological ground that is undeniable and indestructible by any external means. This inviolable and unchallengeable conditional constitution of each being in itself, therefore, redefines the absolute ontological truth of being without opening it for external challenge. In this way, the absolute truth of being is now granted upon the inviolable and non-dualistic ontological grounding of each being in its full conditional constitution. Consequently, therefore, the fact that each being is not universally true does not challenge the fact that the truth of being holds on its conditional yet absolute grounding of itself without opening for external confrontation.

Now, to see explicitly how this renewed version of truth of being could address the contradiction arising from relativism, let us have a brief recap of the key problem of relativism. As we have previously pointed out, the key problem of the ontological relativism in the *Zhuangzi* is the relativistic conflict of beings that results in the contradiction among them. If this is the case, then, without their relativistic confrontation and contradiction, the beings could just exist in their own diversity

without mutually contradicting each other. In other words, the failure of beings only arises when beings come into mutual contact and confrontation with each other. In contrast, if each being stays only in itself and affirms only in itself, then, the conflict and contradiction among the beings will no longer be present. In other words, the issue of ontological relativism only becomes a problem when beings are externally juxtaposed and confronted with each other. If we could find a way to address the external and mutual confrontation of beings, then, the diversity of all beings could be held without resulting into contradiction.

Therefore, to understand how the “conditional” constitution of each being could define its “absolute” truth without running into external and mutual confrontation, we need to take a deeper look on what the conditional constitution of beings actually entails in the *Zhuangzi*. If, the conditional and qualified beings are taken into contact with each other, they will run into external confrontation and contradiction with each other. In this reading, the conditional constitution of the being is taken as “internally” defined; and this “internal” conditional constitution of beings inevitably run into mutual contradiction when it is taken “externally” into confrontation with other beings. However, in the ontological outlook of the *Zhuangzi*, the conditional constitution of each “being in itself” is not taken “internally” as a self-limiting and self-constraining being that is contrasted to its external confrontation and contradiction with other beings. Rather, it is taken as constitutive element that defines the solid and inviolable ontological grounding of each being in itself. The conditional constitution of each being is thus granted purely in itself without posing external threat or

contradiction to other beings. The diverse conditional constitutions of various beings, therefore, are not taken externally to impose mutual opposition and contradiction to each other.

This non-dualistic reading of the conditional constitution in the “being in itself” thus differs from the dualistic reading of the “internal” conditional composition of the “being within itself” as contrasted to its “external” confrontation with other beings. In this renewed reading of “being in itself,” each being is no longer viewed as the “being within itself” whose conditional truth is dualistically opposed to the conditional truth of other “beings without.” Rather, each “being in itself” holds its absolute truth in its conditional constitution that is not contradictable by, and not contradicting to, any external opposition. That is, the distinctive and diverse conditional constitution of each “being in itself,” originally seen in ontological relativism as the internal-constraint of each “being within itself” and as the source for creating external duality and confrontation with other beings, is now retaken as the “being in itself” absolutely affirmed in and only in its conditional constitution that is not prone to mutual confrontation. As long as each “being in itself” grounds *in and only in* its conditional constitution, then, the truth of the being holds absolutely in its conditional constitution with no external confrontation possible. In this sense, while the “being within itself” gets stuck permanently in their relativistic mutual conflict with each other, my proposal of “being in itself” is affirmed upon its conditional yet absolute ontological ground, thereby indeed resolving the relativistic conflict among beings.

Therefore, rather than resting the grounding of the absolute truth of beings on the criterion of its universality, it is rest upon the inviolable and non-dualistic conditional constitution of each “being in itself.” The conditional truth of being is absolute in the sense that the constitution and affirmation of each being lies firmly in the being itself without depending on or challengeable by any external beings; and, in this sense, its potential mutual confrontation with other beings does not pose a viable challenge to this absolute and firm truth of “being in itself.” Each being in its conditional constitution of the “being in itself” is not challengeable by any other beings as constituted by different conditional constitutions; therefore the truth of each being is held “absolutely” qua its conditional constitution. Complementarily, the truth of each “being in itself” is only absolute qua its conditional constitution, therefore the truth of this being is also only absolute in itself and does not exceed beyond its conditional constitution to contradict other beings. It is in this consideration, each “being in itself” is absolutely affirmed in itself and is not contradictable by any other beings; and is only absolutely affirmed “in itself” and does not contradict any other beings. With the relational confrontation among beings no longer contradicting the absolute yet conditional ontological truths of beings, the absolute and conditional truth of each being thus successfully resolves the contradiction that relativism implies.

There is perhaps one more step that we could move further in interpreting the conditional constitution of beings in the *Zhuangzi*. In addition to arguing that the conditional constitutions of beings are the absolute grounding of the beings without running them into mutual conflict, I will further argue that in the *Zhuangzi* the

different conditional constitutions of beings are precisely *the* very reason why they do not run into mutual conflict. It is only because the different conditional constitutions of beings only seeking to define each unique and different “being in itself” rather than seeking to define any universal essence across all beings that they do not run into mutual contradiction with each other. Let me illustrate this point through a concrete example. An apple is defined by its conditional constitution of the “apple in itself,” whereas an orange is defined by its conditional constitution of the “orange in itself.” Their different conditional constitutions, i.e. the “apple in itself” and the “orange in itself,” are not contradicting each other, because each of them only stays in the “apple in itself” and the “orange in itself” respectively, without ever seeking to trespass its own “being in itself.” In other words, the conditional constitution of the apple and the conditional constitution of the orange do not contradict each other precisely because they constitute the apple and the orange respectively, without seeking to universalize them under the same constitution or truth. Without the attempt to seek any universalizing conditions across different beings, then, the different conditional constitutions of beings become precisely the reason why they do not pose contradiction to each other. As a result, ontological relativism that necessarily entails mutual conflict among beings, is now shifted to a new ontological outlook that embraces the diversity of beings with each being defined in and only in its conditional constitution.

In disassociating the absolute truth from the assumption of the universal, we now see a completely different ontological outlook in the *Zhuangzi*. We see that each

“being in itself” in the *Zhuangzi* is affirmed on a solid non-dualistic ontological grounding, and that this grounding is undeniable and indestructible by any external means. It is upon this undeniable and indestructible grounding, i.e. the conditional constitution of each being in and only in itself - though not universally applicable to all beings but does not run them into mutual conflict - that we argue that the truth of beings is simultaneously conditional and absolute. The fact that the conditional truth of “being in itself” is not universally applicable but only grounded “in itself” does not challenge the fact that the truth of being is held absolutely on this firm and inviolable grounding without resulting into conflict. In a word, through the shifting from the Western assumption of the universal as the only version of absolute truth to the renewed reading of absolute truth upon the inviolable and non-dualistic ontological grounding of each being in itself, we see the *Zhuangzi*'s ontology offers an alternative reading of the absolute ontological truth of beings upon their conditional constitutions.

In this section, I have raised an alternative Chinese version of absolute truth in the *Zhuangzi* in the conditional constitution of each being in itself. Conditional constitution, which is supposed to be a threat to Western absolutism or universalism, is now positively embraced in the ontology of the *Zhuangzi* to not only not to challenge but actually to define the absolute truth of beings. This is achieved through a solid and inviolable grounding of each “being in itself” that is both absolute and conditional: the absolute truth of each “being in itself” is defined precisely in the conditional constitution of each being without necessarily running them into mutual contradictions. By shifting the ontological outlook of the absolute truth of beings from

universalism to the conditional constitution of each being that affirms each being in and only in itself, the beings are absolutely and non-dualistically affirmed in itself without contradicting or contradictable by any other beings. The absolute truth of being in the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, does not rest upon a universalizing and static ontological outlook, but upon the diverse and rich conditional constitutions of the different beings with each of them inviolably and non-dualistically grounded in itself. The philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* thus demonstrates its most characteristic feature of diversity and dynamics that is fundamentally different from the static and universalizing grounding of the Western conception of the truth of being.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have presented the ontological solution that the *Zhuangzi* offers to address the ontological problems of beings. With the root problems of beings lying in their ontological duality, i.e. their mutual dependency and opposition, the *Zhuangzi* offers the ontological solution to reconcile this problem by walking through the beings themselves rather than through any external, independent, transcendental and universal Being that imposes onto the beings. Each being is firmly and non-dualistically affirmed as the “being in itself” in its own conditional constitution, without opening itself to be challengeable by or challenging to its dualistic opposite. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* reconciles the ontological duality of beings in the double-affirmation of both

beings of the duality with each being firmly established as the non-dualistic “being in itself.” As a result, it also offers the alternative repositioning of the ontological truth in the *Zhuangzi* from its Western philosophical counterpart. Rather than appealing to universal truth as the only absolute truth, the *Zhuangzi* redefines the absolute truth of beings in the conditional constitution of each being as inviolably and non-dualistically grounded in the being itself. This absolute yet conditional truth of being thus lies *in and only in* the “being in itself” without running into mutual conflict with each other. By grounding the philosophy of being in the inviolably firm and absolute truths of beings, therefore, the ultimate ontological outlook that the *Zhuangzi* offers is undeniably firm rather than nihilistic.

Chapter Five - "To Reside in Experience" -

The Existential Reconciliation of beings in the Human Life

In our previous discussions, we have argued how beings in the *Zhuangzi* are both ontologically and existentially constituted; and how there are both the ontological problems as generated by the beings themselves and the existential problems that human beings create for their encountering of beings in their life. While we have already addressed and reconciled the ontological problems of beings by offering the ontological solutions in the previous chapter, the existential problems that human beings create for the beings in their life remain yet to be addressed. In this chapter, we will proceed to explore how the *Zhuangzi* offers the existential solutions to address the existential problems of beings in the human life. Namely, how the human beings, in dealing with their encountering of beings in their life, could reconcile them in a way so that the human beings would no longer commit to the duality and hierarchy of beings as created by their established heart-mind? By discussing the human existential reconciliation of beings in their life experience, I also hope to demonstrate how the abstract ontological philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* could be actualized as a practical philosophy for the human life.

1. “To reside in experience” (yuzhuyong 寓諸庸) as the existential solution of beings

As I have analyzed previously, the *Zhuangzi* offers the existential solution of beings in the third portion of the *QWL* key section. This portion begins with “therefore, for this reason, all the [horizontal] beam and the [vertical] pillar” (故為是舉莛與楹) and ends in “this is called to use illumination” (此之謂以明).¹ In this portion, the *Zhuangzi* raises the key phrase “to reside in experience” as the existential solution for human beings to address and reconcile the existential problems that they create for the beings in their life. By offering this existential solution, the *Zhuangzi* raises the importance of the human participation and reconciliation of beings in the human experience, thereby providing a practical philosophy for the human daily encountering of beings in their life.

