

THE IDEA OF NATURE IN THE DAOIST CLASSIC OF LIEZI

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

The *Liezi* is regarded the third of the Daoist classics following the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. Dating from the pre-Han period (ca. 4-5 century B.C.) to the Six Dynasties (229-589 A.D.), the *Liezi* constitutes a rich collection of more than a hundred and forty parables, mystical accounts, and philosophical treatises. This dissertation explores the *Liezi*'s idea of nature in four aspects: (1) cosmology; (2) view of life; (3) the way to attain harmony and union with nature; and (4) social and political view of human-nature relations.

Chapter one explores the *Liezi*'s cosmology, which presents a holistic and organic worldview based on the theory of *qi* (氣). This chapter first explores the meaning and concept of *qi*, which is the common medium of all beings in nature. Life begins from the gathering of *qi* and ends in disperse of *qi*. As the dispersed *qi* gathers again, new life is born. Accordingly, different forms of lives, based on their common endowment of *qi*, are interrelated in a chain of metamorphoses. The *Liezi* thus presents a holistic and organic worldview in which the boundaries and categorizations of human, animals, plants, and matters, dissolve.

Chapter two analyzes the *Liezi*'s view of life, which supports an anti-anthropocentric and egalitarian view of all beings in nature. Since all lives are formed by the common medium of *qi*, they have no difference in nature and are equally noble and vile. Accordingly, humans are not superior to other species, but all beings have equal value. Be it humans, animals, plants, or mater substances, all are indispensable in their participation in the metamorphoses of *qi*, and thereby are equally meaningful in their existences.

Chapter three discusses the Daoist ethics of life that is nature friendly and sustainable. Regarding practical way of life, the *Liezi* not only inherits Laozi and Zhuangzi's ideas of simplicity, frugality and humility, but also shows an intriguing connection to certain mystic

beliefs and practices. The notions of faith and belief in the correspondence between human and nature reflect the *Liezi*'s mystical and religious approach to the ultimate goal of union with the Way.

Chapter four explores the *Liezi*'s political thought and its implication to environmental policy. The *Liezi*'s political thought synthesizes various theories of Confucianism, Legalism, and the Huang-Lao school, with the Daoist ideal of non-action as its most basic principle and ultimate goal. It is noteworthy, however, that “non-action” does not mean doing nothing literally. In fact, the Daoist idea of non-action, or non-interference when applied to environmental policy, requires humans to attentively observe, understand, and follow the way nature works. Only when people act according to what is opportune and expedient can they live and prosper together with all beings in nature.

The concluding chapter summarizes the key points and central ideas of the *Liezi* in comparison with major principles of environmental philosophy to evaluate the *Liezi*'s potential contributions to contemporary ecological thought.

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## INTRODUCTION

The *Liezi* is regarded the third of the Daoist classics following the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. A philosophical treatise attributed to the pre-Qin philosopher Lie Yukou 列御寇 (ca. fifth century B.C.) and recomposed during the Han (206 B.C.- 220 A.D.) and the Jin (265-420 A.D.) dynasties, the *Liezi* not only stands in the line of classical Daoist thought represented by Laozi (sixth or fifth century B.C.) and Zhuangzi (ca. 369-286 B.C.), but also incorporates later traditions including the Huang-Lao Daoism and Neo-Daoism. More than a philosophical treatise, the *Liezi* is also a revered Daoist religious scripture. During the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.), the book of *Liezi* is entitled “True Scripture of Emptiness” (冲虚真经) by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (685-762 A.D.), and the philosopher Liezi was honored with the title “True Man of Emptiness” (冲虚真人). Furthermore, the Tang Emperor Xuanzong selected the four major Daoist classics of the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi*, and the *Wenzi* to be textbooks for civil service examination. During the Song dynasty (A.D. 960-1279), the book of *Liezi* was further honored “True Scripture of the Highest Virtue of Emptiness” (冲虚至德真经), and the philosopher Liezi “Perfect Sovereign of Emptiness and Sublime Contemplation” (冲虚观妙真君) by the Song Emperor Zhenzong (968-1022 A.D.). In the *Daozang* (道藏), the official collection of Daoist texts compiled by the Ming court (1368-1644 A.D.), the *Liezi* was placed with the *Laozi* (also known as the *Daodejing*) and the *Zhuangzi* as the major Daoist canons.

An important and influential classic as the *Liezi* is, it has been an understudied text due to its controversial authorship and authenticity. Before this dissertation looks into the *Liezi*'s ideas, it is necessary to first address the questions of the *Liezi*'s authorship, dating, and transmission.

## I. The Text

### 1. The Philosopher Liezi and the *Book of Liezi*

The *Book of Liezi* is attributed to the Daoist philosopher Lie Yukou 列御寇, who lived around the fifth century B.C. and was senior to Zhuangzi (between 399 and 295 B.C.). The historical figure Liezi is recorded in several ancient texts including the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, the *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, the *Shizi* 尸子, etc., among which the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 includes twenty two accounts of Liezi. Hence the *Book of Han* bibliography section 漢書藝文志 suggests, based on the fact that Zhuangzi quotes Liezi, Liezi must have lived before Zhuangzi. As recorded in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Strategies of the Warring States), an ambassador of the Han 韓 state named Shi Ji 史疾 was sent to the Chu 楚 state. The king of Chu was troubled by banditry in the country so he consulted Shi Ji about his policy. Shi Ji answered, "I followed the words of Master Lie Yukou, who honors propriety (*zheng* 正)." Qian Mu comments this passage in his *Textual Research of Pre-Qin Philosophers*, "This account proves that Lie Yukou was a historical figure. Shi Ji heard and learned his theory, which followed the Confucian idea of rectifying names and signifies the beginning of the

Daoist and Legalist schools.”<sup>1</sup> It is notable that Master Lie’s first name is “Yu-kou” 御寇, which means “guarding against bandits.” It is possible that Liezi was known for his success in maintaining social security. Concerning Liezi’s Daoist orientation, the *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Mister Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals) and the *Shizi* 尸子 both records that “Liezi honors emptiness (*xu* 虛).” According to Gao You’s commentary, Liezi is a Daoist adept, who emptied the worldly thought and desires in his mind until it is in accordance with the Way.<sup>2</sup>

Although attributed to the name of the pre-Han philosopher Liezi, the extant *Book of Liezi* was re-edited and re-written during the Han (206 B.C.- 220 A.D.) and the Jin (265-420 A.D.) dynasties. It was first edited by the Western Han historian Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 B.C.), who collated materials from twenty chapters distributed in various collections, and reduced them to eight chapters by eliminating repetitive materials.<sup>3</sup> The Liu edition was lost in late Han period, whereas the extant version did not appear until approximately three centuries later, when a minor official Zhang Zhan 張湛 (ca. 332-?) presented the version with his own commentary.

Zhang Zhan’s preface gives a detailed account of the transmission of the book, derived from his grandfather, who was related to the philosopher Wang Bi 王弼(226-249 A.D.).

<sup>1</sup> Qian Mu, *Xianqin zhuzi xianian kaobian* 先秦諸子繫年考辨 (Shanghai: Xinhua shudian, 1992), 176-177.

<sup>2</sup> The commentary on the *Lü shi chunqiu* by Gao You 高誘 of the Later Han period (25-220 A.D.).

<sup>3</sup> The extant version of the *Liezi* includes eight chapters: 1. Heaven’s Omens (天瑞篇); 2. The Yellow Emperor (黃帝篇); 3. King Mu of Zhou (周穆王篇); 4. Confucius (仲尼篇); 5. Tang’s Questions (湯問篇); 6. Endeavor and Destiny (力命篇); 7. Yang Zhu (楊朱篇); 8. Explaining Conjunctions (說符篇).

According to Zhang Zhan, the *Liezi* was a rare book during the Western Jin period (265-316). After the migration across the Yangzi River, the complete text was unknown outside Zhang's family. Nothing said about the transmission of the book would be easily proved or disproved in Zhang Zhan's own time since none of the people who were said to know the *Liezi* were more recent than Zhang's grandfather's generation.

## 2. Controversy over the Text's Authorship and Authenticity

As the *Liezi* became a popular Daoist religious scripture during the Tang dynasty, questions about the text's dating and authenticity were also raised. Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819 A.D.) was the first who pointed out that many passages in the *Liezi* overlapped with other texts, such as the *Zhuangzi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Lü shi chunqiu*, and even Buddhist sutras. Questioning against the book's authenticity has escalated since the twentieth century as scholars such as Liang Qichao (1873-1929), Ma Xulun (1885-1970), and Yang Bojun (1909-1992) employed methods of linguistic analysis and textual research to argue that the extant version of the *Liezi* is actually dated in the third or fourth century.<sup>4</sup> Liang Qichao even suggests that the author of the extant *Liezi* text is its commentator Zhang Zhan, while the majority of contemporary scholars consider the *Leizi* to be forged by some unknown authors during the Six Dynasties. Among these scholars is Tan Jiajian, who looks

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<sup>4</sup> See Ma Xulun 馬敘倫, *Gushibian* 古史辨 (Inquiry into the Ancient History), Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Liang Rengong xueshu jiangyan ji* 梁任公學術講演集 (Collection of Liang Rengong's Scholarly Lectures), and Yang Bojun 楊柏峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Collective Annotations on the *Liezi*).

into fifty eight parables in the *Liezi* which overlap with other texts and accuses that the *Liezi* plagiarizes other texts.<sup>5</sup> Yang Yiliu finds that thirty parables in the *Liezi* directly relates to the *Zhuangzi*, so he asserts that the *Liezi* models after the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>6</sup> Zhang Cangshou compares the length of parables in the *Liezi* and the *Zhuangzi* and finds that most of the *Liezi*'s stories are much longer. For example, the parable of the monkey keeper who gives three nuts to the monkeys in the morning and four in the evening is seen in both the *Liezi* and the *Zhuangzi*. While the *Zhuangzi* uses only 26 words, the *Liezi* uses up to 68 words. So Zhang considers the *Liezi*'s version an elaboration of the *Zhuangzi*'s.<sup>7</sup>

Some other scholars disagree with the above conjectures and argue for the *Liezi*'s authenticity. Among these scholars are Ma Da, Cen Zhongmian and Li Yangzheng from the mainland China, Yan Linfeng and Chen Guying from Taiwan, and Takeuchi Yoshio from Japan.<sup>8</sup> Ma Da explores the thought and themes embedded in the *Liezi*'s parables, which he

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<sup>5</sup> Tan Jiajian 譚家健, "Liezi gushi yuanyuan kaolue" 《列子》淵源考略, *shehui kexue zhanxian* 3 (2000): 136-144.

<sup>6</sup> Yang Yiliu 楊漪柳, "Lun Liezi dui Zhuangzi yuyan de yingyong" 論列子對莊子寓言的應用 (On the Liezi's Application of the Zhuangzi's Parables), *Sichuan Normal University Journal (Social Science)* 31, no.4 (2004): 46-52.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Cangshou 章滄授, "Liezi sanwen duomian guan" 列子散文多面觀 (Multidimensional Views on the Liezi's Prose Writing), *Journal of Anqing Teachers College* 安慶師範學院學報 2(1994): 59-64.

<sup>8</sup> See Ma Da 馬達, *Liezi zhenwei kaobian* 列子真偽考辨 (Textual Research of the Authenticity of the Liezi), Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000; Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, "Liezi fei jinren weizuo" 列子非晉人偽作 (The Liezi is Not Forged in the Jin Period), in Cen, Zhongmian, *Liang Zhou wenshi luncong* 兩周文史論叢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 313-333; Li Yangzheng 李養正, "Lun daojiao yili yu Liezi" 論道教義理與《列子》(A Discussion on Daoist Doctrines and the Liezi), *Zhongguo daojiao* 中國道教 2 (1991): 11-16; Yan

considers to be a serious reflection on the life and society of the Warring States period, rather than an advocacy complete abandonment and dissipation, which are said to characterize the trend of thought during the Six Dynasties.<sup>9</sup> Wang Lisuo judges from the fact that Zhuangzi records the account of Liezi and calls Liezi the Master to argue that the basic ideas and themes in the thought of Liezi must have appeared earlier than the *Zhuangzi*.<sup>10</sup> Still some other scholars hold an eclectic view which sees the extant text of the *Liezi* as a collection and synthesis of heterogeneous ideas from the Warring States period down to the Six Dynasties.<sup>11</sup> My dissertation agrees with the eclectic view that although the extant text of *Liezi* might be recomposed and re-written after the Han period, it presents an excellent synthesis of early Daoism, the Huang-Lao school of the Han period, and

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Lingfeng 嚴靈峰, *Liezi bianyu ji qi zhongxin sixiang* 列子辯誣及其中心思想 (Defending the *Liezi* against False Charges and Expounding Its Central Ideas) (Taipei, Shibao wenhua, 1983); Chen Guying 陳鼓應, “Lun Laozi wanchu shuo zai kaozheng fangfa shang changjian de miuwu—jianlun *Liezi* fei weishu” 論《老子》晚出說在考證方法上常見的謬誤—兼論《列子》非偽書 (On the Fallacies Commonly Seen in the Textual Research of the Later Version of the *Laozi*—Also on the *Liezi*’s Authenticity), *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究 4 (1994): 411-418. For Takeuchi Yoshio’s 武內義雄 argument on the *Liezi*’s authenticity, see A. C. Graham, “The Date and Composition of Liehtzyy” *Asia Major* 8 (1961): 140-141.

<sup>9</sup> See Ma Da 馬達, *Liezi zhenwei kaobian* 列子真偽考辨 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000), 189-314.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Lishuo 王利鎖, “Zhuangzi, Liezi chongchu yuyan gushi bianyi—yi Zhuangzi, Liezi zhi xianhou wei hexin jinxing kaocha” 《莊子》、《列子》重出寓言故事辯議—以《莊子》、《列子》之先後為核心進行考察 (Discussion on the Parables which Appear in Both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*—Centering on the Issue of Dating of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*), *Henan Social Science* 河南社會科學 15 (2007), 134-139.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Li Chunyan 李春豔, “Liezi qiren qishu zhenwei zhi wojian” 列子其人其書真偽之我見 (My View of the Authenticity of the Man Liezi and the Book of Liezi), *Journal of Baicheng Normal College* 白城師範學院學報 (2008): 28-31.

Neo-Daoism during the Six Dynasties, which do not necessarily contradict against one another.

## II. The *Liezi*'s Value in Philosophy, Religion, and Literature

Till this point, most studies on the *Liezi* have centered on the issues of dating and authenticity, whereas its profound philosophical, religious, and literary values have been widely neglected. As the Taiwanese scholar Zhuang Wanshou (1939-) points out, questions of dating and authorship should not constitute sufficient reason to reject and neglect the *Liezi* as a great philosophical and literary classic.<sup>12</sup> Based on this recognition, this section discusses the *Liezi*'s values in the studies of Daoist philosophy, religion, and literature.

The *Liezi*'s philosophical value lies in its synthesis of various streams of thought. First written during the pre-Qin age of philosophers and later re-composed after the Han period, the *Liezi* not only succeeds ancient Daoist thought represented by Laozi (6th or 5th cent. B.C.) and Zhuangzi (ca. 369-286 B.C.), but also incorporates the Huang-Lao tradition and Neo-Daoism, which developed during the Han (206 B.C.- A.D. 220) and the Six Dynasties (A.D. 220-581), respectively. Moreover, as opposing schools of thought which originated during the pre-Qin era, such as Confucianism, the Yin Yang school, legalism and Buddhism,

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<sup>12</sup> See Zhuang Wanshou 莊萬壽, "Liezi xinzheng—Liezi yu huanglao xuepai sixiang de guanxi" 列子新證—列子與黃老學派思想的關係 (A New Examination on *Liezi*—Relations between *Liezi* and the Huang-Lao School of thought), *Shida xuebao* 30 (1985): 425.

were gradually reconciled and incorporated with one another after the Han period, the *Liezi* presents a complex yet coherent system of ideas, with Daoism as its leading principle. It is interesting that while the *Liezi* shows clear affinities with the philosophy of the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* and hence is categorized in the Daoist tradition, the *Liezi* nevertheless displays little interest in criticizing Confucianism—an attribute which distinguishes the *Liezi* from other pre-Qin Daoist texts. In fact, Confucius appears in several stories as a wise sage, although many Confucian principles are given Daoist interpretation. This eclectic reconciliation of Daoism, Confucianism, and other streams of thought witnesses the post-Han convergence of various schools during the Han and Six Dynasties.

More than a philosophical treatise, the *Liezi* is also an important religious scripture, which signifies the incorporation of Buddhism and the Chinese aboriginal Daoism. Although the mainstay of the *Liezi*'s thought remains Daoist, "its new prominence is surely inspired by Buddhist influence." A. C. Graham notes, "The idea that life is a dream, hardly more than a provocative fancy in early Daoism, occupies the whole third chapter of *Liezi* and is developed a theory...The chapter uses the word *huan* 幻 "illusion," absent from pre-Han literature but the standard Buddhist equivalent of *maya*." In fact, Zhang Zhan who compiled and annotated of the extant book of *Liezi* was a Buddhist, which signals the interweaving of Buddhism and Daoism in the complex work of *Liezi*.

The *Liezi*'s strong religious overtones are one major feature which distinguishes *Liezi* from earlier Daoist texts such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. For the *Liezi*, accounts of

the Divine Men (*shenren* 神人), who walk underwater without suffocating, and tread fire without burning, ride the wind freely, dwell within a stone cliff, inhales the wind, and drinks the dew, are not merely in a figurative sense.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the authors of the anomaly accounts during the Six Dynasties believed in what they wrote as they recorded these accounts in the same way as historical accounts.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the *Liezi* not only presents the Daoist idea of nature from a philosophical perspective, but further from a religious point of view.

The *Liezi* also constitutes one of the richest compendiums of Chinese mythological, legendary, and folkloric materials. As N. J. Girardot states, the *Liezi*'s "inflated use of all sorts of diverse mythological imagery seems to reflect the general spirit of the sage during the Han period as well as a progressive popularization of Daoist thought that reclaimed archaic images and themes kept alive at the folk levels of society."<sup>15</sup> Part of this process is related to the so-called *xian* 仙 cult of transcendence and immortality, which surfaced for the first time during the former Han dynasty and drew upon many ancient religious themes, and the *Liezi* is evident with much of the tonality and style influenced by such movements.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, for examples, the *Liezi*'s chapter of "The Yellow Emperor" records the account of a peasant, Shang Qiukai, who dived into deep water and treaded fire unharmed; a man who dwells within a stone cliff; the Divine Man of Guye Mountain who inhaled the wind and drank the dew. The philosopher Liezi himself was also said to be able to freely ride the wind, an ability typically seen in the accounts of Daoist transcendents.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Ford Company, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (State University of New York Press, 1996), 21-201.

<sup>15</sup> For more discussion on the *Liezi*'s relationship with Chinese mythology and religion, see N.J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 134-165.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

Concerning its literary value, the eight chapters of the *Liezi* include nearly a hundred parables which utilize sundry mythological, legendary, folkloric materials, as well as historical stories and accounts. In these fantastic short stories, historical figures are usually put on one stage with mythical and fictional characters, holding dialogues or debating with each other to expound the truth. As Mircea Eliade points out, “It is in dreams that the pure sacred life is entered and direct relations with the gods, spirits, and ancestral souls are re-established. It is always in dreams that historical time is abolished and the mythical time regained.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed the *Liezi* employs what is unique to myths and dreams to create its fantastic settings, stories and characters.

Comparing the *Liezi* with other early Daoist literature, the *Liezi* develops more overt parabolic stories which are unseen in the *Laozi*'s cryptic and austere writings. Concerning narrative structures, the *Liezi*'s parables develop more complete story structures than the *Zhuangzi*'s parables. Moreover, unlike *Zhuangzi* who always appears as a wise man in his book, *Liezi* is presented as a main character whose inner feelings and life stories from young and naïve to mature and old are fully revealed in the stories. Concerning language and writing style, the *Liezi* is written in simple, direct prose-style language of the Six Dynasties, and thereby is praised profusely by commentators throughout Chinese history. For examples, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819 A.D.) of the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.),

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<sup>17</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 103.

Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381 A.D.) of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), and Yao Jiheng 姚際恒 (1647-1715 A.D.) of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 A.D.) all praises the *Liezi*'s simple yet vivid writing style.<sup>18</sup> With his contributions to the development of fantastic parabolic stories and facile prose-style language, the significance of the *Liezi*'s position in Chinese literary history cannot be overstated.

### III. Method of Study

Different from most contemporary studies which employ linguistic analysis to tackle the issues of dating and authorship of the *Liezi*, this dissertation explores the *Liezi*'s idea of nature embedded in over a hundred parables, myths, and philosophical treatises. Instead of analyzing the eight chapters of the *Liezi* in its original order, my thesis reorganizes materials according to the theme of nature.

Concerning the *Liezi*'s view of nature, it is rather more concrete than mere metaphysics or literary metaphors. Among the *Liezi*'s hundred parables, many discuss the relations of human and animals, human and other subjects of life, human and intimated things like rocks and mountains, and even natural powers and resources such as the wind and water.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the *Liezi*'s idea of "nature" comes closer to what is referred as

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<sup>18</sup> For more details, see the preface of Wang Qiangmo's *Liezi quanyi* 列子全譯 (Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2009), 6-13.

<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the *Liezi*'s idea of "nature" comes closer to what is referred as the "natural environment" than the Chinese word "*ziran*" (自然), usually translated as "self-so" as it first appears in Laozi's *Daodejing*. The term *ziran*, which is often in modern times used to translate the English word "nature," does not exactly mean

the “natural world.” Compared to Laozi’s *Daodejing*, the *Liezi* shows more interests in the process of becoming of the cosmos, that is, the sky (*tian* 天), the earth (*di* 地), and the myriad creatures (*wanwu* 萬物) between them. Therefore, the *Liezi*’s parables may help us to reflect upon several fundamental yet unsettled questions in contemporary environmental thought,<sup>20</sup> including what is nature? How do we sketch a holistic cosmology which sees humans and nature as one unity? Can we equalize humans and non-human beings, including animals, plants, and even natural objects such as rivers and mountains? On the personal level, how should an individual live in harmony with nature? On social and political levels, how do we conceive a social or political system that is in accordance with nature?

The dissertation analyzes the *Liezi*’s idea of nature in four chapters. Chapter one explores the *Liezi*’s cosmology, which provides a theoretical foundation for ecological holism.

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the physical natural world as it is used in modern Chinese. For discussion on the meaning and translation of *ziran*, see W. A. Callahan, “Discourse and perspective in Daoism: A linguistic interpretation of *ziran*,” *Philosophy East & West* 39:2 (1989), 171-189. Also see Richard L. Van Houten, “Nature and *Tzu-jan* in early Chinese Philosophical Literature,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 15 (1988), 35-49.

<sup>20</sup> Environmental philosophy which draws upon various intellectual traditions to conceptualize human-nature relations has become a burgeoning field of study. See N.J. Girardot, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan, eds., *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within A Cosmic Landscape* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001); Roger Ames and Baird Callicott, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1989), which draws upon Chinese, Japanese, Buddhist, and Indian traditions. Callicott also authors the book, *Earth’s Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994). For books of comparative environmental studies in Chinese, see Feng Huxiang 馮滬祥, *Huanjing lunlixue: zhongxi huanbao zhexue bijiao yanjiu* 環境倫理學：中西環保哲學比較研究 (Environmental Ethics: A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Environmental Philosophies) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1991) and Zhuang Qingxin 莊慶信, *Zhongxi huanjing zhexue—yi ge zhenghe de jinlu* 中西環境哲學—一個整合的進路 (Chinese-Western Environmental Philosophy—an Integrated Approach) (Taipei: Wunan tushu chuban gongsi, 2002).

This chapter first explores the concept of *qi*, which serves as the common medium of all beings in nature. Different forms of lives, based on their common endowment of *qi*, are interrelated in a chain of metamorphoses. The *Liezi* thus presents a holistic and organic worldview in which the boundaries and categorizations of human, animals, plants, and matters, dissolve. The examination of the *Liezi*'s concept of *qi* also help to clarify the *Liezi*'s stand in Chinese intellectual history: While the *Liezi* does not negate the importance of the ontological origin--the Dao, or Non-being (*wu* 無), the *Liezi* puts more emphasis on the process of birth and transformation, which signifies the transition during the early medieval time from Wang Bi's emphasis on the "original non-being" (*benwu* 本無) to Guo Xiang's emphasis on the independent transformation (*duhua* 獨化) of myriads of things.

Chapter two analyzes the *Liezi*'s view of life, drawing materials mainly from the *Liezi*'s "Yang Zhu" chapter, a controversial chapter said to be a deviation from the original thought of the pre-Qin philosopher Yang Zhu 楊朱, and contradictory to the chapter of "Endeavor and Destiny" of the *Liezi*. Therefore, before using materials from these two chapters, I first analyze the questions of consistency. This chapter then examines the *Liezi*'s view of life in the following topics: (1) On the body; (2) On offspring; (3) On things in nature; (4) On human and animals; (5) On life and death; (6) On destiny; (7) On how to live. The examination finds that the *Liezi* supports an anti-anthropocentric and egalitarian view of all lives in nature. Since all lives are formed by the common medium of *qi*, they have no difference in nature and are equally noble and vile. Accordingly, humans are not superior to

other species, but all beings have equal value. Be it humans, animals, plants, or matter substances, all are indispensable in their participation in the metamorphoses of *qi* and thereby are equally meaningful in their existences. The *Liezi*'s ethics of life also resonates with the principle of "vital needs" in contemporary environmental ethics, which promotes attitudes of frugality, humility, and gratitude toward nature.

Chapter three explores sundry mystic accounts in the *Liezi* which involves the communication between humans and non-human beings in nature, including animals, inanimate objects, and natural forces such as the wind, the water, and the fire. The chapter is organized in two parts: Part one tells the story of human's fall from the original harmony with nature. Part two analyzes the steps for human to returning to nature, which are categorized into six sections: (1) Following the nature (*xing* 性) of things; (2) Purification and concentration of the mind (*xin* 心); (3) Journey of the spirit (*shen* 神); (4) Faith (*cheng* 誠) and belief (*xin* 信); (5) Correspondence between Human and Nature through Music; (6) Becoming One with the Way (*Dao* 道). The intriguing notions of faith and belief in the correspondence between human and nature reflect the *Liezi*'s mystical approach to the ultimate goal of union with nature.

Chapter four analyzes the *Liezi*'s political thought and its implication to environmental policy. The *Liezi*'s political thought synthesizes various theories of Confucianism, Legalism, the Yin-Yang school, and the Huang-Lao school, with the Daoist ideal of ruling by non-action as its most basic principle and ultimate goal. The Daoist idea

of non-action, or non-interference when applied to environmental policy, requires humans to attentively observe, understand, and follow the way nature works. Only when humans act according to what is opportune and expedient can they live and prosper together with all beings in nature.

The concluding chapter summarizes the *Liezi's* idea of nature in the four areas of the *Liezi's* holistic cosmology, egalitarian view of life, mythical approaches to union with nature, and the *Liezi's* implication to environmental policy. The main points are organized in comparison with the basic principles of Deep Ecology, so to evaluate the *Liezi's* potential contribution to environmental thinking of our time.

## CHAPTER 1: THE *LIEZI'S* COSMOLOGY:

### The *Liezi's* Holistic Worldview

#### I. Introduction to Chinese Cosmology

The word “cosmology” comes from the Greek term *kosmos*, which connotes a clustered range of meanings, including *arche* (originative, material), *logos* (underlying principle), *theoria* (contemplation), *nomos* (law), *theios* (divinity), *nous* (intelligibility).<sup>1</sup>

As Hall and Ames sum up, these clustered meanings of cosmology conjure some notion of “a single-ordered Divine universe governed by natural and moral laws ultimately intelligible to the human mind.”<sup>2</sup>

Quite different from Western cosmologies most notably represented by the Greek and the Christian traditions, ancient Chinese cosmology not only lacks the notion of a divine creator external to the cosmos, but is characterized with a holistic worldview which sees the entire cosmos as an organic wholeness. As Frederick Mote in *Intellectual Foundations of China* points out, ancient Chinese cosmology is that of an “organismic process, meaning that all parts of the entire universe belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process.”<sup>3</sup> Tu Wei-ming in his article “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature” also states, “the apparent lack of a

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<sup>1</sup> See Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

creation myth in Chinese cultural history is predicated on a more fundamental assumption about reality; namely, that all modalities of being are organically connected.”<sup>4</sup>

The chapter explains how the Chinese holistic worldview is formulated with the concept of *qi* 氣. In the Chinese paradigm, *qi* is the most basic medium that constitutes the cosmos; however, *qi* is neither solely spiritual nor material but both. Win-tsit Chan in his *Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* also notes, *qi* is “both energy and matter, a distinction not made in Chinese philosophy.”<sup>5</sup> As Tu notes, the difficulty in translating *qi* into Western languages indicates that the underlying Chinese conception of the cosmos differs significantly from the Cartesian dichotomy between spirit and matter.<sup>6</sup> To explain the Chinese worldview, this chapter first explores the concept of *qi*, which lies at the core of Chinese cosmology. Secondly, it explores the *Liezi*’s theory of *qi*, with evidences drawing mainly from chapter one “Heaven’s Omens” (天瑞篇) of the *Book of Liezi*. Further, to clarify the intellectual sources of the *Liezi*’s cosmology, this chapter compares the *Liezi*’s ideas with the cosmological theories of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the Neo-Daoists, so to assess the *Liezi*’s synthesis of cosmological theories from pre-Han period to the Six Dynasties.

This chapter also assesses the *Liezi*’s contributions to environmental thought by answering the question: How does the *Liezi*’s cosmology provide a theoretical underpinning

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<sup>4</sup> Tu Wei-ming, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, trans. and comp. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 784.

<sup>6</sup> Tu Wei-ming, “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature,” 68.

of ecological holism? As Sylvan and Bennett suggest, “given that ‘Deep Theory’ has not been adequately elaborated upon in terms of its cosmology and politics, the older wisdom of Dao can be profitably drawn upon to elaborate and enrich it.”<sup>7</sup> I argue that the *Liezi*’s cosmology, characterized by the concept of *qi* and the theory of self-origination and self-transformation, provides a sound theoretical foundation for ecological holism. By examining the features of the *Liezi*’s cosmology, which synthesizes Daoist cosmological theories from pre-Han to the Six Dynasties, this chapter clarifies how the cosmos are conceptualized as one unity, in which all beings, including animals, plants, and inanimate objects such as water and rocks are organically connected.

## II. Meaning of *Qi*

The word *qi* (氣) can be translated as “vapor,” “breath,” or “vital energy.” It is still a common expression in contemporary China that can be found in numerous terms. For examples, *qi* is used in words for “air” (*kongqi*; literally, “*qi* of the empty space”), “gas” (*qiti*; literally, “*qi*-body”), “steam” (*zhengqi*; literally, “steamed air”), or “vapor” (*shuiqi*; literally, “water vapor”). In respect to its omnipresent yet changeable nature, *qi* is also used for the “weather” (*tianqi*, “the *qi* of the sky”).<sup>8</sup> Overall speaking, *qi* is associated with air or atmosphere by virtue of its pervasiveness and subtlety; *qi* is constantly moving and

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Sylvan and David Bennett, “Taoism and Deep Ecology,” *The Ecologist* 18 (1988): 148.

<sup>8</sup> See Hans-Georg Moeller, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing* (New York: Columbia University Press), 36-37.

transforming like water vapor or steam.<sup>9</sup> In the *Shuowen* lexicon, *qi* is defined as “cloud vapor.” The character *qi* 氣 is an ideogram whose earliest form looks like vapor rising into the sky and forming clouds. The three curly lines represent the motion of the vapor. The number three signifies multiple layers of the clouds resulting from continuous circulation of water in the air.

*Qi* is not only associated with primary matters such as air and vapor, but oftentimes it refers to “breath” of life in ancient texts and inscriptions. On the inscribed jade named *xing qi* (literally, moving *qi*) during the Warring State Period (403-221 B.C.) recorded a verse about the movement of *qi* within nature as well as living things:

The moving *qi* is swallowed;  
 When it is swallowed it nurtures;  
 When it has nurtured, it is expelled;  
 When it is expelled, it goes down;  
 When it goes down, it settles;  
 When it settles, it solidifies;  
 When it solidifies, it sprouts;  
 When it sprouts, it grows;

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<sup>9</sup> On the inscribed “moving qi” jade (行氣玉佩銘) during the Warring State Period, the character *qi* has a fire signific added, which suggests a prototypical image of water vaporized by fire or heat.

When it grows, it returns;

When it returns, then it ascends to heaven.

As for heaven, its root is in the above.

As for earth, its root is at the below.

If one follows along, one lives.

If one goes against, one dies.<sup>10</sup>

This verse presents the dual qualities of *qi* as matter stuff and life force. As *qi* takes various forms and moves between heaven and earth, the cycle of life and death begins. Living beings keeps taking in and breathing out *qi*, so to keep them alive and growing. As for human beings, *qi* is the medium of the body, which can be translated as “breath” or a more abstract concept of “vital energizing force” which circulates within the body. This vital energy in one’s body can be directed by human will. The Daoist technique of *qigong* (氣功) is one way to preserve and nourish the vital *qi* energy through practices of breathing, sitting, or exercise. Regarding its association with air or breath, the most appropriate Western

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<sup>10</sup> The Chinese historian Guo Ruomo considers the *xing qi yupei ming* an ancient *qigong* theory dated in the early Warring States period. For Chinese version of the text, see Guo Ruomo 郭若沫, *Nulizhi shidai* 奴隸制時代 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1973), 262: “行氣，深則蓄，蓄則伸，伸則下，下則定，定則固，固則萌，萌則長，長則退，退則天。天幾春在上，地幾春在下。順則生，逆則死。” Translation of the verse is from Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997), 88-89.

translation of *qi* may be “pneuma,” which is conceptualized by the Stoic philosophers by virtue of its subtlety, pervasiveness, and dynamic internal tension.<sup>11</sup>

To define *qi* as a philosophical concept, however, it is neither material nor ideal in nature. This distinction, which was important in Greek philosophy, is not made in Chinese Daoism. As Moeller points out, “Unlike some pre-Socratic models, *qi* is neither conceived of as atomistic—it is not constituted by small particles—nor as elementary—it is not constituted by one or more basic ‘stuffs.’”<sup>12</sup> In essence, *qi* more resembles the modern science’s conception of light, which has the dual qualities of “matter” and “energy.” The Chinese philosopher Zhang Dainian provides an insightful comment on the resemblance of *qi* and light,

Perhaps the best translation of the Chinese word *qi* is provided by Eintain’s equation,  $e=mc^2$ . According to this equation, matter and energy are convertible... It is energy that has the capacity to become material objects while remaining what it is. It thus combines ‘potentiality’ with ‘matter.’ To understand it solely as ‘potentiality’ would be wrong, just as it cannot be translated simply as ‘matter.’<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See John Henderson, *Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University, 1984), 263.

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Georg Moeller, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing* (New York: Columbia University, 2006), 36.

<sup>13</sup> See Zhang Dainian, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2002), 45-46.

In essence, *qi* may better be understood as both the energy and the general medium which permeates the universe, by which myriad things come into being and change.

### III. The *Liezi*'s Theory of *Qi*

*Qi* is a core concept in the *Liezi*'s cosmology. The first chapter of the *Liezi* states the four stages of the becoming of the universe based on the forming and transforming of *qi*:

Liezi said: "Formerly the sages reduced heaven and earth to a system by means of the *yin* and *yang*. But if all that has shape was born from the Shapeless<sup>14</sup>, from what were heaven and earth born? I answer: There was a Primal Simplicity, there was a Primal Commencement, there were Primal Beginnings, there was a Primal Material...The Primal Simplicity preceded the appearance of the breath (*qi* 氣). The Primal Commencement was the beginning of the breath (*qi* 氣). The Primal Beginnings were the breath (*qi* 氣) beginning to assume shape. The Primal Material was the breath (*qi* 氣) when it began to assume substance. (Yan: 3-4; trans. Graham: 18-19)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "The Shapeless" denotes the Dao or the Void (無), which is the foundation of Laozi's ontology.

<sup>15</sup> Quotations of the *Liezi* in this dissertation take references of Yan Beiming and Yan Jie's *Liezi yizhu* 列子譯注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991) and A. C. Graham's English translation, *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), the most reliable translation of the *Liezi* up to this date. In Graham's translation, *qi* is translated as "breath." See *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 18-19.

The four stages relate how Non-being (*wu* 無) gives rise to myriad material beings, with an emphasis on the pivot role of *qi* during the process. Non-being is the Dao, by which all things come to be. The concept of Non-being is first proposed by Laozi, who says, “All things in the world come into being from Being; and Being comes into being from Non-being.”<sup>16</sup> (The *Daodejing*, Ch 40) In the *Liezi*, however, the Non-being is re-defined as the “Unborn and Unchanging,” which signifies the *Liezi*’s synthesis and development of the ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi. As stated in the first chapter of the *Liezi*,

There are the born and the Unborn; there are the changing and Unchanging.

