Wandering at Ease IN THE Zhuangzi

Edited by
Roger T. Ames

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STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

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Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

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For information, address State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Production by Cathleen Collins
Marketing by Dana Yanulavich

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Wandering at ease in the Zhuangzi / edited by Roger T. Ames.
p. cm. — (SUNY series in Chinese philosophy and culture)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7914-3921-6 (alk. paper). — ISBN 0-7914-3922-4 (pb : alk. paper)
1. Chuang-tzu. Nan-hua ching. I. Ames, Roger T., 1947–
II. Series.
BL1900.C576W34 1998
299'.51482—dc21

97-43323
CIP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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"What Is the Reason of Failure or Success? The Fisherman's Song Goes Deep into the River"

Fishermen in the Zhuangzi

KIRILL OLE THOMPSON

> Make few your needs, lessen your desires, and then you may get along even without rations. You will ford the rivers and drift out upon the sea. Gaze all you may—you cannot see its farthest shore; journey on and on—you will never see where it ends. Those who come to see you off will all turn back from the shore and go home, while you move ever farther out into the distance. . . . [R]id yourself of hardship, . . . cast off your cares, and . . . wander alone with the Way to the Land of Great Silence.
>
> —*Zhuangzi*, "The Mountain Tree"

A variety of fishermen appear in the *Zhuangzi*,[1] ostensibly because they can utter (or non-utter) spontaneous Daoist insights[2] and conjure up vivid impressions of Daoist cultivation and realization in the mind of the reader.[3] The fishermen thus portrayed suit Zhuangzi's philosophic purposes because, (1) their cultivation is not an artificial regimen, nor is it ascendant in nature—it consists in the very process of their apprenticeship and work as fishermen and proceeds as a gradual deepening of their experience of rivers, lakes, and seas; (2) their realization and insight occur out of their daily interaction with and contemplation of rivers, lakes, and seas—their realization arises spontaneously through their direct experience of these waters, as limpid manifestations of *dao*.

Zhuangzi's portrayals of fishermen have moved generations of readers. Chinese poets and painters have felt inspired to recast their images again and again

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down through the centuries.[4] Despite the philosophic and cultural importance of the fishermen in the *Zhuangzi*, this topic rarely has been singled out for consideration in the scholarship to date.[5]

Given the pristine nature of the subject, we shall embark on an exploration of fishermen in the *Zhuangzi* organized around a set of guiding questions, rather than advancing a focused argument. Questions we shall entertain below include: What is the source of the power and attraction of the image of fishermen in their element as portrayed in the *Zhuangzi*? What levels of realization do Zhuangzi's fisherman display? And how have these fishermen been recast in traditional Chinese poetry and art? What sorts of realization do the later fishermen display?

By exploring such questions, we may open the way to an understanding of the fisherman figure as a representative of the man of *dao* 道 for Zhuangzi and Chinese poets and painters.

FISHERMAN IN THEIR ELEMENT

What distinguishes fishermen from most people is that they lead their lives on the water. They spend hours, days, months, even years, on the water, working on the water, probing the shallows, plumbing the depths, contemplating the water, meditating on the water, sometimes gaining realizations and insights thereby. What, then, is it about the waters of rivers, lakes, and seas that bestows realization and insight on those who are attuned to them and contemplate them for extended periods?

The *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* offer some clues.[6] A "practical" text, the *Laozi* presents several guiding statements about water as "close to *dao*" and as a good exemplar of features and functions of *dao*. The *Zhuangzi*, a more "imaginative" work, on the other hand, opens with a myth in which the northern sea figures as a dark, mysterious realm.

The *Laozi* reads:

> That which is best is similar to water.
> Water benefits ten thousand things and does not oppose them.
> It is always at rest in humble places that people dislike.
> Thus, it is close to *dao*. (ch. 8)
>
> Water is the softest and meekest thing in the world.
> Yet it is best able to overcome that which is strong and solid.
> This is the truth that cannot be changed. (ch. 78)

Thus, by contemplating the beneficent passivity, the recessive humility, the resilient softness of water, the student of *dao* will grasp certain salient features of *dao* and nonaction as "enlightened conduct."

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The water metaphor is implicitly at work throughout the *Laozi*. The following passage, for example, implies the relevance of water as a metaphor that highlights hidden, generally unnoticed features of life and conduct accentuated in Daoism:

> The meekest in the world
> Penetrates the strongest in the world,
> As nothingness enters into that-which-has-no-opening.
> Hence, I am aware of the value of non-action
> And of the value of teaching with no-words.
> As for the value of non-action,
> Nothing in the world can match it. (ch. 43)

By contrast, the *Zhuangzi* opens with an invocation of dark, mysterious oceanic depths in describing the immensity and range of the primordial Kun fish that suddenly transforms into the great Peng bird:

> In the northern darkness there is a fish, and his name is Kun. The Kun is so huge I don't know how many thousand *li* he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is Peng. The back of Peng measures I don't know how many thousand *li* across and, when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. When the sea begins to move, this bird sets off for the southern darkness, which is the Lake of Heaven.[7]

Sea and sky, the respective elements of Kun and Peng, represent yin and yang poles of *qi* 氣, the flowing fluid substratum of the cosmos and all phenomena. Primal yin and yang *qi* impulses, movements, formations, and distributions shape the world, and thus body forth primal patterns of *dao* creativity. Zhuangzi's expression "northern darkness" signifies the yin-pole of the world, whence the yang-*qi* and the *qi* of incipient phenomena begin to emerge. Zhuangzi elsewhere qualifies the expression "darkness" as "mysterious darkness," to describe the realm where phenomena—mental as well as physical—originate, the realm where they are yet-to-begin-to-exist.[8]

In Chinese culture, fish symbolize fertility, strength, prosperity, freedom, and joy; fish are also regarded as supernatural since they can survive in seemingly uninhabitable depths and move freely in any direction.[9] Hence, the gargantuan fish named Kun manifests the principle of fertility and life in the primordial ocean.

Paradoxically, the term "Kun" means fish roe, and thus connotes something small and incipient. With this name-play, Zhuangzi at once foreshadows two principal ideas of his philosophy: the identity of opposites and the identity of multiplicity. These are exemplified, for example, in the doctrines of the identity

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of all the phases of life, and the identity of birth and death: to be born is to die, to be an embryo is to be fully grown.[10]

"[The fish Kun] changes into a bird whose name is Peng." Kun is born of the yin-pole, but bears incipient yang-*qi*; Peng rising from Kun manifests the rise of incipient yang out of yin. Notably, whereas the yin fish lies hidden and mysterious in the dark northern sea, the yang bird is out in the open—it covers the sky and flies as a companion of the prevailing winds. Peng at once churns the air and flies south toward the yang-pole, centered in the Lake of Heaven—a crystalline yang body of water. But, as "return" and "reversal" are "the movement of *dao*," Peng eventually changes back into Kun and returns to the mysterious northern darkness.[11]

In sum, Zhuangzi portrays sky and sea as two primal realms of fluid *qi* complements, yin and yang. These complements in their complex of interactive relationships express the full operation of *dao*. Yet, in its primary originative and closure functions, it is the dark, mysterious primordial depths of the northern waters that are closest to *dao* that the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* seek to accentuate. Accordingly:

> To be aware of the positive, yet to abide in the negative is to be the abyss of the universe.
> To be the abyss of the universe is not to deviate from real attainment and to remain like an innocent child.
> To be aware of the white, yet to abide in the black is to be the chasm of the universe.
> To be the chasm of the universe is to have sufficient real attainment, and to remain in the state of original non-differentiation.
>
> (*Laozi*, ch. 28)

All bodies of water—streams, rivers, lakes, seas—embody to some extent the depths and mysteries of the northern darkness, and bear primal *dao* properties of purity, transparency, reflectivity, passivity, formlessness, humility, fluidity, receptivity, and fertility. Thus, contemplative fishermen in long contact with such waters will spontaneously awaken to *dao*.