To see how “to reside in experience” is offered as the existential solution to the existential problems of beings, we first want to situate it in its immediate context:

物固有所然，物固有所可。無物不然，無物不可。故為是舉莛與楹，
厲與西施，恢恠憭怪，道通為一。其分也，成也；其成也，毀也。凡
物无成與毀，復通為一。唯達者知通為一，為是不用而寓諸庸。

In the beings firmly there is what makes it so. In the beings firmly there is what makes it allowable. No being is not so. No being is not allowable.

¹ HY 4-5/2/35-47.

Therefore, for this reason, all the [horizontal] beam and the [vertical] pillar, the [ugly] leper and the [beautiful] Xishi; the broad, the grotesque, the deceptive and the incongruous, the Way connects them into Oneness.

When they are divided, they are accomplished. When they are accomplished, they are destructed. For all the beings, there is no accomplishment or destruction. Again connect them into Oneness. Only the reached man knows to connect them into Oneness. For this reason [he] does not use [accomplishment and destruction] but resides in the experience. ²

In this opening passage of the third portion of the *QWL* key section, we see a transition from the ontological discussion of beings to the existential discussion of beings. This transition is made through the recurring phrase "to connect into Oneness" (*tongweiyi* 通為一) in this passage. This phrase is first presented as the ultimate ontological connection of beings, in which all beings - no matter it is "the horizontal beam or the vertical pillar, the ugly leper and the beautiful Xishi" - are connected into Oneness by the Way. Here "to connect into Oneness" is offered as the ultimate stage of the ontological solution and reconciliation of beings in the *Zhuangzi*: after the ontological affirmation of each being in its absolute and non-dualistic constitution of itself, the beings are all equalized and therefore connected into Oneness. ³ The

² *HY* 4/2/34-36. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 69-73; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 40-41; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 53-54; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 13-14.

³ I will provide more explanations on "the connection of all beings into Oneness" in a later section of this chapter.

second occurrence of this phrase, then, shifts to address the human existential dealing of the beings: rather than "accomplishing and destructing" the beings, the human sage will "connect them into Oneness" instead. Through this second occurrence, the focus of this passage is shifted from the discussion on the ontological connection of all beings into Oneness to an existential recasting of the connection of all beings as the human reconciliation of the beings. In the third occurrence of the phrase, by stressing that "only the reached man knows to connect them into Oneness," it reiterates the human existential involvement in the reconciliation of beings. In this way, we see that there is clearly a shift from an ontologically oriented discussion on how beings are equalized and connected among themselves; to an existentially oriented discussion on how the human beings reconcile and connect beings in their life. Through the re-orientation of the key phrase "to connect into Oneness" from the ontological reconciliation of beings themselves to the human existential reconciliation of beings in their life, then, the *QWL* key section opens a whole set of existentially oriented discussion on how the human existential reconciliation of beings is possible.

In addition to making the transition from the ontological connection of beings to the existential connection of beings in the human life, the passage also opens our discussion on "to reside in experience" as the existential solution for the human beings to reconcile the beings in their life. Indeed, a second reading of this passage will reveal that the existential solution of human reconciliation of beings is made through the contrast of two existential modes of human beings: namely, the existential mode of "accomplishment and destruction" and the existential mode of "to reside in experience." In doing so, the passage first presents the existential mode of

“accomplishment and destruction” (*chengyuhui* 成與毀), which is explicated through a series of steps: divide (*fen* 分) – accomplish (*cheng* 成) - destruct (*hui* 毀). That is, when the human being begins to attach existential preference and abhorrence to the beings, beings are existentially “divided” (*fen*). The distinction and division that human beings create for the beings then give rise to the presence of the beings, and therefore “accomplish” (*cheng*) the beings. Yet with the accomplishment of the being, the being is established as the superior being to other inferior beings, which then results in the human creation of inequality and hierarchy of beings. In this way, then, while accomplishing (*cheng*) the current being, the human being also simultaneously destructs (*hui*) the being from its equalization with other beings and their total connection into Oneness.⁴

Here we see a contextual association of the phrase “accomplishment and destruction” to the previously analyzed key phrase “to connect into Oneness.” With the human beings’ attachment and entanglement with the beings, he existentially creates the dualistic and hierarchical inequality among beings, which will then destruct the beings from connecting together into Oneness. Therefore, in the existential mode of “accomplishment and destruction,” although it seems that the human being “accomplishes” certain beings in his life, he is so fully attached to the being that he in

⁴ My reading on “accomplishment and destruction” differs from Guo Xiang’s. Deeply rooted in his relativistic ontology, Guo Xiang takes *cheng* 成 as the accomplishment of the being by itself and *hui* 毀 as the destruction of the being by its dualistically opposite counterpart (我之所謂成, 而彼或謂之毀). In other words, he situates the contrast of “accomplishment and destruction” in the dualistic opposition of beings; and does not take *hui* as the destruction of being contrasted to *tong* 通 (connection into Oneness).

fact gets stuck into his “accomplishment” of the being, thereby “destructing” it from equalization with other beings and total connection into Oneness. It is, therefore, simultaneously both an accomplishment and a destruction of the beings. In this sense, then, the human “accomplishment and destruction” of beings is a reiteration of the existential problems that human beings create for beings (as already presented by the first portion of the *QWL* key section, which we discussed in chapter 3 of this study).⁵

The passage then makes a decisive turn from the existential mode of “accomplishment and destruction” as the existential problems of beings in the human life to the existential mode of “to reside in experience” as the solution to address these problems. In contrast to the ordinary man’s existential mode of “accomplishment and destruction,” i.e. the human entanglement with beings and failure to see beings as equalized and connected, the human sage appeals to the route of “to reside in experience” as the ultimate existential reconciliation of beings in his life. To see how this turning is made, we need to take a close semantic and grammatic interpretation of the last sentence of the above passage:

唯達者知通為一，為是不用而寓諸庸。

“only the reached man knows to connect them into Oneness. For this reason [he] does not use [accomplishment and destruction] but resides in the experience.”

⁵ One related phrase to “accomplishment and destruction” is the phrase “accomplished heart-mind” (*chengxin* 成心) in the first portion of the *QWL* key section. With the common word “accomplishment” (*cheng* 成), both are about how the accomplishment of the current being obstructs the human being from seeing other beings are equally affirmed and accomplishable.

The turning is made through two keywords in this sentence. The first keyword is the phrase *weishi* 為是. As I have discussed in chapter 4, *weishi* is raised as a crucial philosophical term by Graham as contrasted to another key term *yinshi* 因是. While I have offered a detailed explication on *yinshi* there, I am offering my detailed explication on *weishi* here since I take it to be crucial in our interpretation of this sentence. In Graham’s rendering of the two phrases, *wei* (deem) and *yin* (circumstance) are taken to be two modifiers to describe the different types of *shi* (that’s it). Therefore, *weishi* is taken as “the ‘That’s it’ which deems”, and *yinshi* as “the ‘That’s it’ which goes by circumstance.” In my reading, however, both *weishi* and *yinshi* are taken to follow a more straightforward grammatic structure of “verb + object,” with *weishi* simply as “for this” and *yinshi* as “to go by it.” In my consideration, while *yinshi* is certainly raised in the *Zhuangzi* as a crucial philosophical term, I do not find *weishi* is raised as a comparable philosophical term to *yinshi*. Rather, it simply means “for this,” or, “for this reason,” and acts as a plain transitioning word to connect the sentences of a passage.

This reading of *weishi* is consistent throughout all the four occurrences of this phrase in the *Zhuangzi* Inner Chapters, all occurring in the *QWL*. Among them, the sentence “for this reason [he] does not use [accomplishment and destruction] but resides in the experience” occurred twice in the *QWL* key section, with the first one in the context of “only the reached man knows to connect them into Oneness” (唯達者知通為一，為是不用而寓諸庸)⁶ and the second one as a substantiation of “to use

⁶ HY 4/2/36.

illumination” (為是不用而寓諸庸，此之謂以明).⁷ In both occurrences, *weishi* acts as a simple transition word to mean “for this,” or “for the reason that...” to connect the previous sentences to the following sentences, explaining a transition from a reason to a consequence. The third occurrence is in connecting the philosophical argumentation of “no being is not so; no being is not allowable” (無物不然，無物不可) and the total connection of all beings into Oneness (故為是舉筵與楹..... 道通為一),⁸ in which *weishi* acts the smooth transition between the two. The fourth occurrence is in connecting “as for the Way, it does not yet have borders; as for saying, it does not yet have constancy” (夫道未始有封，言未始有常) and “there are boundaries, let me say about the boundary” (為是而有畛也，請言其畛),⁹ with *weishi* acting as the transition word between these two aspects of considerations. In all occurrences, therefore, the phrase *weishi* is used as “for this,” i.e. “for this reason” to connect a reason as previously stated and a consequence that follows from the reason.

The second key phrase to make the turning from the existential problems to the existential solutions of this passage is the phrase *buyong* 不用; and its relation with the phrase *weishi*. Both Graham and Ziporyn take *weishi* as the object for the verb *buyong*: Graham takes *weishi buyong* as “the ‘that’s it’ which deems he does not use.”

¹⁰ Ziporyn takes it as “would not define rightness in any one particular way” or

⁷ HY 5/2/47.

⁸ HY 4/2/34-35.

⁹ HY 5/2/55.

¹⁰ Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 53, 55.

“makes no definition of what is right.”¹¹ However, I take *weishi* and *buyong* as two separate words. *Weishi* is taken literally as “for this reason,” and acts as the transitioning link from the previous sentences to this sentence. It refers to the above existential mode of “accomplishment and destruction” and its failure to achieve the “total connection into Oneness” of the beings. That is, “for the reason” (*weishi*) that “accomplishment and destruction” fails to achieve the equalization and total connection of all beings into Oneness, the reached man “does not use” (*buyong*) the option of “accomplishment and destruction.” The omitted object of the verb *buyong*, therefore, is not *weishi*, but the contextual option of “accomplishment and destruction.” Taken together, this passage then makes the turning from the existential mode of “accomplishment and destruction” that fails to reconcile and “connect beings into Oneness” to the existential mode of “to reside in experience” as the solution to the problematic existential mode of “accomplishment and destruction.”

The ultimate existential solution to reconcile the beings in the human life, therefore, is raised in the phrase “to reside in experience” (*yuzhuyong* 寓諸庸). Before we start our full discussion of this phrase, let me give a brief interpretation of it first. The Chinese phrase *yuzhuyong* literally means “to reside in ordinary use,” “to reside in human experience.” There are two keywords in this phrase: *yu* 寓: to reside, to make something home; and *yong* 庸: use, ordinary use, or, with a more interpretative and philosophical twist: the human experience. Taken together, *yuzhuyong* is about how the human beings reside in the use and experience of the beings in their life; or, more

¹¹ Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 13; 15.

elaboratively, about how the human beings reside comfortably in their existential reconciliation, equalization and total connection of the beings in their life experience. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to explicate these two keywords as two complementary aspects of the human existential reconciliation of beings; and hopefully, to explicate how the phrase “to reside in experience” provides us a set of rich and dynamic arguments on the human existential reconciliation of beings.