The Unborn gives birth of the born, and the Unchanging change the changing...The born and the changing, shape and color, wisdom and strength, decrease and growth, all come out of themselves. (Yan: 2; trans. Graham: 17-18)

The significance of this passage is that it expressly links the terminology of birth (生) and change (化), which were separate in the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. The Dao, referred as the “Nameless,” “Shapeless,” and “Non-being” in the *Laozi*, is renamed the “Unborn and Unchanging” by the *Liezi*. In essence, while the *Liezi* recognizes the Dao, or “Non-being” as

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<sup>16</sup> Translation cited from Fung Yu-lan’s *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. Edited and translated by Derk Bodde (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 96.

the ontological origin of the cosmos, it puts more emphasis on the process of birth and transformation of particular beings. Therefore, the *Liezi* defines the Dao as “the Unborn and the Unchanging” in relation to the myriads of beings, which are “the born and the changing.” Furthermore, the *Liezi* proposes the idea that “the born and the changing...all come out of themselves,” which accords with the intellectual trends during the Six Dynasties that transit from Wang Bi’s emphasis on the “original non-being” (本無) to Guo Xiang’s emphasis on the “independent transformation” (獨化) of myriad things.

The *Liezi*’s theory of *qi* not only signifies the *Liezi*’s status in the history of Daoist philosophy, but also shows its close affinity with the Daoist religion. The passage of the four-stage cosmology is originally seen in an augury book prevalent during the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), *Yi wen qian zao du* (易緯乾鑿度), which presents the composite of Han thought in the *Book of Liezi*. Moreover, the *Liezi*’s discourses of the becoming of heaven and earth are also seen in Daoist religious scriptures, such as *Taiping jing* (太平經), *Taishang laojun kaitianjing* (太上老君開天經), and *Yunji qiqian* (雲笈七籤).<sup>17</sup>

Compared to other philosophical and religious discourses, however, the *Liezi* presents the abstruse concept of *qi* with a more overt and lively parabolic style. Take the parable of the “ancient rustic kingdom” (Gumang guo) for example:

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<sup>17</sup> For the discussion on the influence of the *Liezi*’s cosmology on the Daoist religion, see Xiao Dengfu, *Liezi tanwei* (Exploring the Subtleties of the *Liezi*) (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1990), 122-131.

At the South corner of the far West there is a country, I do not know where its frontiers lie: it is named the country of Gumang. The *yin* and *yang* breaths (*qi*) do not meet there, so there is no distinction between cold and heat. The light of the sun and moon does not shine there, so there is no distinction between day and night. Its people do not eat or wear clothes and sleep most of the time. (Yan: 74; trans. Graham: 67)

The ancient rustic kingdom symbolizes the absolute beginning of creation, depicted as a paradise condition of total harmony and calmness.<sup>18</sup> Since the *yin* and *yang* breaths have not met and interacted with each other, the sun and the moon have not been created; therefore, there is no distinction of day and night. The four seasons have not yet appeared, so there is no distinction of heat and cold. Since female and male are not differentiated, assumably were there humans in this kingdom, no one would need to wear clothes. The narration that people there do not eat and sleep most of the time suggests an embryonic stage prior to the birth of humans as well as other lives. Hence this ancient rustic kingdom represents the concept of Non-being, which means both the state before myriad things exist and the origin that generates all things in the phenomenal world.

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<sup>18</sup> In the *Zhuangzi*, this original undistinguishable condition is called “huntun” 渾沌.

## 1. *Qi* as Life Forces

The birth of the universe begins as the breaths (*qi* 氣) of *yin* and *yang* move and interact with each other. First formed are the heaven and the earth:

The pure and light rose to become heaven, the muddy and heavy fell to become earth, the breath (*qi* 氣) which harmoniously blended both became human. Hence the essences contained by heaven and earth, and the birth and changing of the myriad things. (Yan: 4; trans. Graham: 18-19)

The pure and light *qi* is associated with the *yang qi*, which rose to become heaven; the muddy and heavy *qi* is the *yin qi*, which sinks down and form the earth. The dual concepts of *yin* and *yang* originate from the distinction between the shadowy (*yin*) and the sunny (*yang*) sides of a hill.<sup>19</sup> The *yin/yang* distinction further designates dark and bright, wet and dry, and more significantly, female and male. The sexual dimension of the *yin* and *yang* forces conceptualizes the birth of the universe, while the interaction of the two symbols of sexes generates all things in nature. Accordingly, *yin* and *yang* are not mutually exclusive and antagonistic, but are two complementary forces which cooperate with and interpenetrate each other during any process of generation. As Laozi says, “The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang* and are the blending of the generative

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<sup>19</sup> Marcel Granet, *La pensee chinoise* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1934), 108.

forces of the two.”(The *Daodejing*, chapter 42)<sup>20</sup> In this translation by D.C. Lau, *qi* is translated as the “generative forces.”

A similar account of the birth of humans is seen in the *Liezi*: Humans are born when the dynamic blending of the *yin* and *yang* forces reaches a harmonious state. (冲和氣者爲人) In the Chinese text, the blending process of the *yin* and *yang* forces is depicted by a metaphoric term, *chong* 冲, which depicts a dynamic condition of water gushing out or currents dashing against one another. The word *chong* connotes the idea of a “watery, bubbling” condition, and “to clash or dash against.” Chapter seven of the *Zhuangzi* refers to the *taichong* 太冲, which is said to be a particular stage of the process of returning to identification with the Dao. In chapter four of the *Laozi*, *chong* is used in relation to the terms *yuan* 淵 (bottomless pool) and *zhan* 湛 (deep, or clear as water) and suggests an allusion to the watery, dynamic condition of the primordial Dao or the ancestor (origin) of the then thousand things.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, all creatures between heaven and earth are born and develop as the essences of heaven and earth, that is, the life forces of *yin* and *yang*, incorporate with each other until they achieve a perfect harmony.

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<sup>20</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), 103.

<sup>21</sup> See N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Daoism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1983), 60.

## 2. *Qi* as the Medium of the Cosmos

As stated earlier, *qi* is both the life force and the matter that permeates all things. As the general medium of the cosmos, *qi* constitutes heaven, earth, and the myriad things in between. This cosmological theory is further illustrated in the well-known parable “the man of Qi (a country name) who worries about the fall of the sky” (杞人憂天), recorded in *Liezi*, Chapter of “Heaven’s Omens.” In this parable, an over-anxious man fears that the sky may fall, and his body would have nowhere to reside. He is so worried that he cannot eat nor sleep. To relieve his anxiety, a wise man explains to him the constitution of heaven and celestial bodies:

Heaven is nothing but the accumulated air (*qi* 氣); there is no place where there is no air (*qi* 氣). You walk and stand all day inside heaven, stretching and bending, breathing in and breathing out; why should you worry about it falling down?...The sun and moon and stars are air (*qi* 氣)...The rainbow, clouds and mist, wind and rain, the four seasons; these are formations in the accumulated air (*qi* 氣) of heaven. Mountains and hills, rivers and seas, metal and stone, fire and wood; these are formations in the accumulated matter of earth. (Yan: 13-15; trans. Graham: 27-29)

According to the *Liezi*, all celestial bodies such as the sun, the moons, and stars, are all accumulation of *qi*. Moreover, atmospheric phenomena like rain, wind, clouds and mist are

explained as the circulation and motion of *qi*. Even unanimated objects, including rock, metal, water, and wood, are formed by the accumulation of *qi*. *Qi*, translated as “air” in this passage, is so subtle, pliable, and easily penetrated that one cannot be hit or harmed by it.

Although translated as “air” by Graham when referring to the *qi* of celestial bodies, atmospheric phenomena, and other non-living matters, the character “*qi*” in the Chinese text has no differentiation whether for animate or inanimate beings. In fact, the Western dichotomies of human beings and non-human beings, plants and animals, and living and non-living things are absent in Daoist way of thinking, since *qi*, which can be understood as the breath of life, pervades all things in the cosmos. In this sense, a rock has the breath of life as well as a living being. Thus all things in nature are called “*wu*” 物 in classical Chinese, without the categorizations of animals, plants, and unanimated matters. Likewise, the word *qi* renders no differentiation between material objects and living beings. Therefore, the Western dichotomies of human beings and non-human beings, plants and animals, and living and non-living things are absent in Daoist way of thinking, since *qi*, which can be understood as the breath of life, permeates all things in the cosmos. In this sense, a rock has the breath of life as well as a living being. As Hall and Ames note, “For classical China, under the sway of a cosmology that assumes that matter is animate, the Western kind of a mind-body dichotomy cannot and did not appear. Since spirituality and life go hand in hand, we can assume that

spirituality like life pervades all things.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the Chinese natural cosmology can be fairly described as a hylozoism because all beings in nature are more or less living.

#### IV. Transformation of the *Qi* into Myriad Things

The concept of *qi* as a common endowment in all things explains the interconnection of all things in nature. Be it water, soil, plants, insects, animals, or humans, all types of species and matters are interrelated in the sense that they are able to transform into one another based on their common medium of *qi*. This abstruse bio-metamorphosis theory is conveyed through a fantastic narrative in the *Liezi*, named “the hundred-year skull:”

When Liezi was eating at the roadside on a journey to Wei, he saw a skull a hundred years old. He picked a stalk, pointed at it, and said, turning to his disciple Baifeng: “Only he and I know that you were never born and will never die...Within the seeds of things there are germs (*ji* 機). When they find water they develop in successive stages. Reaching water on the edge of land, they become a scum. Breeding on the bank, they become the plantain. When the plantain reaches dung, it becomes the crowfoot. The root of the crowfoot becomes woodlice, the leaves become butterflies. The butterfly suddenly

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<sup>22</sup> David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking from the Han* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 241-242.

changes into an insect which breeds under the stove and looks as though it has shed its skin, named the *quduo*. After a thousand days the *chuto* changes into a bird named *ganyugu*. The saliva of the *ganyugu* becomes the *simi*, which becomes the vinegar animalcula *yilu*, which begets the animalcula *huangkuang*, which begets the *jiuyou*, which begets the gnat, which begets the firefly...This begets the leopard, which begets the horse, which begets man. Man in due course returns to the germs. All the myriad things come out of germs (*ji 機*) and go back to germs (*ji 機*).” (Yan: 6; trans. Graham: 20-22)<sup>23</sup>

The above passage presents a continuous chain of metamorphoses from the tiny substance to various animals and plants, together with legends of strange births, such as the horse begetting man. However, the *Liezi*'s metamorphosis theory should not be understood in Darwin's terms. Unlike Darwin's theory of evolution, the *Liezi* does not rank species in a hierarchy in which certain species is superior to the other. From the *Liezi*'s view, humans and other mammals are not considered more advanced than insects or plants in the process of evolution. For example, birds such as the swallow may become oyster; the liver of a sheep can change into the plant *digao*, which literally means “blood in earth,” because the ancient Chinese thought that this type of plant was transformed from animals' blood.

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<sup>23</sup> The parable of “Liezi and the hundred-year-old skull” is also recorded in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter of Supreme Happiness (至樂篇).

Although contrary to the present-day knowledge, this seemingly absurd imagination of the life chain presents an organistic view of nature in which all beings are mutually entailing and thus of equal value.

In the *Liezi*'s theory of bio-metamorphoses, “*ji*” (機) takes a pivotal role through which “all the myriad things comes out of *ji* and go back to *ji*” (Graham 22). Although translated as “germs” by Graham, “*ji*” literally means “tiny or subtle” and is understood by other Daoist scholars as “tiny substances from which all lives are born.”<sup>24</sup> If defined as “tiny substances,” “*ji*” denotes “*qi*” in the materialistic sense. However, to understand “*ji*” solely in the material sense seems incomplete, since “*ji*” features an important function as the pivot or gate through which myriad things come into being, and reversely, return to non-being. This gate-like depiction of “*ji*” resembles the metaphors of valley, abyss, vagina, and other hollow and empty images in the Laozi. In essence, “*ji*” should be better understood as the passageway between the realms of non-being and being. As Zhang Zhan, the first and so far the greatest commentator of the *Liezi*, says, there exist two realms—“the realm of ultimate emptiness” (太虛之域) and “the realm of movements and functions” (動

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<sup>24</sup> See Zhuang Wanshou, “Zhuangzi, Liezi ‘zhong you ji’ zhang de xijie” 莊子·列子「種有幾」章的新解 (A New Interpretation of the Chapter of “Species Composed of Tiny Substances” in *Zhuangzi and Liezi*), *Dalu zazhi* 59 (1979): 36-40. Also see Zheng Liangji, “Liezi shengsixue yanjiu” (A Study of *Liezi*'s Theory of Life and Death), *Kongda renwen xuebao* 4 (1995): 1-9.

用之域).<sup>25</sup> The former realm is empty of beings, echoing the realms of Primal Simplicity and the Ancient Rustic Kingdom, which precede the appearance of *qi* and the interaction of *yin* and *yang*; the latter is the phenomenal world, in which the movement of *qi* causes myriad things to grow and wither, increase and decrease, live and die. These two realms are connected with “*ji*”--the gateway through which things come into being and return into non-being.

The story of Liezi’s encountering the hundred-year skull and Liezi’s metamorphosis theory is also collected in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter of Perfect Happiness. In the story, Liezi is not sad at the sight of a skull by the roadside, because to Liezi, the skull, being one part of the chain of bio-metamorphosis, never dies. Thus Liezi says to the skull, “Only you and I know that you have never died and you have never lived. Are you really unhappy? Am I really enjoying myself?”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Liezi says that the skull never dies because its life always continues in other forms of lives. New lives are born when the dispersed *qi* gathers again. As the *Zhuangzi* points out, “Life is a coming together of breath. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death.”<sup>27</sup> (氣聚則生, 散則爲死). According to Zhang

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<sup>25</sup> Zhang Zhan’s commentary on the chapter “Heaven’s Omens” of the *Liezi*. For more detailed discussion on Zhang Zhan’s cosmological theory, see Li-chen Lin, “Zhang Zhan ‘guixu’ lun ji qi yu xuan fo sixiang zhi jiaoshe” 張湛「貴虛」論及其與玄佛思想之交涉 (Zhang Zhan’s Theory of “Valuing Emptiness” and Its Convergence with Neo-Daoism and Buddhism), *Taida zhongwen xuebao* 15 (2001): 61-90.

<sup>26</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 195.

<sup>27</sup> *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “Knowledge Wandered North” (知北遊). Translation from Burton Watson’s *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 235.

Zhan's commentary, the parable of the hundred-old skull illustrates the idea of "the transformation of the *qi* (氣) into myriads of beings" (一氣之變, 所適萬形).<sup>28</sup> In essence, *qi* is the common medium by which myriad things mutually entails one another in a ceaseless process of transformation.

The theme of transformation between human and things in nature is also seen in a well-known myth recorded in the *Liezi*, named "Kuafu chases the sun" (夸父逐日):

Kuafu, rating his strength too high, wanted to chase the day-light, and pursued it to the brink of the Yu valley. He was thirsty and wished to drink, and hurried to drink the Yellow River and the Wei. The Yellow River and the Wei did not quench his thirst, and he ran North intending to drink the Great Marsh, but died of thirst on the road before he reached it. The staff which he dropped soaked up the fat and flesh of his corpse and grew into Teng forest. Teng forest spread until it covered several thousand miles. (Yan: 121; trans. Graham: 101)

Kuafu, literally the "huge man," is a giant who descends from the deity Empress Earth. According to the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a major source of earliest Chinese

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<sup>28</sup> Zhang Zhan's commentary on the *Liezi*.

mythology, “Empress Earth gave birth to Xin, and Xin gave birth to Kuafu.”<sup>29</sup> Thereby, Kuafu is a deity of the earth in human form. He is described as “a man who wears two yellow snakes in his ears and holds two yellow snakes in his hands”<sup>30</sup> The yellow snakes emblem the earth in early Chinese cosmogony and mythology. Yellow is the color of the earth in Chinese correlative thought.<sup>31</sup> Snakes, the limbless reptiles crawling on the ground, is also associated with the earth. In the Chinese zodiac, the year of the snake is associated with the earthly branch symbol. Unlike the serpent in the Bible, which serves as a negative symbol, snakes often form the bodies of Chinese deities. Chinese mythical figures, including Fuxi, Nüwa, Shennong, and Yu the founder of the legendary Xia dynasty, all have serpentine bodies. Similarly, Kuafu, who wears snakes in his ears and on his head, is endowed with supernatural powers that he almost catches up with the sun. However, his strength is exhausted so he dies before he can reach the Great March and quench his thirst. After his death, Kuafu returns to the earth as his flesh and fat are soaked by his staff, which grew into a vast forest that covers thousands of miles. Kuafu’s metamorphosis into a grove of trees signifies that his life continues in other forms of lives. In this sense, Kuafu, like the hundred-year skull, never dies.

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<sup>29</sup> See, Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 216.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Earth is one of the five agents in early Chinese cosmogony. The five agents are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, which are associated with five respective colors: white, green, black, red, and yellow. Concerning the role of the five agents in Chinese cosmology, see John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 7-11.

The Kuafu myth as recorded in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* and the *Liezi* shows striking resemblances with the famous creation myth of Pangu 盤古, first seen in *Wu yun linian ji* 五運曆年紀 (A Chronicle of the Five Cycles of Time) by Xu Zheng 徐整 of the third century A.D.,

When the firstborn, Pangu, was approaching death, his body was transformed. His breath became the wind and clouds; his voice became peals of thunder. His left eye became the sun; his right eye became the moon. His four limbs and five extremities became the four cardinal points and the five peaks. His blood and semen became water and rivers. His muscles and veins became the earth's arteries; his flesh became fields and land. His hair and beard became the stars; his bodily hair became plants and trees. His teeth and bones became metal and rock; his vital marrow became pearls and jade. His sweat and bodily fluids became streaming rain. All the mites on his body were touched by the wind and were turned into the black-haired people.<sup>32</sup>

Like Kuafu, Pangu, literally “Coiled Antiquity,” is a semi-god, semi-human giant, whose dying body transforms into myriad things in the universe. As Anne Birrell notes, the narrative of Pangu presents “the motif of the cosmological human body, in which the

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<sup>32</sup> Translation by Anne Birrell. See Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, 33.

microcosm of the human body of Pangu becomes the macrocosm of the physical world.”<sup>33</sup>

The creation of the cosmos, including the sun, the moon, the land, and all things in between, results from the metamorphosis of Pangu’s body.

The name of Pangu indicates that he coiled up like a snake or embryo in a bowl-shape space. Evoking to the totem of snake, Pangu possesses certain divine powers like Kuafu does. By evoking to the image of an coiled embryo, Pangu represents the firstborn of the things between heaven and earth. As recorded in Xu Zheng’s *San Wu liji* 三五曆紀 (A Chronicle of the Three and Five Cycles of Time), Pangu’s birth relates the separation of the sky and earth:

Heaven and earth were in chaos like a chicken’s egg, and Pangu was born in the middle of it. In eighteen thousand years Heaven and earth opened and unfolded. The limpid that was *yang* became the heavens, the turbid that was *yin* became the earth. Pangu lived within them, and in one day he went through nine transformations, becoming more divine than Heaven and wiser than earth. Each day the heavens rose ten feet higher, each day the earth grew ten feet thicker, and each day Pangu grew ten feet taller....That is why Heaven is ninety thousand leagues from earth.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

In this narrative of the separation of the sky and earth, Pangu plays a crucial role as the firstborn semi-divine human, whose birth and growth cause the differentiation and parting of heaven and earth. Pangu's position in the universe is thus regarded as an equal in the cosmic trinity of heaven, earth and human. This tripartition, as Anne Birrell notes, is derived from early Han philosophers such as Dong Zhongshu (179-104 B.C.), the author of the sociopolitical work *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Heavy Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals). His school of thought presents the reciprocal interaction among heaven, earth and human.

## V. Continuity between Diverse Forms of Things

The continuity between one form of life and the other is illustrated in the account of the pumelo tree in the chapter of Tang's Questions of the *Liezi*:

In the countries of Wu and Chu there is a big tree named the pumelo. It is a green tree which does not fade in winter; its fruit is red and tastes sour, and eating its skin and juice cures fits...but when planted North of the Huai it changes into a dwarf orange...It is climate (*diqu*, literally, local air) which causes this. However, although the shapes and energies of things differ, they are equal by nature. (Yan: 116-117; trans. Graham, 99)

In this parable, the pumelo tree and the dwarf orange tree are the same tree. However, their looks and fruits change according to different environments. In the south, the pumelo tree is tall and evergreen and its fruit can heal human sickness. When planted north, however, the tree becomes short and its fruit turns sour and useless for mankind. In the Chinese text, the transformation of the pumelo tree is caused by “*diqu*” 地氣, which literally means “the *qi* of the earth” or the “local air (*qi*),” translated as “climate” by Graham. The flux of *qi* between the tree and its new environment causes the change of its look and quality. In other words, as soon as the pumelo tree is transplanted from the south to the north, it starts to intake substances from the northern soil, breathe the northern air, thus being constantly influenced and changed by the new environment. To stand against the northern wind, the pumelo tree turns into a dwarf tree; to stand the cold weather, its evergreen leaves become deciduous. All these changes are to adapt to the new environment, so that the tree can survive and flourish in the north. Since the dwarf orange tree is good for its own survival, it has value in itself even though its sour fruits lost healing power for mankind. In the contemporary environmental thinker Tom Regan’s word, “Every subject of a life has inherent value. That is to say that it has value on its own, irrespective of anyone else’s purposes, interests, needs, and so forth.”<sup>35</sup> This anti-anthropocentric view opens up the possibility of ascribing values to nonhuman objects regardless of the latter’s usefulness to mankind.

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<sup>35</sup> Tom Regan, “How to Worry about Endangered Species,” in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 106.

The *Liezi* concludes the parable of the pumelo tree and the dwarf orange with the significance of each particular creature, “Although the shapes and energies (*qi*) of things differ, they are equal by nature, none can take the place of another, all are born perfect in themselves, each is allotted all its needs” (Yan: 117; trans. Graham: 99). In the *Liezi*’s worldview, every creature adjusts its portions of *qi* in deference to its environment, which is composed of many other creatures. The portion of *qi* in each creature is unique and perfect for its survival. Moreover, *qi* constantly flows in and between creatures, thus integrating them into an interrelated system in which each particular creature has its own significance in their influence over others. In this sense, the existence of every species is meaningful, unique, and hence cannot be substituted by anyone else.

In the *Liezi*’s view, myriad beings are different in appearance but equal and interrelated in nature. Their different forms are caused by the ceaseless flux of *qi* within and between the creatures. As Zhuangzi says, “The ten thousand things all come from the same seed, and with their different forms they give place to one another. Beginning and end are part of a single ring and no one can comprehend its principle. This is called Heaven the Equalizer, which is the same as the Heavenly Equality (天均).” (The Zhuangzi, chapter of “Imputed Words”)<sup>36</sup> As illustrated in the parable of the pumelo tree, as soon as the tree is transplanted from the south to the north, it starts to intake different substances from the northern soil and is influenced by the northern weather day and night. In the Chinese text,

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<sup>36</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 304-305.

the transformation of the pumelo tree is caused by “*diqui*” 地氣. This *diqui*, translated as “climate” by Graham, literally means “local air.” Influenced by the local air, the pumelo tree gradually changes its look and quality. This change reflects the balancing of various portions of *qi* as the pumelo tree adapts to its new environment. Unlike the ever-green leaves of the tall pumelo tree, the sour fruits of the dwarf orange are no longer useful to treat human sickness. Nevertheless, this transformation, although useless for mankind, is useful for the tree’s own survival. In the words of contemporary environmental ethics, the dwarf orange tree has its own “intrinsic value.” As Po-Keung Ip states in his article “Taoism and the Foundations of Environmental Ethics,” the Daoist notion of ontological equality leads to the notion of axiological equality of beings. The Daoist concept of ontological equality “opens up the possibility of ascribing values to nonhuman objects regardless of the latter’s usefulness to human beings.”<sup>37</sup>

To conclude, the *Liezi*’s cosmology, characterized by the concept of *qi* and the theory of birth and transformation, provides a sound metaphysical foundation for ecological holism and egalitarianism. *Qi* is the common medium that constitutes heaven and earth: Heaven consists of the *yang qi*, which is light and pure; whereas earth is formed by the *yin qi*, which is heavy and muddy. These two types of *qi* are not static, but dynamically interact and incorporate with each other, thus giving rise to all creatures between heaven and earth. A

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<sup>37</sup> Po-Keung Ip, “Taoism and the Foundations of Environmental Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 335-343.

life begins from the gathering of *qi* and ends in disperse of *qi*. As the dispersed *qi* gathers again, new life is born. Accordingly, different forms of lives, based on their common endowment of *qi*, are interrelated in a chain of metamorphoses. Furthermore, the *Liezi*'s holistic cosmology does not negate the significance of each particular species. Instead, the *Liezi* sees each species unique and perfect in their way to survive and flourish in nature. Equilibrium is achieved as each creature adjusts its allotment of *qi* in deference to its environment, which consists of many other creatures. In this paradigm, each creature has its unique allotment of *qi* that is perfect for its survival and flourishing. Hence, all creatures are equally meaningful in their existences, and are equally significant in their relation to and influence over one another. The *Liezi* thus presents a holistic and egalitarian worldview in which the boundaries and differentiation of human, animals, plants, and matters, dissolve.

## CHAPTER 2: THE *LIEZI*'S VIEW OF LIFE:

### Equality of All Species

The notion of *qi*, as discussed in the previous chapter, not only provides a theoretical foundation for the *Liezi*'s cosmology, but also serves as the foundation for the *Liezi*'s ethics of life, which I argue, is characterized with an anti-anthropocentric stand and an egalitarian view of all species. This chapter approaches topics such as the value of life and the comparative value of different species, which are hotly debated in the field of environmental ethics. The questions involve how we evaluate various forms of life. Is mankind superior to other species? Should we consider human lives and needs more important than those of other beings? Are all lives equal? What is a right attitude toward other living things, including animals, plants, and an entire eco-system?

A review of Western discourses on environmental ethics show a tendency of extension from anthropocentrism, to bio-centrism and eco-centrism. As Chung-ying Cheng observes, contemporary environmentalists show an interest in “applying an exploring certain ethical concepts and positions in relation to a set of concrete situations which human persons confront in their life world.”<sup>1</sup> Animal rights activists such as Peter Singer seek to reduce animals’ sufferings and propose that what matters is having a central nervous system that

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<sup>1</sup> Chung-ying Cheng, “On the Environmental Ethics of the Tao and the Ch’I,” *Environmental Ethics* 8, no.4 (1986): 351.

senses pain. Tom Regan in his article “how to worry about endangered species” argues for a strong egalitarian stand that every life has an inherent value. The environmental philosopher Paul Taylor suggests that human are not superior to other living things and proposes an equal treatment for both animals and plants. Environmental holists and eco-centrists, such as Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Arne Naess, Bill Devall, George Sessions, Baird Callicot, and Holmes Rolston, further argue for the rights of trees, mountains, and even an ecosystem as a whole.

Questions about the value of different beings are raised up by Tang in the *Book of Liezi*. The chapter of “Tang’s Questions” lists sundry accounts of animals, insects, plants, and peoples of strange figures and customs to question and challenge conventional values. In terms of length, it is said that in the far East there are people as short as one foot and five inches high, but in the far North East there are shorter people who are nine inches high. In terms of size, there are minute microorganisms that settle on the eyelashes of mosquitoes; there is a type of gigantic fish of several thousand miles broad and long in proportion. Legends go that there is also the *peng* bird whose wings are as wide as clouds hanging from the sky. In terms of the length of time, there is the *mingling* tree, which grows through a spring of five hundred years and declines through an autumn of five hundred years; nevertheless, for the ancient *zhuang* tree, spring and autumn were eight thousand years each. In terms of lifespan, there is a fungus which grows in manure, which is born in the morning

and dies by evening; but the lifespan of gnats is even shorter—they are born when it rains and die when they see the sun.<sup>2</sup>

Hence here comes the question: Are there things large and small, long and short, noble and base, similar and different? The *Liezi* put this question in the mouth of Tang the sage king and founder of the ancient Shang dynasty, in the purpose of ridiculing human wisdom, since even Tang did not know the answer of the question. From the Daoist perspective, however, all creatures are equal regardless of their shapes and values in human perception. In the *Liezi*, this anti-anthropocentric and egalitarian view of nature is supported by the metaphysics of *qi*, and is further elaborated into ethics of life. Such an extension from ontological equality into axiological equality of myriad creatures is mostly discussed in the chapter of “Yang Zhu,” which states,

Yang Zhu said, “It is in life that the myriad things of the world are different; in death they are all the same...However, the myriad things all equally live and die, are equally clever and foolish, noble and vile. Some in ten years, some in a hundred, we all die...Make haste to enjoy your life while you have it; why care what happens when you are dead?” (Yan: 186-187; trans. Graham: 140-141)

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<sup>2</sup> Accounts of these strange animals and plants are recorded in the chapter of “Tang’s Questions” of the *Liezi*. See Yan: 116; trans. Graham: 98.

Yang Zhu (cir. 440-360 B.C.) was one of the most influential Daoist philosophers during the Warring States period. His influence was clearly mentioned by his Confucian opponent, Mencius (372-289 B.C.), who said, “The words of Yang Zhu spread all over the world.”<sup>3</sup> Mencius depicted Yang as a selfish egoist who would not pluck out a single hair for the benefit of the whole world.<sup>4</sup> Is Yang Zhu truly a selfish egoist as Mencius sees? Since Yang Zhu had no book left behind him, his thought can only be found in scattered accounts in other philosophers’ writings, such as the *Hanfeizi*, the *Huainanzi*, *Mister Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals*, and most notably the *Liezi*, in which an entire chapter is devoted to Yang Zhu’s ideas.

### I. Problems concerning the *Liezi*’s Chapter of “Yang Zhu”

Although the “Yang Zhu” chapter in the *Liezi* is seen by many scholars as a representation of hedonism which differs radically from ascetic teachings of Daoism<sup>5</sup>, this seemingly contradiction between hedonism and asceticism can be reconciled if we discern the hidden meaning under the *Liezi*’s exaggerative and satiric expressions. Most notably for those who attack the Yang Zhu chapter for its seemingly extreme hedonistic thought is the parable of the drunkard Gongsun Zhao and the womanizer Gongsun Mu.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Mencius*, IIIB.9.

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Mencius*, VIIA.26.

<sup>5</sup> See Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol.I, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 133. Also, A.C. Graham, “The Dialogue between Yang Ju and Chyntyzy,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22, no.1 (1959): 291-299.

Zichan was chief minister in Cheng. Within three years of his taking sole charge of the government, the good had submitted to his reforms and the wicked dreaded his prohibitions; the state of Cheng was in good order and the other states were afraid of it. But he had an elder brother called Gongsun Zhao who was fond of wine, and a younger brother called Gongsun Mu who was fond of women. Zhao had collected in his house a thousand jars of wine and a whole hillock of yeast for brewing; and for a hundred paces outside his door the smell of the dregs came to meet men's nostrils. When he was carried away by wine, he did not know whether there was peace or war in the world, he did not notice mistakes which he had time to repent, he forgot the possessions in his own house, the degrees of affinity of his kinsmen, and that it is better to live than to die. Even if he had stood in water or fire with sword blades clashing before him, he would not have known it.

In the back courtyard of Mu's house there was a row of several dozen rooms, and he picked young and lovely girls to fill them. When he was excited by lust, he shut the door on his kinsmen and stopped meeting and going out with his friends; he fled into his harem, where the nights were too short to satisfy him, and felt thwarted if he had to come out once in three months. Any beautiful virgin in the district he was sure to tempt with gifts and invite

through go-betweens, giving up only if he could not catch her. (Yan: 179;  
trans. Graham: 143-144)

The above passages wildly display the extreme lustful and sensational indulgence one can imagine. This exaggerative narrative is compounded with a strong sense of satire as the *Liezi* contrasts Zichan 子產, one of Confucius' most prominent student who later became a politician, to his fictional brothers--the drunkard Zhao and the womanizer Mu. Their names, Zhao 朝, literally the "day," and Mu 穆, which sounds identical to the character 暮 with the meaning the "night," playfully suggest that the two brothers spend all day and night lusting for wine and women. In contrast, the decent and serious Zichan came to give his two brothers a lecture, saying,

It is knowledge and foresight which make man nobler than the beasts and birds.  
Knowledge and foresight lead us to propriety and duty. Learn to live properly  
and dutifully, and reputation and office will be yours...Should you listen to  
what I say, you can repent in a morning and draw your salaries by the evening.  
(Yan: 179; trans. Graham: 145)

What the *Liezi* portrays of Zichan is a man of hypocrisy. Beneath his seemingly decent admonishment, he actually uses jobs and salaries to threaten his brothers. To one's surprise,

the two brothers Zhao and Mu are no fools but answer Zichan with their extraordinary view of life. Zhao and Mu answer,

We have long known it, and long since made our choice. Why should we need your advice to make us see it? Always life is precious and death comes too soon. We must never forget that we are living this precious life, waiting for death which comes too soon; and to wish to impress others with your respect for propriety and duty, distorting your natural passions to call up a good name, in our judgment is worse than death. We wish to enjoy this single life to the full, draining the utmost pleasure from its best years. For us the only misfortune is a belly too weak to drink without restraint, potency which fails before our lust is satisfied. We have no time to worry that our reputation is ugly and our health in danger. (Yan: 179-180; trans. Graham: 145)

The two brothers not only articulate their view and way of life, but also criticize Zichan's statecraft which they see as mere temporary success by chance. They say,

Besides, is it not mean and pitiable that you, whom success in ruling the state has made proud, should wish to disturb our hearts with sophistries, and flatter our thoughts with hopes of glory and salary? We in our turn would like to

dispute the issue with you. The man who is good at ordering the lives of others does not necessarily succeed, but overworks himself trying. The man who is good at ordering his own life gives scope to his nature without needing to disorder the lives of others. Your method of ruling others may be realized temporarily in a single state, but it is out of accord with men's hearts. Our method of ruling ourselves may be extended to the whole world...We have long wanted to make you understand our way of life, but on the contrary it is you who come to teach yours!" (Yan: 180; trans. Graham: 145-146)

It would be as absurd as misleading to read this parable in a literal sense. This parable is not to teach people to lust for wine and women day and night. In fact, the seemingly ridiculous excuses of the drunkard and the womanizer brothers touch several fundamental issues in Daoism. First, they are in line with Laozi's political idea of non-intervention. What Zhao and Mu accuse of Zichan is his self-righteous presumption that he can haughtily "order the lives of others."

Secondly, the arguments between Zichan and the two brothers point to one of the core issues in Neo-Daoism, namely, the debate on "proprieties (*lijiao* 禮教) and naturalness (*ziran* 自然)." For literati during the Six Dynasties, the desires for the colors, sounds, tastes, etc. are all inherent and "natural" to the human being, so the human can truly "follow nature" only when these desires have been fully satisfied. Such is the way many Neo-Daoist

thinkers interpret the notion of “following nature.” For instance, Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263) used to indulge himself in wine and wild abandonment. “He would uncover his head, let loose his hair, take off his outer clothes, and lie sprawled on the ground.” Later on the youth of nobility were all followers of his example.<sup>6</sup>

Finally and most importantly, Zhao and Mu uphold the ethics of valuing life more than fame and material goods, which lies at the core of Yang Zhu’s thought. As recorded in the Daoist classic *Huainanzi* 淮南子, “Completeness of living (*quansheng* 全生), preservation of what is genuine, and not allowing outside things to entangle one’s person: these were what Yang Zhu established.”<sup>7</sup> The ancient encyclopedia *Lü shi chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 (Mister Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals) also states that Yang Zhu “valued self” (*guiji* 贵己).

As A. C. Graham points out, the notions of “valuing self,” “keeping one’s nature of life intact,” and “not letting one’s body be burdened with outside things,” strongly suggest that Yang Zhu considers “the preservation of life and self more important than the possession of outside things.”<sup>8</sup> In order to keep one’s health and life intact, Yang Zhu would not advice people to overindulge sensational or lustful desires which may harm their body and health; rather, the true spirit of the Yangism is to satisfy the body’s needs “only in moderation.”

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<sup>6</sup> See Fung Yu-lan. *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. II trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 190.

<sup>7</sup> See the *Huainanzi*, chapter 13. The original sentence in Chinese is 全生保真, 不以物累形。 Translation from Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol.I, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 134.

<sup>8</sup> See A. C. Graham, “The Dialogue between Yang Ju and Chyntyzy,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959): 294-295.