This recognition of water as a source of realization and insight is a seemingly universal human phenomenon. We find philosophers and poets across cultures and across the ages enchanted by and celebrating water. To mention just a few examples: Thales, the first Greek philosopher, declared water the first principle of all things.[12] The Greek poet Pindar called water "the best of all things."[13] An Indian *Purana* praises water as "the source of all things and existence."[14] Sounding somewhat like a Daoist, St. Francis celebrated water as the mirror of nature and the model of his conduct.[15] And Zhu Xi poeticized:

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The wide pond expands like a mirror,
The heavenly light and cloud shadows play upon it.
How does such clarity occur? It is because it contains the living stream from the Fountain.[16]

Mankind experiences flowing water as a living natural force. Springs and rivers display power and perpetual renewal; thus, they are deemed alive. Moreover, they vividly embody two basic features of existence: constancy and change. Between the relatively stable banks of a river, we observe waters in constant flux. As Heraclitus intoned, "We step and do not step into the same river twice, we are and we are not."[17]

A river's journey from source to mouth suggests the passage from innocence to experience, the sojourn from birth to death. The unity of the river thus implies the unity of the life process and the identity of life and death. When viewing a river from a position along its course, we experience its source and mouth as mysterious "beyonds." We imagine the source to be a pristine spring feeding the river from deep within the earth and the mouth as opening into a boundless sea, which absorbs the waters surging down from the river, effortlessly. Consequently, the sight of a river rouses our imaginations to deeper and wider conceptions of our worlds, our souls, our selves.[18]

Fish, too, are part of the fisherman's element. Fish display spontaneous, contented life. Zhuangzi tells of Confucius seeing sages who transcend society and "wander beyond the realm,"[19] such as the three friends who said to each other, "'Who can join with others without doing with others? Who can do with others without joining with others? Who can climb up to Heaven and wander in the mists, roam the infinite, and forget life forever and forever?' The three men looked at each other and smiled."[20]

In attempting to characterize such men to his students, Confucius remarks, "Fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes, and men [such as these] forget each other in the Way."[21] Zhuangzi himself appreciated and vouched for the happiness of the fish.[22] He also affirmed that the True Man, the Spiritual Man "takes his cue from the fishes."[23]

From another perspective, Zhuangzi tells of Prince Ren fishing in the eastern sea for one year hoping to land a gigantic fish—a fish so big that it could feed all the people "from Zhihe east, from Cangwu north."[24] Through Ren's prolonged contemplation of the sea in angling for this avatar of Kun, he gains insight into *dao* and a grasp of the practical benefits of this insight, signified in his landing the colossal fish.

In sum, water, like *dao*, manifests formlessness and potential. Water spawns incipient life; fish, the fruit of their fecund element, flourish at one with their realm and manifest a free, spontaneous, contented life. Moreover, in the processes

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ever possible, *a thinking in terms of the whole*."[30] Thus, the student of *dao* comes to realize that the "knowledge" that had been transmitted to him through venerable texts by authority figures as sacrosanct, definite truths governing patterns of interpersonal relationship and conduct are artificial stipulations and codifications, true only for a certain time and place—even if they have a glorious history and are shrouded in tradition.[31]

The sage thus conceived will be cognizant of the rituals and proprieties of his society but he will respond to situations spontaneously according to his enlightened discernment. Even so, there is nothing to prevent his responses from according with common practice.

Now let us consider examples of fisherman in the *Zhuangzi* to see if and how they fit into this scale of realization.

First, we encounter Zhuangzi himself fishing and rejecting a generous offer to administer the state of Chu in chapter 17, "Autumn Floods." In light of the ascending scale of realization implied in the classification of scholars above, we find Zhuangzi placing himself slightly past the midpoint, the pivot on the scale, as a person who has turned inward, withdrawn himself from society to dwell in nature, and who has begun to experience some enlightenment, some insight into *dao*. Moreover, his disdainful rejection of the offer to take over the administration of the state shows that he still *depends on* being withdrawn and dwelling in a secluded, tranquil setting to angle for contentment and deeper realization. Presumably, if he had acquired the spiritual autonomy of the sage, it would be all the same to him whether he governed or wagged his tail in the mud.

Since Zhuangzi intends to communicate insights into human life, *dao* and the condition of enlightenment to his readers through his writings, he would naturally avoid official service and intentionally position himself at the halfway point between sagehood and nonsagehood and thus truly "walk . . . two roads."[32]

Next, the account of Confucius heeding the advice of Taigong Ren in chapter 20, "The Mountain Tree," places him poised to enter the midpoint of the ascending scale of realization.

Confucius learns from Taigong Ren that his teachings about government and society are not only a form of showing off and selling himself, but give rise to dissatisfaction and strife. Confucius then bids his friends and associates adieu, sends his disciples away, and retires to the great swamp, wearing animal skins and coarsely woven cloth and feeding only on acorns and chestnuts. He grows so "wild" (again, in Thoreau's positive sense of the term) there, so at one with the swamp and wildlife, that he can "walk among the animals without alarming their herds, walk among the birds without alarming their flocks."[33]

Stressing his sudden turn to hermitism, the anecdote doesn't mention Confucius angling, yet the author expects the reader to recall Confucius's enjoyment of waters, his meditation on a stream and his preference for angling with a hook rather than with a net as recorded in the *Analects*.[34]

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Next, in chapter 21, "Tian Zifang," King Wen encounters a venerable old man fishing and at once recognizes him to be a sage. That his sagehood is authentic is underscored in the description:

> His fishing was not really fishing; he was not holding the fishing pole in hand in order to catch a fish. He was undertaking eternal fishing.[35]

King Wen has the discernment to see that this old man can manage the state administration perfectly and conceives of a way to persuade his high officials and relatives to accept him as the prime minister. A veritable Daoist sage, the old man goes on to rule by nonaction. During his three-year tenure, "the regular precedents and laws remained unchanged, and not a single new order was issued."[36] The established hierarchies and distinctions that had characterized government and society for generations fall away and people start to interrelate and conduct their lives in a simple, direct, sincere fashion. Pleased, King Wen seeks to extend the old man's dominion to the whole world. Hearing of King Wen's plan, the old man "looked blank and gave no answers, . . . and when orders went out to make the attempt, the old man ran away . . . and was never heard from again."[37]

As discussed above, in chapter 26, "External Things," Prince Ren makes an enormous fishhook and devotes himself to angling for the gigantic fish of the eastern sea for a full year. With its emphasis on Prince Ren's landing the fish, this story is not so much about the fisherman figure per se as it is intended to illustrate the benefits of cultivating broad-mindedness. Contemplating the wide sea for one year, Prince Ren's mind becomes so open and vast that he can comprehend and catch the giant fish: Daoist Great Understanding identifies with the cosmos and is sensitive and responsive to the pulse and rhythms of nature. Thus, the actions of the man of Great Understanding are, ultimately, more in harmony with the situation and fruitful than those of the more practical, goal-directed person.