2. Yong 庸 as the indispensable existential reconciliation of beings in the human life

As one of the two important aspects of the existential solution of “to reside in experience,” *yong* is explicated immediately after the phrase *yuzhuyong* in the *QWL* key section. It is elaborated through a series of explanations:

庸也者，用也。用也者，通也。通也者，得也。適得而幾矣。

Experience is to use. To use is to connect. To connect is to achieve.

Reaching achievement, and it is almost there. ¹²

To fully explicate *yong* in the serial explanation, let us first explain a recurring grammatic pattern of this passage. In this passage, we see that the explanation of *yong*

¹² *HY* 4-5/2/36-37. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 70-73; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 41; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 54; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 13-14.

is sequenced and presented through a highly specialized sentence structure of “x 也者, y 也.” Grammatically, this is a highly affirmative structure, in which the first noun x is affirmatively elaborated and defined by the second noun y. This strong affirmative structure suggests that we could make good use of the series of keywords to interpret the full philosophical message of *yong*. Specifically, by explicating how the latter keywords affirmatively elaborate the former keywords; and how the sequencing and logic of this serial elaboration work, we will come to a fuller understanding of what *yong* conveys to us as the existential reconciliation of beings in the human life.

The indispensable human existential experience of the beings (庸也者, 用也)

To begin our serial explanation of the keyword *yong*, let us start with the first sentence of this short passage: “experience is to use” (庸也者, 用也). This opening sentence makes an affirmative elaboration of *yong* 庸 by a homophone: *yong* 用: use. With the focus of the *QWL* key section here to be the human encountering of beings in their life, “use” here could be specifically interpreted as the human “use” of beings, or to put it in another way: the human “practice” or “experience” of beings in their life. In this sense, then, this sentence points out the indispensable human existential involvement in the reconciliation of beings in their life. With beings simultaneously both the ontological “being in itself” and the existential “being in human experience,” the abstract ontological reconciliation of beings as equalized and connected with each other has to be concretely and existentially practiced in the human experience. It is

only in the human experience of beings that the equal affirmation and connection of beings are eventually actualized. In other words, the illumination of all beings as equalized and connected has to be existentially practiced in the human experience. In a word, *yong* as the human use and experience of beings points out the indispensable role of human existential reconciliation of beings in making the ontological reconciliation of beings possible.

The indispensable human existential reconciliation of beings in their life as a way to actualize the abstract ontological philosophy of beings is also captured in many other passages of the *Zhuangzi*. For example, the parable of Cook Ding's cutting-up of the ox does not only address the ontological reconciliation of beings among themselves, but also stresses the importance of the human existential reconciliation with the beings in their life. To see this, let us re-visit the words of Cook Ding here:

方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軫乎。

As of now, I encounter it with spirit and do not look with eyes. Senses and understanding stop, while spirits and wanting run. Accord with the heavenly principles, strike the big gaps, guide the big hollows. Go by that which is firmly so. Ligament or tendon I do not yet touch, not to mention big bones.¹³

¹³ *HY 7/3/6-7*. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 119-122; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 50-51; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 63-64; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 22.

The parable of Cook Ding’s cutting-up of the ox is filled with both ontological and existential concerns. As we have discussed previously, one key philosophical message that this parable conveys is the ontological truth of each firmly constituted and affirmed “being in itself.” However, with the conclusion of the parable articulated by King Wenhui as “I get how to nurture life,” we see this story is not merely about the ontological affirmation of the beings themselves but goes further to provide a way to nurture the human life through their existential reconciliation of the beings. The smooth and spontaneous cutting-up of the knots and bones of the ox are metaphors for how the human beings resolve and reconcile the difficult encountering of the beings in their real experience. The human existential reconciliation of the beings in their life therefore is about the non-imposition of their subjective wills onto the beings (“senses and understanding stop”) and to follow the beings as absolutely affirmed and equalized beings in themselves (“go by that which is firmly so”). As a result, the abstract ontological reconciliation among the beings themselves gets actualized in the human existential reconciliation of them in their own life.

The necessity of the human existential reconciliation of beings is also raised in the famous parable of the fasting of the heart-mind (*xinzhai* 心齋) in chapter 4

Renjianshi:

回曰：「敢問心齋。」

仲尼曰：「若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣！聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。」

Yan Hui said: “I venture to ask about the fasting of the heart-mind.”

Confucius said, “Unify your will. Do not listen with the ears but listen with the heart-mind; do not listen with the heart-mind but listen with the vital energy. Listening stops at the ears; the heart-mind stops at matching. As for the vital energy – in emptying [one] waits for beings. Only the Way gathers emptying. Emptying¹⁴ - it is the fasting of the heart-mind.”¹⁵

As one of the most known parables of the *Zhuangzi*, the fasting of the heart-mind provides us important clues to further explicate the indispensable and necessary human existential reconciliation of the beings in their life. The human beings, rather than listening to any of his sensory organs (metaphorically instantiated as the ear) or his emotional-intellectual heart-mind, should listen to *qi* 氣, the vital energy that constitutes all beings in the world. The sensory organs constrain the human beings by

¹⁴ Rather than taking *xu* 虛 in this passage as a noun: i.e. as a crucial metaphysical concept of emptiness, nothingness or Nonbeing (which is what Watson, Graham and Ziporyn take it to be), I take it as a verb: to empty, emptying; with the object of *xu* to be *xin* 心 (the heart-mind). Therefore, I take *xu* in this context to be *xuxin* 虛心: the emptying of one’s heart-mind. In this way, it defines *xinzhai* 心齋 (the fasting of the heart-mind): through the action of emptying of one’s heart-mind and listening to the vital energy of the beings, one waits for the beings. This reading is consistent with the commentaries of Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan: both take *xu* as *xuxin*, the emptying of one’s heart-mind.

¹⁵ *HY* 9/4/26-28. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 147-148; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 57-58; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 68; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 26-27.

binding the beings into the senses and perceptions; and the human heart-mind constrains the human being by matching the beings with their subjective will and attachment. The sage, however, fasts his heart-mind by emptying out his heart-mind (虛者，心齋也), therefore no longer imposing his subjective will and attachment onto the beings. In this way, the sage listens to the vital energy of the beings and waits for the beings (氣也者，虛而待物者也). That is: rather than imposing their subjective will onto the beings and creating the existential duality and inequality of beings, the sage listens to the ontological truth of each being as the absolutely affirmed “being in itself.” With the human beings existentially practicing the affirmation and reconciliation of beings in their life, we see that in the *Zhuangzi* the ontological solution of beings is not only offered as the abstract ontological philosophy of beings themselves but also the existential task to be practiced and actualized in the human experience. Therefore, it is in the human practice and their existential reconciliation of the beings in their own life that the truth of the affirmed and equalized beings gets actualized eventually.

The existential reconciliation of beings as equalized and connected (用也者，通也)

After pointing out the indispensable human existential reconciliation of beings in their life, the *Zhuangzi* then comes the second affirmative elaboration of *yong* 庸: “To use is to connect” (用也者，通也). Here I interpret the keyword *tong* 通 (to connect;

connection) in its immediate context. As we have seen in the previous section, *tong* is raised in the phrase *tongweiyi* 通為一 (to connect into Oneness) in the immediate context for three times. With its first occurrence addresses the ontological reconciliation of the equalization and connection of beings through the Way (“the Way connects them into Oneness”); its second occurrence (“again connect them into Oneness”) and third occurrence (“only the reached man knows to connect them into Oneness”) raise the human existential practice as the way to actualize the equalization and connection of beings in their own life experience. In this consideration, therefore, *tong* as the second-step elaboration of *yong* refers to the human existential reconciliation of the beings in his life as equally affirmed and connected into Oneness.

Combining the first serial elaboration together with the second, then, *yong* 庸 is about the human use and experience (*yong* 用) of beings that existentially equalizes and connects (*tong*) all beings into Oneness. In other words, when the beings are existentially experienced as equalized and connected into Oneness in the human experience, its ontological equalization and connection are then existentially actualized in the human experience. Therefore, the philosophical elaboration of *yong* 庸 as defined by “use and practice” (*yong* 用) and “connection” (*tong*) together, is about how the human beings experience the beings in their life as equalized and connected into Oneness; and how the abstract ontological total connection of all beings is actualized in the existential experience of human beings.

The philosophical messages of the human practice and experience of beings (*yong* 用) and the existential reconciliation and connection of all beings in the human life (*tong*) are also iterated in the famous monkey parable of the *QWL*:

因是已。已而不知其然，謂之道。勞神明為一，而不知其同也，謂之朝三。何謂朝三？曰狙公賦芋，曰：「朝三而莫四。」眾狙皆怒。曰：「然則朝四而莫三。」眾狙皆悅。名實未虧，而喜怒為用。亦因是也。是以聖人和之以是非，而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行。

Just stop at following each this, and then not knowing it is so, this is called the Way. ¹⁶ Laboring the illuminating spirit to make Oneness and do not know they are the same, it is called “three in the morning.” What is “three in the morning?” A monkey keeper distributes nuts and says: “three in the morning and four in the evening?” The monkeys all get angry. He says: “then what about four in the morning and three in the evening?” The monkeys are all delighted. Without loss either in name or in reality, joy and anger are in use. It is just to follow each this. ¹⁷ For this reason the sage

¹⁶ The opening sentence of this passage links from the previous serial elaboration of “to reside in experience” (*yuzhuyong* 寓諸庸) to the monkey parable by connecting the ontological aspect of *yinshi* 因是 and the existential experience of *yuzhuyong* together. It gives the philosophical message that the Way of the being is achieved through both the “ontological” non-dualistic affirmation of beings and the “existential” immersive reconciliation of beings in the human experience.

¹⁷ The repeated occurrences of *yinshi* 因是 in the monkey parable reiterates the ontological reconciliation of beings; and demonstrates the close connection between the ontological reconciliation and the existential reconciliation of beings in the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy.

harmonizes it with right and wrong and rests in the heavenly equalization.

¹⁸ This is called double walking. ¹⁹

In this famous parable, the monkeys encounter the different ways of nuts distribution and display unequal reactions to them. I take the metaphoric message here as the monkeys' failure to see the two distributions - "three nuts in the morning and four in the evening" and "four nuts in the morning and three in the evening" - as the equalized beings. Even when the monkeys place deliberate effort to make these two beings into Oneness (勞神明為一), they still could not understand that these two beings are equalized, connected, and the same (不知其同也). This confused mental state of the monkeys, therefore, is a metaphor of the confused state of the ordinary human beings, with both fail to reach the existential reconciliation of the beings in their life as equalized and connected. In this confused state, the ordinary human beings, just like the monkeys, attach their affect and desire to certain beings in their life and attach their hatred and abhorrence to other beings in their life. Through the human existential creation of duality and inequality of beings, therefore, they are existentially bound to the problems of beings without seeing them as equalized and connected.