Yang Zhu's idea accords with the doctrines in the first few sections of the *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 namely, "taking life as fundamental" (bensheng 本生), "giving weight to self" (zhongji 重己), "valuing life" (guisheng 貴生), and "passions and desires." (qingyu 情欲). As stated in the section of "valuing life,"

The sage who has profound thinking finds nothing in the world more valuable than life. What the ears, the eyes, the nose, and the mouth desire are the nature of life. Nevertheless, if the body desires sounds, the eyes desire colors, the nose desires fragrance, the mouth desires flavors, to an extent that life would be harmed, one should hold back. Concerning the four senses, if they do not benefit life, then do not indulge them. As seen from this principle, the ears, the eyes, the nose, and the mouth cannot be indulge but have to be controlled...This is the skill of valuing life.<sup>9</sup>

In essence, the doctrines of "valuing life" teach people to cherish life and to live out their natural span, and not to risk life for the sake of sensual pleasures. Therefore, it is misleading to understand Yang Zhu's thought as extreme hedonism.

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<sup>9</sup> My translation. The original reads, 聖人深慮天下，莫貴於生。夫耳目鼻口，生之欲也。身雖欲聲，目雖欲色，鼻雖欲芳香，口雖欲滋味，害於生則止。在四官者，不欲利於生者則弗為。由此觀之，耳目鼻口不得擅行，必有所制...此貴生之術也。(呂氏春秋·貴生)

Fung Yu-lan sees the *Liezi*'s chapter of Yang Zhu as complete hedonism, thus differing from Yang Zhu's original ideas.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, if we are aware of the *Liezi*'s rhetorical techniques of exaggeration and satire as shown in the parable of "the drunkard and the womanizer brothers" in the *Liezi*'s chapter of "Yang Zhu", we would not interpret it as mere irresponsible hedonism, but as criticism against hypocrisy and institutionalized proprieties. Furthermore, to have a sound judgment and a thorough understanding of the *Liezi*'s chapter of "Yang Zhu," we need to look into all relevant lines in the Yang Zhu chapter, as well as other chapters of the *Liezi*, in a comprehensive way.

According to Aloysius Chang's "Comparative Study of Yang Chu and the Chapter on Yang Chu," Yang Zhu's view and ethics of life can be summarized as follows,

To perfect one's life and guard one's true nature was the foundation of Yang Zhu's teachings. It is natural that any man, with such conviction, holds life as something important and precious and firmly despises material things; he will never allow material things to interfere and influence his personality, and he will never sacrifice even one hair of his body to gain the whole world.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol.I, 133.

<sup>11</sup> Aloysius Chang, "A Comparative Study of Yang Chu and The Chapter on Yang Chu (Part One)," *Chinese Culture* 12, no.4 (1971): 67.

As seen from Chang's comment, the *Liezi's* chapter of Yang Zhu provides rich sources for the Daoist view of human life and body, which the Daoist ethics of life which is based upon. The following sections examine the *Liezi's* discussions on body, life, death, destiny, and other key concepts that constitute the Daoist conception of human and other living things.

## II. On the Body

John Emerson in "Yang Chu's Discovery of the Body" argues that Yang Zhu's innovation was his physical definition of human nature: "By providing a physical definition of human nature, Yang Chu freed the Chinese elite from the public ritual that had up to that time dominated and defined them. By treating public honors, court ceremonial, and feudal relationships as external conditions, he struck at the heart of the traditional ritual order."<sup>12</sup> As Yang Zhu says, "One who...seeks more from outside himself has an insatiable nature. An insatiable nature is a grub eating away one's vital forces."<sup>13</sup>

Yang Zhu's view of the human body as composed by vital forces (*qi*) accords with the first chapter "Heaven's Gifts" of the *Liezi*, which states, the body is "harmony between your forces, granted from a time by heaven and earth." (Yan: 15; trans. Graham: 29) Since the body is granted by heaven and earth, the body should not be regarded as one's possession.

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<sup>12</sup> John Emerson, "Yang Chu's Discovery of the Body," *Philosophy East & West* 46, no.4 (1996): 533.

<sup>13</sup> For Chinese version, see Yan Beiming and Yan Jie, *Liezi yizhu*, 188; for English translation, see Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 156.

Therefore Yang Zhu speaks,

My body is not my possession...Although I keep life and body intact, I cannot possess this body; although I may not dispense with things, I cannot possess these things. To possess these things, possess this body, would be violently to reserve for oneself body and things which belong to the world. (Yan: 187; trans. Graham: 153-154)

Accordingly, not only that external things, such as food, dress, houses, carriages, and means of entertainment, do not belong to any person, but that the body does not belong to a person. One may ask, "If my own body is not mine, whose is it?" The *Liezi* answers, "It is the shape lent to you by heaven and earth. Your life is not your possession; it is harmony between your forces" (Yan: 15; trans. Graham: 29). The forces here refer to the vital breaths (*qi* 氣) of heaven and earth, which harmonize to give births to life. Humans, not different from other living things, are born out of *qi* and are incessantly transformed by the flux of *qi*. As the *Liezi* says, "You are the breath (*qi*) of heaven and earth which goes to and fro; how can you ever possess it?" (Yan 15; trans. Graham: 30)

This non-possessive view of one's body well explains why Yang Zhu refuses to pluck out a single hair for the benefit of the whole world. From Yang Zhu's perspective, even a single hair should not be disposed willfully since it does not belong to the person but it is

lent to the person by heaven and earth. As Yang Zhu says, “My body is not my possession; yet once born, I have no choice but to keep it intact. Other things are not my possessions; yet once I exist, I cannot dispense with them. Certainly, it is by the body that we live; but it is by means of other things that we tend it” (Yan: 187; trans. Graham: 153). In order to tend the body, man has to take things from nature, which also belong to heaven and earth. Thereby, Yang Zhu’s idea of *weiwo* 爲我 (for thyself) becomes “the most unselfish doctrine based upon the basic denial of the idea of self and the idea of possession which is developed from self.”<sup>14</sup>

### III. On Offspring

Following the *Liezi*’s view of ownership, one cannot claim anything—both external things and one’s body, life, and lives born out of oneself—to be his own possessions. Hence it is said, “Your children and grandchildren are not your possessions; heaven and earth lend them to you to cast off from your body as an insect sheds its skin” (Yan: 15; trans. Graham: 29-30).

Take the parable of Duan Mushu for example. Duan Mushu inherited his family property worth ten thousand pieces of gold so he enjoyed his life with all kinds of pleasures. In an exaggerated way, it is said that “everyday the guests in his court were counted in hundreds, and down in his kitchen the fire never went out, up in his hall and chambers the

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<sup>14</sup> Aloysius Chang, “A Comparative Study of Yang Chu and the Chapter on Yang Chu, Part Two,” 70.

musicians never stopped playing.” His banquets expanded so far and wide that “first in his own clan, next in the town and the villages around, finally all over the country.”<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Duan Mushu gave away all his vast fortune as soon as he is too old to enjoy it. Not leaving anything for his own children and grandchildren, he died without the money to pay for his funeral. The people throughout the country who had enjoyed his bounty then made a collection for his funeral and restored the property of his children. As Graham notes, “The hedonist author is far from refusing to give a hair to benefit others; for him the supreme value is the utmost enjoyment of the prime of life, and it is better to die miserably than to hold on to things which can still give pleasure to those young enough to use them.”<sup>16</sup>

The moral of the Duan Mushu parable goes farther than the purely hedonist interpretation; in fact, Duan Mushu gives away all his property because the property should not be regarded as his own possession. As stated in the chapter of Yang Zhu,

Although I keep life and body intact, I cannot possess this body; although I may not dispense with things, I cannot possess these things. To possess these things, possess this body, would be violently to reserve for oneself body and things which belong to the world. Is it not only the sage, only the highest man, who treats as common possessions the body and the things which belong to the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>16</sup> Graham, “The Dialogue between Yang Ju and Chyntzyy,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22, no.1 (1959): 294.

world? It is this which is meant by “highest of the highest” (Yan: 187; trans. Graham: 153-154).

The “highest of the highest” (*zhizhi* 至至) is the ultimate realization of the natural order: While tending body and life, one must not identify body with self but keep aware that it is only a part of nature. While making use of things for the maintenance of body and life, one should not identify things with self, but keep aware that things are parts of nature. It is only the man identified with the ultimate natural order who recognizes that bodies and all beings of nature, alike and equal, and things are all parts of nature, to be shared alike without discrimination. Interpreting the parable of Duan Mushu from this insight, we can understand why Duan Mushu does not leave any property to his offspring, but give it to the common public. Likewise, the public support Duan Mushu’s children and grandchildren without holding back the property given to them.

#### IV. On Things in Nature

When applied to environmental ethics, the *Liezi*’s idea of ownership supports an attitude of humility toward nature. As illustrated in the parable of “the great thief,” a poor man asks a rich man how to get rich. The rich man tells the poor, “I am good at stealing.” So the poor man climbs over walls and breaks into houses, and grabs anything in reach of

his eye and hand. Soon he is caught and found guilty of theft. Thinking that the rich man deceives him, he questions the rich man again. The rich man explains,

Have you erred so far from the true Way of stealing? Let me explain...I rob heaven and earth of their seasonal benefits, the clouds and rains of their irrigating floods, the mountains and marshes of their products, in order to grow my crops, plant my seed, raise my walls, build my house. I steal birds and animals from the land, fish and turtles from the water. All this is stealing; for crops and seed, clay and wood, birds and animals, fish and turtles, are all begotten by heaven, and how can they become my possessions? (Yan: 16; trans. Graham: 30)

By calling himself a thief, the rich man considers all things he takes from nature to support his life not as his possessions, but heaven's possessions. Nevertheless, he is not punished for stealing because such stealing is "common to all." In other words, heaven and earth generously and impartially provides all lives. Contrast to the "man's way of stealing" that is to grab gold and jade out of greed and possessiveness, "the true Way of stealing" is to take natural resources only for the purpose of sustaining one's body and life. Hence the *Liezi's* non-possessive view of nature leads to life ethics of sustainability, frugality, humility, and gratitude toward nature.

The *Liezi*'s Way of stealing from nature only for self-sustenance resonates with deep ecologists' idea of "self-maintenance," which is the primary duty of any being toward itself. According to the Australian environmental philosopher Freya Matthews, "self-maintenance is not interpreted as to encompass greed, cruelty, exploitativeness etc., but merely involves the satisfaction of 'vital needs.' Vital needs are those which a self is entitled to satisfy in order to secure its own flourishing." Like the *Liezi*'s non-possessive view of one's body and life, Matthews calls to transcend the egoistic view of "self." She says, "We are not of course to understand "flourishing" here in a narrow egoistic sense, as in for example, becoming rich and famous, being a star or celebrity." Rather, "flourishing" is to have basic needs for life, such as shelter, food, clothing, etc. To sustain one's livelihood, one may have to cut down trees, eat plants, or kill animals – on the understanding that other beings are also in their turn entitled to get resources from nature and to maintain their lives. As Matthews points out, "Recognition of the equality of selves then does no require that one starve...But it does require that one refrain from thwarting the interests of other selves if it not necessary to ones' flourishing to do so."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Freya Matthews, *The Ecological Self* (London: Routledge, 1991), 128.

## V. On Human and Other Animals

### 1. Egalitarian View of All Living Things

The *Liezi* presents this tension and relation between human and other creatures with an intriguing debate between a celebrity and a child. The celebrity banquets a thousand guests. While someone is serving fish and geese at the seat of honor, the celebrity says, “How generous heaven is to mankind! It grows the five grains and breeds the fish and birds for the use of man.” All the guests answered like his echo. The celebrity’s talk represents an anthropocentric and utilitarian view of nature, which is favored by most people except a twelve-year-old boy. This child comes forward and challenges him,

“It is not as your lordship says. The myriad things between heaven and earth, born in the same way that we are, do not differ from us in kind. One kind is no nobler than another; it is simply that the stronger and cleverer rule the weaker and sillier. Things take in turns to eat each other, but they are not bred for each other’s sake. Men take the things which are edible and eat them, but how can it be claimed that heaven bred them originally for the sake of man? Besides, mosquitoes and gnats bite our skin, tigers and wolves eat our flesh; did heaven originally breed man for the sake of mosquitoes and gnats, and his flesh for the sake of tigers and wolves?” (Yan: 218; trans.

Graham: 178-179)

In this parable, the celebrity holds an anthropocentric view, which regards human as the noblest being and hence all other beings in nature are to serve human's needs. His anthropocentric view is challenged by the egalitarian view of human and other creatures based on the child's direct observation on a food chain in nature, in which human and animals are preying and being preyed in turns. For examples, human takes whatever they can eat, and is in turns eaten by other creatures such as tigers and mosquitoes. From this perspective, human is not superior to tigers or mosquitoes, but all are equal members in earth's interdependent community, each striving to pursue its well-being in its own way. No one is bred for others' sake, since all strive to survive and flourish.

The *Liezi's* egalitarian view of all living things resonates with the idea of the eco-centric thinker, Paul Taylor, who considers that everything thing that strives to remain alive, grow, and reproduce, has a good of its own, which he calls the "inherent value." The recognition of the inherent value of all living things does not mean that we cannot eat animals and plants. Rather, what follows from inherent value is the "full awareness of an organism's standpoint...as a teleological center of life, striving to preserve itself and to realize its own good in its own unique way."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, an egalitarian view of life does not negate the uniqueness of each particular species.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Taylor, "The Ethics of Respect for Nature," in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, ed. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 89.

## 2. Uniqueness of Each Species

The uniqueness of human in comparison to other species is recognized in the “Yang Zhu” chapter of the *Liezi*. As Yang Zhu says,

Man resembles the other species between heaven and earth, and like them owes his nature to the Five Elements. He is the most intelligent of living things. But in man, nails and teeth are not strong enough to provide defense, skin and flesh are too soft for protection; he cannot run fast enough to escape danger, and he lacks fur and feathers to ward off heat and cold. He must depend on other things in order to tend his nature, must trust in knowledge and not rely on force. Hence the most valuable use of knowledge is for self-preservation, while the most ignoble use of force is to attack others. (Yan: 186; trans. Graham: 153)

To recognize human’s superior intelligence is not to justify human’s mastery over other nature. Rather, it is for self-defense and life-sustenance that Yang Zhu approves human’s access to natural resources. Since human is physically weak compared to other animals, human has to rely on intelligence rather than force to defend himself. On the other hand, human’s survival also depends on other creatures. For instances, human uses the fur of beasts to ward off cold, the leather to protect his soft skin, wood to build shelters, and

metals to make tools. In sum, Yang Zhu's recognition of human intelligence does not lead to an anthropocentric or utilitarian view of nature. On the contrary, Yang Zhu stresses human's dependence on nature and approves human's killing or use of other creatures only for self-preservation.

More fundamentally, Yang Zhu clarifies the resemblance and difference between human and other creatures based on the cosmological theory of *qi*. Human resembles other species between heaven and hearth in their nature of "the Five Elements." The Five Elements, namely, Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth, are five formulations of *qi* that constitutes all things in nature. Chapter one has discussed the two primordial cosmic forces, *yin* and *yang*, which form heaven and earth. Hundreds of years later after the invention of the *yin* and *yang* concept, the Five Elements theory was introduced during the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.). The incorporation of the *yin* and *yang* concept and the Five Elements theory, although complicated, but is well presented in a brief summary by the Daoist scholar Schipper, "Between Water and Fire—the two elements that represent *yin* and *yang* at their apogee—Wood and Metal represent two intermediary phases. The Earth represents a fifth element that makes possible the joining of the preceding four."<sup>19</sup> Hence all beings fall on a shared continuum—*qi*—which is same in kind but may differ in degree. As Ames states, the *qi* endowed on various beings is same in kind but only differs in degree:

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<sup>19</sup> Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 35.

clear/turbid, thin/thick, genial/overbearing.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, human and other creatures have the common nature of *qi*, but each creature has different portions of the *yin* and *yang*, and the Five Elements.

## VI. On Life and Death

This section discusses the *Liezi's* view of life and death, starting with the Daoist epistemological theory of *qi*, from which the axiology is elaborated. With the concept of *qi*, the *Liezi* analyzes the course of life and death in four stages: infancy, youth, old age, death.

(1) In infancy his energies are concentrated and his inclinations at one—the ultimate of harmony. Other things do not harm him, nothing can add to the virtue in him.

(2) In youth, the energies in his blood are in turmoil and overwhelm him, desires and cares rise up and fill him. Other attack him, therefore the virtue wanes in him.

(3) When he is old, desires and cares weaken, his body is about to rest. Nothing contends to get ahead of him, and although he has not reached the perfection of infancy, compared with his youth there is a great difference for the better.

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<sup>20</sup> Roger Ames, "Taoism and the Nature of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 8 (winter 1986): 325-326.

(4) When he dies, he goes to his rest, rises again to his zenith.<sup>21</sup>

In the *Liezi*'s view, the infant and the old are closer to the Dao than the youth. It accords with what Laozi says, "When carrying on your head your perplexed bodily soul can you embrace in your arms the One and not let go? In concentrating your breath (*qi*) can you become as supple as a babe?" (The *Daodejing*, chapter 10)<sup>22</sup> In this passage, the "One" refers to the Dao, and the "breath", in Chinese original "*qi*", is the medium between the Dao and all modalities of life. As Zhuangzi says, "The ten thousand things are really one... You have only to comprehend the one breath that is the world."<sup>23</sup>

To analyze the *Liezi*'s view on life and death we have to trace it back to the Daoist cosmological theory, in which the concept of *qi* plays a pivotal role. The Daoist formulation of the world is seen as the metaphysical stages of "the Dao—*qi*—wu (the individual modality);" in reverse, the way for the individual to return to its source can be illustrated as the stages of "wu—*qi*—Dao."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, *qi* is the medium by which one can cultivate and thereby get close to the Dao. According to Zhang Zhan's commentary on the *Liezi*, "The Perfect Man unites his heart with the primordial *qi*, his body in sublime harmony with

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<sup>21</sup> For Chinese original, see Yan Beiming and Yan Jie, *Liezi yizhu*, 10; trans. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, translated by D. C. Lau, 66.

<sup>23</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 236.

<sup>24</sup> See Cai Fanglu and others, *Qi*, ed. Zhang Liwen (Beijing: People's University of China Press, 1990), 32-33.

*yin* and *yang*.”<sup>25</sup> The *yin* and *yang* are the breaths (*qi*) to create and end life. As the *Liezi* states, “What it begun by the creative process, and changed by the *yin* and *yang*, is said to be born and to die” (Yan: 72; trans. Graham: 65).

In the Daoist view, the creatures that are formed by the *qi* are subject to the natural course of life and death, which is beyond human control. The *Liezi* says, “The born cannot escape birth, the changing cannot escape change; therefore birth and change are the norm. Things for which birth and change are the norm are at all times being born and changing. They simply follow the alternations of the *yin* and *yang* and the four seasons” (Yan: 2; trans. Graham: 17-18). The alternations of the *yin* and *yang* are compared as the natural cycle of the four seasons that is beyond human control. Thus, it is as natural as inevitable that all modalities of life have to come to an end. As stated in the *Liezi*, “That which is born in that which in principle must come to an end. Whatever ends cannot escape its end, just as whatever is born cannot escape birth” (Yan: 2; trans. Graham: 23).

Given that life and death are the coming-together and dispersing of the *qi*, which follows the way of nature instead of the way of human, what kind of attitude should we hold toward life and death? The Zhuangzi says, “Life is the companion of death, death is the beginning of life. Who understands their workings? Man’s life is a coming-together of breath. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death. And if life and death

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<sup>25</sup> The original Chinese reads, “至人心與元氣玄合, 體與陰陽冥諧.”

are companions to each other, then what is there for us to be anxious about?”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the *Liezi* does not regard death as dreadful and detestable but sees death as “returning to one’s true home.” (歸其真宅) The *Liezi* says,

The spirit is the possession of heaven; the bones are the possession of earth.

What belongs to heaven is pure and disperses, what belongs to earth is dense and sticks together. When spirit parts from the body, each returns to its true state. That is why ghosts are called *gui* 鬼; *gui* 歸 means “one who has gone home’, they have gone back to their true home. (Yan: 8-9; trans. Graham: 23)

As the *Liezi* notes, it is no coincidence that the word *gui* 鬼, which stands for the “ghost” or the soul of the dead, is pronounced like the character *gui* 歸, which means “to return.” In the *Liezi*’s view, one who returns home can find true rest. The *Liezi* humorously rewrites a dialogue between Confucius and his student Zigong to illustrate this point.

Zigong grew weary of study, and told Confucius,

“I want to rest.”

“There is no rest for the living.”

“Then shall I never find it?”

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<sup>26</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 235.

“You shall. Look forward to the lofty and domed mound of your tomb, and know where you shall find rest.”

“Great is death! The gentleman finds rest in it, the mean man submits to it!”

“Zigong, you have understood. All men understand the joy of being alive but not its misery, the weariness of growing old but not its ease, the ugliness of death but not its repose.” (Yan: 11; trans. Graham: 26)

The account of Zigong’s tiredness of study is originally recorded in the *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語 (The Household Sayings of Confucius), which records accounts of Confucius’ ideas and life as seen from records up to the early Han period. According to the *Kongzi jiyu*, Confucius admonished Zigong for neglecting his studies. Confucius’s admonishment for Zigong was in doing any thing one should not rest until death.<sup>27</sup> Contrary to Confucius’ original meaning, the *Liezi* manipulates this story to claim that one can find true rest in death. Following the parable the *Liezi* comments, “How well the men of old understood death! The good find rest in it, the wicked submit to it,” echoing the universal principle that like myriad creatures in nature, both the good and the wicked are subject to the natural cycle of life and death.

The *Liezi* further expound the Daoist view of life and death, saying, “Dying is the virtue in us going to its destination. The men of old called a dead man ‘a man who has gone

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<sup>27</sup> See the *Kongzi jiyu*, chapter 22.

back.’ Saying that the dead have gone back they implied that the living are wanderers. The traveler who forgets to go back is a man who mistakes his home” (Yan: 12; trans. Graham: 26).<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, one who tries to go against the natural course of life and death are unwise and should be subjected to reproach:

If one man mistakes his home, the whole world disapproves...Suppose that a man leaves his native soil, parts from all his kin, and abandons his family responsibilities to wander over the four quarters without going back—what sort of man is he? The world is sure to call him a crazy and reckless man (Yan: 12; trans. Graham: 26).

Here the *Liezi* moves from an epistemological view of death to a value judgment of death. In the *Liezi*’s view, a man who clings to this life and body and refuses to let go this world is as crazy as the man who wanders all over the place and does not go home. Although common people regard a man who presumes on his skill and ability to pursue wealth and fame of this world as “a clever and practical man,” only the sage recognizes that death is the destination for all living things.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> See Yan: 12; trans. Graham: 26.

## VII. On Destiny

The Chinese word for “destiny” is *tianming* 天命, literally “heaven’s decree,” signifying that human cannot go against the law of nature. Chapter six of the *Liezi*, titled “Endeavor and Destiny,” argues that human efforts are all futile in the face of destiny. As seen from sundry examples of historical figures and events in this chapter, the length of man’s life, his measure of success, his rank and his wealth, are all predestined by the situation he is placed in. For example, the Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (685-643 B.C.) is praised by many people for his tolerance when he made his adversary Guan Zhong 管仲 chief minister. But the *Liezi* argues that the Duke Huan of Qi was all forced by the situation because Guan Zhong was the best counselor, who could assist the Duke to become the master of the empire. As A. C. Graham explains, “No doubt he could have acted differently, if he had let subjective preferences distort his vision; but if his mind accurately mirrored the objective situation, what choice had he?”<sup>30</sup>

Scholars have questioned the seemingly contradictions between the chapter of “Endeavor and Destiny” and the chapter of “Yang Zhu.” As early as during the Han dynasty, Liu Xiang (ca. 77-6 B.C.) who compiled the chapters of the *Liezi* had suggested that “the chapter of “Endeavor and Destiny” attributes all things to lot and destiny; whereas the chapter of “Yang Zhu” whole advocates a free and easy way of life. The two chapters

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<sup>30</sup> See A. C. Graham’s comment on the chapter of “Endeavor and Destiny,” in *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 120.

contradict to each other and do not seem like a coherent school of thought.”<sup>31</sup> The *Liezi*'s most notable commentator Zhang Zhan (ca. 332-? A.D.) also addressed the issue of contradiction between the two chapters,

The chapter of “Endeavor and Destiny” claims that all things are predestined, leaving human wisdom and effort futile; the chapter of “Yang Zhu” talks about how people indulge their desires, so they are controlled by destiny. The views presented in these two chapters seem contradictory. However, to deal with things in a chaotic age when love and hate, truth and falsehood that are too tangled to unravel, the sage keep both ends in mind but do not impose judgments....The *Liezi* focuses on the two ends and let all beings pursue their own courses in between. If they find the middle way, then those who are intelligent and active will not act presumptuously and those who love fame will not overcorrect themselves and harm their body and life. The true meaning of the words should be understood this way.<sup>32</sup>

The contradiction between the chapters of “Yang Zhu” and “Endeavor and Destiny” is, as Graham points out, the argument between “fatalism” and the belief in “free will.”<sup>33</sup> In other

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<sup>31</sup> In Liu Xiang's “Shang Liezi shu” 上列子書.

<sup>32</sup> Zhang Zhan's commentary on the chapter of “Endeavor and Destiny” of the book of *Liezi*.

<sup>33</sup> Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, preface to the chapter of “Endeavour and Destiny,” 118-121.

words, if a person's ideas and behaviors are all predestined by fate as the chapter of "Endeavor and Destiny" says, why does the author of the chapter of "Yang Zhu" bother to argue or think how to live? Seeing the issue this way, we may find the two chapters contradictory in their fundamental views of life.

But the question is, even though one's destiny is preordained, he cannot perceive and predict his destiny. Man cannot know how long his lifespan is, not even what would happen the next minute in his life. Therefore, there is still need to think about how to live, and to discuss what kind of attitude one should hold toward such unpredictable life. In essence, if we see the chapter of "Endeavor and Destiny" as the *Liezi's* concept of life's destiny, and the chapter of "Yang Zhu" as a proper attitude toward life based on the understanding of the former, then the two chapters are like two sides of a coin and thus have no contradiction at all. As Yan Beiming and Yan Jie point out, the end of the Yang Zhu chapter teaches man to follow the nature of his very being and to obey his destiny, showing that the Yang Zhu chapter is in accordance with the idea of determinism, as illustrated in the chapter of "Endeavors and Destiny."<sup>34</sup>

The concept of "destiny" defined in the chapter of "Endeavor and Destiny" helps us to understand Yang Zhu's attitude toward life and death. As recorded in the chapter of "Endeavor and Destiny," when Yang Zhu's friend Ji Liang fell seriously ill, his sons stood in a circle round him weeping and asking him to call a doctor. But Ji Liang said to Yang

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<sup>34</sup> See Yan Beiming and Yan Jie, *Liezi zhuyi* (Taipei: Shulin chuban gonsi, 1995), 174.

Zhu, “Look how foolish my sons are! Why don’t you compose a song for me which will help them to understand?” Yang Zhu sang,

What heaven does not know

How can man discern?

Blessings do not come from heaven,

Nor calamities from the sins of men.

Is it you and I who are ignorant?

Do doctors and shamans understand?

(Yan: 158; trans. Graham: 128)

Ji Liang’s sons did not understand Yang Zhu’s point, so they called three doctors to diagnose the illness. The first doctor said to Ji Liang,

Your temperature, and the filling and emptying of your vital forces, are out of order. The illness is due to irregular meals, sexual over-indulgence, and worrying too much. It is not the work of heaven or of spirits, and although critical it can be cured (Yan: 128; trans. Graham: 128).

Ji Liang said, “The usual sort of doctor! Get rid of him at once.” The second doctor said,

At your birth there was too little vital fluid in your mother's womb and too much milk in your mother's breast. The illness is not a matter of one morning or evening; its development has been gradual and is irreversible (Yan: 158; trans. Graham; 128-129).

Ji Liang said, "A good doctor! Let him stay for dinner." The third doctor said,

Your illness is not from heaven, nor from man, nor from spirits. Even since you were endowed with life and a body, you have known what it is that governs them. What can medicine and the needle do for you? (Yan: 158; trans. Graham: 129)

Ji Liang said, "A divine doctor! Send him off with a rich present." As seen from this parable, what governs Ji Liang's illness is the destiny, not the deities from heaven nor doctors on earth. The story goes that soon afterwards Ji Liang's illness mended of itself. The *Liezi* comments at the end, "Some who value life do not live, some who scorn it do not die, some who take care of the body do it no good, some who neglect it do it no harm." On the other hand, "Some value life and live, some scorn it and die, some take care of the body and do it good, some neglect it and do it harm."<sup>35</sup> This parable does not ask people to neglect their

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<sup>35</sup> See Yan, *Liezi yizhu*, 158; trans. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 128-129.

body and health, but it teaches people not to worry about life and death, since the lot has been predestined long ago. Therefore, the second doctor's diagnose that Ji Liang's illness is embedded in his embryonic stage and infancy is regarded closer to the truth than that of the first doctor, who only considers one's works and behaviors. In fact, a complete view of Ji Liang's illness is far beyond human comprehension and control—it is the destiny. Hence Yang Zhu sang, "What heaven does not know, how can man discern? Blessings do not come from heaven, nor calamities from the sins of men." As seen from this song, the *Liezi* does not believe in gods and spirits, nor the idea of retribution in sin. "Heaven" in this song refers to personified gods or spirits, rather than the de-personified natural order. What the shamans and doctors do not know is the Way. As it is said in the chapter of "Endeavors and Destiny,"

Inscrutably, in endless sequence,

They come to pass of themselves by the Way of Heaven.

Indifferently, the unbroken circle

Turns of itself by the Way of Heaven.

Heaven and earth cannot offend against this,

The wisdom of sages cannot defy this,

Demons and goblins cannot cheat this.

Being of themselves as they are

Silently brings them about,  
 Gives them serenity, gives them peace,  
 Escorts them as they go and welcomes them as they come.  
 (Yan: 157; trans. Graham: 127-128)

What we call the “destiny” is the Way of Heaven in the human realm. Human cannot know where it comes from nor where it goes. What we know about destiny is only that human cannot defy nor go against it. Accordingly, a proper attitude toward the works of destiny is to “escort them as they go and welcome them as they come.”

The chapter of Confucius of the *Liezi* records another account of Yang Zhu and Ji Liang, which presents Yang Zhu’s attitude toward death. It is recorded, “When Ji Liang died, Yang Zhu looked towards his gate and sang. When Sui Wu died, Yang Zhu wept embracing his corpse. But ordinary people sing when anyone is born and weep when anyone dies.”<sup>36</sup> Yang Zhu’s singing over Ji Liang’s death reminds us of Zhuangzi’s singing and pounding on a tub when his wife died. Why do the Daoist sages react to their friend’s and wife’s death so differently from ordinary people? Furthermore, both Ji Liang and Sui Wu were Yang Zhu’s friends, but why does Yang Zhu sing when Ji Liang dies and weep when Sui Wu dies? The answers can be drawn from their view of life and death. As stated in the *Liezi*’s chapter of “Endeavors and Destiny”:

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<sup>36</sup> In the *Liezi*, chapter of “Confucius.” See Yan, 95; trans. Graham: 83-84.

To live and die at the right time is a blessing from heaven. Not to live when it is time to live, not to die when it is time to die, is a punishment from heaven. Some get life and death at the right times, some live and die when it is not time to live and die (Yan: 157; trans. Graham: 127).

Accordingly, when Ji Liang lived out his lifespan and died of old age, Yang Zhu looked towards his gate and sang; on the other hand, Sui Wu died of an unnatural death so Yang Zhu wept embracing his corpse. One may ask, what is a natural death? What is an unnatural death? How does the Daoist sage see life and death that are fortunate or unfortunate? The *Liezi* speaks,

To be born normally, coming from nowhere, is the Way. When a man follows a course consistent with life, and lives, so that although he dies when his term is up, he does not perish before his time, this is normal; to follow a course consistent with life and perish before his time is misfortune. To die normally, in accordance with your manner of life, is also the Way. When a man follows a course which leads to death, and dies, so that he perishes by his own fault even before his term is up, this is also normal; to live after following a course which leads to death is good luck (Yan: 95; trans. Graham: 83).

In essence, the Daoist sage knows and observes the Way, whereas ordinary people only see and react to what is normal. The Daoist sage considers it unfortunate for one who follows the Way but perishes before his time; on the contrary, it is mere lucky if one follows a course which leads to death but lives. Apart from the above two, it is normal that myriad creatures live and die according to the natural course of the Way. Whether one can live and die fortunately or unfortunately is not a matter of one's own decision—it is the work of the Way in the human realm, namely “destiny.” As the *Liezi* says, “It is neither other things nor ourselves that give us life when we live and death when we die; both are destined, wisdom can do nothing about them” (Yan: 157; trans. Graham: 127). Since death and life depend on destiny, a proper attitude toward death should be that “to meet death unafraid, to live in distress without caring,” and “to know destiny and accept what time brings” (Yan: 161; trans. Graham: 132).

### VIII. On How to Live

Based on the recognition of death as the irresistible destiny for all living beings, the Yang Zhu chapter teaches us to focus on life rather than death. Yang Zhu speaks,

The men of the distant past knew that in life we are here for a moment and in death we are gone for a moment.<sup>37</sup> Therefore they acted as their hearts

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<sup>37</sup> Graham suggests that this sentence reflects the Buddhist idea of reincarnation. See *Ibid.*, 140.

prompted, and did not rebel against their spontaneous desires; while life lasted they did not refuse its pleasures, and so they were not seduced by the hope of reputation. They roamed as their nature prompted, and did not rebel against the desires common to all things; they did not prefer a reputation after death, and so punishment did not affect them. Whether their destined years were many or few, they did not take into account. (Yan: 176; trans. Graham: 140)

As discussed earlier, Yang Zhu is not a selfish egoist, nor is he a dissipated hedonist who lusts for worldly pleasures. In fact, the essence of Yang Zhu's teaching concerns valuing life. Yang Zhu thinks that things outside one's life, such as vanity and reputation, should all be avoided. Furthermore, based on the recognition that humans cannot predict nor control their destiny, Yang Zhu suggests not to worry about how many years we can live. Rather, we should emulate the ancient sage, who did not take into account whether their destined years were many for few.

Yang Zhu's attitude toward life is manifested in several parables in the *Liezi*. In a dialogue between an old hermit Rong Qiqi and Confucius, the *Liezi* illustrates the emphasis on "happiness in life" (*lesheng* 樂生):

When Confucius was roaming on Mount Tai, he saw Rong Qiqi walking in the moors of Cheng, in a rough fur coat with a rope round his waist, singing as he strummed a lute. “Master, what is the reason for your joy?” asked Confucius. “I have very many joys. Of the myriad things which heaven begot mankind is the most noble, and I have the luck to be human; this is my first joy. Of the two sexes, men are ranked higher than women, therefore it is noble to be man. I have the luck to be a man; this is my second joy. People are born who do not live a day or a month, who never get out of their swaddling clothes. But I have already lived to ninety; this is my third joy. For all men poverty is the norm and death is the end. Abiding by the norm, awaiting my end, what is there to be concerned about?” (Yan: 10; trans. Graham: 24)

The hermit Rong Qiqi is contented with his life for three things: First, being a human; second, being a man; third, being an old man. Should we read this parable as to promote anthropocentrism or male chauvinism, it would be contradictory to the *Liezi*'s view of seeing all beings as equal. Rather, this parable is not to promote anthropocentrism nor male chauvinism, as it is not to teach people to cling to this life. As Rong Qiqi says, “For all men poverty is the norm and death is the end. Abiding the norm, awaiting my end, what is there to be concerned about?” In essence, the moral of this parable tells that contentment is

happiness. As old and poor as Rong Qiqi, he is contented with the three identities of himself; as a human, as a man, and as an old man. Apart from being of himself, he has no concern for outside things such as wealth and fame. Therefore Confucius said in the end of the parable, “Good! He is a man who knows how to console himself.”

In another parable Confucius met a hundred-year-old hermit Lin Lie, literally “of the same kind as the forest,” who went picking up the grains dropped by the reapers in the chilly early spring. Toiling at such an old age, Lin Lie nevertheless sang happily as he made his way through the fields. Confucius, who was on a journey to Wei, saw him in the distance from the moors, and turned to his disciples, “That old man should be worth talking to. Someone should go and find out what he has to say.” Zigong asked to be the one to go. He met Lin Lie at the end of the embankment, looked him in the face and sighed.

“Don’t you even feel any regret? Yet you pick up the grains singing as you go.”

Lin Lie neither halted his steps nor paused in his song. Zigong went on pressing him, until he looked up and answered, “What have I to regret?”

“A child, you never learned how to behave; A man, you never strove to make your mark. No wife nor son in your old age, And the time of your death is near. Master what happiness have you had, that you should sing as you walk picking up the grains?”

“The reasons for my happiness all men share,” said Lin Lei smiling.