Lastly, chapter 31, "The Old Fisherman," presents a sustained narrative of an encounter between Confucius and a nameless old fisherman sage. Confucius has brought several disciples to the Apricot Altar to study while he strums his lute and sings. The scene recalls *Analects* 11/26 where Confucius, in a relaxed mood, asks his disciples their respective ambitions. While acknowledging the younger disciples' grand ambitions to administer a state, he shares Zengxi's wish "to go bathing in the River Yi and enjoy the breeze in the Rain Altar, and then go home chanting poetry" with several adults and youths.[38]

Confucius settles down at the Apricot Altar; but, before he has completed playing his first song, an uncanny old fisherman pulls up in a boat, sizes him up, then lectures him on government and society, on eight faults and four evils, and finally on his need to be "diligent in improving [him]self, careful to hold fast to the Truth," Truth in the sense of inner genuineness.

The old fisherman's credentials as a sage are established at the outset of the narrative with his physical description:

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> His beard and eyebrows were pure white, his hair hung down over his shoulders, and his sleeves flapped at his sides.[39]

Moreover, toward the end of the narrative Confucius identifies the old man as a Perfect Man and then as a sage.[40]

Despite the disclaimer that he "will put aside his own ways for the moment and try applying [him]self to the things that [Confucius is] concerned with,"[41] the old fisherman's didactic lectures to Confucius on government and society mark him as a sage savvy about administration and society and place him squarely in our scale of scholars and realization. A genuine sage by that standard, he has transcended yet still comprehends, and perchance has impact upon, government and society in his "realm" of tacit influence. The old fisherman's savvy incorporates the "wisdom" of a laissez-faire nonaction approach, provided that people focus on the affairs within the purview of their concern; he strongly deprecates Confucian interventionism in other people's affairs.

The old fisherman then proceeds to espouse his own notion of Truth: Bearing Truth means being pure and sincere within so that one's manifest feelings and responses are genuine. "When a man has the Truth within himself, his spirit may move among external things."[42] To stand on tradition and custom is to dissipate the purity of one's emotions and complicate one's intentions. By responding directly, guided by one's spontaneous impulses, one will act appropriately and sincerely, and thus will "move" others and be appreciated by them.

Having said his piece, the old fisherman "poled away in his boat, threading a path through the weeds." Confucius watches transfixed, "until the ripples on the water were stilled and he could no longer hear the sound of the pole," before he ventures to mount the carriage back.[43] The old fisherman returns to the hidden Source whence pure waters emerge to purify himself, whereas Confucius rides a chariot back to artificial human society.

When the disciple Zilu dismisses the old fisherman in rather offhand fashion as a mere fisherman, not worthy of the profound respect Confucius has paid him, Confucius replies that to fail to treat an elder with respect is a breach of propriety, and to fail to treat a worthy with veneration is a violation of benevolence. He continues:

> If the fisherman were not a Perfect Man, he would not be able to make people humble themselves before him. And if men, in humbling themselves before him, lack purity of intention, then they will never attain the Truth. As a result they will go on forever bringing injury upon themselves.[44]

In concluding, Confucius identifies *dao* as the path along which the myriad things and human undertakings alike should proceed; things and undertakings that are in accord with the Way survive and flourish, those that do not, die and fail. Hence, the sage will pay homage wherever *dao* is to be found:

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> This old fisherman may certainly be said to possess [the Way]. How, then, would I dare fail to show respect to him![45]

A. C. Graham finds in the old fisherman's call to "hold fast to the Truth," to one's inner genuineness, an echo of Yang Zhu's egoistic hermitism.[46] Yang Zhu's position involves, however, an austere detachment from society and material things as well as a devotion to yogic practice. Yang Zhu would likely fall under the category of adepts devoted to breathing exercises and yoga in our scale of scholars and realization. The *Huainanzi*, chapter 13, for instance, attributes to Yang Zhu the principles of:

> keeping the body intact, protecting one's genuineness, and not tying the body by involvements with other things.[47]

Many pre-Qin texts go on to attribute to Yang Zhu the extreme position of refusing to give anything of the self over to the world and of despising things and treasuring one's own life.[48]

The old fisherman displays none of this excessive austerity. Whereas Yang Zhu simply has no thought about society, except perhaps to eschew it, the old fisherman has a positive view of society as possibly flourishing, on condition that people stay focused on their own duties at their respective social position. He also has a positive, almost Mencian view of human affairs, on condition that people maintain pure, sincere hearts and express their feelings truly and spontaneously. His views imply a detached attitude toward material things, but that is a far cry from the outright renunciation of them espoused by Yang Zhu.

Although similar in letter to Yang Zhu's saying, the old fisherman's call to "hold fast to the Truth," to inner genuineness, is much closer in spirit to views propounded throughout the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. The *Laozi* tells us to "manifest simplicity and embrace original non-differentiation" in chapter 19. Similarly, the *Zhanguoce* (Intrigues of the Warring States) suggests that we "return to inner genuineness and revert to original non-differentiation" ("Qice"). Moreover, the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 12, "Heaven and Earth," reads:

> The man of noble attainment moves in simplicity.... He takes his stand in the original source and his understanding reaches to the spirits. Therefore his attainment is far-reaching. His mind goes forth only when stirred by outer phenomena.... To preserve the self and live out life, to experience attainment and enlightenment into *Dao*—is this not noble attainment?[49]

> The man with attainment is free of thoughts when at rest, and free of calculations when in action. He doesn't bear predetermined ideas of right and wrong, beautiful and ugly.[50]

Above and beyond the affinity between the old fisherman and the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* at this point, the old fisherman ascribes, as noted by Graham,[51] a

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positive value to the feelings that stands out in the *Zhuangzi*, and that is absent from the *Laozi*. As noted, the old fisherman also displays a Mencian trust that people who have cultivated the Truth of inner purity and sincerity will be set to spontaneously express themselves with appropriate emotions and sentiments in various situations.