¹⁸ My translation of *tianjun* 天鈞 as "heavenly equalization" is consistent with Guo Xiang's commentary to take each being as equal (莫之偏任, 故付之自鈞而止也). However, both Graham and Ziporyn take *jun* 鈞 as the metaphoric "potter's wheel." Their takes also find their support in the literature, in which the *Shiwen* 釋文 takes *jun* 鈞 as *taojun* 陶鈞: potter's wheel. I go with Guo Xiang in this translation.

¹⁹ *HY* 5/2/37-40. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 70-74; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 41; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 54; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 14.

The sage, contrary to the unenlightened monkeys and the ordinary human beings, experiences the beings in his life as equalized (*qi* 齊), connected (*tong* 通), and the same (*tong* 同). He does not only existentially equalize and connect all beings in his life into Oneness, but even intuitively experiences them as the same. This existential mode of the sage is described as “double walking” (*liangxing* 兩行). Note here the phrase “double-walking” parallels the sentence of “that and this could not get its opposite” (彼是莫得其偶) in a previous passage in the second portion of the *QWL*. While “that and this could not get its opposite” is about the ontological reconciliation of beings as non-dualistic and equalized beings (as we have previously elaborated in chapter 4 of this study); the “double-walking” here refers to the human experience and existential reconciliation of beings in his life as non-dualistic equalized and connected beings. By “double walking,” therefore, the sage is able to existentially reconcile the duality and inequality of beings in his life so that both beings are affirmed, equalized and harmonized (和之以是非), with the sage resting in his existential actualization of the heavenly equalization (休乎天鈞) of the beings in his life.

Indeed, many other parables in the *QWL* chapter convey the same philosophical message of the existential equalization and connection of all beings in the human life. For example, the parable of the lady from Li (麗之姬) suggests that the dualistic inequality of her loving of her home country and her hating of the foreign country is ungrounded. The being of her living in the foreign country, which she originally considers to be inferior to the being of her living in her home country, is later found to

be equally enjoyable as her living in her home country.²⁰ Similarly, the parable of Zhuang Zhou's dream as a butterfly conveys the same philosophical message: the being of living in the physical form of a butterfly, which the ordinary human being dualistically considers to be inferior to the being of living in the physical form of the human body, is also ungrounded. What affirms the being of the human Zhuang Zhou is also what affirms the being of the butterfly Zhuang Zhou. Therefore, the experience of the human Zhuang Zhou and the experience of the butterfly Zhuang Zhou are equally affirmed and un-destructed from connecting together into Oneness.²¹ Through all these parables, then, the *Zhuangzi* provides us with vivid examples on how the sage experiences the beings in his life as non-dualistically affirmed, equalized, and connected into Oneness.

The achievement and non-destruction of the beings (通也者，得也)

Now we shall proceed to the third affirmative elaboration on *yong*: "to connect is to achieve" (通也者，得也). That is, with the existential reconciliation to take the beings in his life experience as equalized and connected, the sage will eventually "achieve" (*de* 得) something. What exactly does the sage achieve here? To understand this, we would have to situate it in the contrast between "to reside in experience" and

²⁰ HY 6/2/79-80.

²¹ HY 7/2/94-96.

“accomplishment and waning (*chengyukui* 成與虧) as two contrastive existential modes of dealing with the beings in the human life:

是非之彰也，道之所以虧也。道之所以虧，愛之所以成。果且有成與虧乎哉？果且无成與虧乎哉？有成與虧，故昭氏之鼓琴也；無成與虧，故昭氏之不鼓琴也。昭文之鼓琴也，師曠之枝策也，惠子之據梧也，三子之知幾乎，皆其盛者也，故載之末年。惟其好之也，以異於彼，其好之也，欲以明之。彼非所明而明之，故以堅白之昧終。而其子又以文之綸終，終身无成。若是而可謂成乎？雖我亦成也。若是而不可謂成乎？物與我無成也。是故滑疑之耀，聖人之所圖也。為是不用而寓諸庸，此之謂以明。

That right and wrong is brought into light is what makes the Way to wane. What makes the Way to wane is what makes love to be accomplished. Are there really accomplishment and waning? Are there really no accomplishment and waning? There is accomplishment and waning, therefore the Zhao Family play the zither. There is neither accomplishment nor waning, therefore the Zhao Family do not play the zither. Zhao Wen's playing of the zither, Music Master Kuang's propping of the stick, Huizi's leaning on the sterculia, the wisdom of the three men were almost there! All are the flourishing ones, therefore are recorded to this date. Only because they prefer it, it is differentiated from "the other"; because they prefer it, [they] want to illuminate it. "The other" is not what [they could]

illuminate yet [they still seek to] illuminate it, ²² therefore ended up with the obscurity of hardness and whiteness. And Zhao wen's son again ended up with his father's zither strings, with no accomplishment his entire life. Can things like this be called accomplishment? Even I also accomplish. Can things like this not to be called accomplishment? Neither others ²³ nor I accomplish. For this reason, the brightness of chaos and doubts is what the sage targets at. For this reason [he] does not use [accomplishment and waning] but to reside in experience. This is called to use illumination.

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This passage describes the existential mode of "accomplishment and waning" through the stories of the three music masters. Specifically, all the three men: Zhaowen 昭文, Shikuang 師曠, and Huizi 惠子, while "accomplishing" certain beings in their life, also "wane" the connection of all beings into Oneness. In the story of Zhaowen, for example, "accomplishment" is instantiated as the accomplishment of music playing by his preference, a metaphor for the accomplishment of the beings by

²² I take the two occurrences of *bi* 彼 in this passage (in "以異於彼" and in "彼非所明而明之") as "the other", i.e. the dualistic opposite to the being that is accomplished by the human existential preference (其好之也). By differentiating "this" from "the other" according to human preference, the passage argues that the true relation of "this" and "the other" (i.e. as equalized and connected) could never be actualized in the existential mode of "accomplishment and waning." This reading echoes Graham's translation, in which *bi* 彼 is also taken as the philosophically significant concept of "an other." Guo Xiang's commentary and Ziporyn's translation, however, take both *bi* 彼 as "other people."

²³ I translate *wu* 物 in this sentence as "other" (rather than "being"), because here *wu* 物 and *wo* 我 are raised explicitly as a contrasted pair: other and myself.

²⁴ *HY* 5/2/42-47. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 74-79; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 41-42; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 54-55; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 14-15.

the human existential preference and attachment. "Waning" is instantiated as the waning of the completeness of music, a metaphor of the waning of the Way as disrupted from the total connection of all beings into Oneness.²⁵ Indeed, it is in the human existential binding and attachment to the beings that the ordinary man "accomplishes" certain beings while also simultaneously "waned" the equalization and total connection of all beings into Oneness. Eventually, with the human existential creation of the beings into dualistic inequality, the Way becomes waned (道之所以虧, 愛之所以成), and the beings become destructed from their equalization and connection.

In this sense, the phrase "accomplishment and waning" (*cheng* and *kui*) here parallels the phrase "accomplishment and destruction" (*cheng* and *hui*) in a previous passage that we analyzed in the beginning of this chapter. In "accomplishment and destruction," "accomplishment" refers to the accomplishment of beings through human existential attachment and bonding to the beings, and "destruction" refers to the human destruction of the total equalization and connection of beings. Both phrases, therefore, convey the same philosophical message about the waning and destruction of the total connection of all beings as obstructed by the human existential bonded accomplishments of beings. It is about how the ordinary man, while accomplishes certain beings in his life, also fails to see that other beings are just as

²⁵ This reading gets support from Guo Xiang's commentary: "when the sound is manifest, there is loss of sound; when the sound is unmanifest, there is completeness of sound" (彰聲而聲遺, 不彰聲而聲全). See Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 75-79.

equally affirmed and connected; and, as a result, create the waning and destruction of the Way.

Concluding the three stories, this passage then raises the existential mode of “to reside in experience” as the ultimate existential solution for the reconciliation of beings in the human life. That is, “for the reason” (*weishi*) that the ordinary man’s existential mode of “accomplishment and waning” fails to equalize and connect all beings into Oneness, the sage does not use (*buyong*) “accomplishment and waning,” but opts for “to reside in experience” instead. In this way, the passage explicitly makes the contrast between “to reside in experience” and “accomplishment and waning” as different existential modes of human experience of beings in his life. In “to reside in experience,” the sage achieves the “illumination” to existentially reconcile all beings in his life as equalized and connected into Oneness. ²⁶

With this contextualization, we could now come to fully interpret what the sage “achieves” in his existential reconciliation of beings. Specifically, the achievement (*de*) that the sage has in his existential mode of “to reside in experience” is contrasted to the “accomplishment” (*cheng*) that ordinary human beings have in their existential

²⁶ Note that my interpretation of the contrast between “accomplishment and destruction/waning” and “to reside in experience” differs significantly from Guo Xiang’s commentary. For Guo Xiang, both phrases work on the ontological level rather than on the existential human level. Specifically, use (*yong* 用) is taken as the “self-use” (*ziyong* 自用) of the “being in itself”; and the achievement (*de* 得) is also the achievement of the “being in itself.” (See Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 72-73; 78). All human beings have to do is to simply follow the use and achievement of the ontological beings. In this consideration, then, Guo Xiang’s conception of any reconciliation of beings remains on the ontological level; and the human being has a rather passive role in obeying the ontological reconciliations of beings. In contrast, my arguments place much greater emphasis on the active role of the human existential participation in the reconciliation of beings.

mode of "accomplishment and destruction" and "accomplishment and waning." In the existential mode of "accomplishment and waning/destruction," the ordinary man gets stuck in the dualistic divide of his experience of beings; therefore, his accomplishment of the current being is simultaneously accompanied by the destruction and obstruction of connecting it with other beings into Oneness. In contrast, the sage's achievement in the existential mode of "to reside in experience" does not rest on his dualistic divide of the beings. In experiencing the beings in his life, the sage does not attach preference to any of the beings in his life. As a result, the sage's non-dualistic "achievement" of the current being does not destruct it from equalizing and connecting with other beings into Oneness. In other words, in the existential mode of "to reside in experience," the sage's existential achievement of the current being does not destruct the equal achievement of other beings; and does not destruct the connection of all beings into Oneness. In the ultimate illumination of the sage, therefore, there is total equalization and connection of all beings in his life without destruction or waning.