“But instead they worry over them. It is because I took no pains learning to behave when I was young, and never strove to make my mark when I grew up, that I have been able to live so long. It is because I have no wife and sons in my old age, and the time of my death is near, that I can be so happy.”

“It is human to want long life and hate death. Why should you be happy to die?”

“Death is a return to where we set out from when we were born. So how do I know that when I die here I shall not be born somewhere else? How do I know that life and death are not as good as each other? How do I know that it is not a delusion to crave anxiously for life? How do I know that present death would not be better than my past life?” (Yan: 11; trans. Graham: 24-25)

Zigong belittles Lin Lie for not having studied and strived to make his mark when young, hence suffering from poverty and homelessness when age. Lin Lei nevertheless is happy about the things for which Zigong pities him. Ironically his happiness is exactly the worries of all men, such as having no wives and sons, being old, and facing death. Lin Lie’s uncommon happiness echoes an old saying, “Without office and marriage, man’s lusts and

desires would be halved.”<sup>38</sup> Lin Lie’s answer also accords with Yang Zhu’s words, “People find no rest because of four aims—long life, reputation, office, possessions. Whoever has these four aims dreads spirits, dreads other men, dreads authority, dreads punishment” (Yan: 187; trans. Graham: 154).

To further understand why Lin Lei can meet death unafraid and live in distress without caring, we can look at Yang Zhu’s view on life, death, and destiny. Yang Zhu speaks,

If you do not go against destiny, why should you yearn for long life? If you are not conceited about honors, why should you yearn for reputation? If you do not want power, why should you yearn for office? If you are not greedy for wealth, why should you yearn for possessions? On who sees this I call “a man in accord with things.” Nothing in the world counters him; the destiny which decides is within him. (Yan: 187; trans. Graham: 154)

In essence, the Daoist concept of destiny is the natural order of Heaven, or the Way, as manifested in the course of human life; it is what human should accept and follow. As Zhuangzi says, “Life and death are fated—constant as the succession of dark and dawn, a matter of Heaven. There are some things which man can do nothing about—all are a matter

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<sup>38</sup> The original reads, “人不婚宦，情欲失半。”Graham translates “情欲” as “satisfactions,” whereas the term literally means “passions and desires.” See *ibid.*, 155.

of the nature of creatures.”<sup>39</sup> The nature of creatures is the incessant coming together and scattering of *qi*. In this process of change, a man has become one creature among other things, and he is merely waiting for some other change that he does not know about. Therefore, Lin Lei says, “How do I know that when I die here I shall not be born somewhere else? How do I know that life and death are not as good as each other? How do I know that present death would not be better than my past life?”

In conclusion, the *Liezi* supports an anti-anthropocentric and egalitarian view of creatures based on the cosmological theory of *qi*. First, all creatures are all formed by the *qi* of the heaven and earth. Human, like other creatures, owes his life to the creative power of heaven and earth. Therefore, it is wrongful for human to claim anything, including his body and life, to be his private possessions. In fact, it is the generosity of heaven and earth to allow human, as well as all other creatures, to sustain their lives with support from one another. In the end, the *Liezi* teaches people to follow the natural order of life and death. Only those who follow the natural course of the Way will have nothing in the world that counters them.

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<sup>39</sup> In the *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “The Great and Venerable Teacher” (大宗師). Translation from *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, 80.

## CHAPTER 3: THE *LIEZI*'S MYSTICAL THOUGHT:

### Returning to the Original Union with Nature

Chapter One and Two explore the *Liezi*'s ideas of nature in terms of cosmology and axiology respectively; Chapter Three, on the other hand, focuses on mystic and religious elements in the *Liezi*'s view of nature. The texts to be analyzed in this chapter includes fantastic stories which involve human's communication and interaction with natural beings, not only animated beings like beasts, birds, and insects, but also inanimate objects and natural forces such as rocks, water, and the wind. In the *Liezi*'s view, all things in nature are approachable by human since they have the same nature of *qi*. But what hinders human from the original harmony with nature? Quite different from our modern progressive view of human history, the *Liezi* sees human history as a story of degeneration from the original harmony with nature. This chapter first explains the *Liezi*'s regressive view of human history, and then discusses the way to returning to nature as seen from the *Liezi*'s parables.

#### I. Mankind's Fall from the Original Union with Nature

This section examines the *Liezi*'s view of human civilization as seen from the chapter of "The Yellow Emperor." Titled by the name this legendary founder of the Chinese state and civilization, the chapter of "The Yellow Emperor" records a series of mythical accounts

which explain the beginning of human history. Quite contrary to our modern progressive perspective of human civilization, however, the *Liezi* presents a regressive view of human history:

Fuxi, Nüwa, Shennong, and the Emperors of the Xia dynasty, had snakes' bodies, human faces, heads of oxen and tigers' snouts. They did not look like men, but they had the virtue of great sages...

When the Yellow Emperor made war against Yandi in the wilds of Banquan, he commanded bears, wolves, leopards and tigers as his vanguard, and eagles, pheasants, falcons and kites as his standard-bearers. This is an example of mastering the beasts and birds by force. When Yao made Kui his director of music, he beat the stone chimes and all the beasts joined in the dance; he performed the nine parts of the Xiaoshao music, and the phoenix came to dance to its rhythm. This is an example of attracting the beasts and birds by music. In what ways, then, are the minds of beasts and birds different from man's?...

In the most ancient times, men and animals lived together and walked side by side. In the time of the Five Emperors and the Three Kings, the

animals were frightened away and scattered for the first time. In our own degenerate times, they crouch in hiding and flee to their lairs to avoid them.<sup>1</sup>

It is not uncommon in both Daoist and Confucian classics that the times of high antiquity is portrayed as the golden age for mankind; nevertheless, it is quite extraordinary that the *Liezi* narrates human history from the perspective of human-animal relations. More concretely speaking, the *Liezi*'s historical view presents the degeneration of humankind from union and harmony with animals. The three mythical figures, Fuxi, Nüwa, and Shennong, are the Three Highnesses, whom the *Liezi* regards as the greatest sages of antiquity who “were good at adapting themselves to the times.”<sup>2</sup> What does the *Liezi* mean by “adapting to the times?” The chapter of Heaven’s Gifts states, “In the past, the sages follow *yin* and *yang* to unify heaven and earth.”<sup>3</sup> *Yin* and *yang* are the principles which underlie the evolution of all creatures in universe. Hence, the sages who perceive and follow the Way of *yin* and *yang* are able to unify all things in harmony. The *Liezi* creatively illustrates this union with nature through the physical traits of the Three Highnesses, who “had snakes’ bodies, human faces, heads of oxen and tigers’ snouts.”

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, trans. by Graham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 54-55.

<sup>2</sup> The *Liezi*, chapter of “Confucius.” See Yan: 90; trans. Graham: 78.

<sup>3</sup> The original sentence in Chinese is 昔者，聖人因陰陽以統天地。Graham translates the word 因 as to “reduce” to a system. I translate 因 as to “follow,” which is closer to the word’s original meaning.

Following the times of the Three Highnesses were the times of the Five Emperors, including the Yellow Emperor, Zhuanxu, Digu, Yao, and Shun. The Yellow Emperor, the originator of a centralized state, defeated his enemy the Flame Emperor by commanding the beasts and birds. Although the Yellow Emperor was still able to lead the animals, he was considered to be a less virtuous example of “mastering the beasts and birds by force.” Like the Yellow Emperor, Yao also shed the form of animals but was still able to move them with music. However, the times of the Five Emperors were the first time when the animals were frightened away from humans, since the times of the Five Emperors marked the beginning of civilization.

The *Liezi* depicts his own times as “degenerate” times because the spread of human civilization has caused the animals to “crouch in hiding and flee to their lairs to avoid harm.” The *Liezi*’s sympathy with animals stands for an opposite view of human progression and civilization. Instead of lauding human civilization, the *Liezi* considers human history as a fall from natural harmony to human divisions.

To conclude his historical view of human and nature, the *Liezi* directs the way for human to return to natural harmony:

Even now, in the country of Jie in the East, there are many people who understand the speech of domestic animals; this is a discovery possible even

to our own limited knowledge. The divine sages of the most ancient times knew the habits of all the myriad things, and interpreted the cries of all the different species; they called them together for meetings and gave them instructions, as though they were human beings...implies that there are no great differences in mind and intelligence between living species. The divine sages knew that this was the case, and therefore in teaching they left out none of them. (Yan: 47-48; trans. Graham: 55)

What are the teachings of the divine sages? Five principles can be drawn from the parables of the *Liezi*: 1. following the nature (*xing* 性) of things, 2. purification and concentration of the mind (*xin* 心), 3. journey of the spirit (*shen* 神), 4. faith (*cheng* 誠) and belief (*xin* 信) without doubt, 5. correspondence with nature through music, and 6. union with the Way. The following section illustrates these principles which lead human beings to return to the nature.

## II. The Way to Returning to Nature

### 1. Following the Nature (*xing* 性) of Things

When Confucian thinkers discuss human nature, they assume a clear separation between moral principles and the animal side of human. This is not the case in Daoism. For

the Daoists, not only that the nature of human and the nature of animals are homogeneous, but all things in heaven and earth are of the same nature, that is, all things are composed of *qi*. As it is said in the *Zhuangzi*, “You have only to comprehend the one breath that is the world. The sage never ceases to value oneness.”<sup>4</sup> (通天下一氣耳, 聖人故貴一) Translated as “to comprehend” here, the word “tong” 通 signifies the sage’s “communion with nature” based on the common medium of *qi* that permeates all things in heaven and earth. Thus the Daoist sage is revered for his ability of interacting and communicating with non-human creatures.

The Daoist sage’s ability of communion with non-human creatures is illustrated in the *Liezi*’s parable of “an animal trainer” in the chapter of “The Yellow Emperor”:

The groom of King Xuan of Zhou had a slave called Liang Yuan, who was skilful in rearing wild beasts and birds. He collected them and fed them in his garden and yard, and never failed to tame even creatures as savage as tigers and wolves, eagles and ospreys. Male and female herded together without fearing to couple and breed in his presence; different species lived side by side and never pounced and bit each other. The King was concerned

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<sup>4</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 236.

that the secrets of his art should not die with him, and ordered Mao Qiuyuan to become his apprentice.

Liang Yuan told Mao Qiuyuan, 'I am a vile slave, what arts have I to teach you? But I am afraid His Majesty will say that I am keeping secrets from you, so let me say a few words about my method of rearing tigers...

'The man who feeds tigers does not dare to give them a live animal, because they will get into a rage killing it. He does not dare to give them a whole animal, because they will get into a rage tearing it apart. He keeps watch for the times when they are full or hungry, and penetrates to the motives of their anger. Although tigers are a different species from man, when they fawn on the man who rears them it is because he lets them get their way; and likewise when they kill him it is because he thwarts them.

"That being so, how would I dare to make them angry by thwarting them? Bu I do not please them by giving them their way either. For when joy passes its climax we are bound to revert to anger, and when anger passes its climax we always revert to joy, because in both cases we are off balance. Now since in my heart I neither give them their way nor thwart them, the birds and animals regard me as one of themselves. So it is only reasonable that when they roam in my garden, they do not remember their tall forests

and wild marshes, and when they sleep in my yard, they never wish to be deep in the mountains and hidden away in the valleys.” (Yan: 36; trans. Graham: 42-43)

The animal trainer is so well versed in the nature of animals that he can keep them in a perfect balance between starvation and overeating, anger and joy. He neither indulges their desires nor falls short of their basic needs, because both cases are off balance. In essence, he raises the animals not by the way of man, but by the way of Nature. In human feelings, it is good to please the animals by feeding them. But this is not the way Nature rears creatures. As Laozi says, “Heaven and earth are ruthless (*buren* 不仁), and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 5). Heaven and earth are “ruthless” not because they do not support lives, but they do not support them by human’s way. In the Chinese text, the term “ruthless” (*buren* 不仁), literally “inhumane,” should be understood as an anti-anthropocentric view of Nature. According to Ames and Hall’s interpretation, Nature treats the myriad creatures not according to human morality, but treats them all as “straw dogs.” The straw dogs are objects used in ancient rituals. They were treated with great deference when used as an offering but discarded and trampled upon as soon as they had served their purpose. Like the straw dogs, myriad creatures are transient in nature. Heaven and earth do not hold the creatures back from the natural course of life and death, growing and declining, preying and being preyed. Likewise, the animal trainer keeps his animals

according to the Way of Nature to achieve such perfect equilibrium that “different species lived side by side and never pounced and bit each other.” Since his garden is actually Nature in miniature, the animals do not remember their tall forests and wild marshes, nor do they wish to be deep in the mountains and hidden away in the valleys. In essence, the animal trainer is the embodiment of the Way; hence, the birds and beasts regard the trainer as one of themselves. It is an irony that this lowly slave has the Way to harmonize all creatures. As Laozi says, “It can be called small; yet, as it lays no claim to being master when the myriad creatures turn to it, it can be called great. It is because it never attempts itself to be great that it succeeds in becoming great.”<sup>5</sup> (The *Daodejing*, chapter 34)

Like the animal trainer, many Daoist sages in the *Liezi* are supermen in humble appearances who resemble animals in the wilderness. Take the man who grows up at the Luliang waterfall for example:

Confucius was looking at Luliang waterfall. The water dropped two hundred feet, streaming foam for thirty miles; it was a place where fish and turtles and crocodiles could not swim, but he saw a man swimming there. Taking him for someone in trouble who wanted to die, he sent a disciple along the bank to pull him up. But after swimming a few hundred yards, the man came out, and strolled along singing under the

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<sup>5</sup> *Tao Te Ching*. trans. by D. C. Lau (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 93.

bank with his hair hanging down his back. Confucius proceeded to question him:

“I thought you were a ghost, but now I can look you over I see you are human. Many I ask whether you have a Way to tread in water?”

“No, I have no Way. I began in what is native to me, grew up in what is natural to me, matured by trusting destiny. I enter the vortex with the inflow and leave with the outflow, follow the Way of the water instead of imposing a course of my own; this is how I tread it...Having been born on land I am safe on land—this is native to me. Having grown up in the water I am safe in water—this is natural to me. I do it without knowing how I do it—this is trusting destiny.” (Yan: 37-38; trans. Graham: 44)

The knack of swimming is “not imposing a course of one’s own” but “following the Way of the water.” Instead of imposing his own course against the turbulent flows of the waterfall, the swimmer compliantly enters the vortex with the inflow and leaves with the outflow, following the Way of water.

In Daoist classics, “water” is a common metaphor of the Way (the Dao). Laozi first compares the Way to a deep, dark abyss, “The Way is empty, yet use will not drain it. Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad creatures...Darkly visible, it only seems as if it were

there.” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 4)<sup>6</sup> The Way is also compared to a great flood, “The Way is broad, reaching left as well as right. The myriad creatures depend on it for life yet it claims no authority. It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit. It clothes and feeds the myriad creatures yet lays no claim to being their master.” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 34)<sup>7</sup> Like water, the Way is formless and invisible, but it is constantly surging, permeating, and nurturing all things. Facing the almighty and omnipresent Way, humans, like the swimmer in turbulent waterfall, can survive and flourish only by following the Way. As John Gray notes, such a swimmer has the perfect freedom of a wild fish. The idea that freedom means becoming like a wild animal may be offensive to Western religious and humanist prejudices. However, Daoism, based on its recognition of the “littleness of man in a vast universe” and the “inhumane Dao which all things follow,” proposes that the only way to survive and flourish is following the Way of nature.<sup>8</sup>

In the parable of “the ferryman in the deep lack,” Confucius’ favorite disciple Yan Hui, once again placed in a setting of wilderness, saw a Daoist adept who ferried across a deep lack without effort.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>8</sup> See John Grey, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 114-115.

Yan Hui asked Confucius a question: “Once I crossed the deep lake of Shang-shen; the ferryman handled the boat like a god. I asked him whether one can be taught to handle a boat. ‘Yes,’ he told me, ‘any one who can swim may be taught it; a good swimmer picks it up quickly; as for a diver, he could handle a boat even if he had never seen one before.’ I questioned him further, but that was all he had to say. May I ask what he meant?”

“Anyone who can swim may be taught it, because he takes water lightly. A good swimmer picks it up quickly, because he forgets the water altogether. As for a diver, he could handle a boat without ever having seen one before, because to him the depths seem like dry land, and a boat turning over seems no worse than a cart slipping backwards. Though ten thousand ways of slipping and overturning spread out before him, they cannot enter the doors of his mind; he is relaxed wherever he goes....if you hold yourself back, you give weight to something outside you; and whoever does that is inwardly clumsy.”

(Yan: 36-37; trans. Graham: 43-44)

For the Daoist, life is “relaxed wherever he goes.” While ferrying and swimming, he does not consciously differentiate himself from the water. He is fully merged with the water

to the point that he “forgets” the water and himself altogether. In essence, the union with the nature involves the mental state of “forgetting” one’s fixed identity as human, and “remembering” one’s origin as *qi* that is homologous with all creatures between heaven and earth. As Zhuangzi says, “Let your heart roam in simplicity and blend your *qi* with the vastness, follow along with things the way they are, and make no room for personal views—then the world will be governed.”<sup>9</sup> (汝遊心於淡，合氣於漠，順物自然，而無容私焉，而天下治矣。) To conclude, the secret to the animal trainer’s taming wild beasts and birds, the swimmer’s ability of diving the great Luliang waterfall, and the ferryman’s successful crossing the deep lake of Shangshen, all lies in “forgetting” their fixed, limited human identity and “following” along with the ultimate cosmological principle that underlies all things in nature.

## 2. Purification and Concentration of the Mind (*xin* 心)

The Daoist notion of “following the Way” not only concerns observing the rules of the physical universe, but also involves certain psycho-mental processes for human to experience the oneness with nature. As Graham points, the Daoist “frees the current of thought for more fluid differentiations and assimilations...it is self-evident that among spontaneous inclinations the one prevailing in greatest clarity of mind, other things being

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<sup>9</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 94.

equal, will be best, the one in accord with the Way.”<sup>10</sup> To attain the supreme realm of union with the Way, one has to purify his mind of any scheming and calculation so to prevail in the greatest clarity of mind.

As illustrated in the parable of “a child who plays with seagulls,” a child who has a pure mind is able to befriend the wild birds.

There was a man living by the sea-shore who loved seagulls. Every morning he went down to the sea to roam with the seagulls, and more birds came to him than you could count in hundreds. His father said to him,

‘I hear the seagulls all come roaming with you. Bring me some to play with.’

Next day, when he went down to the sea, the seagulls danced above him and would not come down. (Yan: 39; trans. Graham: 45)

The child is able to befriend the seagulls with a pure love, but once he harbors a scheme in his mind—a scheme to get hold of the seagulls and to master over them as playthings instead of playmates—the seagulls do not approach him any more. The child loses his friendship with the seagulls as soon as he conceives them as objects rather than peers of his

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<sup>10</sup> In John Grey, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, 113-114.

kind. The differentiated mindset, taught by the child's father, marks the child's fall from his original harmony with nature.

According to the *Liezi*, among the four stages of human life—infancy, youth, old age, and death—the first and the last, although least in knowledge and weakest in physical strength, are closest to the cosmic origin of all things. It is stated that “in infancy his energies (*qi*) are concentrated and his inclinations at one—the ultimate of harmony...In youth, the energies in his blood are in turmoil and overwhelm him, desires and cares rise up and fill him.”<sup>11</sup> In the parable, as the child grows like his father, his harmony with the seagulls is lost to desires and prejudices of man.

The *Liezi* calls for returning to the beginning, symbolized by old age and death. “When he is old, desires and cares weaken, his body is about to rest...When he dies, he goes to his rest, rises again to his zenith.” The dead are called *gui*, which means “one who has gone home.”<sup>12</sup> This idea of returning to man's cosmic origin at death is illustrated by the parable of a hunchbacked old man, whose body is like a wood-chopper hacking at a root, and his arm as steady as a branch on a withered tree—the images of winter, death, and the union of man and nature.

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<sup>11</sup> The *Liezi*, chapter of “Heaven's Gift.” See Yan: 10; trans. Graham: 23.

<sup>12</sup> See Yan: 9; trans. Graham: 23.

Confucius went on a journey to Chu. Coming out of a forest, he saw a man with a crooked back catching cicadas with a rod and line, as easily as though he were picking them up off the ground.

‘What skill!’ Confucius said. ‘Is it because you have the Way?’

‘I have the Way. When the season comes round in the fifth and sixth months, I balance balls on top of each other. If I can balance two without dropping them, I shall not miss many cicadas; if I can balance three, I shall miss one in ten; if I can balance five, it will be like picking them off the ground. I hold my body like a wood-chopper hacking at a root, I hold my arm as steady as a branch on a withered tree; out of all the myriad things in the vastness of heaven and earth, I am conscious only of the wings of a cicada. I never turn about or fidget; I would not take the whole world in exchange for the wings of a cicada. How can I fail to catch it?’

Confucius turned round and said to his disciples, “‘Set your will on one aim, and be equal to the gods.’ (用志不分, 乃疑於神) Doesn’t the saying fit this fellow with a crooked back?’

‘You are one of those people with big sleeves,’ said the man. ‘What do you think you know about it? Sweep away those principles of yours before you talk about it again.’ (Yan: 38; trans. Graham: 44-45)

In this story playfully places Confucius and his disciples—masters of human cultures—in a natural forest. There, the knowledgeable Confucius is ridiculed as a man with big sleeves and big words, whereas the lowly cicada catcher becomes a spokesman for the Way. For the Daoist, the Way is not mere words, but involves rigorous training of the body and the mind. The Daoist sage is the one who knows the knack of how to do. As John Gray puts it, “For Daoists, the good life is only the natural life lived skillfully.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, it is a skill that comes with unceasing practice and pure devotion. As illustrated in the parable, for five or six months the cicada catcher keeps concentrating on balancing two balls on top of each other, and for more months and years he continues practicing the skill of balancing additional balls, until he can hold his body and arm as steady as a branch on a withered tree. In other words, the cicada would rest on his arm as if it rests on the branch of a tree. Most important of all, he does not trade the cicada for money, as he says, “I would not even take the whole world in exchange for the wings of a cicada.” This pure, spiritual devotion uncontaminated by worldly cares and desires is his secret to approaching the finest substances in nature, symbolized by the wings of a cicada.

Through the mouth of Confucius, the *Liezi* points out the moral of the parable, “Set your will on one aim, and be equal to the gods.” (用志不分, 乃疑於神) The word *zhi* 志 refers to human will and intent, whereas the word *shen* 神 connotes several ambiguous meanings. Translated as “gods” by Graham, however, *shen* is closely related to the Daoist

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<sup>13</sup> John Grey, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, 112.

conception of the human mind. The mind is considered the most important among human senses. It governs the five faculties—ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and body—which are called are “xingqi” 形氣, or “shaped breath.” By contrast, the shapeless *qi* of the mind is called “jingqi” 精氣, literally “essential breath.” The *qi* of the mind is named the “essential breath” because it is more refined than the *qi* of the body. It is also more valuable as the mind is able to direct the body, and thereby interact with things in the environment. In other words, it is the faculty of the mind that initiates the influx of *qi* between human and nature. Therefore, to attain the union with myriad creatures in nature, human has to cultivate the mind.

To illustrate the interaction of the mind, the body, and the things in the world, the *Liezi* uses several parables of skills, including horsemanship, charioteering, archery, and fishing. The chapter of “Tang’s Questions” includes a fantastic account of the charioteer Tai Dou, who masters the skill of charioteering to the extent that he is able to “advance and withdraw treading a stretched cord, and wheel round as exactly as a compass, take the road on far journeys and have strength and breath to spare.” The charioteer Zao Fu wishes to learn Tai Dou’s supreme skill, but for three years Tao Dou told him nothing. He behaved even more punctiliously, and finally Tao Dou told him,

“An old poem says:

‘The son of a good bow-maker

Must begin by making baskets.

The son of a good blacksmith

Must begin by making chisels.’

First watch me run; you will not be able to hold six bridles and drive six horses until you can run like me.”

“I will obey whatever you command,” Zao Fu answered.

Then Tai Dou set up a row of posts, just big enough to stand on, the length of a stride apart. He ran backwards and forwards stepping from one to the next without stumbling. Zao Fu practiced and could do it perfectly in three days.

“How nimble you are!” Tai Dou said. “You have picked it up quickly! Charioteering is just the same. When you were running just now, you responded with your mind to what you felt in your feet. (得之於足, 應之於心) Applying this to charioteering, you must control the bridle from the point where it meets the bit, and pull tight or slacken feeling the corners of the lips; decision must come from within your breast and execution from within the palm of your hand. What you sense within in your innermost heart will accord outside with the horse’s temper. (內得於中心, 外合於馬志) ...If you respond with the bridle to what you feel in the bit, with the hand to what you feel in the bridle, with the mind to what you feel in the

hand (得之於銜, 應之於轡; 得之於轡, 應之於手; 得之於手, 應之於心), then you will see without eyes and urge without a goad; relaxed in mind and straight in posture, holding six bridles without confusing them, you will place the twenty-four hooves exactly where you want them, and swing round, advance, and withdraw with perfect precision. Only then will you be able to drive carving a rut no wider than the chariot's wheel, on a cliff which drops at the edge of the horse's hoof, never noticing that mountains and valleys are steep and plains and marshland are flat, seeing them as all the same. This is all I have to teach; remember it!" (Yan: 131; trans. Graham: 113-114)

The secret of Tai Dou's effortless charioteering lies in the perfect harmony of his mind, hands, the bridle, and the bit in the horse's mouth. This ultimate unification of the mind, the body, and the things outside oneself is achieved by several stages of practice. First, Tai Dou asks Zao Fu to respond with his mind to what he feels in his feet. In other words, he has to unify his own mind and body. Second, the charioteer has to unify what he senses within in his innermost heart with the horse's temper. That is, to accord his mind with the horse's. Finally, he makes accord his mind, hands, the bridle and the bit together as one unity. In this way he can hold the six bridles without confusion, and "place the twenty four hooves exactly as he wants, and swing round, advance, and withdraw with perfect precision." (Yan: 131; trans. Graham: 114)

The union of the mind, the body, and the things outside is also demonstrated through the skill of fishing, as recorded in the *Liezi*'s chapter of "Tang's Questions":

Zhan He made a fishing line from a single thread of silk out of the cocoon, a hook from a beard of wheat, a rod from one of the pygmy bamboos of Chu, and baited it with a split grain of rice. He hooked a fish big enough to fill a cart, in the middle of a swift current in waters seven hundred feet deep. The line did not snap, the hook did not straighten out, the rod did not bend, because he let out and drew in the line following the pull and give of the water. The king of Chu marveled when he heard of it, and summoned him to ask him the reason. Zhan He told him,

"I heard my late father speak of Puqiezi's archery with a line attached to the arrow. Using a weak bow and thin line, and shaking the line so that it rode with the winds, he transfixed both of a pair of black cranes on the edge of a dark cloud—because his attention was concentrated and the movement of his hand equalized the give and the pull. (用心專, 動手鈞也.) I profited by this story, and took as my model when I learned to fish. It took me five years to learn all that there is to learn about this Way. When I overlook the river holding my rod, there are no distracting thoughts in my mind. I contemplate nothing but the fish. (心無雜慮, 唯魚之念.) When I cast the line and sink

the hook, my hand does not pull too hard nor give too easily, so that nothing can disturb it. (手無輕重, 物莫能亂.) When the fish see the bait on my hook, it is like sinking dust or gathered foam, and they swallow it without suspecting. This is how I am able to use weak things to control strong ones, light things to bring in heavy ones. (Yan: 125; trans. Graham: 105-106)

Zhang He takes five years practicing the skill of fishing. When he holds the rod, there are no distracting thoughts in his mind but only the fish. His hand does not pull too hard nor give too easily, so the bait on his hook is simply like the dust or foam in the water. Perfectly in tune with nature, Zhan He is able to hook a fish big enough to fill a cart out of seven hundred feet deep water with a single thread of silk and the bait of a split grain of rice. This supreme condition of balancing with all things is called “Equalizing” (均).<sup>14</sup> It requires extreme concentration on distributing one’s strength to the finest and tiniest things. Hence the *Liezi* says, “Let a hair hang so that the give and pull are equal. Pull to hard, give too easily, and the hair will snap...If they were kept equal, nothing that snaps would snap. Men doubt this, but there have been those who knew that it is so.” (Yan: 124-125; trans. Graham: 105) In essence, the principle of “Equalizing” is the Way of heaven. As Laozi says,

Is not the way of heaven like the stretching of a bow?

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<sup>14</sup> Graham’s translation. See *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 105.

The high it presses down,

The low it lifts up;

The excessive it takes from,

The deficient it gives to.

It is the way of heaven to take from what has in excess in order to make good what is deficient.

(The *Daodejing*, chapter 77)<sup>15</sup>

The skill of archery is a common metaphor in the *Daodejing* and the *Liezi*. In several parables, the *Liezi* also uses archery to demonstrate the steps of attaining the Way. As seen from the above parable, Zhan He models his fishing skills from Puqiezi's archery, who can transfixes a pair of black cranes on the edge of a dark cloud with a weak bow and thin line—all because “his attention was concentrated and the movement of his hand equalized the give and the pull.” (Yan: 125; trans. Graham: 105)<sup>16</sup> This unification of one's mind and body is further demonstrated in the following parable of great archers:

Gan Ying was a great archer of ancient times. When he drew his bow, beasts lay on the ground and birds flew down without waiting for him to

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<sup>15</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 139.

<sup>16</sup> The Chinese original reads, “用心專, 動手鈞也.”

shoot. A disciple named Fei Wei learned archery from Gan Ying, and his skill surpassed his master's. Ji Chang in his turn was learning archery from Fei Wei.

Fei Wei told him, "You must learn not to blink before you can start talking about archery."

Ji Chang went home and lay down on his back under his wife's room, with his eye next to the pedal. After two years he did not blink even when the sharp point dropped to the corner of his eye. He told Fei Wei, who replied,

"I won't do yet. I shall not be satisfied until you learn how to look. Come and tell me when you can see the small as though it were big, the faint as though it were distinct."

Ji Chang hung a flea at his window by a hair from a yak's tail, and watched it from a distance with the sun behind it. Within ten days it was growing larger; at the end of three years it was as big as a cartwheel. When he observed other things in the same way, they were all hills and mountains. Then he shot at it with a bow tipped with horn from Yen and an arrow of peng from the North, and pierced the flea's heart without snapping the thread. He told Fei Wei, who stepped high and slapped his chest, saying "You've got it." (Yan: 130-131; trans. Graham: 112)

To enhance his eyesight, Ji Chang first practices focusing his eyes on a pedal for two years until he would not blink even when the sharp point dropped to his eye. Then he watches things as tiny as a flea for three years until the small things look as big as hills and mountains to him. In the end he can piece the heart of a flea without effort. The climax of the story ends when Ji Chang competes with his master Fei Wei.

After Ji Chang had learned all that Fei Wei could teach him, he judged that only one man in the world was a match for himself. So he planned to kill Fei Wei. The two men met in the moorlands and shot at each other; their arrow-heads collided in mid-air and dropped to the ground without raising the dust. Fei Wei was the first to run out of arrows. Ji Chang had one arrow left; when he shot it, Fei Wei interposed the tip of a bramble thorn and did not miss. Thereupon the two men threw aside their bows weeping, bowed down to each other on the road, and asked to become father and son. They drew blood from their arms and took an oath never to reveal their arts to other men. (Yan: 130-131; trans. Graham: 113)

A similar episode of archery competition between the disciple and the master is recorded in the old encyclopedia *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽:

Fei Wei learned archery from Gan Ying. He was skilled in all his master's methods, except that Gan Ying did not teach his method of catching arrows between his teeth. Wei secretly took an arrow and shot at Ying. Ying caught the arrowhead between his teeth and shot it back at Wei. Wei ran round a tree, and the arrow swerved round the tree after him.<sup>17</sup>

Gan Ying is the master of Fei Wei; Fei Wei is the master of Ji Chang. In both stories, the masters of archery win the contest not by the bow and the arrow, but by directing things in nature. Fei Wei interposes Ji Chang's arrow-head with the tip of a bramble thorn. More fantastically, Gan Ying directs the arrow not by the bow, but by his will so the arrow can swerve round the tree and chase after Fei Wei. As Lu Zhongxuan comments on the *Liezi*'s account of Ji Chang and Fei Wei, "Their spirits meet and their minds accord with each other. This is not about the skill of archery, so they threw aside their bows and took an oath. Only those whose spirits accord can succeed such archery, which cannot be told in terms of skill."<sup>18</sup> The *Liezi* says, "The sage trusts the transforming process of the Way, and puts no trust in cunning and skill."<sup>19</sup> (聖人恃道化而不恃智巧) The *Liezi* does not mean to despise

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<sup>17</sup> Translated by A. C. Graham, in *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 113, Note (I).

<sup>18</sup> Other than Zhang Zhan of the Jin dynasty, Lu Zhongxuan of the Tang dynasty also wrote a detailed commentary on the *Liezi*. The original of this Lu commentary reads, "此所謂神交而意得也，非矢之藝，故投弓而誓焉。神契方傳矣，故不得以術告之也。" See Lu Zongxuan, *Liezi jie* 列子解 (Explanation of the *Liezi*).

<sup>19</sup> The *Liezi*, chapter of "Explaining Conjunctions." See Yan: 205; trans., Graham: 161.

wisdom and skill; instead, the true wisdom and skill is to abide the ultimate principle of the Way, so that one can succeed in managing all things effortlessly.

The chapter of “The Yellow Emperor” also records an archery competition between Liezi and his friend Bohun Wuren.

Liezi was demonstrating his archery to Bohun Wuren. He drew the bow to the full and placed a bowl of water on his left forearm. After he released the arrow, he fitted a second arrow to the string, released it, and fitted a third, while the first was still in flight. The whole time he was like a statue.

“This is the shooting in which you shoot,” said Bohun Wuren. “It is not the shooting in which you do not shoot. If I climb a high mountain with you, and tread a perilous cliff overlooking an abyss a thousand feet deep, will you be able to shoot?”

Then Bohun Wuren did climb a high mountain and tread a perilous cliff overlooking an abyss a thousand feet deep. He walked backwards until half his foot hung over the edge, and bowed to Liezi to come forward. Liezi lay on his face with the sweat streaming down to his heels. Bohun Wuren said:

“The Highest Man

Peers at the blue sky above him,

Measures the Yellow Spring below him.

Tossed and hurled to the Eight Corners,

His spirit and his breathing do not change.

Now you tremble and would like to shut your eyes. Isn't there danger within you?" (Yan: 32-33; trans. Graham: 38-39)

In the parable, Liezi is in the process of attaining the Way but has not fully attained it. Although he has excelled the physical skills of archery, his mind is not truly relaxed. His flaw is revealed when Bohun Wuren tests him to shoot from a perilous cliff overlooking an abyss a thousand feet deep. That time Liezi trembles in fear and sweats all over. In contrast, Bohun Wuren can shoot with half of his foot hung over the edge of the cliff. It is interesting to note that the name of Bohun Wuren literally means "a man (*bo* 伯) without conscious mind (*hun* 昏)," who is the "Nothingness personified" (*wu-ren* 無人). In essence, this fictional character represents the Way, whose synonym is "Nothingness" (*wu* 無). Human who attains the Way is called the "Highest Man" (*ziren* 至人), who is able to keep his spirit and breathing unchanged even when facing the blue sky above him, measuring the Yellow Spring below him, and being tossed and hurled to the eight corners. As Liezi's master Guan Yin teaches him, the attainment of "integrity of spirit" 神全 requires the Daoist practitioner to "unify his nature, tend his energies, maintain the virtue inside him, until he

penetrates to the place where things are created.”<sup>20</sup> If one can be like this, the spirit inside him will have no flaws, and therefore no things can harm him.

### 3. Journey of the Spirit (*shen* 神)

Translated as “spirit,” the word “shen” 神 is actually a polysemous term which embodies several meanings:<sup>21</sup> (1) The first meaning of *shen* refers to gods or spirits. In the earliest bronze inscriptions of Shang dynasty, the word *shen* begins to appear as a graph signifying a man kneeling in worship. The Shuowen lexicon says, “*shen* refers to the gods of heaven.” (神, 天神.) (2) The second meaning of *shen* refers to the ultimate cosmological principle. With the rise of humanism in the Zhou dynasty, *shen* is used interchangeably with *tian*, the Dao, and the *yin-yang* in the works of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist philosophers. Among these thinkers, Guanzi offers the most lucid theory of the human *shen*, from which the third meaning derives. (3) In Guanzi’s theory, *shen* refers to human’s vital essence (*jing*). Guanzi says, “For the life of man, heaven produces his vital essence (*jing*) and earth his

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<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 38. The same statement is also seen in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “Mastering Life.”