FISHERMAN SAGES

At this point, we would do well to pause and inquire whether the appearance of fisherman scholars and sages in the *Zhuangzi* signals a shift in the Daoist conception of sagehood. As we have seen, the ascending scale of scholars and realization into which all the fishermen figures in the *Zhuangzi* can be mapped, involves the assumption that scholars, worthies and sages at the higher levels will continue to understand and have insight into the ways of government and society. Those at the higher levels, even sages who have transcended all the mundane restrictions and concerns of society, will have a firm grasp of human affairs and will perchance exert a positive, generally harmonizing influence on government and society.

By contrast, the *Zhuangzi* usually portrays contemplative sages, figures detached from and unconcerned about mundane matters of interpersonal and social life. Emphasis is placed on the character of their enlightenment, their personal style, and their bearing and conduct. These sages tend to be elderly, with long, flowing white hair and beards, but with skin as smooth and soft as a baby's and eyes that are blank and innocent. They are as gentle and light-hearted as young girls. Their conduct is smooth and effortless and their existence in the world is never threatened; for their identity with heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things keeps them attuned to their setting and synchronized with the things transpiring around them.

Accordingly, the fisherman motif suggests an indirect shift to a slightly more practical conception of sagehood. To review, the fishing Zhuangzi refuses government service, preferring to wag his tail in the mud; as we have noted, this attitude was consistent with his position on the scale of realization. We, too, saw Confucius withdrawing from society to live as a hermit in the great swamp; again, this was consistent with his position on the scale. We may also observe that, whereas Zhuangzi would be particularly inclined, by temperament, toward a free, contemplative sagehood, Confucius would ultimately be inclined toward a more practical form. The old man fishing discovered by King Wen at first appears to be a contemplative sage, but once placed in charge of state administration he—by nonaction—infuses harmony into the realm by spurring the people to become simple, pure, sincere, and cooperative. Prince Ren's landing the gargantuan fish underscores the practical benefits of realizing *dao*. Finally, whereas the old fisherman dwells at the Source of the flowing river, alone and nameless, he displays impressive insight into government and society as well as into the subtleties of

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The Old Fisherman

At night the old fisherman docks his boat along the
western cliff.
Before sunrise he draws up clear river water and
burns Chu bamboo to cook.
Anon the sun rises and the fog disperses,
there is not a soul to be seen.
With the sound of the oar in the water,
the mountains and river are verdant.
Shifting our gaze, we see the waters flow out
from the horizon.
The white clouds atop the cliffs pursue each other
without intention.[60]

Wang Wei (699–759) expressed the essential thought of Daoism and Chan Buddhism in his best poetry. His poetic art achieved perfection in that he conveyed the philosophy directly through the juxtaposition of images, events and feelings, without recourse to special terms or jargon. In the following poem, the image of the fisherman's song entering deep into the river highlights the poet's sense of detachment from worldly concerns and sense of oneness and attunement with *dao*, as reflected in his tranquil setting and quiescent mind:

Of late I concern myself with quiescence.
Nothing in the world concerns my mind.

The breeze from the pine woods blows my sash;
The mountain moon shines upon my harp.
You ask me the reason of failure and success;
The fisherman's song goes deep into the river.[61]

Finally, the poet Sikong Shu (d. c. 790) actually speaks as a fisherman in the following poem. His degree of realization is manifested in his perfect comprehension of, and attunement with, his river setting:

Ceasing fishing, I return back for the day, but
don't bother to fasten the boat to shore.
Unconcerned, I fall asleep just as the moon sets over
the village.
Even though the night wind blows,
The boat will stay in the reeds and blossoms
in the shallow water.[62]

Why needn't the fisherman secure his boat to the shore? Why can he fall asleep easily, unconcerned whether the boat will slip away and float downstream? He is at one with the river, the Way, attuned to the subtle ebb and flow of its

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current. Thus, he knows just where to leave his boat, at just the place where, held in place both by the reeds and by an equal balance between current and counter-current, the boat will remain, even more securely than if he were to fasten it down.

This poem recalls Zhuangzi's story about attempting to hide a boat:

> You hide your boat in the ravine and your fish net in the swamp and tell yourself that they will be safe. But in the middle of the night a strong man shoulders them and carries them off, and in your stupidity you don't know why it happened. You think you do right to hide little things in big ones, and yet they get away from you. But if you were to hide the world in the world, so that nothing could get away, this would be the final reality of the constancy of things.[63]

What does it mean to hide a universe in the universe? A person who has realized *dao* is at one with heaven, earth, and the myriad things. Since he (his Great Self) is at one with the world, he and the world are mutually dependent and sustain each other. Consequently, nothing can happen to either him or the world: even if his empirical self were to die or vanish, his Great Self would continue to persist in and through the totality. Similarly, Sikong Shu's fisherman persona is at one with heaven, earth and the myriad things. He is at one with the totality and is sensitive to the ebb and flow of the river. Thus, he knows intuitively where to leave his boat, without a care, in the knowledge that it will remain in place and nothing will move it. This signifies the wisdom of the fisherman sage.

NOTES

1. The chapter title is from "Qou Zhang Shaofu," a poem by Wang Wei. Translation adapted from Chang Chung-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism: A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art, and Poetry* (New York: Julian Press, 1963), p. 91.
2. There are questions concerning the authorship of the *Zhuangzi*. See A. C. Graham's discussions in *Chuang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book*, trans. A. C. Graham (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), pp. 3–5, 27–30. See also Ping Wong Chin, *A Study of Chuang-tzu: Text, Author and Philosophy* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1978), pp. 29–93. For ease of presentation, the author(s) will be treated simply as "Zhuangzi" in this paper.
3. For example, fishermen appear in chapters 15, 17, 21, 26, and 31. Fish appear in chapters 1, 6, 17 and elsewhere. Chapter 20 includes the recommendation to drift out to sea to realize *dao* (quoted at the head of this paper) and reports Confucius fleeing society to the great swamp where he becomes a bona fide hermit.