In a nutshell, then, the contrast between "accomplishment and waning/destruction" and "to reside in experience" is a contrast of two different existential modes of the human experience of beings in their life. If the human being gets stuck in their existential attachment and entanglement with the beings, see them as dualistically divided and hierarchically ordered; then, in all his encountering of beings, he will always fail to see the beings as equalized with other beings. As a result, while he could accomplish certain beings in his life with his preference, he also destructs it from connecting with other beings into Oneness. On the other hand, if the human being experiences the beings in his life in the non-dualistic and equalized way,

then his achievement of any being in his life will not destruct its connection with other beings. As a result, he reconciles all the beings in his life as equalized and connected into Oneness without destruction.

Almost there reaching the Way (適得而幾矣)

With the explication on the sage's achievement in his existential reconciliation of beings in his life, we come to the last sentence in the serial explanation of *yong*: "reaching achievement, and it is almost there" (適得而幾矣). To understand this, we first need to elaborate the different modes of human experience of beings in their life. In the third portion of the *QWL* key section, it lists four existential modes that human beings could have in their experience of beings, with varying degrees of accomplishment and waning of the beings:

古之人，其知有所至矣。惡乎至？有以為未始有物者，至矣盡矣，不可以加矣。其次以為有物矣，而未始有封也。其次以為有封焉，而未始有是非也。是非之彰也，道之所以虧也。道之所以虧，愛之所以成。

The men of the ancient, their wisdom had reached [the ultimate]. Where had it reached? There were [some] who took there was not yet begun to be being. The utmost! The completed! There is no more to be added! Next were those who took there was already being, but there had not yet begun to be boundary. Next were those who took there was boundary, but there

had not yet begun to be right and wrong. That right and wrong is brought into light is what makes the Way to wane. What makes the Way to wane is what makes love to be accomplished. Are there really accomplishment and waning? Are there really no accomplishment and waning? ²⁷

In this passage, the *Zhuangzi* raises four different existential modes or stages in the human experience of beings in their life. While the *Zhuangzi* starts from the most enlightened state and gradually downgrades to the worst, I would explore them from the worst stage to the best stage. As we could see, among the four stages the least favorable stage is the one in which the human being existentially creates duality and inequality of beings. With the human being attaching his affect and judgment to the beings in his life, the beings are differentiated with boundaries and duality. As a result, inequality and hierarchy are created among the beings, thereby destructing them from the total connection into Oneness (是非之彰也，道之所以虧也。道之所以虧，愛之所以成). Therefore, by existentially creating the dualistic divide between the superior and the inferior beings, the human being fails to experience the beings as non-dualistically equalized and connected. This is precisely the stage of “accomplishment and destruction/waning” that we have previously talked about. ²⁸

²⁷ HY 7/2/40-42. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 74-76; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 41; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 54; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 14-15.

²⁸ Another phrase to support that “what makes the Way to wane is what makes love to be accomplished” (道之所以虧，愛之所以成) as the human existential problems with the beings is the phrase “accomplished heart-mind” (*chengxin* 成心), which we have already cited repeatedly. Both talk about how the human existential preferences create duality and inequality of beings and fail to see them as connected into Oneness.

The existential stage that is better than the least favorable stage of existential inequality of beings is the stage where there is boundary but not yet right and wrong (其次以為有封焉，而未始有是非也). In this stage, the human being distinguishes beings of his life into concretely set boundaries. Yet, these boundaries do not destruct him from seeing these beings as non-dualistically affirmed and equalized. In this stage, therefore, the human being is not stuck in his existentially created inequality and hierarchy of the being, and there is no human creation of the duality of beings into "right and wrong" or "good and bad." In other words, this is the stage in which the human being does not create the duality and inequality of beings but to see them as equalized and connected into Oneness. This, then, is the stage of "to reside in experience" that we have talked about so far. That is, despite the existence of the distinct boundaries and identities of the beings, they are not existentially divided into the dualistic inequality and hierarchy. In the human experience of beings of this stage, he does not attach his dualistic preference to the beings in his life and does not destruct beings from equalization and connection into Oneness.

There is, however, a further existential stage that is better than the stage of "to reside in the experience." This is the stage in which the human being sees the presence of beings but without setting them into distinctive identities and boundaries (其次以為有物矣，而未始有封也). In this existential stage, then, the human being does *not* experience the beings as *first* individuated and separated and *then* equalized and connected into Oneness. Rather, the human being experiences them without even distinguishing or dividing them in the first place. In other words, here the human being

sees the beings in his life *not* in their individual presence but in the totality of them altogether with no distinction or division. This stage, then, is *not* the stage of "connection" (*tong* 通) in which the human being equalizes the individual beings and sees the connection of them. Rather, it is the stage of "sameness" (*tong* 同) in which the human being grasps the totality of all beings in their sameness (which we have briefly elaborated in the monkey parable). It is a fully intuitive and immersive experience of the sage (已而不知其然) in the total connection of all beings as Oneness without distinguishing them into individual presence or concrete boundaries. This stage, therefore, is one step further than the "to reside in experience" stage: the beings in one's life are not merely seen as equalized and connected, but more fundamentally, undivided and undistinguished from the totality of their sameness.

There is, however, one step further in the process of the human existential reconciliation of beings in his life. In this ultimate stage, the human being does not even recognize there is being (未始有物). According to this passage, this is the utmost existential stage that a human being could ever achieve in his experience of reality in his life. In this existential stage, then, the human being does not distinguish any beings in their individual presence or their connection; nor does he experience the presence of beings in the totality of their undivided sameness or Oneness. Rather, there is no recognition of any presence of any being in the first place. This ultimate state, therefore, is the human mystical experience to connect themselves to the ontological source of Nonbeing. In this consideration, then, the mystical human experience of

Nonbeing as the source of all beings is considered to be the ultimate human existential reconciliation of reality in the *Zhuangzi*.²⁹

With the elaboration of the four existential stages of the human experience of beings, we could now come to explain why the existential mode of "to reside in experience" is "almost there." As we could see, there is clearly an ascending order of superiority in the stages of human existential experience of beings. In the worst existential stage, the human being is fully committed to his attachment and entanglement with the beings, thereby creating the duality and hierarchy of the beings in his life. In the second existential stage, the human being existentially reconciles and equalizes the beings without destructing them from connecting into Oneness. Yet the human being still makes distinction and identity of the individual beings in his life. In the even better existential stage, then, the sage experiences the reality in the undistinguished totality and sameness of all beings. And lastly, in the ultimate existential stage of the sage, he experiences reality in the mystical Nonbeing as the source of all beings. In the ascending order of these four stages, then, the stage of "to reside in experience" is not the ultimate stage. Yet, despite of not achieving the ultimate Nonbeing as the source of all beings or the undivided Oneness as the sameness of all beings, in this stage the human being already starts to disentangle his existential attachment to the beings and starts to see them as equalized and connected

²⁹ Note that by tracing the experience of beings into the Totality of Oneness, and eventually to the mystical Nonbeing, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy clearly displays both the mystical orientations and the non-mystical orientations in it. While the mystical experience of Oneness or Nonbeing serves as the ultimate stage of human reconciliation with reality, the majority of the *Zhuangzi* places more emphasis on the non-mystical human experiences of beings in their life.

into Oneness. With this start, he will eventually also see the beings in their undivided sameness; and, ultimately, the Way as the mystical Nonbeing. In this sense, therefore, by reconciling the beings as equalized and connected in his experience, the human being is “almost there” reaching the Way though not completely reaching the Way yet.

In short, with the serial affirmative elaboration of *yong* 庸, the *Zhuangzi* conveys to us the indispensable role of human existential reconciliation of beings. That is, in the human experience (*yong* 用) of beings in his life, he reconciles the beings as all non-dualistically affirmed and equalized, he then existentially achieves (*de* 得) all beings in his life without destructing them into connecting (*tong* 通) with each other into Oneness. In this existential mode, then, the human being is almost there (*ji* 幾) reaching the Way. Therefore, rather than merely an ontological reconciliation among beings themselves, the non-dualistic equalization and connection of beings could also be practiced and actualized in the human experience.

3. *Yu* 寓: residing comfortably in the ceaseless presencing of beings

As we have seen, *yong* 庸 (experience) as the first aspect of the phrase “to reside in experience” (*yuzhuyong* 寓諸庸) underscores the indispensable human existential participation in the reconciliation of beings. In this section, I will proceed to elaborate the second aspect *yu* 寓 (to reside) of this phrase. Methodologically, rather than

deploying the close textual interpretation of the immediate context (as we did in the section of *yong*), I am going to explore *yu* slightly differently. With the lack of direct elaboration on *yu* in the immediate context of the "to reside in experience" passage, I will elaborate the philosophical message of *yu* by other passages that raise concepts and issues related to *yu*. In this way, we will also be able to provide a contextualized reading of *yu* in the *Zhuangzi*.³⁰

To start our exploration on *yu*, let me provide a basic translation of *yu* first. *Yu* 寓 the Chinese character means to reside; to make something home; to live in. The message of *yu* thus adds on to the message of *yong* in that the human being does not only experience the beings in his life and reconcile them as equalized and connected; but more importantly, resides in and lives in the beings in his life and feels unalienated from them. As I will soon show, by immersing himself in the total integrative experience of beings in his existence, *yu* emphasizes the comfortable and unalienated human existential reconciliation of beings in his life. Therefore, the human existential reconciliation of beings, rather than as any rationalized intellectual understanding of the beings, is actually the human intuitive and immersive "residing" in the beings that are constitutive of his very own existence.

³⁰ Treating related concepts, issues and problematiques together is a common methodology in comparative philosophy. For example, Roger Ames and David Hall point out that the study of Chinese philosophy often treats a cluster of related concepts together. Schwartz also points out that there are commonly appearing problematiques and concepts that connect multiple texts in the Chinese philosophy together. See David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), Introduction. Also see Schwartz, *The World of Thought*, Introduction.

Residing in the unstoppable (一宅而寓於不得已)

The philosophical message of *yu* as the comfortable human residing in the beings is made explicit in this sentence: “residing in the Oneness and residing in the unstoppable.” Occuring in Chapter 4 *Renjianshi*, this sentence is contextualized in the famous parable of the fasting of the heart-mind. As we have analyzed in the previous section on *yong*, this parable addresses the human existential reconciliation of beings by following the absolutely affirmed beings in themselves without imposing the human perception or will onto the beings. What is often neglected when we talk about this parable is that it continues to elaborate the fasting of the heart-mind as “residing in the Oneness and residing in the unstoppable” (一宅而寓於不得已).³¹ In this sentence, we see that the word *yu* 寓(reside) and the word *zhai* 宅 (residence, home) are used interchangeably to refer to the human being’s home-coming to and residing in the beings in their life. Through the words *zhai* and *yu*, this sentence points out the comfortable human home-coming to the beings as all equalized and connected into Oneness and their comfortable residing in the unstoppable beings in their life. With this addition, then, the parable of the fasting of the heart-mind does not only point out the necessary human existential reconciliation of beings but also their comfortable residing in and home-coming to their encountering of beings in their life.