<sup>21</sup> For in-depth analysis of the multiple meanings of *shen*, see Cai Zong-qi, “The Polysemous Term of *Shen* in *Wenxin diaolong*.” In *Recarving the Dragon: Understanding Chinese Poetics*, ed. Olga Lomova (Prague: The Karolinum Press, 2003): 85-115. See also, Zhao Weidong, “Taiyi shengshui shenming xinshi” 太一生水神明新釋 (New Interpretation of *Shen-ming* in *Tai-yi-sheng-shui* carved on bamboo slips), *Zouyijianju* 55 (2002): 10-15.

body (*xing*). The two combine to make a man.”<sup>22</sup> Both the “vital essence” and the “body” are constituted of *qi* or breath. Hence Guanzi conceives two kinds of human *qi*: the *xingqi* 形氣 (breath of the body) that permeates and governs the body, and the *jingqi* 精氣 (breath of vital essence) that produces and govern mental activities. Comparing the quality of these two kinds of *qi*, Guanzi says, “Jing is the essence of *qi*.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the *jingqi* is more refined than the *xingqi*. (4) The fourth meaning of *shen* relates to the miraculous function of the *jingqi*, which governs mental activities to an extent that it can defy restrictions of time and space and embark on a daemonic journey (神遊), or journey of the spirit. When a person embarks on a daemonic journey, he is in a state of deep unconsciousness. Hence judging by his appearance, people may think that he falls asleep or skip into a coma.<sup>24</sup>

In Ralph L. Woods’ great anthology *The World of Dreams*, which systemically collects the most significant writings on dreams from ancient times to today, two Daoist philosophers, Chuangzi and Liezi, stand out to be the masters of dreams in China. While Chuangzi and Liezi lived around the same time during the Warring State period (475-221 BC), the extent book of *Liezi*, recompiled hundreds years later, presents the convergence of Daoism and Confucianism, as well as the burgeoning of the Buddhist and Daoist religions

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<sup>22</sup> Translated by W. Allyn Rickett, in *Kuan-Tzu: A Repository of Early Chinese Thought* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965), 166.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>24</sup> See Yang Rubin, “Shengtian, bianxing yu buju shuihuo” 昇天, 變形與不懼水火 (Ascending into Heaven, Transformation, and Unshrinking from Water and Fire), *Hanxue yanju* 7, no.1 (1989), 248.

during the Six Dynasties. Another difference between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi* is that the *Zhuangzi*'s famous discourses on dreams are scattered in separate chapters<sup>25</sup>, whereas the *Liezi* devotes the entire chapter of King Mu of Zhou to dreams.

The chapter of King Mu of Zhou in the *Liezi* consists of eight strange stories, which play upon the themes of dream, forgetfulness, and mental abnormality. With intriguing plots and fascinating descriptions of the subconscious realms, these stories propose multi-layered interpretations of dream and reality, health and illness, and normality and abnormality. Oftentimes the morals of the stories are not explicitly said, but are open for questioning and textual comparisons. This section begins with the *Liezi*'s theory of dream against the background of the Chinese dream traditions, and further seeks to clarify the various dimensions, traditions, and mysteries of dream in light of the *Liezi*'s parables.

Among the eight strange stories in the chapter of "King Mu of Zhou", a discourse on Chinese dream traditions is inserted between the second and the third story:

There are eight proofs of being awake, six tests of dreaming. What is meant by the eight proofs? They are events and actions, gain and loss, sorrow and joy, birth and death. These eight happen when the body encounters

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<sup>25</sup> Zhuangzi's discourses of "dreaming and waking" is found in two separate passages in the chapter of *Discussion on Making All Things Equal* 齊物論 and the chapter of *The Great and Venerable Teacher* 大宗師, his theory of "True Men sleeping without dreaming" 真人無夢論 is found in the chapter of *The Great and Venerable Teacher*, and the famous "dream of butterfly" is at the end of the chapter of *Discussion on Making All Things Equal*.

something. What is meant by the six tests? There are normal dreams, and dreams due to alarm, thinking, memory, rejoicing, fear. These six happen when the spirit connects with something. (Yan: 73; trans. Graham: 66)

The “six tests of dreams” are first seen in *The Book of Rites*, which provides China’s earliest dream theory. *The Book of Rites* categorizes dreams into six types according to the causes of dreams: normal causes, alarm, thinking, memory, rejoicing, and fear. This categorization presents a highly logical and empirical view of dreams that sees dreams as the activities of the mind and that the mind is influenced by the physical world. An abundance of dream experiences are listed after the theory of “six dreams” to illustrate the interrelated view of the mind and the body:

When a body’s energies fill and empty, diminish and grow, they always communicate with heaven and earth, responding to the different classes of things. Therefore when the Yin energy is strong, you are frightened by dreams of walking through great waters. When the Yang energy is strong, you are roasted by dreams of walking through great fires. When the Yin and Yang are both strong, you dream of killing or sparing. When you overeat, you dream of giving presents; when you starve, of receiving them. For the same reason, when you suffer from giddiness, you dream of floating in the

air; from a sinking, congested feeling, of drowning. When you go to sleep lying on your belt, you dream of snakes; when a flying bird pecks your hair, of flying. As it turns dark you dream of fire, falling ill you dream of eating; after drinking wine you are anxious, after singing and dancing you weep.

(Yan: 73; trans. Graham: 66-67)

To sum up the above examples, the *Liezi* says, “Hence by day we imagine and by night dream what spirit and body chance upon.” 故晝想夜夢，神形所遇 (Yan: 73; trans. Graham: 67) However, the most intriguing part of the *Liezi*’s dream theory comes as follows,

That is why, when someone’s spirit is concentrated, imagination and dreaming diminish of themselves. What those who trust the time when they are awake do not explain, and those who trust in dreams do not fathom, is the arrival and passing of the transformations of things. It is no empty saying that the True Men of old forgot themselves when awake and did not dream when they slept! (Yan: 73; trans. Graham: 67)

This passage seems to conclude with Zhuangzi's idea that "True Man does not dream." A similar passage is seen in Zhuangzi, "The True Man of ancient times slept without dreaming and woke without care."<sup>26</sup> (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of "The Great and Venerable Teacher") True Man is the Daoist sage, synonymous with the terms, the Perfect Man and the Holy Man. According to Zhuangzi, the True Man did not dream because he had no worries when awake; the True Man woke without care because he had gained the enlightenment of the Way. Zhuangzi says, "This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to help out Heaven. This is what I call the True Man." (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of "The Great and Venerable Teacher")<sup>27</sup> As seen from the above passages in the *Zhuangzi*, dreams are clouded with negative meanings since they are the works of an unenlightened mind, burdened with worldly cares and emotions.

Although the *Liezi* seems to adopt Zhuangzi's statement that "the True Man did not dream," he does not completely belittle dreams' significance. Apart from the ordinary dreams as defined previously in the *Book of Rites* and the *Zhuangzi*, there is the "true dream" (信夢), which cannot be explained by common reasons. The *Liezi* says, "Those who trust the time when they are awake do not explain, and those who trust in dreams do not fathom." 信覺不語，信夢不達 (Yan: 73; trans. Graham: 67) This terse and intriguing sentence may have different interpretations and is actually interpreted differently by the

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<sup>26</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

English translator, Graham, and the Chinese commentator, the Yans. Graham translates the character “信” as a verb, “to believe,” whereas the Yans interprets “信” as an adjective, “true.” According to the Yans’ commentary, this sentence would be interpreted this way, “The true awakening cannot be conveyed in words; the true dream cannot be explained by common reasons.” The Yans’ interpretation of the “true dream” proposes a higher level of dream, which is more applicable to the marvelous quality and the great diversity of the *Liezi*’s dream stories.

In summary, there are at least two levels of dreams in the *Liezi*’s theory: The ordinary dreams, as defined in *The Book of Rites*, reflect the “eight proofs of being awake” and mix with the “six tests of dreaming.” These dreams are influenced by thinking of daily events and actions, cares for worldly gain and loss, worries of birth and death, and emotions of sorrow, joy, fear, and anger, which are all the works of the unenlightened mind. Therefore, the True Man, who has gained the enlightenment of the Way, does not dream the ordinary dreams. Higher than the ordinary dreams is the “true dream,” which is unexplainable through common causes and reasons. This is the mystical yet revelatory dream that leads to the enlightenment of the Way.

The very appeal of the *Liezi* lies in its use of strange and fantastic writings to expound abstruse thought and belief. Having discussed the theoretical underpinnings of the *Liezi*’s view of dreams, the following sections look into the dream stories in the *Liezi*. Most of them are included in the chapter of *King Mu of Zhou*, which begins with “King Mu’s spiritual

journey to the Far West,” followed by “three kingdoms of Gumang, Zhongyang, and Fuluo,” “dreams of the servant and the master,” and “woodman’s dream of a deer.” Another fantastic dream story, “Yellow Emperor’s spiritual journey to the Kingdom of Huaxu,” is recorded at the beginning of the chapter of the Yellow Emperor. The following sections begin with the commoners’ dreams, which appeal to our real experiences, to dreams of King Mu of Zhou and the Yellow Emperor, which presents the great dream of the Chinese people.

(1) Dreams of the servant and the master – dreams of desire and fear

The “dreams of the servant and the master” follows the theory of “eight proofs of being awake” and “six tests of dreams” in *The Book of Rites*, which considers dreams to be the emotional reactions to events or encounters during the day. The story of the servant and the master present this interrelationship of dream and reality through a comic role reversal, having the servant fulfill his desires whereas the master suffer in their dreams:

Mr. Yin of Chou ran a huge estate. The underlings who hurried to serve him never rested from dawn to dusk. There was an old servant with no more strength in his muscles, whom he drove all the harder. By day the servant went to work groaning, at night he slept soundly dulled by fatigue. Losing consciousness, every evening he dreamed that he was lord of the state,

enthroned above the people, with all affairs of state under his control. He gave himself up to whatever pleased him, excursions and banquets, palaces and spectacles; his joy was incomparable. Waking, he was a servant again. (Yan: 75; trans. Graham: 68)

The servant's dream of being a king is completely opposite to his real situation; however, his dream is deeply rooted in his physical desires for ease, comfort, and enjoyment that cannot be fulfilled in real life. This view of "dream as wish fulfillment" coincides with modern psychoanalysis of dream:

According to Freud, dreams are caused by wishes...The dream is then an imaginary fulfillment of the wish, relieving the mind, and soothing the nervous system...The unconscious wishes are selfish; and the dreams are egoistic, for if the dreamer does not appear imaged in his own person, he is present as something or somebody else.<sup>28</sup>

While having the servant fulfill his wishes of being a lord in dreams, Liezi playfully put the master in the servant's shoes in dreams:

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<sup>28</sup> Ratcliff, *A History of Dreams*, 120-121.

Mr Yin's mind was vexed by worldly affairs, his thoughts occupied with the family inheritance, which exhausted him body and mind; and at night he too fell fast asleep dulled by fatigue. And every evening he dreamed that he was a slave, harried by every conceivable task, scolded and beaten for every imaginable fault. He muttered and groaned in his sleep, and there was no relief until dawn. (Yan: 75; trans. Graham: 68-69)

Although the servant's and the master's dreams contradict the reality, the causes of their dreams are actually rooted in reality. The master becomes a slave in his dreams because he keeps thinking about pushing around his servant. As the servant's dreams are driven by desires that cannot be fulfilled during the day, the master's dreams are caused by cares and anxieties when waking. Both men's dreams can find their roots in the "eight proofs of being awake" as recorded in *The Book of Rites*.

Having illustrating the causes of dreams, the *Liezi* gives this story a happy ending: After experiencing the pains of his servant in the dreams, the master eases his demands on the servant and reduced the responsibilities which worried him. Then his ailment took a turn for the better. The ending coincides with Laozi's ideal of a non-oppressive and egalitarian

society: “It is the way of heaven to take from what has in excess in order to make good what is deficient.”<sup>29</sup> (The *Daodejing*, Chapter 77)

(2) Woodman’s dream of a deer – a dream which reveals reality

The story of “woodman’s dream of a deer,” which is placed right after the “dreams of the servant and the master” in the chapter of “King Mu of Zhou”, continues with the theme of dream and reality, but involves a much more complicated and intriguing plot and view of dream:

There was a man of Cheng who went to gather firewood in the moors, and came on a frightened deer. He stood in its way, struck it and killed it. Fearing that someone would see the deer, he quickly hid it in a ditch and covered it with brushwood. His joy overwhelmed him. But soon afterwards he could not find the place where he had hidden it, and decided that he must have been dreaming.

He came down the road humming to himself about the affair. A passer-by heard him, acted on his words and took the deer. When this man got home he told his wife: “Just now a woodcutter dreamed he had caught

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<sup>29</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 139.

a deer, but did not know where it was. Now I have found it. His dream was a true one.”

“Isn’t it rather that you dreamed you saw the woodcutter catch the deer? Why should there be any woodcutter? Since you have really got the deer, isn’t it your dream which was true?”

“All I know is that I have got it. What do I care which of us was dreaming?” (Yan: 75-76; trans. Graham: 69)

This statement resonates with Wang Bi’s discourse on words and meanings (言意之辨):

The purpose of words is to preserve the ideas, but once the ideas have been grasped, the words may be forgotten; as the purpose of a trap is to ensnare hares, so once the hares have been trapped, the trap can be forgotten; the purpose of a hook is to catch fish, so once the fish has been caught, the hook can be forgotten. (*General Commentaries on the Book of Changes*)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In Wang Bi’s *Zhouyi Lueli* 周易略例 (General Commentaries on the Book of Changes).

In light of Wang Bi's stress on primary concepts or principles<sup>31</sup> rather than trivial and superficial appearances, the dialogue between the man who found the deer and his wife seem to suggest that the twists and turns of getting the deer, although complicated, are as trivial and forgettable as a dream.

However, the story does not end here but reach another climax when the original owner of the deer had a "true dream" (真夢) of not only the place where he hid the deer, but also the man who found it. Guided by the dream, he sought out the man, and went to law to contest his right to the deer. The case was brought up to three ranks of judges, whose discourses made the dream and the reality more and more undistinguishable:

The case was referred to the Chief Justice, who said: "If in the first place you really did catch the deer, you are wrong to say you were dreaming. If you really dreamed that you caught it, you are wrong to say it actually happened. The other man really did take your deer, yet contests your right to it. His wife also says that he recognized it in his dream as another man's deer, yet denies the existence of the man who caught it. Now all I know is that here we have the deer. I suggest you divide it between you."

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<sup>31</sup> "Concept," "principle," and "the Way" (Dao) are synonymies in Wang Bi's *General Commentaries on the Book of Changes*. See Fung, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vo.2, 186-7.

It was reported to the lord of Cheng, who said, “Alas! Is the Chief Justice going to dream that he has divided someone’s deer?”

The Prime Minister was consulted. He said, “It is beyond me to distinguish dreaming and not dreaming. If you want to distinguish dreaming from waking, you will have to call in the Yellow Emperor or Confucius. Now that we have lost the Yellow Emperor and Confucius, who is to distinguish them? For the present we may as well trust the decision of the Chief Justice.” (Yan: 76; trans. Graham: 70)

The first judge questions the woodman whether he was dreaming or waking when catching the deer; the second judge questions the first judge if he was dreaming when judging the case; the last judge admits that he is unable to distinguish dreaming and waking and conclude with the Taoist idea of self-denial and non-insistence. As Zhuangzi says, “When I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. Words like these will be labeled the Supreme Swindle.”<sup>32</sup>

Although the judges are confused with dreaming and waking, let’s not forget that the narrator does tell that the woodman had a “true dream” (真夢), which guided him to the place where he hid the deer, and further, to the man who took away his deer. This dream presents a mystic, revelatory dream experience: a dream discovers and even foretells the

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<sup>32</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 48.

truth. This type of dream cannot be logically explained through physical encounters or past events, but it is not uncommon that people meet with someone in dreams and come to know that person later, or visit certain places in dreams they have never been to but actually go there years later.

The revelatory dream has deep association with myth and theology. Artemidorus (ca. 140 A.D.), a Roman theologian and dream interpreter, provides a fascinating explanation of how a dream discovers the truth,

Whilst the body sleeps, the spirit is awake, and transported to all places where the body could have access, and it sees and knows all things which the body could know and see when awake, and touches all that it could touch. In short, that it has all the operations that the body, now asleep, can be capable of when awake.<sup>33</sup>

Artemidorus' theory resembles the *Liezi's* view of dream as "a journey of the spirit," as further illustrated in the stories of King Mu's and Yellow Emperor's dreams. By recognizing the "true dream" of the woodman, the *Liezi* draws a positive correlation of dream and reality -- dream as a channel to the revelation of truth.

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<sup>33</sup> Ralph Woods, *The World of Dreams*, 128-129.

(3) King Mu's journey to the far West -- a journey of the spirit

King Mu of Zhou was the fifth sovereign of the Zhou Dynasty, reigning nearly sixty-six years from ca. 976 BC to ca. 922 BC. According to the *Mu tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 (The Biography of King Mu), a fourth century BC romance, King Mu of Zhou traveled to the ends of the earth until he met with the Queen Mother of the West in the Kunlun Mountains. The great charioteer Zao Fu carried the king by chariot to the Queen Mother of the West, who hosted a banquet by Jasper Lake and treated the king with the peach of immortality. The third chapter of the *Liezi* titled "King Mu of Zhou" begins with the fantastic journey of King Mu of Zhou. It is also the longest story full of magical fantasies and trilling adventures:

In the time of King Mu of Zhou, there came from a country in the far West a magician who could enter fire and water, and pierce metal and stone, who overturned mountains, turned back rivers, shifted walled cities, who rode the empty air without falling and passed unhindered through solid objects; there was no end to the thousands and myriads of ways in which he altered things and transformed them.

King Mu revered him as though he were a god, served him as though he were his prince...But the magician found the magician found the royal palace too mean and humble to live in, the delicacies of the royal

kitchen too tough and rank to eat, the ladies of the royal harem too ugly and smelly for intimacy...

Not long afterwards, he invited the King to come with him on an excursion. He soared upwards, with King Mu clinging to his sleeve, and did not stop until they were in the middle sky. There they came to the magician's palace...All that the eye observed and the ear listened to, the nose inhaled and the tongue tasted, were things unknown in the world of men. The King really believed that he was enjoying 'the mighty music of the innermost heaven' in the Pure City of the Purple Star, the palaces where God dwells. When he looked down, his own palaces and arbours were like rows of clods and heaps of brushwood.

When it seemed to the King that he had lived there twenty or thirty years without thinking of his own country, the magician again invited him to accompany him on an excursion. They came to a place where they could not see the sun and moon above them, nor the rivers and seas below them. Lights and shadows glares, till the King's eyes were dazzled and he could not look...Every member and organ loosed in terror, his thoughts ran riot and his spirits waned; and he asked the magician to let him go back. The magician gave him a push, and the King seemed to meteor through space.

When he awoke, he was sitting as before in his own palace, and his own attendants waited at his side. He looked in front of him: the wine had not yet cooled, the meats had not yet gone dry...He again questioned the magician, who answered, “Your Majesty has been with me on a ‘journey of the spirit’ 神遊. Why should the place where you lived be different from your own palace, or the place of our excursion different from your own park? Your Majesty feels at home with the permanent, is suspicious of the sudden and temporary. But can one always measure how far and how fast a scene may alter and turn into something else?” (Yan: 68-70; trans. Graham: 61-63)

The *Liezi*'s account of King Mu's journey of the spirit involves astonishingly rich mythological and religious questions. First, why is dreaming defined as the “journey of the spirit”? Second, in his dream King Mu of Zhou lived twenty or thirty years in the magician's palace, but he woke up to find that he was dozing in his own palace for only a short while. What does the discrepancy of time tell us? As the mythologist Mircea Eliade notes, “It is always in dreams that historical time is abolished and the mythical time regained—which allows future shaman to witness the beginnings of the world and hence to become contemporary not only with the cosmogony but also with the primordial mythical

revelations.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, during a trance, it is believed that one’s soul leaves his body and embarks on the ecstatic journey to the sky or the underworld.<sup>35</sup> In other words, it is in dream that one’s spirit can be freed from the boundaries of the physically world as well as the historical time, and is able to enter the spiritual realm where direct relations with mystical beings are made possible.

The major mythical figure in the *Liezi*’s account of King Mu’s journey is the “magician from the Far West” (西極化人). Many scholars consider that the magician from the Far West refers to the Buddha,<sup>36</sup> who meant to teach the King the relativity and temporality of sensational pleasures, and further, the Buddhist truth of illusion (幻) and transformation (化). Nevertheless, the King seems only able to grasp the first level of his teaching. After the spiritual journey, King Mu gave up his royal enjoyments and sexual desires, and completely devoted the rest of his life to wonderful excursions. He traveled thousands of miles to the western kingdom of Qusou, and farther to the mythical mountain of Kunlun, where he dined with the Western Queen Mother on Jasper Lake. The story ends that the King lived his lifetime to the full, and was believed to transcend into immortality.

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<sup>34</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 103.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 451-453.

<sup>36</sup> Chen Lianqing, “Liezi yu fojing de yinqiu guanxi” 列子與佛經的因襲關係 (The relationship of the *Liezi* and Buddhism). *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 1 (1981): 26.

What is the moral of the story? What is the author's view or judgment of King Mu? Is King Mu a licentious king or a wise man? Scholars offer various interpretations according to different philosophical traditions. From Confucian perspective, Ruzhou Yang thinks that this legendary story is to exhort rulers not to indulge their sensational pleasures and futile fantasies, but give priorities to the welfare of the people. Otherwise, the later generations will blame them for their licentious behaviors.<sup>37</sup> Yang's interpretation agrees with Graham's translation of the ending paragraph, "How can we call King Mu a Divine Man! He was able to enjoy his lifetime to the full, but still he died when his hundred years were up." 穆王幾神人哉！能窮當身之樂，猶百年乃徂。(Yan: 70; trans. Graham: 64) The translator uses "but" to connect the sentences, which poses a negative judgment of King Mu. However, the connective word is absent in the Chinese text. Thus the original text may be translated as a neutral narration: Could King Mu be a divine man? He was able to enjoy his lifetime to the full, and live until a hundred year old.

Zhenggu Fu appeals to Zhang Zhan's commentary on *Liezi*, "the book upholds the principle of ultimate Emptiness, testifies to the final extinguishment of myriad phenomena, ...often with reference to Buddhist texts."<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Fu considers that the

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<sup>37</sup> Yang Ruzhou, "Liezi shenmi sixiang zhi yizhi" 列子神祕思想之意旨 (The *Liezi's* mystical thought), *Chinese Yi-Ching Learning Monthly* 4, no.11(1983): 26.

<sup>38</sup> My translation. The original reads, "其書大略明群有以至虛爲宗，萬品以終滅爲驗...往往與佛經相參." (Zhang Zhan, *Liezi zhu*)

dreams in the *Liezi* are a vehicle for the illusionary and temporary life.<sup>39</sup> It is noteworthy that the *Liezi* was reedited during the post-Han period when the three teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism interacted and converged with each other. Hence, it is possible that the *Liezi* embodies the three teachings. However, as seen from the story of King Mu's journey of the spirit, it is unobvious that the *Liezi* holds a negative view of King Mu's life, or criticizes him for failing to rule as a Confucian sage king or attain Buddhist enlightenment. Rather, the *Liezi* embellishes King Mu's hedonistic way of life with so many delightful fantasies and mythical accounts that this dream story seems to eulogize Daoist pursuit of freedom, transcendence, and immortality, rather than advocate Confucian statesmanship or Buddhist asceticism.

(4) The Yellow Emperor's dream of Huaxuguo – a great dream of utopia

Another notable “journey of the spirit” in the *Liezi* is the Yellow Emperor's journey to the Huaxu kingdom, recorded at the beginning of the chapter of “The Yellow Emperor.”

Concerning the location of this country, it is said to be “to the West of Yen province in the far West, to the North of Tai province in the far North West. Yen is the end of King Mu of Zhou's journey to the west, but the Huaxu kingdom is to the even farther west of Yen, who knows how many thousands and myriads of miles from the Middle Kingdom. In other

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<sup>39</sup> Fu Zhenggu, “*Liezi meng lilun yu meng yuyan pingshu*” 《列子》夢理論與夢寓言述評 (On *Liezi's* theories and parables of dream). *Guizhou shehui kexue*10 (1991): 55.

words, “It is a place which you cannot reach by boat or carriage or on foot, only by a journey of the spirit” (Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 34). By saying “a journey of the spirit” (神遊), the *Liezi* indicates that the Yellow Emperor did not go to the Huaxu kingdom physically, but only in a dream or trance during which his spirit leaves his body and sojourned to the mystical wonderland:

In this country there are no teachers and leaders; all things follow their natural course. The people have no cravings and lusts; all men follow their natural course. They are incapable of delighting in life or hating death, and therefore none of them dies before his time. They do not know how to prefer themselves to others, and so they neither love nor hate. They do not know how to turn their faces to things or turn their backs, go with the stream or push against it, so nothing benefits or harms them. There is nothing at all which they grudge or regret, nothing which they dread or envy. They go into water without drowning, into fire without burning; hack them, scratch them, there is no ache nor itch. They ride space as though walking the solid earth, sleep on the void as though on their beds; clouds and mist do not hinder their sight, thunder does not confuse their hearing, beauty and ugliness do not disturb their hearts, mountains and valleys do not trip their feet—for they make only journeys of the spirit. (Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 34)

As the Huaxu kingdom cannot be reached physically, the people there also travel by the spirit rather than by carriage or foot. It is said that the Huaxu people “make only journeys of the spirit” (神行). In essence, the people of Huaxu are the manifestation of the True Man in the *Zhuangzi*, who can “climb the high places and not be frightened, enter the water and not get wet, enter the fire and not get burned.”<sup>40</sup> It is because the True Man does not travel physically, but because “his knowledge was able to climb all the way up to the Way like this.”<sup>41</sup> Concerning the knowledge of the True Man, Zhuangzi says,

The True Man of ancient times knew nothing of living life, nothing of hating death. He emerged without delight; he went back in without a fuss. He came briskly, he went briskly, and that was all. He didn't forget where he began; he didn't try to find out where he would end. He received something and took pleasure in it; he forgot about it and handed it back again. This is what I call not using the mind to repel the Way, not using man to help out Heaven. This is what I call the True Man.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “The Great and Venerable Teacher” 大宗師. See *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 78.

Like Zhuangzi's portrayal of the True Man, the *Liezi* depicts the mind of the Huaxu people with a series of negation sentences:

The people have no cravings and lusts; all men follow their natural course.

They are incapable of delighting in life or hating death...They do not know how to prefer themselves to others, and so they neither love nor hate. They do not know how to turn their faces to things or turn their backs, go with the stream or push against it, so nothing benefits or harms them. There is nothing at all which they grudge or regret, nothing which they dread or envy.

(Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 34)

The people of Huaxu are empty of cares, desires, wills, and emotions, and simply follow the natural courses of the Way that resides in and penetrates all things in nature. Thereby, they attain the supernatural abilities of “going into water without drowning, into fire without burning; hack them, flog them, there is no wound nor pain; poke them, scratch them, there is no ache nor itch.” Like the supernatural figures in later *zhiguai* 志怪 fictions, the Huaxu people “ride space as though walking the solid earth, sleep on the void as though on their beds; clouds and mist do not hinder their sight, thunder does not confuse their

hearing.”<sup>43</sup> In contrast to King Mu, who was dazzled by lights and shadows and deafened by thunders in his journey of spirit, the Huaxu people are unhindered by thunders, mist, clouds, mountains, or valleys because they have attained the ultimate union with the Way.

After his spiritual journey to the Kingdom of Huaxu, the Yellow Emperor was suddenly enlightened. When the Yellow Emperor woke from the dream, he said that he had striven to find a way to govern others but could not succeed; yet when he fell asleep without struggle, he found the Way. Here the Yellow Emperor, the ancient great sage ruler, is portrayed as a vexed ruler who found the Way out not because of his own merits but through a self-consciousless dream. He spoke to his ministers,

I have lived undisturbed for three months, fasting to discipline mind and body, and mediating a way to care for myself and govern others, but I did not find a method. Worn out, I fell asleep, and this is what I dreamed. Now I know that the utmost Way cannot be sought through the passions. I know it, I have found it, but I cannot tell it to you. (Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 35)

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<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on the Liezi's influence on later *zhiguai* fictions, see Yuan Yan, “Liezi yuyan de xushi fenxi” 列子寓言的叙事分析 (Analysis of the narratives of the Liezi's parables), *Jiangxi Social Science* (2010.8), 39-44.

The statement that “the utmost Way cannot be sought through the passions”<sup>44</sup> (至道不可以情求) points out the very mystic nature of the Yellow Emperor’s dream: an instant and full enlightenment of the Way. This enlightenment cannot be told in words, understood by the mind, or attained by physical means, since “the way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way; the name that can be named is not the constant name.” (The *Daodejing*, Chapter 1) Unspeakable, nameless, and formless as the Way is, it is all pervading and unailing. As Laozi says, “There is a thing confusedly formed, born before heaven and earth. Silent and void, it stands alone and does not change, goes round and does not weary...I know not its name, so I style it ‘the Way.’” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 25)<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, one who knows the Way that underlies all things also knows the way to live and rule. In essence, the Yellow Emperor’s “journey of the spirit” is precisely as Qian Zhongshu defines,

It means the transcendence of thought and deliberation. It means an affirmation of the miraculous realm and the attainment of the ultimate truth. This is what is meant by these remarks: “The import of the vital essence enters the spirit” found in the *Book of Changes*; “When one is great, one becomes a sage; being a sage, one becomes luminous divinity” found in the *Mencius*; and “The vital essence of the heart is called sagely” found in the

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<sup>44</sup> The Yans interprets “情” in this sentence as “常情” (common reasons).

<sup>45</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 82.

*Kongcongzi*. The “Daode” chapter of the *Wenzi* also writes, “Superior learning means listening with the spirit; lesser learning, with the heart; and inferior learning, with the ears.”<sup>46</sup>

To conclude the Yellow Emperor’s dream of the Huaxu kingdom, it is remarkable for its embodiment of political, religious and philosophical ideals— collectively presenting a “great dream” of the Chinese people. As Carl Jung says,

The collective unconscious produces strange and marvelous dreams remarkable for their beauty, or their demoniacal horror, or for their enigmatic wisdom—“big dreams”...They are spiritual experiences that defy any attempt at rationalization.<sup>47</sup>

The parable ends in the fulfillment of the great dream of utopia. After attaining the enlightenment of the Way, the Yellow Emperor governed his country as well as the Kingdom of Huaxu and then rose into Heaven. The ending incorporates the Confucian ideal of “sage rule” (聖人之治) as well as the Daoist ideal of transcendence, which witnesses the convergence of Confucianism and Daoism during the Six Dynasties.

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<sup>46</sup> Qian Zhongshu, *Tan yi lu* 談藝錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 43. Translation cited from Cai Zong-qi, “The Polysemous Term of *Shen* in *Wenxin diaolong*,” 106.

<sup>47</sup> Segal, *Jung on Mythology*, 103.

(5) Parable of amnesia – forgetting and remembering

Similar to the mental conditions of dreaming and trance, amnesia signifies forgetting the condition after the fall, and remembering of the original union with the Way. As Girardot notes,

The *Liezi* suggests that, as “dreaming” was the normal state of mind in the Gumang land, a Daoist practicing the art of Dao is able to forget the deceptive surface reality of everyday consciousness and, by submitting to a dreamlike or undifferentiated consciousness attained in meditation, remember the primal state of man, the condition of man before the fall.<sup>48</sup>

Following the parables of dreams, the *Liezi* ends the chapter of “Kung Mu of Zhou” with a series of parables with the themes of amnesia and mental illnesses to subvert our ordinary view of the normal and the abnormal. The parable of amnesia involves a man named Huazi, who lost his memory at middle-age. His symptoms are described in a funny way,

He would receive a present in the morning and forget it by the evening, give a present in the evening and forget it by the morning. In the street he would

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<sup>48</sup> Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 163.

forget to walk, at home he would forget to walk, at home he would forget to sit down. Today he would not remember yesterday, tomorrow he would not remember today. (Yan: 76; trans. Graham: 70)

Troubled by Huazi's forgetfulness, his family invited a diviner to tell his fortune, a shaman to perform an auspicious rite, a doctor to treat him, but all without success. Finally, there came a Confucian scholar who claimed to be able to cure Huazi's forgetfulness. The Confucian told the family,

“This is clearly not a disease which can be divined by hexagrams and omens, or charmed away by auspicious prayers, or treated by medicines and the needle. I shall try reforming his mind, changing his thoughts; there is a good chance that he will recover.”

Then the Confucian tried stripping Huazi, and he looked for his clothes; tried starving him, and he looked for food; tried shutting him up in the dark, and he looked for light. The Confucian was delighted, and told the man's sons,

“The sickness is curable. But my arts have been passed down secretly through the generations, and are not disclosed to outsiders. I shall shut out his attendants, and stay alone with him in his room for seven days.”

They agreed, and no one knew what methods the Confucian used; but the sickness of many years was completely dispelled in a single morning.

(Yan: 76-77; trans. Graham: 71)

Why is Huazi's forgetfulness cured by the Confucian scholar, rather than the doctor, the shaman, or the diviner? Rather than venerating the Confucian scholar's keen observation and consummate arts of healing, the plot of this parable is to criticize the fallen state of mind, represented by the Confucian scholar's meticulousness and unwillingness to share his skills and knowledge. As Laozi says, "Foreknowledge is the flowery embellishment of the way and the beginning of folly. Hence the man of large mind abides in the thick not in the thin, in the fruit not in the flower."<sup>49</sup> (The *Daodejing*, chapter 38)

Therefore, when Huazi woke up from his amnesia, he was not grateful at all but was very angry. He dismissed his wife, punished his sons, and chased away the Confucian with a spear. He said,

"Formerly, when I forgot," said Huazi, "I was boundless; I did not notice whether heaven and earth existed or not. Now suddenly I remember; and all the disasters and recoveries, gains and losses, joys and sorrows, loves and hates of twenty or thirty years past rise up in a thousand tangled threads. I

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<sup>49</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 99.

fear that all the disasters and recoveries, gains and losses, joys and sorrows, loves and hates still to come will confound my heart just as much. Shall I never again find a moment of forgetfulness?" (Yan: 77; trans. Graham: 71)

Huazi's reminiscence of his forgetfulness echoes the Zhuangzi's parable of Hundun's coercive death.

The emperor of the South Sea was called Shu, the emperor of the North Sea was called Hu, and the emperor of the central region was called Hundun. Shu and Hu from time to time came together for a meeting in the territory of Hundun, and Hundun treated them very generously. "All men," they said, "have seven openings so they can see, hear, eat, and breathe. But Hundun alone doesn't have any. Let's try boring him some!" Every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hundun died. (The Zhuangzi, chapter of "Fit for Emperors and Kings")<sup>50</sup>

Hundun, which denotes the condition of nebulous mass, has no eyes, nostrils, ears, and mouth on his face, indicating the closure of the five senses. This faceless condition of Hundun is similar to the psycho-mental condition of dreaming or forgetting. The Daoist

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<sup>50</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 97.

method of returning to the union with the Way is, in Girardot's words, "death to the ordinary condition of the civilized world and a return to the primordial, primitive, or mythic life of Hundun."<sup>51</sup> More specifically speaking, the Hundun theme signifies "psychic signs" of the fantastic experience of unification with the Way.<sup>52</sup>

To read the Zhuangzi's parable of Hundun together with the *Liezi*'s parable of Huazi, we can see that the secret of returning to the undifferentiated Hundun condition is "to forget" one's degenerate condition, which is not to rely on the five senses on face. The Daoists have a specific solution to Huazi's reminiscence of "forgetfulness"—that is, the arts of recovering the Hundun condition hidden in the depths of the human mind. In essence, the *Liezi*'s parable of "forgetting" is more than a theory or an allegorical and literary device; it involves a meditative process toward the unification with the Way—a move from philosophical Daoism to religious Daoism, which puts more stress on practices and techniques of meditation, concentration, posture, breath manipulation, and even seclusion.

(6) Parable of mental illness -- normal or abnormal?

According to Eliade, pathological sickness, like dreams and ecstasies, is one of the means of reaching religious enlightenment. "Sometimes there is not exactly an illness but rather a progressive change in behavior. The candidate becomes meditative, seeks solitude, sleeps a great deal, seems absent-minded, has prophetic dreams...All these symptoms are

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<sup>51</sup> N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 98.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

only the prelude to the new life that awaits the unwitting candidate. His behavior suggests the first signs of a mystical vocation, which are the same in all religions.”<sup>53</sup> In the following parable, a young man was clever as a child but suffered from an abnormality when he grew up, and his symptoms are described as follows,

When he heard singing he thought it was weeping, when he saw white he thought it was black; fragrant smells he thought noisome, sweet tastes he thought bitter, wrong actions he thought tight. Whatever came into his mind, heaven and earth, the four cardinal points, water and fire, heat and cold, he always turned upside down. (Yan: 77; trans. Graham: 72)

To cure his illness, his father sets out of Lu, where there are many intelligent gentlemen such as Confucius. Passing through Chen he comes across Laozi, so he takes the opportunity to tell him about his son’s symptoms.