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4. For a general survey, see William W. Lew, *The Fisherman in Yuan Painting and Literature as Reflected in Wu Chen's "Yu-fu T'u" in the Shanghai Museum* (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1976), pp. 38–75, 161–81.
5. Graham provides some discussion on ch. 31, "The Old Fisherman," pp. 221 and 248.
6. Translations from the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* in this paper are adopted from Chang Chung-yuan, trans., *Tao: A New Way of Thinking: A Translation of the "Tao Te Ching" with an Introduction and Commentaries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), and Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).
7. *Zhuangzi* (hereafter Z), ch. 1, p. 29.
8. Z, ch. 2, p. 43; see also Z, ch. 6, p. 83, and Z, ch. 17. p. 187 for the term *xuanming* 玄冥 (literally "mysterious darkness"), which Watson renders as "Dark-Obscurity."
9. Kuang-ming Wu, *The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 70. Wu's glosses and meditations on the opening paragraph have benefitted this discussion.
10. See, for example, Z, ch. 2, pp. 39 & 40, ch. 6, pp. 84–88, and ch. 17, pp. 175–82. For discussion, see Chang, *Tao: A New Way*, pp. xvi–xviii.
11. *Laozi*, ch. 48: "Reversal is the movement of *Dao*. Yielding is the action of *Dao*." The term "return" (*gui* 歸) appears throughout the *Laozi*.
12. Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 63.
13. Pindar, *Olympian Odes*.
14. Quoted in Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed (New York: New American Library, 1958), p. 188.
15. "The Canticle of Brother Sun," in L. S. Cunningham, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976), p. 58.
16. Quoted in Chang Chung-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1963), p. 182.
17. Quoted in Barnes, p. 117.
18. This is implied in Z, ch. 17, pp. 175–183. F. S. Colwell notes Coleridge's intriguing view of rivers and their sources as "companionable forms," and characterizes them as "agents that establish ... our most profound discourse with ourselves, offering a measure of self-knowledge otherwise inaccessible." *Rivermen: A Romantic Iconography of the River and the Source* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 5.
19. Z, ch. 6, p. 86.
20. Ibid.
21. Z, ch. 6, p. 87.
22. Z, ch. 17, pp. 188–89.

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23. Z, ch. 24, p. 277.
24. Z, ch. 24, p. 276.
25. An implied scale of levels of realization and categories which differentiate among them appear elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*, for example, in ch. 1, pp. 31–33, where Song Rongzi and Liezi are profiled, then three categories are given: the Perfect Man—who has no self, the Spiritual Man—who has no merit, and the Sage—who has no fame. Song Rongzi and Liezi have not quite reached these categories. Xu Yu appears to exemplify the Perfect Man, Jie Yu the Spiritual Man, and the Holy Man of Gushe Mountain the Sage. This classification, which reflects the position of Zhuangzi himself, is further removed from the realm of practical affairs than the classification that appears in chapter 15, which reflects the position, perhaps, of early Han Daoists who were developing the political and social side of their thought.
26. Z, ch. 15, pp. 167–68.
27. Z, ch. 15, p. 167.
28. Z, ch. 33, p. 362, with modifications.
29. Given in Chang, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking*, p. xxi.
30. C. G. Jung, *Jung on the East*, ed. J. J. Clark (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 74. (Selected from "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," par. 924.)
31. See, for example, Z, ch. 2, p. 40: "A road is made by people walking on it, things are so because they are called so. What makes them so? Making them so makes them so . . . There is nothing that is not so, there is nothing that is not acceptable."
32. Z, ch. 2, p. 41. See also Z, ch. 6, pp. 79–80: "Therefore his liking was one and his not liking was one. His being one was one and his not being one was one. In being one, he was acting as a companion of Heaven. In not being one, he was acting as a companion of man. When Heaven and man do not defeat each other, then we may be said to have the True Man."
33. Z, p. 214.
34. *Analects* 6.23: "The wise find joy in water"; 7.27: "The Master used a fishing line but not a cable (attached to a net)"; and 9.17: "While standing by a river, the Master said, "What passes away is, perhaps, like this. Day and night it never lets up." D.C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects (Lun yu)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1979, 1983), pp. 53, 63, and 81.
35. Cf. Z, p. 229. The author retranslated this passage. Thoreau suggests eternal fishing at several points in *Walden*. He writes, for example:

    Time is but a stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count

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> one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I am not as wise as the day I was born. (p. 66)
>
> On midnight fishing: At length you slowly raise . . . some horned pout squeaking and squirming to the upper air. It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonal themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook. (p. 117)
>
> Commonly [my fellow citizens] did not think that they were lucky, or well paid for their time, unless they got a long string of fish, though they had the opportunity of seeing the pond all the while. They might go there a thousand times before the sediment of fishing would sink to the bottom and leave their purpose pure; but no doubt such a clarifying process would be going on all the while. (p. 142)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966).

36. Z, ch. 21, p. 229.
37. Z, ch. 21, p. 230.
38. Lau, p. 105.
39. Z, ch. 31, p. 344. The description bears comparison with that of the Spiritual Man ("Holy Man" in Watson's translation) of Gushe Mountain (Z, ch. 1, p. 33), the True Man of ancient times (Z, ch. 6, p. 78), and the Sage (Z, ch. 13, p. 142).
40. Z, ch. 31, p. 351.
41. Z, ch. 31, p. 346.
42. Z, ch. 31, p. 349.
43. Z, ch. 31, p. 351.
44. Ibid.
45. Z, ch. 31, p. 352.
46. Graham, p. 248.
47. Graham, p. 221.
48. For discussion, see Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 133–43.
49. Z, ch. 12, p. 128. Translation modified.
50. Z, ch. 12, p. 137. Translation modified. The discussion that follows in chapter 12 goes on to parallel the old fisherman's trust in aptness of the spontaneous feelings of pure, sincere people:

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Moreover, leading English translations of *Zhuangzi* interpret "*wu ji*" in this passage by reference to a concept of "no self." Victor Mair and Burton Watson have "no self," and A. C. Graham has "selfless."[4] While they do not specifically stress concepts of "self" and "no self" in their own explanations of Master Zhuang's thought, their translations attribute these concepts to him and, in my opinion, thereby lead others astray. As a result, certain contemporary American thinkers interested in Master Zhuang have interpreted him as having a doctrine of "no self."[5]

In other words, whether intentionally or not, interpreters of *Zhuangzi* frequently attribute to him concepts of "self" and "no self" in the way they translate or explain key Chinese phrases in the text, such as *wu ji* and *sang wo*. Yet when we seek to understand these phrases in terms of Master Zhuang's overall message, these attributions are not only unnecessary, they are extremely misleading.

Master Zhuang did not preach a particular gospel or push his own brand of metaphysics, but he did have a consistent message about the art of living. I will characterize his ideal in the art of living as "flowing," making reference to contemporary theory on the "flow experience." Zhuang describes this ideal through sayings like the one in my epigraph, by means of philosophical dialogues, and with metaphorical tales about wandering, swimming in water like fish, flying like birds, or reaching states beyond flying (with hints of mystical experience).[6]

I believe one very useful way of understanding Zhuang's message on the art of living is to consider his views on the mental and behavioral traits that obstruct flowing. I will argue that he uses terms like *ji* and *wo*, not to mean selfhood in the modern Western or Chinese senses (represented, respectively, by the terms "self" and "*ziwo*" 自我), but only to identify traits that obstruct one's carefree flowing with the world of living things. As for my own interpretation of the passage at the end of the epigraph, in which *wu ji* is used for the first time, it will be clarified in due course, as we proceed through the stages outlined below.

ESSAY OVERVIEW

The first section below will discuss the modern Western concept of self in order to show its cultural specificity. The reason for doing so will be to indicate that the concept, and thus the term "self," carries so much cultural baggage that its use in the interpretation of ancient Chinese texts will inevitably mislead us.