³¹ *HY* 9/4/30. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 149; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 58; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 69; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 27.

Now let us analyze the two phrases of this sentence one by one. To better understand "residing in the unstoppable," it requires us to take a close interpretation of the phrase "the unstoppable" (*budeyi* 不得已). As with most commentators and translators, "the unstoppable" is often taken as "cannot be stopped," and therefore "the inevitable."³² With this interpretation, then, this phrase points out to the inevitability, or, in other words, necessity of beings that is not to be arbitrarily altered by any external force or human will. That is, rather than imposing any subjective will or attachment onto the beings, the human being follows the inevitable and necessary "being in itself" that cannot be stopped or changed. By "residing in the unstoppable", therefore, the human being resides comfortably in the inevitability and necessity of each "being in itself" as if he is residing in his own home. In this way, therefore, "residing in the unstoppable" conveys the human existential reconciliation of beings in their comfortable home-coming to the inevitability and necessity of beings without the human being feeling any sense of alienation from the beings.

There is, however, another way to interpret the phrase that often eludes the scholars' attention. The phrase "the unstoppable" could also be taken as "the not-end-able" since both meanings of "stop" and "end" are present in the Chinese character of *yi* 已. With this nuanced twist, "the unstoppable" as "the endless" or "the ceaseless" now articulates another crucial aspect of the philosophy of beings in the *Zhuangzi*. By taking "the unstoppable" as "the endless," the *Zhuangzi* points out that the beings are

³² Guo Xiang takes it *budeyi* 不得已 as the "inevitable" and the "necessary;" Watson translates it as "what cannot be avoided;" Graham translates it as "inevitable;" and Ziporyn translates it as "cannot be avoided."

presented as the endless and ceaseless processes of themselves. In this consideration, then, in addition to the reading of being as a static presence in itself (as we have been elaborating by far), the *Zhuangzi* here also provides us a dynamic reading of the being as a process in its temporal unfolding of itself.

Indeed, the dynamic reading of Chinese metaphysics has been raised in the scholarly literature. For example, Hall and Ames propose the "process" view of Chinese metaphysics. They argue that rather than viewing the concept of "thing" in Chinese philosophy as "fixed," it is better taken as "events" with "ceaseless transformation."³³ Building upon their "process" metaphysics, Perkins then raises the dialectic relation between "substance metaphysics", "in which the fundamental constituents of reality are substances that are separate, unified, and identical over time;" and "process metaphysics" that is "based on process, change, correlation, and interaction" and "takes change and interaction as ontologically primary."³⁴ In other words, there is a potential conflict between a static version of ontology and a dynamic version of ontology. However, in the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*, we find that these two readings of beings are not necessarily incompatible with each other. The beings in the *Zhuangzi* are presented as both the static being that holds its "presence" in itself and the dynamic being that has its "presencing" in the temporal unfolding of itself. Here I am using the word "presencing" to refer to the reading of being as temporally unfolding itself in a dynamic process of itself. By using "presencing"

³³ Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, 250.

³⁴ Franklin Perkins, "What is a thing (*wu* 物)? The problem of individuation in early Chinese metaphysics," in *Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems*, ed. Li Chenyang, Franklin Perkins, and Robin Wang (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 55, 58, 62.

rather than "process," I hope to describe the being as simultaneously both the dynamic "presencing" and the static "presence" of itself.

With this consideration, then, the two ways of interpreting "the unstoppable" could be compatible with each other. Indeed, by associating these two aspects together, we could consider that the inevitability and the necessity of beings do not only lie in the static, unchanging or permanent presence of the beings but also in the dynamic presencing of the beings in their full temporal unfolding. There is, therefore, certain necessity in not only the static presence of the being but also the endless presencing of the beings themselves that could not be altered or stopped by the human will. As a result, then, the phrase "the unstoppable" conveys to us the inevitable and ceaseless presencing of beings in their temporal unfolding in the human life. By "residing the unstoppable," the *Zhuangzi* describes the human existential reconciliation of beings as the comfortable residing in and home-coming to the necessary and ceaseless presencing of beings in his life without feeling any alienation from them.

Now that we have elaborated the philosophical message of *yu* in the second phrase "residing in the unstoppable," let us come back to elaborate the philosophical message of *zhai* in the first phrase "residing in Oneness" (*yizhai* 一宅). By "residing in Oneness," it refers to the human comfortable home-coming to his existential reconciliation of beings as equalized and connected into Oneness (as we have elaborated in the previous section on *yong*). By placing the phrase "residing in Oneness" and "residing in the unstoppable" together, then, the *Zhuangzi* takes them as

paralleling each other and conveying the same philosophical message of the human comfortable residing in and home-coming to the beings in their life. With "residing in Oneness" referring to the human comfortable home-coming to the total connection of all beings into Oneness and "residing in the unstoppable" referring to the human comfortable residing in the necessary and ceaseless presencing of the beings in their life, the *Zhuangzi* points out the human comfortable residing in and home-coming to the equalization and connection of beings in their presencing in the human life. He understands that the beings in his life do not only unfold themselves in the inevitable presencing of themselves but also participate in a total process of transformation that connects all beings into Oneness. The human comfortable home-coming to his existential reconciliation of beings, therefore, is not only the home-coming to the static presence of beings as equalized and connected into Oneness, but also the process of the total transformations of all the necessary and ceaseless presencing of beings that connect them into Oneness. By comfortably residing in and home-coming to the equalized and connected presencing and transformations of the beings in his life, then, the human being also accomplishes his own existence in his experience of the beings without the any feeling of alienation from them.

Residing in the endless presencing and transformation of the beings (寓諸无竟)

Yu as the human residing in and home-coming to the endless presencing and transformations of beings in their life is also elaborated in other passages in the *Zhuangzi*. Another example comes from the *QWL* chapter:

何謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦无辯；然若果然也，則然之異乎不然也亦无辯。化聲之相待、若其不相待。和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以窮年也。忘年忘義，振於无竟，故寓諸无竟。

What does it mean by "harmonizing with the heavenly distinction"? Treat "not this" as "this." Treat "not so" as "so." If "this" is indeed "this," then its differentiation from "not this" is not to be distinguished. If "so" is indeed "so," then its differentiation from "not so" is not to be distinguished. Treat the dependency of the transforming voices as if they are not dependent. Harmonize with the heavenly distinction, go with the various transformations, so as to live out the years. Forget the years, and forget the righteousness. Vibrate in the endless, therefore reside in the endless. ³⁵

This is a passage near the end of the *QWL* chapter. As we have elaborated in chapter 4, the first half of this passage elaborates the ontological affirmation of each being as the absolutely and non-dualistically constituted "being in itself." The second half of this passage, then, addresses how existentially the absolute affirmation and reconciliation of beings could be actualized in the human life. In "treating the dependency of the transforming voices as if they are not dependent," the human being

³⁵ *HY* 7/2/90-92. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 108-110; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 48-49; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 60; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 20.

treats the dualistically dependent and opposite beings as the absolute and non-dualistic "being in itself." In this way, the human being existentially harmonizes the beings in their heavenly distinction and follows the beings in their unique and dynamic presencing of themselves. It is only in this way the human being lives his life and completes his existence in the beings, detaching himself from the existential attachment to the beings such as the years and the righteousness. He therefore is perfectly reconciled with the presencing of the beings in his life and resides himself in the endless presencing and transformation of all beings.

There are several important philosophical messages of this passage to be more explicitly explicated. First of all, with the human being "harmonizing with the heavenly distinction" (和之以天倪), it stresses the human existential reconciliation with the distinctive and unique beings in themselves. With its "heavenly distinction" (*tianni* 天倪), each being has its unique presence that is distinctive in itself and different from other beings. The human being thus sees the uniqueness and diversity of the beings neither as the reason for their inequality or hierarchy; nor as an obstruction to their connection into Oneness. Rather, he harmonizes the unique and diverse manifestations of beings and reconciles them as non-dualistically affirmed and equalized beings with no dependency or opposition. The human being, therefore, resides in the harmonized equalization of the distinctive beings and their connection into Oneness.

Secondly, with the human being "going with the various transformations" (因之以曼衍), the *Zhuangzi* stresses the dynamic aspect of the beings and the human

existential reconciliation with it. Just like the phrase "the unstoppable" (*budeyi*) in the early sentence quoted, here the phrase "various transformation" (*manyan* 曼衍) also proposes the dynamic reading of beings. With each being as a dynamic process of transformation that presents itself in its temporal unfolding; all beings together participate in the dynamic process of the endless transformation that connects them all. The human existential reconciliation with the beings, therefore, lies in the reconciliation with the dynamic presencing of all beings in their endless transformations.

This idea of the dynamic presencing of beings is then reinforced in the phrase "residing in the endless" (*yu zhu wujing* 寓諸无竟). Just like the "various transformation" and "the unstoppable," the phrase "the endless" (*wujing* 无竟) also addresses the dynamic presencing of beings. Not only the presencing of each being has its own course of emergence, duration, and termination that is ceaselessly and endlessly processing on its own; all beings collectively consists the totality through an endless transformation that connects them all. In referring the human sage as "residing in the endless," then, the *Zhuangzi* positions the human beings' comfortable home-coming to and residing in the dynamic presencing and transformation of all beings in their life.

One further message that this passage raises is that the home-coming to the endless presencing and transformation of beings is achieved through the human being's active participation in the endless presencing of the beings. The human participation in the beings in his life is expressed through a very active phrase

"vibrating in the endless" (*zhenyu wujing* 振於無竟). Using this phrase as an explanation to "residing in the endless," the *Zhuangzi* stresses the human being's vibrant and active participation in his residing and reconciliation in the endless presencing and alteration of the beings in his life. The comfort home-coming reconciliation with the beings in the human life therefore is achieved not through a passive or reluctant acceptance of the beings as alienation or enforcement, but precisely in the active and engaging vibration and participation in all the beings in their endless presencing and transformation. Eventually, through the active participating and comfortable residing in the beings in their distinctively unique and dynamic presencing and transformation, the human existence is constituted and completed in full.