“How do you know that your son is abnormal?” said Laozi. “Nowadays everyone in the world is deluded about right and wrong, and confused about benefit and harm; because so many people share this sickness, no one perceives that it is a sickness. Besides, one man’s abnormality is not enough

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<sup>53</sup> Eliade, *Shamanism*, 35.

to overturn his family, one family's to overturn the neighborhood, one neighborhood's to overturn the state, one state's to overturn the world. If the whole world were abnormal, how could abnormality overturn it? Supposing the minds of everyone in the world were like your son's then on the contrary it is you who would be abnormal. Joy and sorrow, music and beauty, smells and tastes, right and wrong, who can straighten them out? I am not even sure that these words of mine are not abnormal, let alone those of the gentlemen of Lu, who are the most abnormal of all; who are they to cure other people's abnormality? You had better go straight home instead of wasting your money. (Yan: 77-78; trans. Graham: 72-73)

The Daoist view of human history is that which degenerates from the original Oneness, to civilized distinctions, and to oppression and violence. Written and reedited in a chaotic time of disunity, the *Liezi* expresses profound grief and acute criticism against the world that falls from the accordance with the Way.

#### 4. Faith (*cheng* 誠) and Belief (*xin* 信)

The word “cheng” 誠, usually translated as “sincerity”, or “faith” in Graham's the *Book of Lieh-tzu*, is commonly used in modern Chinese; to our surprise, however, in any of the texts written by early Warring States period, including the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of*

*Changes*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the character “cheng” never appears. Not until the mid Warring States period did “cheng” become more frequently used and further endowed with philosophical meanings.

It is in the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Center of Harmony, or Doctrine of the Mean), attributed to Confucius’ grandson Zisi 子思 (492-431 B.C.) that the word “cheng” develops into a central philosophical concept. The *Zhongyong* defines, “Sincerity is the way of Heaven.”<sup>54</sup> (誠者，天之道也) “Sincerity is the end and beginning of things; without sincerity there would be nothing.”<sup>55</sup> (誠者物之終始，不誠無物) Accordingly, “cheng” is the way of Heaven, that is the ultimate order of all things in nature. The concept of “cheng” also relates to the relation of human and things in nature. As the *Zhongyong* states,

It is only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity that can exist under heaven, who can give its full development to his nature. Able to give its full development to his own nature, he can do the same to the nature of other men. Able to give its full development to the nature of other men, he can give their full development to the natures of animals and things. Able to give their full development to the natures of creatures and things, he can

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<sup>54</sup> *The Four Books: The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, Confucian Analects, and the Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge (Taipei: Culture Book, 1970), 88.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, he may with Heaven and Earth form a ternion.<sup>56</sup>

In brief, it starts with the most complete sincerity that a human can comprehend the natures of things, and further assists with the transforming powers of the Way. The *Zhongyong* comments, such person who “possesses the most complete sincerity is like a spirit.”<sup>57</sup> (至誠如神) As Wing-Tsit Chan points, “The quality that brings man and nature together is *cheng*, sincerity, truth or reality... Sincerity is not just a state of mind, but an active force that is always transforming things and completing things, and drawing man and Heaven (*tian*, Nature) together in the same current.”<sup>58</sup> It is notable that the *Zhongyong* speaks of “cheng” almost in the same way the Daoists speak of the Divine Man 神人, the True Man 真人, or the Highest Man 至人. No wonder that even before the *Zhongyong* attracted the Neo-Confucianists during the Tang and Song dynasties, its subtle doctrines had strong appeal to both Daoists and Buddhists.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the *Zhongyong* signifies “a bridge between Daoism and Buddhism and the Confucian school and in this way prepared for the influence

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>58</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 96.

<sup>59</sup> From the fourth to the eleventh century, Daoist and Buddhist scholars wrote commentaries on the *Zhongyong*. See Ibid., 95.

of Buddhism and Daoism on Confucianism, thus ushering in the New-Confucian movement.”<sup>60</sup>

Different from the Daoists, however, Confucians tend to emphasize more on the moral orders in the human world than the cosmological order of the natural world. The character “cheng” is often followed by the character “xin”信, which depicts a man and a word, meaning that a man keeping his word or promise. Such a person is trustworthy. In the *Analects*, “xin” appears thirty eight times, and in twenty four occurrences “xin” means to keep one’s word and not to deceive.”<sup>61</sup>

The interweaving of moral and cosmological categories is a distinctive feature of Chinese thinking. As Zhang Dainian notes in *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, “It is strange to find a moral virtue included among cosmological categories. It is the case that moral and cosmological categories do interweave in the Chinese context.”<sup>62</sup> It is the case that the term “cheng” was developed as both as a cosmological category and as a moral category. Furthermore, “cheng” and “xin” also becomes pivotal concepts in the thought of the “correspondence between Heaven and human”—a theory which can be traced back to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> See Wu Ruixia, “Cong zhuzhong zhuti de cheng dao jianji keti de zhen—xianqin zhenshi guan chutan” 從主體的“誠”到兼及客體的“真”—先秦“真實觀”初探 (From the subjects’ sincerity to the object’s truthfulness—an initial exploration of the pre-Qin concept of truth), *Journal of Hubei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science)* 14:2 (1994), 35.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang Dainian, *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Edmund Ryden. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 140.

ancient Chinese occult arts and later become a systemized belief during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). The idea of mutual influence between human and heaven becomes such a dominant ideology in the Han dynasty that even the Grand Historian Sima Qian and the famous scholar Dong Zhongshu spoke for the idea that human behaviors cause unusual phenomena in the world of nature.

What sets the *Liezi* apart from earlier Daoist texts such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* is the prevalent belief in the “correspondence between Heaven and human.” This religious sort of thinking not only asserts a mutual influence between the human and natural worlds, but also coalesces with Confucianism with its emphasis on the virtues of loyalty 忠, trustworthiness 信, and sincerity 誠. It is reasonable that the extant text of the *Liezi*, composed later during the Six Dynasties (221-589 A.D.), shows such influence from the Han belief in the correspondence between human and nature. This section analyzes the *Liezi*'s myths and parables involving the mystical idea of human-nature correspondence that are not found in the earlier Daoist texts such as the *Zhuangzi*.

One of the most well-known myths in the *Liezi* is “Mr. Simple moves the mountains,” which dramatizes the divine power of human sincerity. The hero in this myth is Mister Simple--a simple-headed, ninety-year-old man who lives opposite two high mountains. It vexed him that the mountains blocks the road and it is such a long way to go around the mountains, so he gathers his family and proposes that they should make every effort to level the high mountains, so that there is a clear road straight through. Then, taking his son and

grandson as porters, Mister Simple broke stones and dug up earth, which they transported in hods and baskets day and night, year after year. Mister Simple's great ambition and primitive method are despised by Old Wiseacre, who laughs at Mister Simple, "With the last strength of your declining years, you cannot even damage one blade of grass on the mountains; what can you do to stones and earth?" However, Mister Simple refutes Old Wiseacre's argument, "You are not even as clever as the widow's little child. Even when I die, I shall have sons surviving me. My sons will beget me more grandsons, my grandsons in their turn will have sons, and these will have more sons and grandsons. My descendents will go on for ever, but the mountains will get no bigger. Why should there be any difficulty about leveling it?" Mister Simple and his followers then work day and night, not even going home until the hot season has given way to the cold. They are so determined to level the mountains that even the mountain spirits are afraid. The mountain spirits reported it to Emperor of Heaven, who is moved by Mister Simple's sincerity and commands two mighty gods to carry the mountains on their backs and put one in the East, the other in the South, so that there is no mountain blocking Mister Simple's way.<sup>63</sup>

As seen from the myth of Mister Simple leveling the mountains, the *Liezi* seems to immensity the power of human sincerity and faith, which are believed to be able to moves heaven and earth and make all things work for his benefit. This quasi-religious thinking is evident in many supernatural accounts in the *Liezi* and other Han and Six Dynasties

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<sup>63</sup> The *Liezi*, chapter of "Tang's Questions." See Yan: 119-120; trans. Graham: 99-101.

literatures, setting them apart from earlier Daoist works such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. One of the stories unseen in earlier Daoist texts is the story of Shang Qiukai, which records how “perfect faith” (*zhicheng* 至誠) makes a man unharmed by water and fire.

Hesheng and Zibo, two chief clients of the Qin prince, went traveling outside the city and lodged in the hut of the old peasant, Shang Qiukai. In the middle of the fame and power of the Qin prince, who could save or ruin, enrich or impoverish, anyone he pleased. Shang Qiukai was a poor man, always cold and hungry; he hid on the North side of the window and listened to them. Encouraged by what he heard, he borrowed provisions, packed them in a basket on his back, and traveled to the Prince’s gate.

The prince’s retainers noticed that Shang Qiukai was old and feeble, with a weather-beaten face and unstylish clothes and cap, they all scorned him...They took Shang Qiukai up a high terrace. Someone in the crowd said as a joke:

‘A hundred pieces of gold for anyone who can jump down!’

Everyone pretended to take him at his word. But Shang Qiukai thought he was serious and hastened to jump ahead of the others. His body drifted to the ground like a flying bird, without breaking flesh or bone.

The Prince's band thought it was mere luck, and did not greatly wonder at it. But to test him someone pointed out a deep corner in a bend in the river, and told him:

'There is a precious pearl down there, a diver could get it.'

Shang Qiukai proceeded to dive for it; and when he came up, he really had found a pearl. For the first time everyone was doubtful, and the Prince granted him an allowance of meat and silk with others.

Soon afterwards the storehouse caught fire. 'If you can go into the fire and save my brocades,' said the Prince, 'I'll reward you according to the amount you recover.'

Shang Qiukai set off without showing the least reluctance, went into the fire and returned; the soot did not smear him, his body was not scorched. The Prince's band were convinced that he possessed the Way, and they all apologized to him together...

"I do not possess the Way," said Shang Qiukai. "Even in my own heart I don't know how I did it. However, there is one thing I can try to tell you about...I believed you with all my heart...I feared only that I might fall short in believing and acting on it. I forgot where my body was going, I forgot which things benefit and which things harm me. It is simply that I was single-minded; that is the only reason why no thing stood in my way. But now

that I know for the first time that you were all making fun of me, I have worries and suspicions hidden inside me...Shall I ever dare to go near water and fire again?" (Yan: 33-35; trans. Graham: 39-41)

Shang Qiukai, in appearance of an ignorant peasant, represents an example of the Highest Man (至人) who “walks under-water and does not suffocate, treads fire and does not burn, walks above the myriad things and does not tremble” (Yan: 31; trans. Graham: 37). As recorded both in the *Liezi* and the *Zhuangzi*, Liezi asked a Daoist adept named Guan Yin why the Highest Man has such supernatural powers. Guan Yin answered, “This is because he guards the pure breath—it has nothing to do with wisdom, skill, determination, or courage.”<sup>64</sup> Rather, the Highest Man is compared to a drunken man who falls from a carriage, though the carriage may be going very fast, he won’t be killed. It is because “he rides without knowing it, falls without knowing it; life and death, astonishment and fear, find no entry into his breast, and so he does not shrink from hitting things.” As the *Liezi* says, “The sage hides himself in Heaven, therefore no thing can harm him.” (Yan: 32; trans. Graham: 38)

In the *Liezi*’s view, Shang Qiukai’s supernatural power comes from his “faith.” According to the *Liezi*, “The man with perfect faith (*zhixin* 至信) can make other things

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<sup>64</sup> The dialogue of Liezi and Guan Yin is recorded in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “Mastering Life,” and the *Liezi*, chapter of “The Yellow Emperor.” This citation is from *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 198.

react to him. He moves heaven and earth, makes the spirits react to him, fills the universe in every direction and nothing stands in his way.” (Yan: 35; trans. Graham: 41) What is translated as “faith” here refers to belief without reasoning and questioning. In Christianity, people with such faith are also said to be able to move mountains and trespass seas. As Jesus says to his disciples, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthews 17:20). There is also an account of Jesus walking on the sea in the Bible:

And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” So he said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthews 14: 26-31)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The Bible, New King James Version.

As taught in the *Liezi*'s parables, faith without doubt is highly valued in Christian belief that it is said to be able to move mountains and calm the sea.

Nevertheless, the *Liezi* does not teach the belief in any personified spiritual beings, like God and the Christ in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In contrast, the Way, which is the ultimate truth in Daoism, is shapeless, indefinable, and having no personal will. It does not control nor rule over anything, but follow along with all things the way they are. As Laozi says, when the task of the Way is accomplished and the work done, the people all say, "It happened to us naturally." (*Daodejing*, chapter 17) Therefore, Shang Qiucai who possesses the Way does not even know that he possesses the Way.

Since the Daoist adepts who embody the Way are as speechless as the Way, the moral of their stories are often told in the third person, usually a didactic Confucian. The following story of a nameless Daoist adept dwelling in a stone cliff, which is recorded both in the *Liezi* as well as the *Bowuzhi*, a book of strange accounts collected during the Western Jin dynasty (265-316 A.D.), is narrated in the third persons' perspective:

Zhao Xiangzi went hunting in the Central Mountains with a party of a hundred thousand. He set fire the forests by lighting the tall grass, and fanned the flames for a hundred miles. A man came out from within a stone cliff, rising and falling with the smoke and ashes; the crowd thought he was a demon. When the fire passed, he came out walking casually, as though the

fire he had passed through did not exist. Zhao Xiangzi marveled and detained the man. He scrutinized him at leisure: in his shape, his color, and his face, he was human; in his breathing, in his voice, he was human. He asked the man by what Way he lived in stone and went through fire.

“What are these things you call stone and fire?” said the man.

“The thing you have just come out from was stone. The thing you have just been waling through was fire.”

“I didn’t know.”

Marquis Wen of Wei heard of it, and questioned Zixia, the disciple of Confucius.

“What sort of man was that?”

“According to what I have heard the Master say, the man who is in harmony is absolutely the same as other things, and no thing succeeds in wounding or obstructing him. To pass through metal and stone and tread through water and fire are all possible.”

“Why don’t you do it yourself?”

“I am not yet capable of cutting open my heart and throwing away the knowledge in it. However, I can tell you all you want to know about it.” (Yan; 39-40; trans. Graham: 46-47)

From a Confucian scholar's view, the reason why the man can pass through metal and fire is because he is in absolute harmony with other things. He does not even know how to name stone and fire, since all things are regarded the same to him. Even though the Confucian's analysis seems convincing, he who speaks cannot practice it. Only those who cut open their hearts and throw away all the knowledge of differentiation are capable of harmonizing with nature. This anti-rational approach to nature marks the *Liezi's* mysticism.

##### 5. Correspondence between Human and Nature through Music

In the *Liezi's* mystic thought, music takes an important role in connecting human and natural worlds. As John Henderson in *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* points out, "Perhaps the most obvious traditional application of *gan-ying* (correspondence) was in the field of music."<sup>66</sup> Han cosmologists applied the concept of musical resonance to affecting the course of events in the natural world. They maintained that by performing the music to a particular season, one facilitated the normal waxing and waning of yin and yang powers through the course of the year. This idea resonates with the *Liezi's* fantastic accounts of music performance. In the Chapter of "Tang's Questions," it is recorded that when Hu Pa played the lute, the birds danced and the fishes bounded. When Kuang performed the *qing-jua* music, a drought came upon the country and lasted for three years.

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<sup>66</sup> For the role of music in human-nature correspondence, see John Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 22-24.

Zou Yan, by blowing the pitchpipe, warmed the climate of a country in the far North.<sup>67</sup> One of the most marvelous accounts records how the lute-player Wen reverses the four seasons through playing particular lute strings which correspond to respective seasons of the year:

[D]uring the spring, he touched the Autumn string and called up the note of the eighth month; a cool wind came suddenly, and fruit ripened on the bushes and trees. When autumn came he touched the Spring string and aroused the note of the second month; a warm breeze whirled gently, and the bushes and trees burst into flower. During the summer he touched the Winter string and called up the note of the eleventh month; frost and snow fell together and the rivers and lakes abruptly froze. When winter came he touched the Summer string, and aroused the note of the fifth month; the sunshine burned fiercely and the hard ice melted at once. When he was coming to the end, he announced the Gong string and played the other four together; a fortunate wind soared, auspicious clouds drifted, the sweet dew fell, the fresh springs bubbled. (Yan: 126; trans. Graham: 108)

This marvelous account of music resonance, though seemed unbelievable in our times, is based on the theory of resonance between music and cosmos. The Chinese musical tones,

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<sup>67</sup> *The Book of Liezi*, 107, 108.

especially those emitted by the twelve pitchpipes, are also correlated with the twelve months of the year. According to Henderson, during the Han dynasty, Chinese cosmologists constructed the musical theories which “correlate musical tones with the months of the year, since the Chinese pitchpipes, like the months, numbered twelve.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Chinese music has a pentatonic scale in which the notes (excluding the first note Gong) are associated with the four seasons. The Gong note leads the other four notes; therefore, when the musician Wen plays the Gong string, signs of all the four seasons come together.

Human voice can also resonate with nature. As recorded in the *Liezi* and the *Huainanzi*, there was a female singer named Han E, whose voice lingered round the beams of the hall and did not die away for three days after she had left the place.<sup>69</sup> Cai Zhongde in his book *A History of Chinese Aesthetics of Music* offers an insightful explanation of the *Liezi*'s account of Han E's singing, “Musical theorists during the Han dynasty perceived music as the flux and movement of *qi*.”<sup>70</sup> *Qi* is the vital breath of life; therefore, by vibrating the breath of life, music can move birds to dance and fishes to bound, and even make plants sprout, auspicious clouds drift, sweet dew fall, and fresh springs bubble. As the *Book of Music* records, “Singers moves not only themselves but also the heaven and earth—their singing harmonizes the four seasons, regulate the stars, and makes myriad creatures

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<sup>68</sup> John Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>69</sup> The *Liezi*, chapter of “Tang's Questions.” See Yan: 127-128; trans. Graham, *The Book of Liezi*, 109.

<sup>70</sup> Cai Zhongde, *Zhongguo yinyue meixue shi* (A History of Chinese Aesthetics of Music) (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1995), 345.

grow.”<sup>71</sup> In essence, the conception of *qi* as the continuum of cosmos provides the intellectual foundation of the correlative thought between human and nature.

## 6. Becoming One with the Way

Among all the parables of the Daoist adepts, Liezi and his master Huzi (literally, Pot Master) are the examples of Perfect Man (*zhiren* 至人) or True Man (*zhenren* 真人)—human who resume their original union with the Way. As seen from the *Liezi*, the True Man possesses supernatural powers listed above, such as leading wild animals, diving into deep waters, treading fire, and riding the wind.

Liezi himself is said to be able to ride the wind as recorded in the *Liezi* as well as the *Zhuangzi*. According to the *Zhuangzi*, “Liezi could ride the wind and go soaring around with cool and breezy skill, but after fifteen days he came back to earth. As far as the search for good fortune went, he didn’t fret and worry.”<sup>72</sup> Zhuangzi then makes such comments on Liezi, “Therefore I say, the Perfect Man has no self; the Holy Man has no merit; the Sage has no fame.”<sup>73</sup> In essence, Liezi’s ability to ride the wind is not of man’s mastery of nature, but of dissolving the dualist boundaries between self and other, merit and fault, fame and

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<sup>71</sup> The Book of Music (*Yueji* 樂記) is a major work in the history of Chinese musical theory. It is compiled during the Han period and is characterized with the idea of resonance between human and nature. The quote comes from the “shiyi” (師乙) chapter of the *Book of Music*.

<sup>72</sup> *The Complete Words of Chuang Tzu*, 32.

<sup>73</sup> As Watson notes, the three names of the Perfect Man, the Holy Man, and the Sage are not three different categories but refer to the same thing.

disgrace. As recorded in the *Liezi*, it took Liezi nine years before he could release himself from all the dualist boundaries and be united with the Way. Only then could he “drift with the wind East or West, like a leaf from a tree or a dry husk,” without knowing whether it was the wind that rode him or he that rode the wind.<sup>74</sup>

To become one with the Way, Liezi spent nine years learning from his Master and experienced four stages of cultivation. As recorded in chapter two of the *Liezi*, Liezi told his disciples the four stages of his cultivation:

(1) Three years after I began to serve the Master and befriend a certain man, my mind no longer dared to think of right and wrong, my mouth no longer dared to speak of benefit and harm; and it was only then that I got as much as a glance from the Master.

(2) After five years, my mind was again thinking of right and wrong, my mouth was again speaking of benefit and harm; and for the first time the Master’s face relaxed in a smile.

(3) After seven years, I thought of whatever came into my mind without any longer distinguishing between right and wrong, said whatever came into my mouth without any longer distinguishing between benefit and harm; and for the first time the Master pulled me over to sit with him on the same mat.

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<sup>74</sup> The *Liezi*, chapter of “The Yellow Emperor.” See Yan: 30-31; trans. Graham, *The Book of Lieh Tzu*, 37.

(4) After nine years, I thought without restraint of whatever came into my mind and said without restraint whatever came into my mouth without knowing whether the right and wrong, benefit and harm, were mine or another's, without knowing that the Master was my teacher and the man I have mentioned was my friend.(Yan: 30-31; trans. Graham: 36-37)

Concerning Liezi's four stages of cultivation, the first stage (after three years) is to eliminate his self perspective and stand. Therefore, during stage one, he is trained not to think of right and wrong, nor speak of benefit and harm. In the second stage (after five years), since he has been free from self prejudices, he begins to objectively evaluate things. Again he thinks of right and wrong and speaks of benefit and harm. However, in the third stage (after seven years), Liezi learns not even to judge and value things, because everything has its value irrespective of human's value system. In the last stage (after nine years), Liezi finally removes all divisions, such as human/non-human, master/student, self/other, mind/body, right/wrong, benefit/harm, subjectivity/objectivity, etc. This ultimate realm of Daoist cultivation is symbolized by Liezi's faceless and shapeless image: his eyes become like his ears, his ears like his nose, his nose like his mouth; everything is the same...With his bone and flesh, mind and body, fused completely, he begins to drift with the wind, without knowing whether it is the wind that rides me or he that rides the wind. In other words, he has attained union with the wind.

Liezi's neighbor Nanguozi 南郭子, literally "Philosopher of South Suburb," is also a Daoist adept who does not make contact with the world with the faculties of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. It is said that "his ears hear nothing, his eyes see nothing, his mouth says nothing, his mind knows nothing, his body never alters."<sup>75</sup> Although Liezi and Nanguozi live next door to each other for twenty years, they never invite or call on each other. When they chanced to meet on the road, their eyes seem not to see each other. So the disciples of Liezi think that Liezi and Nanguozi are enemies. Liezi denies by bringing them to visit Nanguozi.

Forty disciples went with him. They saw Nanguozi, who did indeed seem like a clay image with which it was impossible to make contact. When they looked round at Liezi, his spirit was out of connection with his body and no communion was possible with Liezi either.

Suddenly Nanguozi pointed to the man at the very rear of the file of Liezi's disciples and began talking to him, hectoring him like a bigot who is determined always to be in the right. The disciples were startled by this, and all had doubtful expressions when they returned to the house. (Yan: 91-92; trans. Graham: 79-80)

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<sup>75</sup> The account of Nanguozi is recorded in the *Liezi*, chapter of "Confucius." See Yan: 91-92; trans. Graham: 79-80.

As seen from this account, Nanguozi and Liezi do not contact each other by eyesight or language, but they communicate through the spirit. When their spirits wander out of their bodies, they look like clay images with which it is impossible to communicate. The spiritual realm is called “sitting and forgetting” (坐忘) by Zhuangzi, who says, “I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything.”<sup>76</sup> (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “The Great and Venerable Teacher”) In contrast to his dumb and motionless appearance while practicing the “sitting and forgetting”, once he speaks Nanguozi can argue in such a flow of eloquence that all the Liezi’s disciples are startled. As the *Liezi* says, “Whoever gets the idea says nothing, whoever knows it all also says nothings.” In essence, the true knowledge is the knowledge of Nothingness, which denotes the Way.

Kangcangzi 亢倉子 recorded in the chapter of “Confucius” of the *Liezi* is another Daoist who attains the Way. He is said to be able to “look with his ears and listen with his eyes.” When the Marquis of Lu hears of this sage he is amazed, and sent a great noble to bring him to Lu with the highest honors. When Kangcangzi arrived, he clarifies, “The rumor is false. I can look and listen without using eyes and ears, but I cannot exchange the functions of eyes and ears.” The Marquis questions what sort of Way it is. Kangcangzi says,

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<sup>76</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 90.

My body is in accord with my mind (*xin* 心), my mind with my energies (*qi* 氣), my energies with my spirit (*shen* 神), my spirit with Nothing (*wu* 無).

Whenever the minutest existing things or the faintest sound affects me, whether it is far away beyond the eight borderlands, or close at hand between my eyebrows and eyelashes, I am bound to know it. However, I do not know whether I perceived it with the seven holes in my head and my four limbs, or knew it through my heart and belly and internal organs. It is simply self-knowledge. (Yan: 89; trans. Graham: 77-78)

In essence, Kangcangzi does not hear with ears but with the mind. In Zhagnzi's word, this practice of the mind is called "fasting of the mind" (心齋): "Maintain a perfect unity in every movement of your will, You will not wait for the hearing of your ears about it, but for the hearing of your mind. You will not wait even for the hearing of your mind, but for the hearing of the spirit. Let the hearing (of the ears) rest with the ears. Let the mind rest in the verification (of the rightness of what is in the will). But the spirit is free from all pre-occupation and so waits for (the appearance of) things. Where the (proper) course is, there is freedom from all pre-occupation; such freedom is the fasting of the mind." (The Zhuangzi, chapter of "In the World of Men") The narrative that Kangcangzi does not "perceive with the seven holes in his head nor by his four limbs" echoes the Emperor Hundun in the Zhuangzi before he is poked seven openings on his face. Hundun, which

visualizes the nebulous scene before the creation of heaven and earth, symbolizes the primordial condition of oneness.

This ultimate realm of Daoist cultivation is the re-experiencing of the beginning—the condition that existed “before we first came out of our Ancestor”—in the words of Liezi’s legendary teacher, Pot Master. According to the *Liezi* and the *Zhuangzi*, Pot Master is able to transform his face into various images of nature. Written in wild fantasies and rich symbols, the parable of “Huzi’s four faces” presents the Perfect Man’s unification with the earth, the heaven, and ultimately, the Way. The story begins as Liezi meet a shaman with the insight of a god.

When Liezi saw him, his heart was drunk, and he returned to tell his teacher Huzi, ‘Master, once I thought your Way was the utmost, but there is another with goes still farther.’

‘I have taught you all that shows on the surface,’ said Huzi, ‘but have you really found the Way?...Try bringing him here, and make him take a look at me.’

Next day, Liezi brought him to see Huzi. Coming out, the shaman told Liezi, ‘Alas! Your master is a dead man. There is no more vitality in him...’ Liezi went in, with the tears soaking the lapels of his coat and told Huzi. Huzi answered, ‘I have just shown him the configuration of my earth. My breathing,

like the life in a growing shoot, did not vibrate yet did not cease...Try bringing him again.'

Next day, Liezi brought him again to see Huzi. Coming out, the shaman told Liezi, 'It is lucky that your Master happened to meet me. He will recover...I can see him checking the power in him.' When Liezi entered and told him, Huzi said, 'I have just shown him my soil fertilized by heaven. Nothing had entered my mind, either as name or as reality; but the incipient breath was coming up from my heels. This is what made him think I was checking the powers in me...Bringing him again.'

Next day he brought him again to see Huzi. Coming out, the shaman told Liezi, 'Your Master has not fasted, so I have nothing to go by. I cannot succeed in reading his face...' When Liezi entered and told him, Huzi said, 'I have just shown him the absolute emptiness in which there is no foreboding of anything...Whirlpools, still waters, currents, all hollow out deep pools; of the nine kinds of deep pool I have shown him three. Bring him again.'

Next day he brought him again to Huzi. Before coming to a standstill the shaman fled in a panic... 'I have just shown him,' said Huzi, 'myself before we first came out of our Ancestor.' (Yan: 40-42; trans. Graham: 47-48)

This parable is full of rich symbols, starting with the funny name of Liezi's teacher--"Huzi," (壺子) or Master Hu. The name of Huzi literally means the "Pot Master," or the "Gourd Master" as Girardot translates it. The gourd plant's fruit is shaped round and empty, and it is commonly in south China and Southeast Asia that a container is made from the gourd's hard dry skin. Thus it is no coincident that both the "pot" and the "gourd" are pronounced the same as "hu" in Chinese. Girardot in *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism* lists the various meanings associated with the phonetic particle *hu*: "stupid," "foolish," "muddled and blind," "calabash gourd," "pot or vase," "sacrificial vessel used to contain grain," and "long life."<sup>77</sup> As Girardot explains, "a gourd's emptiness is both a positive cipher of sanity, growth, healing, and health (it produces and contains the medicine of longevity), and, more negatively for conventional society, the sign of an "empty" head--stupidity."<sup>78</sup> The connotations of *hu* as "stupid," "foolish," or "muddled and blind," reminds us of the Emperor Hundun, who has no eyes, ears, nose, and mouth in the beginning; it also reminds us of Nanguozi, who seems as dumb as a clay image when he practices the meditative process of unification with the Way. As for the meanings of the "calabash gourd" and the "pot," they yield the richest metaphorical and cultural fruitfulness in Daoism. As Girardot points out,

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<sup>77</sup> See Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 308.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

The gourd lives in human culture as a symbol...it tells the mythic story of the cyclic, inexhaustible creativity of the world and man, a creativity that ultimately depends on emptiness. Laozi (the *Daodejing*, chapter 4) remarks that the Dao, as the “ancestor of all things,” is “empty (like a bowl, bottle, container, cocoon, or gourd.) It may be used but its capacity is never exhausted.” The existential mystery of this is that utility depends on “nonbeing or nothingness” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 11). The Daoist sage knows how to “turn being into advantage” by resting in nothingness, emptiness, or “non-action”. The Daoist is concerned with the belly, not with the bored openings of the eyes. (The *Daodejing*, chapter 12)<sup>79</sup>

In essence, the bottle gourd in its emptiness, its *wu* (Nothing), emphasizes the mysterious creation out of “Nothing.” The round pot, likewise, symbolizes the condition of wholeness and before heaven and earth parted and myriad things differentiated from each other.

The Pot Master’s countenance presents a series of wonderful images of nature: life concealed under the soil of the earth, the soil fertilized by the dew sent down from heaven, and life in drastic transformations like still waters, currents and whirlpools all hollowing out deep pools. In the end, all these fascinating images come to an unimaginable imagelessness that scares the shaman away. The imageless face symbolizes Nothing (*wu* 無)--the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 230.

primordial condition that exists before the creation of things but embodies all potentials. As

Laozi says,

There is a thing confusedly formed,  
 Born before heaven and earth.  
 Silent and void  
 It stands alone and does not change,  
 Goes round and does not weary.  
 It is capable of being the mother of the world.  
 I know not its name  
 So I style it “the Way.”  
 (The *Daodejing*, chapter 25)<sup>80</sup>

To sum up, the True Man is able to unite with all things in nature because his is in union with the Way, who is the mother of all things, the Ancestor before our ancestors.

In conclusion, the *Liezi*'s myths and parables presents an unconventional yet inspiring view of human and nature, which can be concluded in a historical narrative: Originally, human and nature are One. Human civilization is degeneration from the original natural harmony. To return to the original harmony with nature, humans have to follow the Way,

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<sup>80</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 82.

which underlies all things in nature. For the Daoists, the notion of “following the Way” is more than observing the law of nature external to one’s own being; rather, it involves an intensive exercise of both the body and the mind to attain the union with the Way. In addition to the emphasis on the concentration and purification of the mind, which is in line with Zhuangzi’s thought, the *Liezi* further brings in the notions of “sincerity” and “faith” that lie in the core of the mystic thought of the correspondence between human and nature prevalent during the Han period. Therefore, the *Liezi*’s idea of the union with nature is more than an ideal; it reflects the mythic beliefs and religious practices from ancient to early medieval China.

## CHAPTER 4: THE *LIEZI*'S POLITICAL THOUGHT:

### The *Liezi*'s Political Thought and Its Implication to Environmental Policy

In the *Liezi*, the concept of harmony between human and nature is not only reflected in the fields of metaphysics and religion, but also in the more pragmatic field of political policies. Of all the eight chapters in the *Liezi*, the three chapters of the “Yellow Emperor,” “Confucius,” and “Explaining Conjunctions” include considerable length of discussion on politics. In addition, the chapters of “Tang’s Questions” and “King Mu of Zhou” are titled by the names of political figures, who are major characters in the *Liezi*'s stories. Compared to the *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi* provides more down-to-earth political ideas and guidelines that synthesize the schools of Confucianism, Legalism, and Huang-Lao Daoism, signifying the convergence of various schools of thought after the Han dynasty. On the highest level, the *Liezi* still follows Laozi and Zhuangzi's ideal of governance by doing nothing against nature, as manifested in the *Liezi*'s utopias of the Huaxu Kingdom and the Zhongbei Kingdom. On the other hand, the *Liezi* incorporates Confucianism, Legalism, the Yin-Yang school, and Huang-Lao Daoism to propose practical ways to rule. Therefore, the *Liezi* also provides more concrete and practical thinking than its pre-Han Daoist predecessors. In this chapter, I first analyze the *Liezi*'s political view and its intellectual sources, and then suggest its application to environmental policies.

Although the *Liezi* includes heterogeneous intellectual sources, these streams of thought do not necessarily conflict with each other; in fact, they can be categorized into multi-levels and aspects. In terms of social and political theories, the *Liezi* gives consideration to both idealistic and pragmatic sides. The following sections organizes these heterogeneous streams of thought as illustrated by the *Liezi*'s intriguing parables.

## I. The *Liezi*'s Ideal States

The *Liezi*'s ideal states, represented by the Huaxu kingdom (華胥國) recorded in the chapter of "The Yellow Emperor", the Zhongbei kingdom (終北國) from the chapter of "The Tang's Questions", and the Gumang kingdom (古莽國) from the chapter of "The King Mu of Zhou." These countries are characterized by natural settings, primitive societies, and supernatural figures who are able to soar the wind, thread fire, live on the dew, and are unhindered by mist, clouds, thunder, mountains, and valleys.

### 1. The Huaxu Kingdom 華胥國

The account of the Huaxu kingdom, as recorded in the very beginning of the chapter of "The Yellow Emperor," employs the Yellow Emperor to be its main character. But why the Yellow Emperor? The Yellow Emperor is regarded as the first ancestor of the Chinese people, who put an end to battling among the clans through military conquest, and established a centralized bureaucratic state replete with ministers, laws, and other

accouterments of feudal bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup> The earliest legends show that the Yellow Emperor is a warrior-god who successfully fought against a series of enemies—the Flame Emperor, Chi Yu the god of war, the Four Emperors, the hero Xing Tian, and the one-legged god Kui, besides many other lesser known mythical figures.<sup>2</sup> By the time of the Han historian Sima Qian (B.C. 145-87), the legends of the Yellow Emperor, which originates as local myths or tribal legends, grew into a universal history making the Yellow Emperor the fountainhead of Chinese culture and civilization. The *Book of Han* 漢書 lists the works that mention the Yellow Emperor under an extremely wide spectrum of categories, including Daoism, Legalism, the *yin* and *yang*, the five phases, military, mythology, divination, immortality, astrology, medicine, pharmacy, and even sexual yoga.<sup>3</sup>

From Confucian perspective, the Yellow Emperor is the pacific culture bearer who initiates the main patterns of civilization. As an innovator the Yellow Emperor is credited with creating music, rites, the ceremonial hall (明堂), and *renyi* (仁義 benevolence and righteousness)—all distinctly Confucian concerns.<sup>4</sup> Daoists, on the other hand, stress the image of the Yellow Emperor as an ideal ruler who follows the Way and thereby ends up ascending to heaven. The Huang-Lao cult, a branch of early Daoist religion during the Han dynasty, adopts the Yellow Emperor as its foundational patriarch along with Laozi. The

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<sup>1</sup> See Randall P. Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 84-92.

<sup>2</sup> See Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*, 130-137.

<sup>3</sup> See Peerenboom, *Law and Morality in Ancient China*, 86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Daoist adoption of the Yellow Emperor as its representative figure, as Seidel points out, signifies a synthesis of the ancient myths of the sage with the later political ideas.<sup>5</sup> The manifold symbolic values of the Yellow Emperor are all present in the *Liezi*, which demonstrates the complexity of the *Liezi*'s use of this legendary figure.

The *Liezi*'s chapter of "The Yellow Emperor" begins with the Yellow Emperor's frustration with politics.