The second section will further problematize the use of "self" as well as "no self" in interpreting *Zhuangzi* by considering key works of modern Chinese and Western scholars. These are all scholars who lean heavily on the concept of "self," assuming it has enough universal relevance to aid us in understanding Master Zhuang's thought.

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The third section will consist of a detailed effort to contextualize the use of Chinese terms in *Zhuangzi* (*ji, wo,* and others) by looking at their use in late Zhou period texts other than *Zhuangzi* as well as at many passages from the text itself. By investigating this set of terms, which may overlap in meaning with modern terms for self (that is, "self" in English, "*ziwo*" in Chinese), I aim to contribute to the comparative study of concepts of the person, with specific reference to ancient China and the modern world. This will be necessary because, despite the many works that talk about Confucian and Daoist "selfhood," few begin with a linguistic survey of the relevant Chinese words.

The final section will aim to show what Master Zhuang probably *did* mean when he used those Chinese words that we normally render in English as "self." In doing so I will present, as the context for understanding what he meant, his essential message about the art of living. As already indicated, the key modern concept that I *will* use for this purpose is "the flow experience."

THE MODERN CONCEPT OF SELF

From Marcel Mauss through Charles Taylor, many thinkers have insisted that "self" is a modern Western (post-Cartesian) cultural construction.[7] Studies on concepts of the person in various non-Western societies have reinforced this view.[8] Moreover, the concept of self is actually a whole constellation of concepts. As Brian Morris points out: "The 'self' structure of Western culture has thus been widely described as individuated, detached, separate and self-sufficient, and involving a dualistic metaphysic."[9]

This cultural construction even intrudes on our way of thinking when we do not use the term, or think the concept, "self." In his seminal work, *Sources of the Self,* Charles Taylor begins by suggesting how wide is the range of the intrusion of this concept and its corollary, "the modern identity." In his words: "[In writing this book] I wanted to show how the ideals and interdicts of this identity—what it casts in relief and what it casts in shadow—shape our philosophical thought, our epistemology and our philosophy of language, largely without our awareness." The unconscious way in which we impose our concept of "self" on worlds of thought far removed from our own in time and place is of particular concern to me in this essay. In order that I can phenomenologically bracket it out of my effort to understand the concept of the person and the art of living in *Zhuangzi,* let us now survey key aspects of this cultural construction.

Among the aspects of our concept "self" that make it unique and differentiate it from the universally human "sense of me," and the ubiquitous terms of self-reference in human languages, Taylor points to the strong degree to which we have nominalized "self." He states:

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> It is probable that in every language there are resources for self-reference and descriptions of reflexive thought, action, attitude.... But this is not at all the same as making "self" into a noun, preceded by a definite or indefinite article, speaking of "the" self, or "a" self. This reflects something important which is peculiar to our modern sense of agency.[10]

This is part and parcel of our stress on inwardness, on a subjectivity that lives within us, built on the dichotomy of inner and outer, which, thanks originally to Augustine, is linked to a whole series of dichotomies. Augustine set us on this path, building on Platonic oppositions he had inherited. According to Taylor, "this same opposition of spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal, immutable/changing *is* described by Augustine, not just occasionally and peripherally, but centrally and essentially in terms of inner/outer."[11]

After modern thinkers, from Descartes through Locke, had made their contributions, the "self" became, paradoxically, an inner object to be shaped by disciplined action as well as an inner subject seen as a privileged observer of objects in the outer world. Radical objectivity and radical subjectivity thus became part of the modern mind set. This is not so paradoxical if one accepts Taylor's argument that Cartesian rational disengagement made possible the modern objectification of both self and world. Speaking of a whole constellation of post-Cartesian, Enlightenment era developments in European society, he offers this explanation:

> What one finds running through all the aspects of this constellation—the new philosophy, methods of administration and military organization, spirit of government and methods of discipline—is the growing ideal of a human agent who is able to remake himself by methodical and disciplined action. What this calls for is the ability to take an instrumental stance to one's given properties, desires, inclinations, tendencies, habits of thought and feeling, so that they can be *worked on*, doing away with some and strengthening others, until one meets the desired specifications. My suggestion is that Descartes' picture of the disengaged subject articulates the understanding of agency which is most congenial to this whole movement, and that is part of the grounds for its great impact in his century and beyond.[12]

Thus, Taylor's search for the historical sources of the modern sense of agency not only reiterates what many have said—that Cartesian subjectivity is a uniquely modern concept of human agency—but he links this to the equally "modern" proclivity to make one's "self" the object of methodical development.

In addition to Taylor's opus, I have also found Frank Johnson's briefer treatment of the subject in "The Western Concept of Self" very useful. While Johnson gives a short summary of historical developments, his main emphasis is

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on the qualities that are imparted to "self," when the term is used in contemporary Western discourse in the humanities and social sciences. Johnson lists four such qualities: analytical, monotheistic, individualistic, and materialistic/rationalistic.[13] As this implies, a whole constellation of ways of thinking, or habits of thought, forms itself around the modern concept of self.

By "analytic" Johnson means, above all, "the tendency to see reality as an aggregation of parts." He adds: "This endorsement of a particulate universe of material objects is important given the western tendency toward an emphasis on 'taking things apart'—i.e., analysis—and on the consequent process—*deduction.*" Thinking in the analytic-deductive mode leads to a view of "self" as an observer separate from external objects as well as to what Johnson calls static, structural models of "self as subject."[14]

Johnson is among a number of scholars who use the term "monotheism" to mean more than a theological position, that is, to mean a whole way of thinking. Naturally, he cites Nietzsche, who called monotheism "the rigid consequence of the doctrine of one normal being," as the initiator of this trend. One corollary of monotheism, so viewed, is a series of dualisms that begins with the true God/false gods opposition. Johnson lists various pairs of opposites, dividing them into two groups: "*qualities of existence* (for example, good/bad, beautiful/ugly, sacred/profane, and so on) and *categories of identity* (for example, God/Satan, mind/matter, love/lust, and so on)." Johnson identifies a second corollary of the monotheistic way of thinking—a closed-system cosmology—and explains its connection to modern concepts of self, as follows:

> Another corollary of monotheism is the tendency to support a closed-system cosmology whose limits are coterminous with a singular, all-encompassing deity. Such encapsulation of reality, modeled after a unitary, omnipotent power, has tended to reinforce the description of a closed-system *personology* as well as a closed-system theology.[15]

"Monotheism" thus involves the tendency toward unitary explanations of phenomena in general and, also, toward a closed-system view of self.