The comfortable residing in the temporal presencing of the beings (安時而處順)

One important implication from the previous passage on the endless transformation of beings is that each being presents itself in a process that does not only have its emergence and presencing of itself but also its termination as its end. With each being having its own course of presencing from emergence to termination, no single being in the human life is permanent. Rather, all beings take turn to present and alternate in the endless transformation. The human experience of beings, therefore, inevitably involves the coming and going of the beings. The human comfortable residing in the beings, thus, lies in the comfortable welcoming of the being when it emerges and the equally comfortable letting go of the being when it terminates. One parable that

explicitly addresses the human existential reconciliation of the temporal presencing of beings is the parable of Qin Shi’s mourning of Lao Dan. In this parable, when Lao Dan passed away, Qin Shi came to mourn Lao Dan without the sorrow of the ordinary men. In the passage below, Qinshi addresses the human existential reconciliation with the temporal presencing of beings in the human experience, especially with the existential duality of life and death:

適來，夫子時也；適去，夫子順也。安時而處順，哀樂不能入也，古者謂是帝之縣解。

When it comes, the master goes with the time; when it goes, the master reconciles with it. Be comfortable with the time and reside in the reconciliation, sorrow and joy could not enter. This is what the ancients call the release from God’s bond. ³⁶

To interpret this passage, I take the “come” and “go” in the opening sentence to refer to the “come” and “go” of the beings in the human experience. Through the concept of *shi* 時 (time), this passage articulates the temporal presencing of the beings as their coming and going in the human experience. With all the beings temporally constituted and presented from emergence to termination, the human existential reconciliation with them also lies in the reconciliation with their temporal presencing from emergence to termination. When the being comes to its emergence,

³⁶ *HY* 8/3/18-19. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 128-129; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 52-53; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 65; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 23-24.

the human being goes with its time; and when the being goes into its termination, the human being also goes with its time and is completely reconciled with its termination. He thus does not only affirm and welcome the emergence of the being but also affirms and welcomes the termination of the being with no lingering.

Moreover, through the phrase "be comfortable with the time and reside in the reconciliation" (安時而處順), the *Zhuangzi* depicts the human experience with the temporal presencing of being as the comfortable reconciliation with the beings rather than the coerced enforcement from the beings. The human being stays comfortably in the presencing of the beings from emergence to termination without feeling coerced or enforced by their temporal presencing. When the being comes, the human being comfortably accepts its emergence and welcomes its presencing. When the being goes away, he also comfortably accepts its termination and is not saddened by its passing-away. In this way, then, the human being resides comfortably in the temporal presencing of the beings in his experience without any emotional binding to them. Only in this way, the existential reconciliation of beings is actualized in an immersive and nonalienated way in the human life, and the human being rests comfortably in the temporal presencing of the beings. This is called the ultimate solution for the human being to release himself from God's bonding.

Indeed, the human existential reconciliation with the temporal presencing of beings in their experience is well recognized in the scholarly literature. For example, Yearley describes a rather dynamic existential state of the perfected person in the *Zhuangzi*, in which the person, while thoroughly enjoying each moment and each

event when it is present, does not attach to any moment or any event when it passes away.³⁷ Such existential state of the human being echoes what I describe here. When the being emerges into its presencing, the human being stays comfortably and enjoys it thoroughly. When the being passes into its termination, the human being does not affix his own attachment to it and does not feel any discomfort or anxiety from its passing away. The momentary presencing of the beings, therefore, does not prevent the human being from thoroughly enjoying their presencing; yet it also does not affix them permanently to them. The human existential reconciliation with the beings, therefore, is about the equal enjoyment of the presencing of the beings and the termination of the beings.

More specifically, this passage addresses the human reconciliation with two most crucial beings: namely, the duality of life and death as temporal presencing of beings in the human existence. Rather than deploring the temporal and momentary presencing of life and death, the human being completely reconciles and stays comfortably in the temporal presencing of them. When life comes to emergence, the human being follows life in its temporal presencing; and when life goes to termination and death comes to emergence, he also follows death in its temporal presencing without lingering in the presencing of life. By understanding the ceaseless and inevitable transformation that life and death participate and alternate in, he thereby comfortably welcomes the temporal presencing of death as much as his comfortable welcoming and residing in the temporal presencing of life. In this way, he comfortably

³⁷ Yearley, "The Perfected Person," 127, 135.

reconciles life and death in their temporal presencing and rests himself completely in this reconciliation.

Necessity of beings as one's destiny and mission (知其不可奈何而安之若命)

In the above discussion, we have addressed the human existential reconciliation of beings in his comfortable residing in the inevitable and necessary presencing of beings in their temporal unfolding. Indeed, how the human being comfortably resides in the necessary presencing of beings in his life without feeling alienated is the key for his reconciliation with the beings. The following passage elaborates this point more explicitly:

仲尼曰：「天下有大戒二：其一，命也；其一，義也。子之愛親，命也，不可解於心。臣之事君，義也，無適而非君也，無所逃於天地之間。是之謂大戒。是以夫事其親者，不擇地而安之，孝之至也；夫事其君者，不擇事而安之，忠之盛也；自事其心者，哀樂不易施乎前，知其不可奈何而安之若命，德之至也。為人臣子者，固有所不得已。行事之惰而忘其身，何暇至於悅生而惡死！夫子其行可矣！」

Confucius said, "Under heaven there are two great rules.³⁸ One is destiny, the other is propriety. A child's loving of the parents, it is destiny;

³⁸ The translation of the Chinese phrase *dajie* 大戒 is worth some explanation here. Graham translates it as "supreme commandment" with a strong religious connotation. Ziporyn translates it as "great constraint;" but the English word "constraint" is not the direct rendering

inescapable from the heart-mind. The vassal’s serving of the ruler, it is propriety; there is nowhere he go that is without the ruler, inescapable between heaven and earth. These are called the great rules. This is why those who serve his parents do not choose place but stay comfortable with it, it is filial piety to its utmost. Those who serve his ruler do not choose situation but stay comfortable with it, it is loyalty to its flourishing. Those who serve his own heart-mind, sorrow and joy do not easily alternate before him, know that there is nothing one can do about it while stay comfortable with it as if it is one’s destiny, it is virtue to its utmost. As a vassal and as a child, inherently there is something unstoppable. Just act on the reality of the situation and forget your body, when do you have the leisure to delight in life and abhor death? Go, sir, just go ahead.”³⁹

This passage is extracted from the parable of envoy Zigao, the Duke of She in the state of Chu (葉公子高). Receiving the king of Chu’s order on a mission to the state of Qi, Zigao was extremely anxious and worried. Confucius then advised Zigao to console his anxiety by the two “great rules.” According to the passage, the first great rule is *ming* 命 (destiny, order, mission). It is illustrated by the child’s love of the parents that he spontaneously feels in his own heart-mind. This inescapable existential experience of the filial love to his parents is necessary in his life and is the

of the Chinese word *jie* 戒. My translation is adapted from Guo Qingfan’s commentary to take *jie* 戒 as *fa* 法: i.e. laws, rules.

³⁹ HY 10/4/39-44. Translation is my own; with reference to Guo Xiang and Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, 155-157; Watson, *The Complete Works*, 59-60; Graham, *The Seven Inner Chapters*, 70; and Ziporyn, *The Essential Writings*, 28.

destiny that he could not escape. The second great rule is *yi* 義 (propriety, duty, loyalty). It is illustrated by the vassal's propriety to serve the ruler. This necessary and inevitable propriety is inescapable in the entire realm of the heaven and earth no matter whether or not the human being desires it.

What is common in these two great rules is that despite of the different ways of experiencing them, one as spontaneously felt by the human being and the other as inescapably fallen onto the human being, both are the necessary presencing of beings in the human life that cannot be altered or changed. Therefore, the child's loving and serving of the parents is the utmost of his filial piety that he lives comfortably in without choosing it. Similarly, the vassal's serving of his ruler is the flourishing of his loyalty that he lives comfortably in without choosing situation. Analogously, then, the human being who serves his own heart-mind reaches the utmost existential experience with the beings. Rather than engaging with the beings by his own subjective attachment and entanglement, he knows that the beings in his life are inevitable and necessary, therefore "there is nothing he can do about it." Yet he lives comfortably with them as if they are the "destiny" of his own life and is completely reconciled with them. This comfortable existential reconciliation of the necessity of the beings in his life as if they are the destiny of himself, is the utmost virtue that a human being could ever achieve.

The ultimate existential reconciliation with the beings in one's life, as the passage reads, is to reside comfortably in the beings and take them as the "destiny" of one's life. Here the word "destiny" is a heuristic and simplified translation of the

Chinese character *ming* 命. To further explore how it is offered as the ultimate solution of the human existential reconciliation of beings, we shall take a deeper look into the word *ming* here. As a crucial concept in early Chinese philosophy, the concept of *ming* has multiple meanings. The first meaning of *ming* is an "order" from an external source of power or authority. The second meaning of *ming* is the existentially-derived "mission" that a human individual commits and dedicates himself to. The third and most intriguing meaning of *ming* is the "fate" or "destiny" of one's life: with "fate" acting as the completely pre-determined power that allows no human agency while "destiny" only denotes the ultimate results without completely rejecting human agency, *ming* in this third meaning suggests the necessary outcomes in the human existence with varying degrees of tolerance for human agency. These three meanings of *ming* are not completely isolated and separated from each other. For example, *ming* as the fate of one's life could be associated with *ming* as the order from an external power in that both are not within the human subjective control and requires the submission of the human being. Also, *ming* as the destiny of one's life and *ming* as the existentially derived mission of oneself are connected in that both are carried out in the human experience and constitutes the very existential path of the human life.

By arguing that the human being understands the necessary and inevitable presencing of the beings and comfortably residing in them as his own *ming*, it encompasses all the above three meanings. On the one hand, the beings have their own inevitability and necessity that are not to be arbitrated by the human will; in this sense it is like an external order or a pre-set fate that has to be carried out in the human life.

This is illustrated in the example of the vassal's propriety of serving the ruler. In this example, the necessity of being is expressed through the metaphor of the order from an authority that the human being has no anywhere to escape from. On the other hand, the necessity of being is also existentially and spontaneously experienced in the human life itself, as is perfectly illustrated in the example of the child's loving of the parents. In this case, the being's necessity does not come from the external order or fate but from the immersive existential experience of the human being himself. As a result, in respecting this existentially experienced necessity of the beings in one's life, the human being is perfectly reconciled in the being without feeling any sense of imposition or alienation. In this consideration, the beings in his life are the missions of his own existence that he actively exercises his agency to complete his destiny.

No matter it is the externally driven order from the necessity of the beings or the existentially necessitated mission that is spontaneously experienced in the human being himself, he is always comfortably reconciled in the necessity of the beings. In the human being's existential reconciliation of the beings, therefore, there is a perfect coexistence of all three meanings of *ming*: in reconciling the necessity of being into one's own life, the human being completely accepts its necessity and inevitability as if it is an *order* from an authority, takes it as one's own existentially derived *mission*, and is committed to practice it in his life as if it is his own unalterable *destiny*. In the human existential reconciliation of the beings in his life, therefore, there is no longer any divide between an externally driven order and an existentially derived mission. As long as he is in perfect reconciliation with the beings, he himself becomes the being, and is no longer alienated or externalized from the being. What he wants from his own

mission is identical to what he accepts as the destiny of his own life. The human being, therefore, accepts the necessity of the beings as unalterable, and resides comfortable in the beings as if they are the mission and destiny of his own life.