For fifteen years after the Yellow Emperor came to the throne, it pleased him to be borne on the heads of the Empire. He "tended life," amused his eyes and ears, pampered his nostrils and mouth, till his ravaged flesh darkened and his dulled senses were stupefied. During the next fifteen years he worried about the misgovernment of the Empire, and devoted all his eyesight and hearing, knowledge and strength, to ruling the people. But still his ravaged flesh grew darker and his dulled senses more stupefied. (Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 33)

As seen from the passage, the governance or misgovernment of the empire has nothing to do with the Emperor's diligence or negligence. Not until he exhausts all means of

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Seidel, *La Divinisation de Lao tseu dans le taoisme des Han* (Paris: Ecole française d'extrême-orient, 1969), 50-58. For Girardot's interpretation in English, see Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 198.

governance as well as ascetic practices does the kingdom of Huaxu is revealed to him in a dream:

In this country there are no teachers and leaders; all things follow their natural course. The people have no cravings and lusts; all men follow their natural course. They are incapable of delighting in life or hating death, and therefore none of them dies before his time. They do not know how to prefer themselves to others, and so they neither love nor hate. They do not know how to turn their faces to things or turn their backs, go with the stream or push against it, so nothing benefits or harms them. There is nothing at all which they grudge or regret, nothing which they dread or envy. They go into water without drowning, into fire without burning; hack them, scratch them, there is no ache nor itch. They ride space as though walking the solid earth, sleep on the void as though on their beds; clouds and mist do not hinder their sight, thunder does not confuse their hearing, beauty and ugliness do not disturb their hearts, mountains and valleys do not trip their feet—for they make only journeys of the spirit. (Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 34)

The *Liezi*'s portrayal of the Huaxu kingdom begins with the statement: "In this country there are no teachers and leaders; all things follow their natural course." In essence, the idea

that the Huaxu country has no political and social hierarchies echoes Laozi's political thought that teachers and leaders are meaningful only "when the great way falls into disuse."<sup>6</sup> As Laozi says, "When cleverness emerges, there is great hypocrisy...When the state is benighted, there are loyal ministers."<sup>7</sup> (The *Daodejing*, chapter 18) Therefore, Laozi proposes, "Exterminate the sage, discard the wise, and the people will benefit a hundredfold."<sup>8</sup> (The *Daodejing*, chapter 19)

The people of Huaxu simply "follow their natural course." (*ziran eryl* 自然而已) The word *ziran* 自然, translated as "natural," signifies a form of anarchism or non-interventionism in political terms. W. A. Callahan analyzes the first appearance of *ziran* in the *Daodejing* and concludes that out of its five occurrences in the *Daodejing*, four have strong political connotations. Apart from chapter 25, which characterizes the Way as "what is naturally so" (道法自然), the rest four appearances of *ziran* applies this character of the Way to the way to rule. In chapter 17 it is said: "The most excellent ruler—the people do not know that he exists....Relaxed, he prizes his words. When his accomplishments are complete and the affairs of state are in order, the common people all say, 'We are naturally like this.'"<sup>9</sup> (百姓皆謂: 我自然) The ideal ruler does not interfere ("the people do not

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<sup>6</sup> The *Daodejing*, chapter 18. See *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), 74.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>9</sup> See W. A. Callahan, "Discourse and perspective in Daoism: A linguistic interpretation of *ziran*," *Philosophy East & West* 39, no.2 (1989), 178.

know that he exists”) and does not issue commands (“he prizes his words”), but the people act of their own accord. Chapter 23 of the Daodejing continues with this same theme as chapter 17, saying, “Seldom issuing commands is in accordance with the natural.” (希言自然) Chapter 51 explicitly analogizes the Way with the way to rule, “The Way is revered and virtue honored not because this is decreed by any authority but because it is natural for them to be treated so.” (道之尊，德之貴，夫莫之命而常自然) Chapter 64 states that the ideal ruler “makes good the mistakes of the multitude in order to help the myriad creatures to be natural.” (輔萬物之自然) As Callahan concludes, *ziran* signifies “politics in the more basic sense of harmonious interrelation and interdependence of parts in human society as well as in the larger compound of nature.”<sup>10</sup>

The Huaxu people illustrate the ideal of harmony with nature. As the *Liezi* depicts, “They go into water without drowning, into fire without burning...They ride space as though walking the solid earth, sleep on the void as though on their beds; clouds and mist do not hinder their sight, thunder does not confuse their hearing,...mountains and valleys do not trip their feet—for they make only journeys of the spirit.” This harmony with nature is not made through the physical body, but the mind. It requires the people to cultivate their mind until they have no cravings or lusts; neither love nor hate; do not grudge nor regret; do not dread nor envy. As already discussed in chapter three, the Huaxu people are Zhuangzi’s ideal “True Man”, although they appear not as an individual, but as a country.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 186.

The story ends with the Yellow Emperor's realizing his dreamed utopia. The *Liezi* records, "After another twenty-eight years, when the Empire was almost as well governed as the country of Huaxu, the Emperor rose into the sky. The people did not stop wailing for him for more than two hundred years" (Yan: 28; trans. Graham: 35). The *Shiji* 史記 by Sima Qian, the Grand Historian of the Han dynasty, also records, "A bearded dragon descended to the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor rode on the dragon. With his wives and councilors who numbered over seventy persons sending him off, the Yellow Emperor was carried into sky." (The *Shiji*, *Fengchanshu* 史記 封禪書)<sup>11</sup> In essence, the *Liezi*'s account of the Yellow Emperor and his dream of the Huaxu kingdom not only illustrates the thought of early Daoism represented by Laozi and Zhuangzi, but further incorporates later religious ideals of transcendence and immortality developed during the Han period. In terms of its political thought, the *Liezi* recognizes the political ideal of "sage rule," which is common to both the Confucian and Daoist traditions.

## 2. The Zhongbei Kingdom 終北國

Another utopia comparable to the Huaxu kingdom is the Zhongbeiguo, literally the "Utmost North Kingdom." As recorded in the chapter of "Tang's Questions" in the *Liezi*, the utopia of Zhongbei was found by Yu, the ancient hero and sage-king who tamed the great flood and founded the Xia dynasty (ca. 2183-1752 B.C.). According to the *Liezi*'s

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<sup>11</sup> My translation. The original reads, "有龍垂鬚鬣，下迎黃帝，黃帝上騎，群君後宮從上者七十餘人，龍乃上去。" (史記 封禪書)

account, however, it was not by Yu's wisdom or might that he was able to find the utopia of Zhongbei; he came to Zhongbei simply by mistake because he lost his way when he was draining the flood. As written in the *Liezi*,

When Yu was draining the Flood, he blundered and lost his way, and came by mistake to a country on the Northern shore of the North sea, who knows how many thousands and myriads of miles from the Middle Kingdom. The name of this country is Utmost North; I do not know where its borders lie...The country is flat in all directions, and right in the middle is a mountain named Urn Peak (壺嶺), shaped like a pot with a small mouth. On the summit there is an opening, round like a bracelet, which is named the Cave of Plenty (滋穴). Waters bubble out of it, named the Divine Spring (神澗), which smell sweeter than orchids and spices, taste sweeter than wine and musk. Four streams divide from the one source, flow down the mountain and irrigate every corner of the country.

The climate is mild, and there are no epidemics. The people are gentle and compliant by nature, do not quarrel or contend, have soft hearts and weak bones, are never proud or envious. Old and young are equals, and no one is ruler or subject. Men and women mingle freely...They live out their span of a

hundred years, without sickness and early deaths; and the people proliferate in countless numbers, knowing pleasure and happiness...By custom they are lovers of music; they hold hands and take turns to sing ballads, and never stop singing all day. Hungry and tiring they drink the Divine Spring, and are soothed and refreshed body and mind...When they bathe and wash their hair in the Divine Spring, their complexions grow sleek and moist, and the fragrant smell does not leave them for ten days...(Yan: 122; trans. Graham: 102-103)

This narrative of the Zhongbie kingdom conceives a cluster of intriguing symbols and images. First, concerning the name of the kingdom, “Zongbie” 終北 refers to “the Utmost North.” According to the cosmological theory of the five elements, the North is associated with the original state of non-being. As Livia Kohn states in *Early Chinese Mysticism*,

The North is the direction of darkness, of water, of what the philosophers call nonbeing. Here lies the highest potential of the world; here perfection and realization take place; here the ordinary world is fully overcome. A person

venturing to the extreme North becomes an equal of the forces of the universe;

he or she is ‘shining together with the sun and the moon.’<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the people of the Utmost North Kingdom are immortals who never die. Since they live with and live by the Way, they can reverse the process of decline, and their whole beings are all perfected and fulfilled. This complete oneness with the Way is the highest state that Daoist mystics seek to attain.

The landscape of the Utmost North Kingdom includes so astonishing rich metaphors and symbols. The Urn Peak (壺嶺), shaped like a round pot with a small round opening on its summit, represents “the Daoist structure of productive order: an empty center surrounded by a full and useful periphery.”<sup>13</sup> It reminds us of Laozi’s metaphor of the spinning wheel: “Blunt the sharpness; untangle the knots; soften the glare; let your wheels move only along old ruts.” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 4)<sup>14</sup> The spinning motion of the wheel describes the way in which the Dao moves, namely, the circular motion. As Moeller says, the course of the Way is “of a perfectly closed (like a circle) monistic pattern of efficiency.”<sup>15</sup> This circular movement of the Way is the same model for the movement of the earth and its seasons,

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<sup>12</sup> Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 91.

<sup>13</sup> See Hans-Georg Moeller, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Translation by D. C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), 60.

<sup>15</sup> Hans-Georg Moeller, *Daoism Explained* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005), 108.

which in turn structures the circular process of human activities in an agrarian society. In essence, the circular motion is the model of the Way, heaven and earth (nature), and human.

On the summit of the Urn Peak is a small opening, named the Cave of Plenty (滋穴), which symbolizes emptiness and fertility. The cave symbol evokes the metaphors of the valley and the female vagina in the *Daodejing*:

The spirit of the valley never dies. This is called the mysterious female.

The gateway of the mysterious female is called the root of heaven and earth. Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there, yet use will never drain it.

(The *Daodejing*, chapter 6)<sup>16</sup>

Like the valley, the cave is the empty space surrounded by hills or solid ground. To Daoists, this emptiness is the inexhaustible source of utility. As it is said in the *Daodejing*, chapter 4, “The Way is empty, yet use will not drain it. Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad creatures.”<sup>17</sup> (道冲而用之或不盈，渊兮似万物之宗.) This passage includes two characters with the water radical: *chong* 冲, which depicts turbulent flows of water clashing or dashing against things; *yuan* 渊, which connotes the deep pool or abyss. The word *yuan*,

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<sup>16</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 60.

deep pool, or abyss, echoes the images of the dark cave, the empty valley, and the moist vagina. It seems dark and obscure, but conceives the potential of life.

As opposed to the “full” mountains and solid ground that surround it, the abyss (*yuan* 淵) is a negative form; it is mere potential, a potential that has not yet materialized. On the other hand, the word *chong* 冲 signifies the dynamic process of birth and transformation. One of its synonyms is *yong* 湧, the word the *Liezi* uses to depict the image of the Divine Spring gushing out of the Cave of Plenty: “Waters bubble out of it, named the Divine Spring.” 有水湧出，名曰神瀆。 Since life emerges from water, the Divine Spring symbolizes the source of fertility; as the *Liezi* states, “four streams divide from the one source, flow down the mountain and irrigate every corner of the country.” This image echoes the nebulous scene of a great flooding river in the *Daodejing*, chapter 34:

The Way is broad, reaching left as well as right. 大道汜兮其可左右

The myriad creatures depend on it for life yet it claims no authority.

It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.

It clothes and feeds the myriad creatures yet lays no claim to being their master.

For ever free of desire, it can be called small; yet, as it lays no claim to being master when the myriad creatures turn to it, it can be called great.

It is because it never attempts itself to be great that it succeeds in becoming great.<sup>18</sup>

In Daoism, the metaphors of the valley, the river, and great waters have strong political connotations. As seen from the above passage, Laozi suggests that an ideal ruler should emulate the broad flooding water that saturates and nourishes myriad creatures but claims no authority nor merit. Like the sage who “makes good the mistakes of the multitude in order to help the myriad creatures to be natural” in chapter 64 of the *Daodejing*, the ideal ruler, in the Daoist perspective, is the one who “help” but not “intervene.”

As for the metaphors of the river and the valley, they are inseparable and are always used in conjunction. In chapter 66, Laozi illustrates his political philosophy through a parable of the river and the valley.

The reason why the river and the sea are able to be king of the hundred valleys is that they excel in taking the lower position. Hence they are able to be the king of the hundred valleys,

Therefore, desiring to rule over the people, one must in one’s words humble oneself before them;

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<sup>18</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 93.

And, desiring to lead the people, one must, in one's person, follow behind them.

Therefore the sage takes his place over the people yet is no burden; takes his place ahead of the people yet causes no obstruction. That is why the empire supports him joyfully and never tires of doing so.

It is because he does not contend that no one in the empire is in a position to contend with him.

(The *Daodejing*, chapter 66)<sup>19</sup>

In this chapter, Laozi compares a sage to a great river and the sea, the people to hundreds of valley streams. Little streams flow into the river and the sea because the latter is lower than the former. Likewise, if the ruler wants the people to follow him naturally and willingly, he has to be humble and non-oppressive. Then people will venerate him as their ruler and never go against him.

In Chapter 78, Laozi again uses a parable of water to illustrate his political philosophy of softness:

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<sup>19</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 128.

In the world there is nothing more submissive and weak than water. Yet for attacking that which is hard and strong nothing can surpass it. This is because there is nothing that can take its place.

That the weak overcomes the strong, and the submissive overcomes the hard, everyone in the world knows yet no one can put this knowledge into practice.

Therefore the sage says,

One who takes on himself the humiliation of the state is called a ruler worthy of offering sacrifices to the gods of earth and millet;

One who takes on himself the calamity of the state is called a king worthy of dominion over the entire empire.

Straightforward words seem paradoxical.

(The *Daodejing*, Chapter 78)<sup>20</sup>

In Daoism, the way to rule is a paradoxical truth: To be the highest authority, one should lower himself. To be a powerful leader, a ruler has to be soft and humble. Instead of taking the bounty of the people, he should accept the dirt and calamity of the state. If a ruler can be

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 140.

as soft, humble, and forbearing as water, he is able to overcome things that are hard and strong. Therefore Laozi said,

The most submissive thing in the world can ride roughshod over the hardest in the world—that which is without substance entering that which has no crevices.

That is why I know the benefit of resorting to no action. The teaching that uses no words, the benefit of resorting to no action, these are beyond the understanding of all but a very few in the world.

(*Daodejing*, Chapter 43)<sup>21</sup>

According to Arthur Waley's annotation, the softest thing refers to the water, and the hardest the rock.<sup>22</sup> This animated image of the soft and reticent water cleaving the hard stone presents a wonderful illustration of the Daoist paradox politics.

The various images of water make it the most favorable metaphors in Daoism. In chapter 15 Laozi juxtaposes the images of the “stirring, muddy water” and the “settled, limpid water.” Laozi says, “Who can be muddy and yet, settling, slowly become limpid?”

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Waley, trans., *The Way and Its Power* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965), 197.

Who can be at rest and yet, stirring, slowly come to life?”<sup>23</sup> In this chapter, the muddy water represents the fertile condition of the Way. As Moeller explains, “Muddy water is a ‘chaotic’ mass of particles that have not yet settle. This water will clear up and then take on a specific color and quality, but as of yet it is still in a primordial ‘non-form’ that precedes its actual form.”<sup>24</sup> The muddy water metaphor is parallel to the metaphor of the valley in chapter 15 of the *Daodejing*, “How impenetrable! Like muddy water. How vast! Like the valley.” The valley is a vast and empty space, a space which has not been filled. It is mere potential, a potential that has not yet materialized. Nevertheless, the power of the Way lies exactly in its empty nothingness and formlessness. The combination of the valley and the dark, muddy water which resides in the valley leads directly to a reiteration of the metaphor of the female sexual organ—all symbolize the creative primordality of the Way, which is chaotically murky but teeming with the germs of life. This cosmogonic theme is accompanied by the theme of birth and death, visualized by the constant flowing back and forth of the water.

The process of the muddy water slowly settling and becoming limpid represents the purification of the mind. The imagery of “still water” is especially favored by Zhuangzi, who says, “Men do not mirror themselves in running water—they mirror themselves in still water. Only what is still can still the stillness of other things.” (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of

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<sup>23</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Hans-Georg Moeller, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9.

“The Sign of Virtue Complete”)<sup>25</sup> In the chapter of “The Way of Heaven,” Zhuangzi further draws the analogy between still water and the sage’s mind.

Water that is still gives back a clear image of beard and eyebrows; reposing in the water level, it offers a measure to the great carpenter. An if water in stillness possesses such clarity, how much more must pure spirit. The sage’s mind in stillness is the mirror of Heaven and earth, the glass of the ten thousand things. (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “The Way of Heaven”)<sup>26</sup>

When the water is still, it becomes so clear that it can reflect the tiniest hair. The tranquil and level water also serves as a measure for the greatest craftsmen. As Sarah Allan points out, the “stillness” is a synonym of “non-action,”<sup>27</sup> which is the key to successful actions. Hence, following the parable of still water, Zhuangzi writes, “Still, they may rest in inaction; resting in inaction, they may demand success from those who are charged with activities.” (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “The Way of Heaven”)<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Zhuangzi’s notion of “stillness” (*jing* 靜), like Laozi’s “non-action,” is not a complete passivity, but a wise

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<sup>25</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>27</sup> See Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Spouts of Virtue*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 142-143.

decision on whether to act or not depending on the natural course of things. This dual concept of “non-action” is well illustrated in the following water parable.

It is the nature of water that if it is not mixed with other things, it will be clear, and if nothing stirs it, it will be level. But if it is dammed and hemmed in and not allowed to flow, then, too, it will cease to be clear...To be pure, clean, and mixed with nothing; still, unified, and unchanging; limpid and inactive; moving with the workings of Heaven—this is the way to care for the spirit. (The *Zhuangzi*, chapter of “Constrained in Will”)<sup>29</sup>

As seen from the above passage, there is a distinction between “clear water” and “stagnant water.” The latter is unclear because it does not flow, which implies that the clear water flows although it may seem still. Similarly, the Daoist notions of “stillness” and “non-action” actually refer to the action of following the Way, rather than absolute inaction.

The imagery of the bubbling spring is also favored by Confucian thinkers. Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BC), China’s most famous philosopher and the founder of Confucianism, once stood by a river and said, “It goes on like this, never ceasing day or night!” (The *Analects* 9:16) Later Confucian thinkers, such as Mencius 孟子 (372–289

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 169.

BC) and Xunzi 荀子 (300-230 BC) for example, all elaborate on Confucius' view of the river imagery. When interpreting Confucius' praise of the river, Mencius puts a special emphasis on the headwater that makes a great river flow.

The disciple Seu said, "Chungne (Confucius) often praised water, saying 'O water! O water! What did he find in water to praise?'" Mencius replied, "There is a spring of water; how it gushes out! It rests not day nor night. It fills up every hole, and then advances, flowing on to the four seas. Such is water having a spring! It was this which he found in it to praise. But suppose that the water has no spring. In the seventh and eighth months when the rain falls abundantly, the channels in the fields are all filled, but their being dried up again may be expected in a short time. So a superior man is ashamed of a reputation beyond his merits." (*Mencius*, IVB.18)<sup>30</sup>

Mencius praises the fountain but degrades the rain because the former is a constant source whereas the latter is not. Only the river with a constant source can go far, as a worthy person who holds fast to his good nature can achieve goodness. In another parable of the fountain, Mencius further defines the innate goodness of man, namely, the "four

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<sup>30</sup> *The Four Books*, trans. James Legge (Taipei: Culture Book Company, 1970), 743-744.

beginnings” (四端) of goodness: humaneness (仁), righteousness (義), propriety (禮), and wisdom (智).

Mencius said, “All men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others...We may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man...Since all men have these four principles in themselves, let them know to give them all their development and completion, and the issue will be like that of fire which has begun to burn, or that of a spring which has begun to find vent. Let them have their complete development, and they will suffice to love and protect all within the four seas. (*Mencius* IIA.6)<sup>31</sup>

As seen from the above two paragraphs, Mencius not only stresses the innate goodness in man, but also emphasizes the importance of developing that good nature. In other words, although everyone has the potential--the four beginnings--to achieve goodness, one has to realize that potential. To illustrate an orderly and persistent way to fully develop that good

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 548-552.

nature, Mencius uses the metaphor of the river, which proceeds by filling pits one by one, to explain that a worthy person should enhance his knowledge and virtue step by step:

There is an art in the contemplation of water...Flowing water is a thing which does not proceed till it has filled the hollows in its course. The students who has set his mind on the doctrines of the sage, does not advance to them but by completing one lesson after another. (*Mencius* VIIA.24)<sup>32</sup>

Mencius also uses water as a metaphor to explain his ideas of human nature and the relationship between the ruler and the people. He believes that human beings have a natural tendency toward goodness, as water tends to flow downwards.

The tendency of man's nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. There are none but have this tendency to good, just as all water flows downwards. Now by striking water and causing it to leap up, you may make it go over your forehead; and, by damming and leading it, you may force it up a bill—but are such movements according to the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 955.

nature of water? It is the force applied which causes them. When men are made to do what it not good, their nature id dealt with in this way.

*(Mencius VIA.2)*<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Mencius uses water’s downward tendency to illustrate the relationship between the people and the ruler. In Mencius IVA.9, Mencius says, “The people turn to a humane ruler as water flows downward.” A more explicit argument is made in Mencius IA.6:

Now among the shepherds of men throughout the empire, there is not one who does not find pleasure in killing men. If there were one who did not find pleasure in killing men, all the people in the empire would look towards him with outstretched necks. Such being indeed the case, the people would flock to him, as water flows downwards with a rush, which no one repress. *(Mencius IA.6)*<sup>34</sup>

Since people have a natural tendency toward goodness, they will spontaneously submit themselves to a humane king. Therefore, an effective way to gain support from the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 851-852.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 447-448.

people is to follow their natural tendency toward goodness and rule by humaneness. To make this point, Mencius uses the example of Yu, the sage king who tamed a great flood by following the downward tendency of the water and channeling it to the sea.

In the time of Yao, the waters, flowing out of their channels, inundated the Middle Kingdom...Shun employed Yu to reduce the waters to order. Yu dug open their obstructed channels, and conducted them to the sea...and after this men found the plains available for them. (*Mencius* IIIB.9)<sup>35</sup>

In *Mencius* IVB.26, Mencius points out that Yu channeled the water according to its natural tendency; hence, he had no problem at all. A similar argument is recorded in *Mencius* VIB.11:

Yu's regulation of the waters was according to the laws of water...Water flowing out of its channels is called an inundation. Inundating waters are a vast waste of water, and what a benevolent man detests. (*Mencius* VIB.11)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 673-674.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 924.

According to S. F. Teiser, the flood is a metaphor for the social disorder in Mencius' time.<sup>37</sup>

To put the chaotic world back in order, Mencius, like other Confucian thinkers, advocates that the ruler should establish rites and proprieties to guide the people, as Yu directed the water with proper channels.

Like Mencius, Xunzi 荀子, another great Confucian thinker during the Warring State period, elaborates on Confucius' view of the river imagery from a very different perspective:

Confucius was once gazing at the water flowing eastward. Zigong questioned Confucius about it, saying, "Why is it that whenever a gentleman sees a great stream, he feels the necessity to contemplate?" Confucius replied, "Ah! Water—it bestows itself everywhere, on all living things, yet there is no assertion: in this it resembles inner power. Its direction of flow is to descend toward the low ground and whether its course is winding or straight, it necessarily follows its natural principle: in this it resembles morality. Things float along on its surface and its depths cannot be fathomed: in this it resembles knowledge. Its vast rushing waters are neither subdued nor exhausted: in this it resembles the Way. If there

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<sup>37</sup> See Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue*, 73.

should be anything that blocks its course, its response will be to react against it, like a reverberating echo. It will travel through chasms a hundred rods deep fearlessly: in this it seems as though it had courage. Led to an empty place, it is sure to make itself level: in this it resembles the law. It will fill something completely and not require a leveling stick: in this it resembles rectitude. Indulgent and restrained while penetrating into the subtlest matters: in this it resembles scrutiny. As it comes and goes, it accommodates itself to whatever impurities enter it, renewing and purifying them: in this it resembles the transformation power of the good. Through myriad turns and twists its course is certain to flow eastward: in this it resembles the mind with a sense of purpose. It is for such reasons that whenever the gentleman sees a great stream he feels the necessity of contemplating it.” (*Xunzi 28.5 The Warning Vessel on the Right 宥坐*)<sup>38</sup>

Xunzi not only draws from the river imagery the characteristics of vigor, persistence, and determination, but also emphasizes the qualities of rectitude, justice, and scrutiny, since water always lies horizontally and never lets go any crevice. Xunzi’s emphasis on the law and scrutiny forms a link between Confucianism and Legalism. Among Xunzi’s students

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<sup>38</sup> *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, trans. John Knoblock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 248.

were two famous Legalists, the philosopher Han Fei 韓非 (280–233 BC) and the statesman Li Si 李斯 (280–208 BC). However, unlike the Legalists, who propose that rulers should control their subjects by statecraft, Xunzi still follows Confucius' methods of governance, using rites and music to guide the people toward goodness. As seen from the above parable of water, Xunzi compares the transforming power of goodness to water's purifying power. As unclean things are washed repeatedly by water, eventually they will become clean. Although the underlying assumption in this parable seems to suggest that human nature is unclean and evil, Xunzi's emphasis is on the importance of continuous purification and cultivation, which transform people from evil to good. In this sense, Xunzi is still considered a true follower of Confucius.<sup>39</sup>

The following parable of “water in a container” (槃水) further illustrates Xunzi's view of the human mind.

The human mind may be compared to a pan of water. If you place the pan upright and do not stir the water up, the mud will sink to the bottom, and the water on top will be clear and pure enough to see your beard and eyebrows and to examine the lines on your face. But if a slight wind passes over its surface, the submerged mud will be stirred up from the bottom,

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<sup>39</sup> See Lin Lizhen, “Xunzi.” In Wang Shouan, ed., *Zhongguo lidai sixiangjia* 中國歷代思想家 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu jinshuguan, 1999), 662-663.

and the clarity and purity of the water at the top will be disturbed so that it is impossible to obtain the correct impression of even the general outline of the face. Now, the mind is just the same. Thus, if you lead it with rational principles, nurture it with purity, and not allow mere things to “tilt” it, then it will be adequate to determine right and wrong and to resolve any doubtful points. But if small things pull at it so that its right relation with the external world is altered and the mind’s inner workings are “tilted,” then it will be inadequate to decide even gross patterns. (*Xunzi* 21.7b *Dispelling Blindness* 解蔽)<sup>40</sup>

In this parable, Xunzi compares the human mind to water in a pan, which can be clear or murky depending on external conditions. In other words, the good or evil of the human mind is influenced by the external environment, and the nature of the human mind is neither good nor evil. Hence, Xunzi emphasizes outward guidance, objective principles, and assiduous cultivation, which lead people toward goodness.

In the two water parables below, Xunzi proposes that the ruler should lead the people toward goodness by making himself a virtuous example.

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<sup>40</sup> *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 107.

The ruler is the bowl; the people the water. If the bowl is round, then the water will be round; if it is square, then the water will be square. (*Xunzi*

*12.4 On the Way of a Lord* 君道)<sup>41</sup>

The lord is the wellspring of the people. If the wellspring is pure, then the outflow will be pure; if the wellspring is muddy, then the outflow will be muddy. (*Xunzi 12.5 On the Way of a Lord* 君道)<sup>42</sup>

The above two water parables illustrate Xunzi's view of the relationship between the ruler and the people. In the "water and bowl" parable, Xunzi claims that the ruler has a strong influence over the people, whose characters can be easily shaped by the ruler, like water shaped by its container. Accordingly, if the ruler is virtuous, the people will follow his example. The "wellspring and outflow" parable compares the ruler to the origin of a spring, and the people to its outflow. If the origin is pure, the stream is pure; if the origin is muddy, the stream is muddy. In sum, Xunzi believes that the ruler plays the key role in purifying, educating, and leading the people toward goodness, and an ideal ruler should be a virtuous example for the people.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

To sum up the Confucian parables of water, water is appreciated for its constancy, incessancy, persistence, courage, and determination. Since the Confucians seek to put the disorderly world in order with rites and proprieties, they favor the image of a river that runs along a constant course. Confucius sought to revive the traditional rites and institutions of the Zhou dynasty, which he believed to be the antidote to the unstable society and politics of his time. Mencius also gives approval to the traditions of Zhou and shows a conservative attitude toward the ancient institutions. Xunzi, too, advocates the conservation of the Zhou institutions, which fall into decay in his time.<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that they especially favors the river imagery which races vigorously through thousands of obstacles, which symbolizes the virtues of diligence, perseverance, and determination to achieve humaneness in life and bring peace and order to the world.

When we compare the metaphor of the bubbling spring in the *Liezi* and the Confucian texts, the different views of Daoism and Confucianism are revealed. The Divine Spring in the *Liezi*'s Zhongbei kingdom symbolizes the source of life, the Way. The imagery of "four streams dividing from the one source, flowing down the Urn Peak, and irrigating every corner of the country" evokes to the flooding river "reaching left as well as right," hence saturating all the land and nurturing myriad lives. (The *Daodejing*, chapter 34) It is noteworthy that the river imagery favored by the *Liezi* and Laozi does not have specific

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<sup>43</sup> See Fung Yu-Lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), vol.1, 54-56, 108-111, 282-283.

directions. In contrast to Mencius' parable of the flowing water which "does not proceed till it has filled the hollows in its course" (*Mencius* VIIA.24), the Daoist water imagery is favored for its softness, invincibility, humility, reticence, spontaneity, and undifferentiated benevolence for the myriad creatures.

To conclude the *Liezi's* parable of the Utmost North Kingdom, the Divine Spring is more than a metaphor of the Way, it also represents the methods of maintaining health, enjoying longevity, and attaining immortality--the major themes in religious Daoism. It is said that the Zhongbei people "live out their span of a hundred years, without sickness and early deaths; and the people proliferate in countless numbers, knowing pleasure and happiness, ignorant of decay, old age, sorrow and anguish." In essence, the Zhongbei people lead the simple, rustic, yet hedonistic life rather like the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove of the Six Dynasties, among whom, Ji Kang was a great musician, Ruan Ji loved drinking, and Liu Ling would not bother putting on garments at home. Similarly, the Zhongbei people are "lovers of music; they hold hands and take turns to sing ballads, and never stop singing all day." They also enjoy drinking and sometimes get drunk: "Hungry and tiring they drink the Divine Spring, and are soothed and refreshed body and mind, and so drunk, if they take too much, that they do not wake for ten days." Like Liu Ling, the Zhongbei people do not weave and clothe themselves, since the climate is so warm. The narrative that their "men and women mingle freely without go-betweens and betrothal presents" suggests a longing for sexual freedom and a complete abandonment of social restrictions. Needless to say,

there is no social and political hierarchy in this country; as it is stated, “old and young are equals, and no one is ruler or subject.” In essence, the *Liezi*’s Zhongbei kingdom is not merely the state of savagery of a primitive society, but rather a civilization that includes primitiveness. For if it were actually a primitive society, how, then, can the people “hold hands and take turns to sing ballads,” and “by custom lovers of music?” As Fung Yu-lan points, “Great civilization looks like primitiveness. Such a civilization is the one best able to survive.”<sup>44</sup>

### 3. The Gumang Kingdom 古莽國

In the chapter of “King Mu of Zhou,” the *Liezi* juxtaposes a Daoist utopia Gumang kingdom (literally “Ancient Rustic Kingdom”) with the Zhongyang kingdom (the Central Kingdom) and the Fuluo kingdom (the kingdom where the sun never sets) in a tripartite narrative structure.

The first kingdom, Gumanguo, is a kingdom of dreamers:

The Yin and Yang breaths do not meet there, so there is no distinction between cold and heat. The light of the sun and moon does not shine there, so there is no distinction between day and night. Its people do not eat or wear clothes and sleep

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<sup>44</sup> Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 191.

most of the time, waking once in fifty days. They think that what they do in dreams is real, and what they see waking is unreal. (Yan: 74; trans. Graham: 67)

The *Liezi* depicts this dreaming kingdom as a primitive yet peaceful realm, where “the Yin and Yang breaths do not meet” – the stage before myriad transformations begin and myriad things are born. This non-differentiable and non-distinguishable oneness is close to the Way. As Laozi says, states, “The Way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures.”<sup>45</sup> (The *Daodejing*, chapter 42) It is noteworthy that the Kingdom of Gumang sits in darkness, which coincides with Laozi’s political ideal:

Of old those who excelled in the pursuit of the Way did not use it to enlighten the people but to hoodwink them. The reason why the people are difficult to govern is that they are too clever,

Hence to rule a state by cleverness will be to the detriment of the state; Not to rule a state by cleverness will be a boon to the state.

These two are models.

Always to know the models is known as mysterious virtue (玄德).

(The *Daodejing*, Chapter 65)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 195.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

The Chinese character “玄” also means “black” or “dark.” By placing the Kingdom of Gumang in darkness, the *Liezi* suggests that this is the kingdom of Enigmatic Virtue. The people there resemble the True Man in *Zhuangzi* and the people of Huaxu, who “do not know how to prefer themselves to others...do not know how to turn their faces to things or turn their backs,”<sup>47</sup> but only follow the Way.

The second kingdom, the Central Kingdom, located exactly in the boundary of China. “It goes North and South across the Yellow River, East and West over Mount Tai,” where “the *yin* and *yang* are truly proportioned...Darkness and light are rightly divided, so there is alternation of day and night” (Yan: 74; trans. Graham: 67). This is a kingdom of differentiation and distinctions: People there “wake and sleep in alternation, and think that what they do waking is real, and what they see in dreams is unreal” (Yan: 74; trans. Graham: 68). In the Central Kingdom, “myriad things thrive and multiply, there are many kinds of skill and talent, there are rulers and ministers, and manners and laws” (Yan: 74; trans. Graham: 67). The *Liezi* depicts the Central Kingdom as a Confucian state in a disapproving tone, “What they say and do is past telling and counting.” Since the Central Kingdom is governed by man-made rules rather than natural principles, it is farther from the Way.

The third kingdom, *Fuluoguo*, is a restless state full of contention and violence. Since the sun never sets there and the people are always awake, “its soil will not grow fine crops; its people...are hard and fierce, the strong oppress the weak, they honor the victor and do

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<sup>47</sup> See Yan: 28; trans. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 34.

not respect right...they are always awake and never sleep” (Yan: 74; trans. Graham: 68).

This sleepless kingdom symbolizing the counter-effect of extreme differentiations and divisions, which may turn to destroy human life and civilization.

In essence, the three kingdoms of Gumang, Zhongyang, and Fuluo imply the *Liezi*'s view of human history, which degenerates from the original Oneness, to civilized distinctions, and to oppression and violence. Written and re-edited in a chaotic time of disunity, the *Liezi* lodges a great dream of harmony in the dreaming Ancient Rustic Kingdom, which embodies the Daoist philosophical and political ideals of living and ruling in accordance with the Way. As illustrated in the Yellow Emperor's dream, the ultimate truth—the Way—cannot be explainable by common reasons nor reachable by human strength and thought, but by a dream journey of the spirit. The dreaming utopias of Huaxu and Gumang represent a great dream that embody social, political, religious and philosophical ideals of Daoism.

#### 4. The Guye Mountain 姑射山

The fairyland of Guye Mountain recorded in the chapter of “The Yellow Emperor” presents another ideal realm where dwells a Divine Man:

Upon the mountains there lives a Divine Man, who inhales the wind and drinks the dew, and does not eat the five grains. His mind is like a bottomless spring, his body is like a virgin's. He knows neither intimacy nor love, yet immortals and sages serve him as ministers. He inspires no awe, he is never angry, yet the eager and diligent act as his messengers. He is without kindness and bounty, but others have enough by themselves; he does not store and save, but he himself never lacks. The *yin* and *yang* are always in tune, the sun and moon always shine, the four seasons are always regular, wind and rain are always temperate, breeding is always timely, the harvest is always rich, and there are no plagues to ravage the land, no early deaths to afflict men, animals have no diseases, and ghosts have no uncanny echoes. (Yan: 29; trans. Graham: 35)

A similar passage of the Guye Mountain is seen in the *Zhuangzi*, but the *Liezi*'s description of the Guye Divine Man emphasizes more on political implications. In addition to the description of the Divine Man's features, *Liezi*'s account elaborates on his political relationship with immortals, sages, and other people. According to the *Liezi*'s account, this Divine Man "knows neither intimacy nor love, yet immortals and sages serve him as ministers. He inspires no awe, he is never angry, yet the eager and diligent act as his

messengers”.<sup>48</sup> Comparing the account of the Guye Divine Man in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*, we find that the *Zhuangzi*’s passage is rather short and idealistic:

[T]here is a Holy Man living on faraway Guye Mountain, with skin like ice or snow, and gentle and shy like a young girl. He doesn’t eat the five grains, but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the four seas. By concentrating his spirit, he can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful.<sup>49</sup>

Compared to the *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi* presents the Divine Man not only as a delicate fairy but as a capable ruler who can make “immortals and sages serve him as ministers” and “the eager and diligent act as his messengers.” He represents the Daoist sage ruler who, without being coercive nor interfering, enables the people prosper by themselves. As recorded in the Laozi,

Hence the sage says,

I take no action and the people are transformed of themselves;

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>49</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 33.