Of course, "individualism," as a quality of Western thinking and subjectivity, is closely related to the kind of "personology" that Johnson mentions. The "self" experienced as closed off from what is not self, in part, is a consequence of the personal anxiety connected with our cultural belief in ontological separation and estrangement from God. In tandem with this, the stress on individual freedom and rights, regardless of its merits in the political realm, produces feelings of loneliness and alienation. Self-expression and self-actualization become important ways of establishing who one is and how one will find satisfaction in the world. This affects, for example, the way children are raised. In Johnson's words: "Children are socialized simultaneously to be obedient, to submit to rules which protect the rights of others, *and* to develop a progressive independence."[16]

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Finally, as for materialistic-rationalistic tendencies of thought, Johnson asks us to see these as a "belief system," rather than a privileged "rational, scientific approach to reality." This is a belief system defined by "acceptance of the mechanical and logical characteristics of a world of objects."[17] While general acceptance of this belief system does not preclude explanations of phenomena (such as a person's death) in terms of other, coexisting belief systems, it does lead to (1) the tendency for rationalistic and materialistic explanations to predominate, (2) the tendency to apply modes of understanding the material world to realms that are not easily "materialized," and (3) the tendency to discredit explanations not using the analytic-deductive mode of thinking.[18]

As Johnson indicates earlier in his essay, when this mode of thinking is applied to selfhood by contemporary authors in the humanities and social sciences, certain common trends emerge. "Self" is normally seen as a unitary phenomenon, although it is common to contrast this (inner) self with a social self. Another typical way of analyzing a person's (single) self is in terms of so-called "levels" (or "layers") of selfhood. Finally, as Taylor also stressed, "self" is presented as something to be "worked on," for example, through stages of development.[19]

"SELF" AND "NO SELF" IN *ZHUANGZI* STUDIES

In this section I give examples of approaches to Master Zhuang's thought that feature the concept of self (or no self). These include examples from the pens of both American scholars and Chinese scholars. The Chinese scholars, some of whose works are in English, are all part of the Chinese *Zhuangzi* studies milieu. Yet we should not expect them to be less under the influence of the modern concept of self than their "Western" counterparts, despite the fact that Taylor and Johnson, for example, stress the Western origins of this concept. Indeed, there are reasons for us to expect the opposite.

In his excellent survey of Chinese conceptions of the self through the centuries, Mark Elvin indicates that, since the late nineteenth century, modern Chinese thinkers have given "self" a central role in their philosophies, whether they advocate its liberation or propose its absorption into a collective consciousness.[20] Lin Tongqi, Henry Rosemont, and Roger Ames, covering contemporary developments in a recent essay on the state of the field in Chinese philosophy, explain that in recent years "self" has been, along with "culture," one of the two central concepts in Chinese thought. They not only underscore the continuing importance on debates over the status of "self" (*ziwo*) but also the new obsession with the concept of "subjectivity" (*zhutixing* 主體性). They quote a Chinese scholar (Wang Pengling) as saying, in 1987, that one can hardly open a journal without confronting a discussion of subjectivity.[21] These developments are, of course, in response to China's confrontation with Western philosophy, literature, social science, and so on, throughout which the modern concept of self is a taken-for-granted notion.

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Looking at this situation, particularly in light of Wu's otherwise brilliant efforts to see Zhuang in his own terms, I cannot help but feel that Wu has come under the spell of modern "self" theory.

Paul Kjellberg, in an important review article on Wu's *Butterfly as Companion*, reaches the same conclusion. He does so in the context of criticizing Wu for presenting his own views (such as that of levels of self) under Zhuang's inspiration, rather than sticking to his intended work of exegesis. Here is what Kjellberg has to say:

> One wonders at times if the project of *understanding* Zhuang Zi is not being sacrificed in favor of being *inspired* by him. One particularly disturbing example of this is the very distinction he draws between *wu* and *wo*.... [Zhuang Zi's] use of these two terms here, both of which are first-person pronouns, is readily explained by the fact that, unlike *wo*, the word *wu* cannot function as the object of a verb unless pre-posed after a negation.... Thus, while it is certainly an interesting and useful distinction to draw, the implication that Zhuang Zi has a developed theory of two levels of the self for which *wu* and *wo* are technical terms is at the very least a bit precipitous, if not misleading.[28]

As we turn to several other key contributors to American *Zhuangzi* studies, we will see that their interpretations, while insightful in other respects, also suffer from being under the spell of modern "self" theory.

Judith Berling's essay, "Self and Whole in Chuang Tzu," exemplifies the best and the worst in this regard.[29] On the one hand, it is an insightful piece that articulates how, through teaching an art of living, Master Zhuang offers freedom from societal limitations without preaching the ascetic way of life that is so commonly advocated for this purpose. On the other hand, it reads into Zhuang's thought almost every imaginable feature of modern "self" theory, including a model of outer (social) self versus true inner self, a notion of layers of self, the goal of an autonomous perfected self, and a process whereby the spiritual quality of the inner self can shine through the layers of outer selfhood.

Interestingly, Berling stresses the importance of the passage on which this essay focuses, interpreting *zhiren* ("ultimate man" in Mair's translation) to mean "perfected self." She considers the passage to be one among several images and anecdotes used by Zhuang "which portray the transcendence of the perfected self." She interprets many other passages, in which various obstructions to freedom are the subject of humorous critiques, as Zhuang's presentation of two "extrinsic layers." The first layer consists of labels attached to persons. Of them, she states: "These labels represent judgments which in no way touch or reflect the true self." To complete this model, she adds: "A second layer of the socialized self consists of the various roles and functions designated by society."[30] Moreover, in common with some Chinese interpreters discussed above, she sees physical

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existence as another layer covering the real self, as if she were dealing with a tradition that posits a spirit/matter dualism (even though she knows she is not). Thus, she states: "Spirit [*shen* 神] is a quality of the inner self that lies beneath the layers of mind and things; it is the spirit which one tries to release or recover by moving toward the ideal of the perfected self."[31]

Ultimately, after setting socialized and physical existence into opposition with authentic selfhood, Berling shows how Master Zhuang is able to reconcile the two while avoiding ascetic withdrawal from ordinary life. Instead of ascetic withdrawal, Zhuang advocates joining the flow of life without sacrificing individual freedom. However, this reconciliation—"a balance between uncovering the inner core of the self and being open to the whole of life"—was only required, in the first place, because a foreign dichotomy had been imposed on Zhuang's thought.[32] As I will argue below, this imposition is not needed for one to understand Zhuang's message about joining the flow of life.