In a word, just like the two great rules that the human beings could not escape from, the beings in the human life have their inevitability and necessity that are not alterable by the human will. No matter it acts as the necessary order that the human being could not escape from or as the spontaneously experience of one's own heart-mind, the human being resides comfortably in them without any anxiety or alienation. He takes the inevitability and necessary of the beings as if they are the mission and destiny of his own existence and resides comfortably in the beings. In this way, then, he feels no alienation from the beings and lives his life in his harmonious reconciliation with the presencing of the beings in his life.

In short, through the elaboration on *yu* 寓 (reside), the *Zhuangzi* explicates the human existential reconciliation of the beings by comfortably residing in the inevitable and necessary presencing of the beings in the human life. The human being does not only reside in the static presence of the beings as equalized and connected into Oneness, but also in the dynamic presencing of the beings in their ceaseless and unstoppable transformations. He equally enjoys the emergence and the termination of the beings without feeling any attachment to any side of the duality. By actively participating in and comfortable residing in the beings in their distinctively unique and dynamic presencing and transformations, he resides in the harmonized equalization of the beings without feeling any sense of alienation. The human being thus resides in the

temporal presencing of the beings in his life and accomplishes his own existence in the necessity of the beings as the mission and destiny of his own existence.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented “to reside in experience” (*yuzhuyong* 寓諸庸) as the existential solution offered to address the existential problems of beings. By existentially reconciling the beings in his life, the human being actualizes the ontological equalization and connection of the beings and completes his own existence in his reconciliation of them. Through the concept of *yong* 庸, the *Zhuangzi* conveys the indispensable human experience and participation in their existential reconciliation of the beings in their life. The human being thus accomplishes and reconciles the beings in his life as non-dualistically affirmed and equalized without destructing them from connecting into Oneness. Through the concept of *yu* 寓, the *Zhuangzi* points out the unalienated home-coming to and the comfortable residing in all the beings in the human life. The human being thus resides comfortably in the temporal presencing and transformation of the beings and equally enjoys their emergence and termination. Eventually, the human being accomplishes his own existence by comfortably residing in the necessity and inevitability of the beings as if they are the mission and destiny of his own life.

Conclusion

This study presents the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* as both the ontological “being in itself” that defines the truth of reality and the existential “being in human experience” that constitutes the human life. Rather than resting on the framework of the modern Western divide between metaphysics and epistemology that study the truth of reality and the human intellectual understanding of reality separately, it adopts an ontological-existential approach to explore the intimate relation between human existence and ontological reality. It argues that beings in the *Zhuangzi* covers comprehensively all things, emotions, states, judgments, events, processes in all aspects of human life and reality. Ontological reality and human existence are not only intimately connected but more importantly, mutually constitutive of each other and fundamentally inseparable from each other. The beings therefore are not only ontologically defined in their presence in reality but also existentially constituted by their participation in the human experience. Similarly, the existence of human being is also not only existentially defined by the human experience of themselves but also fundamentally constituted by the human encountering of the presencing of beings in their life.

This study also raises the comparative difference between the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy and the ancient Greek philosophy. In contrast to the ancient Greek preference to the determinate, universal and permanent truth, the truth of being in the *Zhuangzi* is dialectically presented as the balance between the determinate and the indeterminate, the universal and the conditional, and the permanent and the changing.

While there is certainly the mystical Nonbeing or Oneness that acts as the indeterminately unfathomable source of all beings in the *Zhuangzi*, it places greater emphasis on the various expressions of beings in their determinate manifestations. Rather than appealing to any universal or transcendental Being that acts as the ultimate ruler for the various beings, the *Zhuangzi* affirms the beings as uniquely and diversely constituted in themselves without appealing to any external force. It then redefines the absolute truth of being in the conditional yet inviolably firm constitutions of beings themselves without opening for mutual conflict. Moreover, the beings in the *Zhuangzi* are simultaneously both the static presence of themselves firmly grounded in their own constitution and the dynamic presencing of themselves in their temporal unfolding from emergence to termination. In this way, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being offers a substantially different alternative to the ancient Greek assumption by accommodating the beings in their full diversity and dynamics.

By presenting the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*, this study also seeks to offer a contextual positioning of the *Zhuangzi* in relation to other thinkers and texts of the time. Rather than treating the *Zhuangzi* as a complete follower of the *Laozi* that focuses on the mysterious philosophy of Nonbeing, it proposes the *Zhuangzi* stresses the fullness of beings in their various manifestations in constituting reality and human existence. The *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of being also differs from the *Laozi* in affirming both beings in the dualistic hierarchy rather than reversing the hierarchy by prioritizing the inferior. In its analytic and dialectic presentation of the philosophy of being, the *Zhuangzi* clearly displays a significant impact from the Mohists and the School of Names by exhibiting strong styles of argumentation and disputation. Yet the

Zhuangzi also differs from them by fundamentally orienting its analytics and dialectics on its concerns on the truth of ontological reality and the care for human existence. Ultimately, with the beings in the *Zhuangzi* simultaneously constituting ontological reality and human existence, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy is a unique blend of its own by offering a bridge for the human being to connect himself to the ultimate truth of reality without losing his own existence; and a path to actualize the abstract truth of ontological reality in the concrete and real human life.

Specifically, this study presents the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* by exploring the problems of beings as well as the solutions offered to address these problems. I argue that there are both the existential problems that human beings create in their encountering of beings and the ontological problems that beings create among themselves. Existentially, the human heart-mind assigns its preference and abhorrence to the beings in their life, thereby creating the hierarchical duality of the superior and inferior beings by the human will. Ontologically, the problem of the ontological duality is created in the mutual dependency and opposition of beings by affirming themselves as the superior and denying the other as the inferior. This hierarchical duality then results in the problems of ontological relativism and skepticism in which no universal and determinate truth of beings is available. With beings and human beings mutually constitutive of each other, then, the ontological problems and existential problems are mirroring problems of each other and are two aspects of the same set of problems.

The solution that the *Zhuangzi* offers to address the ontological problems of beings is by focusing on the root problem of ontological duality. Unlike the *Laozi* or the deconstructionist philosophers that seek to reverse the hierarchical duality by raising the inferior side of the duality to be the new superior, the *Zhuangzi* reconciles the duality of beings in the equal affirmation of both beings in the duality. In doing so, the *Zhuangzi* takes each being as firmly and non-dualistically affirmed and grounded in itself that is neither opposable by nor opposing to other beings. The problem of ontological duality is thus addressed in the *Zhuangzi* not as a reductive logical reconciliation but as a fundamental ontological philosophy that affirms each being in its inviolably firm constitution of itself without opening it for dualistic conflict with other beings. Through the double-affirmation of both beings in the duality, the *Zhuangzi* thus offers its philosophy of being on the solid ontological affirmation of all beings rather than on any nihilistic denial of them. The ultimate ontological grounding in the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, is inviolably firm rather than nihilistic.

The inviolable and non-dualistic affirmation of beings also addresses the problem of ontological relativism. Rather than appealing to any universal or transcendental Being that acts as the external arbitrator of all beings, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy stresses the inviolably firm grounding of each being and its unique expression of itself. Each being is non-dualistically constituted and affirmed in itself without opening for challenges from other beings, thereby resolving the potential conflict from their mutual interaction. The absolute ontological truth of being is thus redefined *in and only in* the conditional yet inviolably firm constitution of each being itself without intruding into other being's equally conditional yet absolute truth. In this

way, the *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of beings fully embraces the diversity of beings in their unique expressions of themselves without the universal truth behind them.

Ultimately, the ontological affirmation and equalization of beings are actualized in the human existence by the human experience and immersion in the necessary presencing of the beings in his life. The human being achieves the actualization of all beings in their non-dualistic equalization and total connection with each other; and reconciles the dualistic beings in his life by the equal enjoyment of both beings in the duality. He also resides comfortably in the ceaseless and inevitable temporal presencing of the beings in his life; and enjoys the termination of the beings as much as their emergence. He understands that he is also part of the ceaseless and necessary transformation that equalizes and connects them all, thus feels no alienation from the presencing of the beings in his life. Eventually, his existence is constituted by his active participation and comfortable residing in the presencing of the beings in his life as if they are the mission and destiny of his own life. Therefore, far from a nihilistic denial of the human existence, the existential philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* is a deeply affirmative one. It affirms each being in each moment of the human life without feeling the anxiety for its necessary termination, which will then give rise to the emergence of another being that is equally enjoyable.

Therefore, this study presents the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* not merely as an ontological philosophy that addresses the truth of reality but also an existential philosophy that fundamentally concerns with the human existence. By raising the importance of the beings as fundamentally constitutive of ontological

reality and human existence, it gives the philosophical primacy to the beings. Human existence, as a result, is expressed as the encountering of beings in the human experience. By stressing the primacy of the beings, the *Zhuangzi* emphasizes the inviolable and necessary presencing of the beings that is not alterable by the human will. The ultimate position that the *Zhuangzi* proposes is thus to fully allow the necessary unfolding and manifestations of the beings themselves without the human imposition onto them. In this way, the *Zhuangzi* is also able to raise the agenda for human transformation, in which the human being departs from his status quo of entanglement and attachment with the beings, and eventually reaches the illuminating stage in which his very existence is reconstituted by the necessary and ceaseless presencing of the beings in his life.

The primacy of the beings, therefore, should not be taken as the *Zhuangzi*'s indifference to the human existence. Indeed, the philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi* is also an existential philosophy of the human life, since the beings are never independent ontological beings only but always also constituting the human existence. It is thus essential in the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* for the human being to existentially experience and reconcile the beings in his life in an unalienated way so that the actualization of beings takes place in him and through him. Eventually he comes to understand that rather than confronting antagonistically to the dualistic beings in his life, all beings in his life are equally affirmable and enjoyable. His own existence, rather than opposing to the presencing of the beings in his life, is precisely constituted by his own belonging to the ceaseless presencing and transformation of beings that connect them all.

There is, therefore, the ontological necessity of the inevitable presencing of beings that is not arbitrated by the human will; and the existential necessity of the indispensable human experience for the reconciliation of beings in their own life. Both necessities are indispensable in our understanding of the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi*, as omitting either one will lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of it. The philosophy of being in the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, is neither an independent ontological philosophy that does not care about the human existence nor a straight existential philosophy without concerning the truth of reality, but fundamentally an ontological-existential philosophy in which ontological reality and human existence are mutually constitutive of each other and are never separable.

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