I prefer stillness and the people are rectified of themselves;

I am not meddlesome and the people prosper of themselves;

I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block.

(The *Daodejing*, chapter 57).<sup>50</sup>

To sum up, the Divine Man of the Guye Mountain in the *Liezi* represents the Daoist ideal ruler, who is empty of desires, non-coercive, non-interfering, yet he is able to rule with the wisdom of non-action. Moreover, the *Liezi*'s ideal ruler rules in accordance with the way of nature, that is, the principles of yin and yang. Therefore, under his rule, "the *yin* and *yang* are always in tune, the sun and moon always shine, the four seasons are always regular...the harvest is always rich, and there are no plagues to ravage the land." This passage signifies the *Liezi*'s incorporation of the Yin Yang school of the Warring States period and the idea of correspondence between man and heaven which was prevalent during the Han dynasty. Furthermore, compared to the idealistic *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi* shows overtones of political pragmatism, which can be traced to the Huang-Lao tradition that incorporates Daoist, Legalist, and Confucian political philosophies.

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<sup>50</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 118.

## II. The *Liezi*'s Synthesis of Confucian and Legalist Pragmaticism

Irrespective of its admiration for the Daoist ideal of ruling by non-action and non-intervention, the *Liezi* recognizes Confucianism and Legalism as practical means to rule. Unlike pre-Qin Daoist thinkers such as Laozi and Zhuangzi, who took the stand against Confucian and Legalist views, the *Liezi* incorporates Confucian and Legalist pragmaticism into the mainstay of Daoist thought, thus witnessing the convergence of Daoism, Confucianism and Legalism during the Six Dynasties. The *Liezi*'s syncretic political ideas can be summarized as follows:

### 1. The Ruler's Strategic Manipulation of the People

The well-known parable of “three in the morning and four in the evening” 朝三暮四 is seen both in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*. While the *Zhuangzi* uses this parable to explain the difference between words and reality,<sup>51</sup> the *Liezi* uses it to illustrate the way to rule.

There was a keeper of monkeys in Sung who loved monkeys so much that he reared flocks of them. He could interpret the monkey's thoughts, and the monkeys too caught what was in his mind. He made his own family go short in order to give the monkeys whatever they wanted. Before long he found

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<sup>51</sup> Different from the *Liezi*, the *Zhuangzi*'s parable of “three in the morning” is told in the first person narrative and the narrative is mixed with philosophical discourses. The *Zhuangzi* uses parable to illustrate the idea that “there was no change in the reality behind the words.” See *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson, 41.

himself in need, and decided to give them less to eat. Fearing that the monkeys would not submit to it tamely, he played a trick on them beforehand:

“If I give you three chestnuts in the morning and four in the evening, will that be enough?”

The monkeys all got up in a rage,

“Will it be enough if I give you four in the morning and three in the evening?”

The monkeys were all pleased and lay down again. (Yan: 49; trans. Graham: 55-56)

The *Liezi* tells the moral of this parable in the end: “The sage by his wisdom gets all the fools into his cage, just as the keeper did to the monkeys.” The statecraft of keeping people ignorant is first proposed by the Daoist patriarch Laozi and later adopted by the Legalist thinker Hanfeizi. As Laozi says, “Of old those who excelled in the pursuit of the way did not use it to enlighten the people but to hoodwink them. The reason why the people are difficult to govern is that they are too clever” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 65).<sup>52</sup> The monkey-keeper parable can be read in the light of Chad Hansen’s comments on Laozi’s way of governance, “The ruler keeps people ignorant, empties their minds and fills their stomach,

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<sup>52</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 127.

does not try to make them clear and enlightened but stupid and simple.”<sup>53</sup> The legalist thinker Hanfeizi picks up Laozi’s idea and elaborates it into an obscurantist policy that works for the benefit of the ruler. Although the monkey keeper in the *Liezi* fools the monkeys by a manipulative strategy, he is out of good intention to feed them. Likewise, the ruler can use wise strategies to keep the people in order and to work for the goodness of the people.

## 2. Meritocracy and Moral Education

The *Liezi* also adopts Confucian ideas of meritocracy and moral education as seen from a discussion on the policy concerning robbery:

The state of Jin was infested with robbers. There was a certain Xi Yong who could read a man’s face, and recognize him as a robber by scrutinizing the space between his eyebrows and eyelashes. The Marquis of Jin sent him to identify robbers; he did not miss one in a hundred or a thousand. The Marquis was delighted and told Zhao Wenzhi:

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<sup>53</sup> Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 225. It is noteworthy that “being stupid and simple” is a Daoist paradox which sounds negative but is actually positive. As Laozi says, “My mind in that of a fool-how blank!” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 20)

“By discovering this one man I have made an end of robbery throughout the country. Why should we need anyone else?”

“My lord will never get rid of robbers if he relies on an inspector to catch them. I would add that Xi Yong certainly will not die a natural death.”

Immediately afterwards the robber bands plotted together, saying: “The man who has brought us to this pass is Xi Yong.” Then they joined forces to waylay him, and murdered him. The Marquis of Jin was very startled at the news, and at once called Wenzhi:

“It has turned out as you said, Xi Yong is dead. But how are we going to catch the robbers?”

“There is a proverb of Zhou: ‘Scrutiny which reveals the fish in a pool is unlucky. The wisdom which guesses secrets is fatal.’ If you wish to be done with robbers, your best course is to appoint worthy men to office, and let them enlighten those above them and reform those below them. If the people have a sense of shame, why should they become robbers?”

Then the Marquis made Sui Hui chief minister, and the robber bands fled to Qin. (Yan: 207; trans. Graham: 164-165)

As seen from the parable, the *Liezi* seems to agree to Confucius’ ideas of meritocracy and governance by moral education. The way to eliminate robbers, according to the wise man

Zhao Wenzhi, is not to catch and kill the robbers, but to reform the robbers to become people who have a sense of shame. As Confucius says, "Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments and the common people will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves" (*The Analects*, Book 2 Chapter III).<sup>54</sup> To carry out the reform project, the ruler has to appoint virtuous and capable men to office, who can educate and reform the people. Here the *Liezi* seems to agree to Confucian political ideas.

### 3. Ruler's Self-Cultivation

The *Liezi* records a dialogue between the King of Chu and his wise counselor Zhan He. The king asks how to put his kingdom in order, but Zhan He avoids talking about state affairs but says, "Your servant understands how to put one's own life in order, but not the state." When the king presses to learn more from him, Zhan He says,

Your servant has never heard of a prince whose own life was in order yet his state in turmoil, nor of any whose life was in turmoil but his state in order.

Therefore the root lies in your government of yourself; I would not presume to answer you by talking of the tips of the branches. (Yan: 212; trans. Graham:

170-171)

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<sup>54</sup> *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1992), 11.

In other words, to govern a kingdom, the ruler has to be able to govern himself first; hence, the root of governance lies in governance of oneself. As Confucius says, “The gentleman devotes his efforts to the roots, for once the roots are established, the Way will grow therefrom.” (*The Analects*, Book 1 Chapter II).<sup>55</sup> The idea of self-cultivation as the root of government is more clearly stated in the Confucian classic, *The Great Learning*:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was

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<sup>55</sup> *The Analects*, 3.

made tranquil and happy. From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides. It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered. It never has been the case that what was of great importance has been slightly cared for, and, at the same time, that what was of slight importance has been greatly cared for. (*The Great Learning*, section 2)<sup>56</sup>

As seen from the above passages, the *Liezi*'s advice for a ruler agrees with the Confucian idea of the moral cultivation of the ruler himself.

#### 4. Lessening of Desires

The following dialogue between Liezi and his contemporary man Yan Hui presents the Liezi's incorporation of Confucianism and the Huang-Lao Daoism. The Confucian moral ideal of righteousness 義<sup>57</sup> and the Huang-Dao political idea of reducing desires on the ruler's part are both stressed in this parable.

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<sup>56</sup> *The Four Books: The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, Confucian Analects, and the Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge (Taipei: Culture Book Company, 1970), 4-8.

<sup>57</sup> The word *yi* 義 is used to define what is right and what ought to be done. Graham translates the word *yi* 義 as "honor" in the dialogue between Yan Hui and Liezi,

Yen Hui said to Liezi, “The reason for inquiring about the Way is to get rich. I might get rich by finding a pearl, and then why should I need the Way?”

“Jie and Zhou gave weight to nothing but their own interests and neglected the Way; that is why they perished. How lucky that I have the chance to tell you in time! ‘Men, yet devoid of honor (義), living for food and nothing else—such are no better than chickens and dogs. They lock their horns fighting for food, and the victor makes the rules—such are no better than the wild beasts and birds.’ If you are as lazy as a chicken or dog, or as savage as a wild beast or bird, you cannot expect other men to respect you. If others do not respect you, danger and disgrace will befall you.” (Yan: 204; trans. Graham: 159-160)

In the parable, Liezi uses the example of Jie and Zhou, two notorious tyrants of the ancient Xia and Shang dynasties, to argue that rulers should not pursue their own interests and richness, nor should they rule force; otherwise, they will lose the people’s respect and disgrace will come upon them. As Liezi says, Jie and Zhou perished because they “gave weight to nothing but their own interests and neglected the Way” The Way, concretely speaking in political terms, requires the rulers to reduce their desires and to avoid the use of

force.<sup>58</sup> Hence Liezi says, “If you are as lazy as a chicken or dog, or as savage as a wild beast or bird, you cannot expect other men to respect you. If others do not respect you, danger and disgrace will befall you.” The argument here is *not* that humans are more virtuous than lazy chicken or savage beasts; rather, this passage is to criticize those who are insatiable for material desires, and for their desires, grab the material goods by force. Here the Daoist self-cultivation of desire control is crucial not only for rulers, but is also meaningful and significant to the way humans act toward nature. As Laozi says, “There is no crime greater than having too many desires; there is no disaster greater than not being content; there is no misfortune greater than being covetous.” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 46).<sup>59</sup> Therefore, danger and disgrace will befall rulers who are lazy and ruthless; likewise, destruction will also come upon mankind who violently exploits nature.

##### 5. Being Circumspect in Political Matters

In political matters, the *Liezi* in many parables teaches people to discard fixed standards and suit measures to the changing circumstance. The pragmatic political view echoes the Legalist Hanfeizi’s idea that “the sage does not try to practice the ways of antiquity or to abide by a fixed standard, but examines the affairs of the age and takes what precautions are

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<sup>58</sup> In Daoism, “virtue” does not refer to humanness or righteousness; “virtue” means desire control especially on the ruler’s part. See Zhongjian Mou and others, eds, *Daojiao Tonglun—jianlun Daojia xueshuo* 《道教通論—兼論道家學說》 (General Theory of Religious Daoism—In Comparison with Philosophical Daoism), (Jinan: Qilu chubanshe, 1991), 287.

<sup>59</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 107.

necessary” (*Hanfeizi*, section 49).<sup>60</sup> It is also stated by the legalist Shang Yang that “rites and laws were fixed in accordance with what was opportune, regulations and orders were all expedient” (*The Book of Lord Shang*, Chapter 1 Paragraph 1).<sup>61</sup> The idea of being circumspect in political matters is illustrated by the *Liezi*’s parable of Mr. Shi and Mr. Meng.

Mr. Shi of Lu had two sons; one loved learning, the other loved war. The former presented himself as a teacher to the Marquis of Qi, who admitted him to the court as tutor to his sons. The latter went to Chu, and presented himself as a strategist to the King, who was pleased with him and put him in command of the army. The two men’s salaries enriched the family and their rank brought honor to their parents.

Mr. Shi’s neighbor Mr. Meng also had two sons, trained in the same two professions, but he was miserably poor. Envyng the wealth of Mr. Shi, he asked him by what method his family had risen in the world so fast; and Mr. Shi’s two sons told him what they had done.

Then one of Mr. Meng’s sons went to Qin, and presented himself as a teacher to the King of Qin. The King said:

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<sup>60</sup> *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 96-97.

<sup>61</sup> *The Book of Lord Shang*, trans. J.J.L. Duyvendak (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 172.

“At present the princes of the states are in violent contention, and are occupied solely with arming and feeding their troops. If I rule my state in accordance with moral teaching, this will be the Way to ruin and extinction.”

So he castrated the man and banished him.

The other son went to Wei, and presented himself as a strategist to the Marquis of Wei. The Marquis said:

“Mine is a weak state, situated between big states. Bigger states I serve, smaller states I protect; this is the Way to seek safety. If I rely on military force, ruin and extinction will be a question of hours. But if I let this man leave unharmed, he will go to another state and cause me serious trouble.”

So he cut off the man’s feet and sent him back to Lu. (Yan: 205-206; trans. Graham: 162-164)

The reason why Mr. Meng’s sons fail whereas Mr. Shi’s sons are successful lies in how they judge the external situations. During the Warring States period, each state has its own preference and weakness. The state of Qi sponsors most scholars and counselors, so Mr. Shi sends his learned son to Qi to be a tutor in the court. The state of Chu is in need of military strategists, so it is a good fit for the son who loved war. Mr. Meng also has two sons, trained in the same two professions like Mr. Shi’s. However, Mr. Meng acts against the circumstances of the time. He sends his learned son to Qin, a militant state where a scholar

is useless and despised; and sends the son who loves war to Wei, a weak and small state who tried to avoid wars. As a result, his sons are banished from the two kingdoms. The moral of the parable is “to pick times and snatch opportunities” (Yan: 206; trans. Graham: 163-164). As the *Liezi* points out, “In any case, nowhere is there a principle which is right in all circumstances, or an action that is wrong in all circumstances. The method we used yesterday we may discard today and use again in the future; there are no fixed right and wrong to decide whether we use it or not” (Yan: 206; trans. Graham: 163).

With no fixed standards, how should we decide how to act? The *Liezi* teaches us to act as “the shadow following the body”:

Liezi was studying under Huzi.

“When you know how to keep to the rear,” Huzi told him, “I can start teaching you how to behave.”

“Please tell me about how to behave.”

“Look round at your shadow, and you will understand.”

Liezi looked round and watched his shadow. When his figure bent his shadow was crooked, when his figure stood upright his shadow was straight.

So whether to bend or stand upright rests with the figure and not with the shadow; and whether we should be active or passive meant by “staying at the front by keeping to the rear.” (Yan: 203; trans. Graham: 158)

Huzi teaches Liezi to follow the external situation as closely as the shadow follows the body. When the body bends, the shadow bends; when the body stands upright, the shadow simultaneously stands straight. If we can perceive and follow the circumstance so precisely and quickly as the shadow follows the body, we will surely succeed. In essence, whether we should be active or passive depends on external circumstances and not on ourselves. Interpreting the parable of Mr. Shi and Mr. Meng from this perspective, we see that the sons of Mr. Shi succeed because they meet the needs of the countries they serve; in contrast, Mr. Meng's sons fail because they follow their own likings but do not observe and perceive their environments. Therefore, the *Liezi* speaks, "The sage knows what will go in by *seeing* what came out, knows what is coming by *observing* what has passed. This is the principle by which he knows in advance" (Yan: 203; trans. Graham: 159). The *Liezi* thus presents the Neo-Daoist political thought during the Six Dynasties, which emphasizes observing ever-changing circumstances and taking suitable measures to particular situations. The principle of being observant and circumspect, if applied to environmental policies, suggests that we should not only focus on human interests, but should pay more attention and consideration on our environment. Hence The *Liezi*'s may offer a counterpoint to anthropocentrism in dealing with our relations with the environment.

### III. The *Liezi*'s Implication to Environmental Policy

When applied to environmental policies, the *Liezi* suggests that human policies should be carefully examined in respect of their impacts on the natural environment. For example, a parable in the *Liezi* discusses and evaluates a policy concerning releasing wild life back to nature:

The people of Handan presented doves to Zhao Jianzi on New Year morning. He was delighted and richly rewarded them. When a visitor asked the reason, Jianzi explained:

“We release living things on New Year’s Day as a gesture of kindness.”

“The People know you wish to release them, so they vie with each other to catch them, and many of the doves die. If you wish to keep them alive, it would be better to forbid the people to catch them. When you release doves after catching them, the kindness does not make up for the mistake.

“You are right,” said Jianzi. (Yan: 218; trans. Graham: 178)

In this parable, Zhao Jianzi is a ruler who believes in Buddhism. Out of kindness, he promotes the Buddhist ritual of “releasing lives back to nature” (放生) which causes unexpected consequences. Knowing that the ruler wants to perform the Buddhist ritual, the people rush to catch birds, resulting in many deaths of the birds. As seen from the *Liezi*'s

discussion of Zhan Jianzi's policy, the *Liezi* not only takes a pro-life stand, but also recognizes the devastating impacts of human behaviors and policies on wild life. Seeing the devastating results of man's policies, the *Liezi* suggests people to treat lives *not* according to human's kindness, but according to the way of nature. As Laozi says, "Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs." (The *Daodejing*, chapter 5)<sup>62</sup> Zhuangzi also says, "Great Benevolence is not benevolent;" "Perfect benevolence knows no affection."<sup>63</sup> Heaven and earth are 'ruthless' not because they do not support lives, but heaven and earth do not support lives by human's way. Thereby, the Chinese word *buren*, literally "inhumane", should be understood as an anti-anthropocentric view of nature. Nature treats the myriad creatures as "straw dogs," which are objects used in ancient rituals and discarded as soon as they had served their purpose. Like the straw dogs, myriad creatures are transient in nature. Heaven and earth do not hold the creatures back from the natural course of life and death, thus maintaining the state of equilibrium.

In conclusion, although the *Liezi*'s political thought synthesizes various theories of Confucianism, Legalism, the Yin-Yang school, and the Huang-Lao school, its most basic principle and ultimate goal remains the Daoist ideal of governing by non-action. It is noteworthy, however, that "non-action" does not mean doing nothing literally. In fact, the Daoist idea of non-action, or non-interference when applied to environmental policy,

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<sup>62</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 61.

<sup>63</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 44, 155.

requires humans to attentively observe, understand, and follow the way nature works. Only when people act according to what is opportune and expedient can they live and prosper together with all beings in nature.

## CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter summarizes the *Liezi*'s idea of nature in the four aspects of the *Liezi*'s holistic cosmology, egalitarian view of life, mythical approaches to union with nature, and the *Liezi*'s implication to environmental policy. The main points are organized in comparison with several key concepts in contemporary environmental thought, so to evaluate the *Liezi*'s potential contributions to the thinking of our time. Contemporary environmental thought can be categorized into three groups: anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism (ecological holism)<sup>1</sup>, among which ecocentrism is the most radical one.<sup>2</sup> My examination of the *Liezi*'s idea of nature finds that the *Liezi* especially resonates with the main principles of Deep Ecology, one of the most radical branches of ecological thought which examines environmental issues from philosophical and religious perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Hence the concluding chapter of this dissertation summarizes the key points and spirit of the *Liezi*'s idea of nature in comparison with the basic principles of Deep Ecology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffery Olen and Vincent Barry, *Applying Ethics: A Text with Readings*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2002), 501-503.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Devall, "Deep Ecology and Radical Environmentalism," in *Reflecting on Nature: Readings in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Lori Gruen and Dale Jamieson (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1994), 115-120.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase "Deep Ecology" was coined by the Norwegian philosopher and environmental activist Arne Naess (1912-2009). Deep Ecology is considered as one of the most radical branch of environmental thought which seeks to examine environmental issues from philosophical and religious perspectives.

<sup>4</sup> The basic principles of Deep Ecology were proposed by its representative figures Arne Naess and George Sessions in 1984 during the advent of spring and John Muir's birthday. Naess and Sessions summarized fifteen years of thinking while camping in Death Valley, California.

## I. Concept of Inherent Value

The first basic principle of Deep Ecology states, “The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.”<sup>5</sup> This principle defines the so-called “intrinsic value” or “inherent value” as values that are independent of the usefulness for human purposes. The recognition of non-human beings’ intrinsic value sets apart anthropocentric environmentalism from the other two schools of thought—biocentrism and ecocentrism—since the former does not believe that non-human objects have values if not used or attributed by human, since they are still values created by human valuers;<sup>6</sup> whereas the later two think that all beings in nature have their values irrespective of human interests or purposes.

Biocentrists reason the concept of “inherent value” in the following terms: Paul Taylor proposes that any being that strives to remain alive, grow, and reproduce has “a good of its own” because each is a teleological center of life trying “to realize its own good in its own unique way.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, all living things, whether plants or animals, are “teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unified system of goal-oriented activities directed

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1985), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Details of the debates between anthropocentrists and non-anthropocentrists on the meanings of intrinsic value and instrumental value can be seen from Hargrove, *Foundations of Environmental Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 125.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Taylor, “The Ethics of Respect for Nature,” in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, eds. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84, 94.

toward their preservation and well-being.”<sup>8</sup> Tom Regan also argues that every subject of life has “inherent value.” That is to say that it has value of its own, and irrespective of anyone else’s purposes, interests, needs and so forth.<sup>9</sup>

The *Liezi* recognizes the intrinsic or inherent value as proposed by biocentric thinkers. In the parable of the debate between a child and a rich man who hosts a banquet, the *Liezi* presents the contending views between anthropocentrism and biocentrism, concerning whether animals are made to be the food of mankind. The rich host, who holds anthropocentric view, says, “How generous heaven is to mankind! It grows the five grains and breeds the fish and birds for the use of man.” His guests all answer like his echo echoes except a child, who challenges his view with a rhetorical question: “Mosquitoes and gnats bite our skin, tigers and wolves eat our flesh; did heaven originally breed man for the sake of mosquitoes and gnats, and his flesh for the sake of tigers and wolves?” (Yan: 218; trans. Graham: 178-179) In this sense, the *Liezi* agrees with what the animal rights thinker Peter Singer advocates that each entity has a good of its own, and that it is “speciesist” to think that human interests are more important than animals’ interests.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, tigers and wolves have a good of their own to live and grow; mosquitoes also have a good of their own to flourish so heaven allows mosquitoes to bite humans. As the *Liezi* points, the myriad

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>9</sup> “Environmental Sustainability: Scientific and Ethical Perspectives” Course handout by Professor Robert McKim at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in Spring 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” in *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, eds. David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17-27.

things between heaven and earth are neither nobler than another, nor are not they bred for others' sake.

The *Liezi* resonates with Paul Taylor's idea of biocentric egalitarianism that humans are not superior to other living things; however, the *Liezi* takes a pragmatic standpoint and does not object to eating meat. As stated in parables concerning human and animals, the *Liezi* recognizes the fact that "things take in turns to eat each other" (Yan: 218; trans. Graham: 178), and that "they (wild beasts and birds) lock their horns fighting for food" (Yan: 204; trans. Graham: 160). Moreover, unlike some biocentrists who argues for "equal treatment" for all living beings, the *Liezi* recognizes human's uniqueness in comparison to other animals. In the "Yang Zhu" chapter of the *Liezi* it is said,

Man resembles the other species between heaven and earth, and like them owes his nature to the Five Elements. He is the most intelligent of living things. But in man, nails and teeth are not strong enough to provide defense, skin and flesh are too soft for protection; he cannot run fast enough to escape danger, and he lacks fur and feathers to ward off heat and cold. He must depend on other things in order to tend his nature, must trust in knowledge and not rely on force. (Yan: 186; trans. Graham: 153)

The *Liezi* recognizes both the superior intelligence and weak physical strength of human compared to other animals. Since human is physically weak, he has to rely on intelligence rather than force in order to survive. In other words, the *Liezi* permits human to use the fur of beasts to ward off cold, the leather to protect his soft skin, wood to build shelters, and metals to make tools. But all these are for the vital needs of survival, not for attacking others. As the *Liezi* states, “The most valuable use of knowledge is for self-preservation, while the most ignoble use of force is to attack others” (Yan: 186-187; trans. Graham: 153). Therefore, the *Liezi*’s recognition of human’s superior intelligence does not lead to an anthropocentric or utilitarian view of nature. On the contrary, Yang Zhu stresses human’s dependence on nature and approves human’s access to natural resources only for survival or vital needs.

## II. Principle of Vital Needs

The *Liezi* agrees with the principle of “vital needs” as defined by Deep Ecology: Humans have no right to reduce the richness and diversity of life forms except to satisfy vital needs.<sup>11</sup> As stated in parables concerning human and animals, the *Liezi* recognizes the fact that “things take in turns to eat each other,” and that “they (wild beasts and birds) lock their horns fighting for food” (Yan: 218, 204; trans. Graham: 178, 160). Such recognition,

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<sup>11</sup> Deep Ecology basic principle 3. See Bill Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 70.

nevertheless, does not lead to validation of a sybaritic and sensualist lifestyle which indulges man's appetites and other carnal desires.

The *Liezi* permits human's access to natural resources in order to maintain life or to satisfy their vital needs. As illustrated in the widely known parable "Mister Simple who Moves the Mountains," Mister Simple works day and night trying to remove two great mountains which block the way and make the villagers come and go a long way round. His effort gains the favor of gods, who help him move the mountains away. As seen from this parable, although Mister Simple tries to change natural landscape, he is not blamed because his action is to facilitate the vital needs of people.

In another parable "the great thief," the thief is not punished because he gets rich from "the true Way of stealing." As he says,

I rob heaven and earth of their seasonal benefits, the clouds and rains of their irrigating floods, the mountains and marshes of their products, in order to grow my crops, plant my seed, raise my walls, build my house. I steal birds and animals from the land, fish and turtles from the water. All this is stealing; for crops and seed, clay and wood, birds and animals, fish and turtles, are all begotten by heaven, and how can they become my possessions? (Yan: 16; trans. Graham: 30)

It is noteworthy that he calls all his utilization of nature “stealing”—which defines a concept of “possession” that challenge our ideas of property laws. In his view, all things in nature belong to heaven, not humans. It is heaven’s mercy and generosity to let humans use natural resources without being accused of robbery. This parable reveals an attitude of humility and gratitude toward heaven and nature, which teaches people to live simple and frugal life. Hence all the the great thief steals are for his basic needs and survival, such as crops for food and wood for lodging, but nothing for extravagant luxuries. As Laozi says, “Hence the sage is for the belly, not for the eyes.” (The *Daodejing*, chapter 12)<sup>12</sup> To sum up, Daoist thinkers not only recognize humans’ vital needs as to eat meat or use natural resources, but also set a limit on human greed and teach a frugal way of life.

### III. Ideological Challenge against Materialistic View

In resonance with Daoist ethics of frugality, the seventh principle of Deep Ecology says, “The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living.”<sup>13</sup> This ideological change from pursuing better material life to appreciating nature’s inherent value completely reverses what people think is good and valuable since

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<sup>12</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), 68.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 70.

the scientific and industrial revolutions.<sup>14</sup> The modern view of nature, which sees nature not as a living organism but as a lifeless machine—composed of material objects and bound into service for mankind—leads to man’s exploitation of nature. Seeing the devastating result of the materialistic worldview, Deep Ecology advocates a return to an organic view of nature, which echoes the ancient wisdom of Daoism.

Daoism provides a sound theoretical foundation for an organic worldview, which is based on the theory of *qi*. In Daoist cosmology, *qi* refers to the common medium that constitutes heaven and earth: Heaven consists of the *yang qi*, which is light and pure; whereas earth is formed by the *yin qi*, which is heavy and muddy. These two types of *qi* are not static, but dynamically interact and incorporate with each other, thus giving rise to all beings between heaven and earth. Different forms of lives, based on their common endowment of *qi*, are all interrelated in a chain of metamorphoses. Life begins from the gathering of *qi* and ends in disperse of *qi*. As the dispersed *qi* gathers again, new life is born. Daoism thus presents a holistic and organic worldview which dissolves the boundaries and categorizations of human, animals, plants, and matters.

The Daoist theory of *qi* explains the interconnectiveness of all beings in nature, which may well support the ecocentrist thinker Holmes Rolston’s idea of “systemic value,” which refers to the value of each individual being in terms of its contribution to or instrumental

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<sup>14</sup> See Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 65-89.

relationship with the entire ecosystem.<sup>15</sup> With stress on the interconnectiveness of beings in nature, ecocentrism extends the individual being's intrinsic value to systemic value in a more comprehensive perspective.

The theory of *qi* also serves as the foundation for the Daoist ethics of life. Since all beings are all formed by the *qi* of the heaven and earth, humans, like other beings, owes their life to the creative power of heaven and earth. Therefore, it is wrongful for human to claim anything, including his body and life, to be his private possessions. In fact, it is the generosity of heaven and earth to allow human, as well as all other creatures, to sustain their lives with support from one another. As the *Liezi* says,

My body is not my possession; yet once born, I have no choice but to keep it intact. Other things are not my possessions; yet once I exist, I cannot dispense with them...Although I keep life and body intact, I cannot possess this body; although I may not dispense with things, I cannot possess these things. To possess these things, possess this body, would be violently to reserve for oneself body and things which belong to the world. (Yan: 187; trans. Graham: 153-154)

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<sup>15</sup> See Holmes Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 188.

The above passage radically challenges people's concept of ownership. In the *Liezi*'s view of ownership, one cannot claim anything—not only external things such as food, dress, houses, carriages, and means of entertainment, but also one's own body, life, and lives born out of oneself—to be one's possessions. As the *Liezi* says, “Your children and grandchildren are not your possessions; heaven and earth lend them to you to cast off from your body as an insect sheds its skin” (Yan: 15; trans. Grham: 29-30).

One may ask, “If my own body is not mine, whose is it?” The *Liezi* answers, “It is the shape lent to you by heaven and earth. Your life is not your possession; it is harmony between your forces, granted for a time by heaven and earth” (Yan: 15; trans. Graham: 29). The forces here refer to the vital breaths (*qi* 氣) of heaven and earth, which harmonize to give births to life. Humans, not different from other living things, are born out of *qi* and are incessantly transformed by the flux of *qi*. Hence the *Liezi* says, “You are the breath (*qi*) of heaven and earth which goes to and fro; how can you ever possess it?” (Yan: 15; trans. Graham: 30)

The *Liezi*'s idea of universal ownership leads to ethics of life, which teach humility, gratitude, love, and respect of nature. The *Liezi*'s ideal world is characterized by natural settings, primitive societies, and supernatural figures who are able to soar the wind, thread fire, live on the dew, and are unhindered by mist, clouds, thunder, mountains, and valleys—which signifies the ideal of oneness with nature. To be one with nature, humans have to be purged of greed and trickery, to be as pure-hearted as babes. As illustrated in the

parable of “a child who plays with seagulls,” the child is able to befriend the seagulls with a pure love, but once he harbors a scheme in his mind—a scheme to get hold of the seagulls and to master over them as playthings instead of playmates—the seagulls do not approach him any more.

The *Liezi* believes that at the beginning humans and nature are one, but greed and trickeries cause humans to fall from the original oneness. To return to the original union with nature, humans have to follow the Way that underlies all things in nature. With perfect faith and sincerity, humans can coexist and interact with other creatures in harmony. The notions of faith and sincerity involve the belief in the correspondence between humans and nature. This mystic belief is theorized by the Daoists with the concept of *qi*, which is the common medium of the myriad creatures in heaven and earth. The *Liezi* believes that when one’s body is in accord with the mind, the mind with the *qi*, the *qi* with the spirit, and the spirit will be united with the Way. The spirit refers to the miraculous function of the mind, which enables humans to be freed from their human bodies and to attain the communion with the Way. Humans who are united with the Way are also in harmony with the myriad things in nature. They are called the Highest Men who “walk underwater and do not suffocate, thread fire and does not burn, walk above the myriad things and does not tremble” (Yan: 31; trans. Graham: 37). This belief in harmony with nature is so prevalent in the sundry mythic accounts of humans’ communion with animals, inanimate things, and even natural forces such as the wind, the water, and the fire.

#### IV. The *Liezi*'s Implication to Environmental Policy

When applied to the area of environmental policy, the *Liezi* holds the principle of non-interference based on respect of nature, which agrees with Deep Ecology's basic principles five and six that "Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive...Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures."<sup>16</sup> Based on the ideology of humility toward and respect of nature, the *Liezi* holds a non-interference policy which can be seen from its criticism against the Buddhist ritual of *fangsheng*, literally "releasing life" as a gesture of human kindness. In the *Liezi*'s parable, a ruler was delighted in performing the *fangsheng* ritual; consequently the people vied with each other to catch wild lives to present to the ruler. The *Liezi* comments, "If you wish to keep them alive, it would be better to forbid the people to catch them. When you release doves after catching them, the kindness does not make up for the mistake" (Yan: 218; trans. Graham: 178). As seen from the *Liezi*'s view of the *fangsheng* policy, the *Liezi* not only takes a pro-life stand, but also cautions the devastating impacts of human behaviors and policies on wild life. Seeing the devastating results of human's excessive interference with nature, the *Liezi* suggests that people treat lives *not* according to human's kindness, but according to the way of nature. As Laozi says, "Heaven and earth are ruthless (*buren* 不仁), and treat the myriad creatures as straw

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<sup>16</sup> Bill Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 70.

dogs.”<sup>17</sup> (The *Daodejing*, chapter 5) Heaven and earth are “ruthless” not because they do not support lives, but they do not support them by human’s way. As Zhuangzi says, “Great Benevolence is not benevolent (大仁不仁).”<sup>18</sup> Nature treats the myriad creatures as “straw dogs,” which are objects used in ancient rituals and discarded as soon as they had served their purpose. Like the straw dogs, myriad creatures are transient in nature. Therefore, heaven and earth do not hold the creatures back from the natural course of life and death, so to achieve equilibrium. Hence the *Liezi* says, “To live and die at the right time is a blessing from heaven...It is neither other things nor ourselves that give us life when we live and death when we die; both are destined” (Yan: 157; trans. Graham: 127).

## V. Conclusion: Following the Way of Nature

To have a proper view of life and death, and to live an ethical life in harmony with nature, human should know and follow the Way of nature. As the *Liezi* says,

“Inscrutably, in endless sequence,

They come to pass of themselves by the Way of Heaven.

Indifferently, the unbroken circle

Turns of itself by the Way of Heaven.” (Yan: 157; trans. Graham: 127)

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<sup>17</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 44.

According to Yan Beiming and Yan Jie's annotation, the Way of Heaven is the Way of Nature,<sup>19</sup> by which all lives begin and end in an unbroken and endless circle. The profound thought can be best illustrated by the well-known myth of "Kuafu racing the sun" as recorded in the *Liezi*,

Kuafu, rating his strength too high, wanted to chase the day-light, and pursued it to the brink of the Yu valley. He was thirsty and wished to drink, and hurried to drink the Yellow River and the Wei. The Yellow River and the Wei did not quench his thirst, and he ran North intending to drink the Great Marsh, but died of thirst on the road before he reached it. The staff which he dropped soaked up the fat and flesh of his corpse and grew into Teng forest. Teng forest spread until it covered several thousand miles. (Yan: 121; trans. Graham: 101)

Kaufu is such a giant that he almost catches the sun. But he fails and dies of thirst because he overrated his own strength. After his death, Kuafu returns to the earth as his flesh and fat are soaked by his staff, which grows into a vast forest covering thousands of miles. His

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<sup>19</sup> Yan Beiming and Yan Jie, *Liezi yizhu* 列子譯注 (Translation of and Annotations on the *Liezi*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 157.

magical metamorphosis into a grove of trees signifies the unbroken and endless cycle of life and death in nature.

The *Liezi* places the myth of “Kuafu racing the sun” immediately after the parable of “Mister Simple who moves the mountains” as a contrast. Mister Simple tries to move the mountains for the vital needs of his people, so he gains favor from gods in heaven who fulfill his wish. What underlies the parable of Mister Simple is the sense of humans’ humbleness and heaven’s grace. In contrast, Kuafu the giant races the sun not for his vital needs, but for boasting his strength against heaven. Overrating his own strength, Kuafu dies of thirst in the middle of the way. He fails because he does not recognize his position as a human, and disobey the destined Way of nature. Even though he tries to go against the Way of nature, when he dies he cannot but return to nature. His body returns to the earth and gives rise to into other forms of life, following the indomitable Way of nature. As a common Chinese saying goes, “One who follows heaven prospers; one who goes against heaven is doomed.” Facing increasingly destructive natural disasters in our age, the *Liezi*’s portraits of Mister Simple and Kuafu give us profound warning as well as much food for thought.

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