While Berling's work exemplifies the "layers" feature and dualistic tendency of modern "self" theory, Robert Allinson's *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation* exemplifies the developmental tendency.[33] He argues that the Inner Chapters of *Zhuangzi* involve the reader in a project of self-transformation, taking him/her step by step away from conventional ways of thinking, through mental "forgetting," to an ideal state of mind. The strong point of this analysis is the emphasis, not on what Zhuang says, but on how he says it. The emphasis is on the language and literary devices (fantastic tales, uses of logic against logic, shocking humor, and so on) that allegedly lead us through the stages of self-transformation. Here I am not concerned with whether or not Allinson succeeds in proving that Zhuang's language is intended to transform readers step by step.[34] I am concerned mainly with his claim that the process of transformation taught by Zhuang was a step-by-step transformation of the "self." Allinson says *Zhuangzi* is "a chart of spiritual progress." He explains: "The literary conceits and linguistic techniques which make up the text of the *Zhuangzi* seem systematically and artfully arranged both to indicate the different levels of spiritual development which lie before us and to show which linguistic devices are appropriately applied to these differing and ascending levels."[35]

What is self-transformation? According to Allinson: "The project of self-transformation appears in the *Zhuangzi* under various labels, most frequently as entering into Heaven or obtaining the Tao or the Way. The master key to the attainment of the Tao or the entrance into Heaven is the employment of the strategy of forgetting the mind." Unable to find a suitable example of the phrase "forgetting the mind" (*wang xin* 忘心) in *Zhuangzi*, Allinson has to settle for a passage (outside the Inner Chapters) about forgetting the self, in which we read: "The man who has forgotten self may be said to have entered Heaven."[36] He takes this as a key passage on transformation of the self, for in his view: "For-

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getting the self and transforming the self are more or less the same thing."[37] He comments on the passage in question, as follows:

> If we can take as the mark of attaining heavenliness the success that one has had in forgetting one's self, I think it is fair to say that mental forgetting is the master key to attaining the Tao. If we keep in mind that mental forgetting is the same as learning how not to operate through one's conscious mental functions, I believe that we will have found an explicit textual reference which identifies the project of self-transformation as the central project of the *Zhuang Zi*.[38]

Here *Zhuangzi* is taken to teach a project of self-transformation and, moreover, to present the human individual as having a "self" that s/he can forget. In other words, we have the developmental tendency of modern "self" theory built upon the idea, quite foreign to Master Zhuang, of "the self" as something that a person "has."

The same assumption—of "the self" as something to have or lose, to possess or forget, and so forth—underlies the interpretations of those who stress, not Zhuang's views on "self," but his views on "no self." One example of this is David Loy's attempt to compare Zhuang's views to Buddhist theories of "no self" (*anatman*) in "Zhuangzi and Nāgārjuna on the Truth of No Truth."[39] Loy reads Zhuang as taking the Buddhist position that "self" is an illusion that we possess and must eradicate to reach the realization of "no self." Buddhist interpretations of Zhuangzi, of course, are not new. They are not covered here because my interest is in the influence of Western, not Indian, views of selfhood.[40]

Our second example looks for parallels, not in Buddhism, but in postmodern thought. It is David Hall, "To Be or Not to Be: The Postmodern Self and the *Wu*-forms of Taoism."[41] After tracing the history of the Western concept of self, culminating in the modern notion that one "has" a self, Hall presents the postmodern rejection of the analytical-monotheistic-rationalistic model of "modern" thought about human agency. Thereafter, he discusses what postmodern thinkers have in common with Master Zhuang and, moreover, what they can learn from him.

There are many strengths in Hall's approach. First, he is fully aware of the cultural peculiarity of the modern concept of self. Second, he knows that the postmodern stance is a reaction to modernity, stating "I have claimed that the postmodern interpretation of self is a legitimate response to a serious impasse in the project of modernity."[42] Third, he sees key elements of what Zhuang and postmodern thinkers have in common. He states: "The postmodern, plural, aesthetic self has an awareness of its plurality and the insistent particularity of the elements that variously focus that plurality. This aesthetic self-consciousness rehearses the Taoist vision of no-soul, no-self (*wu-wo*, *wu-ji*)."[43] Finally, he insists that it

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Kong gives his advice to the Duke of She as he leaves on a diplomatic mission to the state of Qi 齊. It is advice for "one who is a subject or a son," as follows: "he must carry out his affairs according to circumstances and forget about his own person [*wang qi shen* 忘其身]. What leisure has he for loving life and despising death? Thus, sir, you may proceed on your mission."[54] Since forgetting one's person is presented along with an admonition *against* "loving life and despising death," it is likely that these words do *not* represent Master Zhuang's position.

Moreover, all similar instances present forgetting, taking lightly, or losing *shen* as a bad idea. One passage that obviously expresses Zhuang's own viewpoint comes in his critique of Master Hui 惠子 at the end of chapter 5 ("Symbols of Integrity Fulfilled"), as follows:

> "What I mean by having emotions is to say that a man should not inwardly harm his person [*nei shang qi shen* 內傷其身] with 'good' and 'bad,' but rather should accord with the spontaneous and not add to life."
>
> "If he does not add to life," said Master Hui, "how can this person exist?"
>
> "The Way gives him an appearance," said Master Zhuang, "and heaven gives him a form. He does not inwardly harm his person with preferences and aversions. Now you, sir, dissipate your spirit and expend your essence by leaning against a tree while you mutter or by dozing over your study table. Heaven granted you a form, sir, but you go on babbling about 'hard' and 'white.'"[55]

This passage tells us at least two things: first, "the person," which is harmed, is not simply the physical person, the body; and, second, it is something that can be "hurt" by the kind of sophistry for which Master Hui was famous. Obviously, *shen* is taken to include mental as well as physical aspects of a person.

Of course, there are many uses of *shen* in the Inner Chapters where it unambiguously means "body" or where it is unclear whether it means the body or the entire person. However, it is clear in all these uses that preserving *shen* is good and losing it is bad. For example, the phrases "endanger my person/body" (*wei wu shen* 危吾身), "take his person/body lightly" (*qing yong qi shen* 輕用其身), and "take my person/body lightly" (*qing yong wu shen* 輕用吾身) all describe extremely undesirable situations.[56]

Numerous examples from outside the Inner Chapters reiterate that forgetting one's *shen* is a bad idea. The most interesting of these examples is found in a story from chapter 20 ("The Mountain Tree") sometimes said to describe Master Zhuang's conversion experience.[57] It is a story in which Zhuang, out walking in a place called Eagle Mound, realizes that he is no different from other creatures ignorantly pursuing advantage in the world, while "forgetting" what is really important: their "persons." Zhuang was so deeply affected by the experience that

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Wandering at Ease in the *Zhuangzi*

Roger T. Ames, editor

Chinese philosophy specialists examine the *Zhuangzi*, a third century B.C.E. Daoist classic, in this collection of interpretive essays. The *Zhuangzi* is a celebration of human creativity—its language is lucid and opaque; its images are darkly brilliant; its ideas are seriously playful. Without question, it is one of the most challenging achievements of human literary culture. Thematically, the *Zhuangzi* offers diverse insights into how to develop an appropriate and productive attitude to one's life in this world. Resourced over the centuries by Chinese artists and intellectuals alike, this text has provoked a commentarial tradition that rivals any masterpiece of world literature.

Wandering at Ease in the **Zhuangzi** continues the interpretive tradition as Western scholars shed light on selected passages from the difficult text, offering the needed mediation between available translations of the *Zhuangzi* and the reader's process of understanding. Taken as a whole, this anthology is a primer on how to read the *Zhuangzi*.

> "I find throughout the work an excellent balance between philological and philosophical analysis. The style and prose of most of the essays are pleasing and easy to follow. The topics will appeal to a wide range of readers with a disparity of interests."—Ewing Y. Chinn, Trinity University

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A volume in the SUNY series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture
David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, editors

State University of New York Press
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