

A DREAM OF THE SELF: IDENTITY IN THE “INNER CHAPTERS” OF THE ZHUANGZI

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Abstract

This article examines self and identity in the “Inner Chapters” (*neipian* 內篇) of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. Previous scholarship on this topic has tended to support its arguments by defining the “Way” (*dao* 道) as either a normative order or an objective reality. By contrast, this article argues that the Way is a neutral designation for the composite, ever-changing patterns of the cosmos that does not provide normative guidance.

Within this cosmos, the human “self” (*shen* 身) is likewise defined as a composite, mutable entity that displays “tendencies” (*qing* 情) of behavior and thought. Two of these tendencies include the positing of unitary agents and the creation of “identities” (*ming* 名)—imaginative constructs used for self-definition. As a result of combining and reifying the two tendencies, most humans conflate their identities with their larger selves. The result is a simplified vision of an essential self that gives rise to normative judgements, blinds humans to the changing cosmos, and creates problematic social structures.

The text advocates that one should retrain the tendency toward identity by cultivating an inviolate “sense of self” or “virtue” (*de* 德) that is empty of specific identity. Virtue acts as an emotionally safe space in which the mirror-like mind can temporarily take on the identities of other creatures. This practice increases practitioners’ empathetic understanding of the world, detaches them from destructive social structures, and has the potential to generate new versions of human society.

Introduction

The idea of the “self” is a key element of the “Inner Chapters” (*neipian* 內篇) of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and it has generated a great deal of debate

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in the secondary literature.¹ That debate has focused on questions such as, What is the relationship between the self and the Way? How should one approach the self within the context of the work's philosophical program? And, What is the ontological position of the self within the text's cosmology? In broad terms, many of the scholars within that debate can be divided into two camps: those who argue that the text advocates the idea of a "true self" and those who contend that it holds a "no self" position.

The tenacity of this debate is due, at least in part, to ambiguous passages in the text that can be read as supporting either of the above positions. For example, in the opening of the "Qiwulun" 齊物論, the character Nanguo Ziqi 南郭子綦 states: "I lost myself" (*wu sang wo* 吾喪我).² This enigmatic line has been used to support both "true self" and "no self" interpretations.

An especially nuanced example of the former interpretation is that of Edward Slingerland.³ Slingerland argues that the line is a metaphorical description of how one must strip away "everything extraneous to the

1. The *Zhuangzi* is traditionally divided into three sections: the "Inner Chapters," the "Outer Chapters" (*waipian* 外篇, chapters eight to twenty-two), and the "Miscellaneous Chapters" (*zapan* 雜篇, chapters twenty-three to thirty-three). Presumably this division was the work of the commentator Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312 C.E.), but it may also predate his exegesis. More recently, scholars such as A. C. Graham and Liu Xiaogan have suggested further subdivisions to delineate different intellectual strands within the compilation of the *Zhuangzi*. This article discusses only the "Inner Chapters" and argues that, though they may not be written by the same author or even at exactly the same time, the received version of these seven chapters demonstrates a coherent, self-contained argument. For helpful discussions of the *Zhuangzi*'s textual history, including possible subdivisions, see A. C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzu* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981); and Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994).

2. *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961; rep. Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008), 45. All citations refer to this edition and all translations are my own. However, I have benefited greatly from the following: Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) and Graham, *Chuang-tzu: Seven Inner Chapters*.

3. For other scholars who favor the "true self" interpretation, see Lao Siguang 勞思光, *Xinbian Zhongguo zhexueshi* 新編中國哲學史 (Taipei: Sanmin, 1981); Wu Yi 吳怡, *Xiaoyao de Zhuangzi* 逍遙的莊子 (Taipei: Dongda tushu, 1984); Wu Kuang-ming, *The Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); and Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Zhuangzi's Conversion Experience," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 19.1 (1991), 13–25. Chris Jochim also provides a helpful survey of some studies related to the ideas of "true self" and "no self" within the *Zhuangzi*. See Chris Jochim, "Just Say No to 'No Self' in *Zhuangzi*," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 35–74.

true self—from social values to personal greed.”⁴ According to Slingerland, “purging ... the false instantiations of the self” is what enables a person to uncover and manifest the natural “true self” that is consistently associated with Heaven.⁵

For a fascinating example of the “no self” interpretation, we might turn to David Loy.⁶ Loy argues that the line is one of many instances in the text that “emphasize or presuppose the need to get beyond the self” based on the *Zhuangzi*’s underlying denial of “the ontological self.”⁷ For Loy, the “ontological self” refers to an unchanging essence that defines an entity as a discrete thing. He suggests that a key part of the text’s argument is the claim that humans possess a “sense-of-self” that they are driven to “stabilize” into a discrete identity that is separate from the fluctuations of the cosmos. Sadly, that need “can never be fulfilled” because “the self is indeed illusory.” Therefore, the proper action of human beings is to rid themselves of the illusion of self altogether.⁸

Despite the differences between Slingerland and Loy’s positions, they both rely on the shared claim that the text presents the “Way” (*dao* 道) as a source of normative guidance, either because it refers to the natural world, to objective reality, or to both.

Thus, Slingerland argues that the “true self” possesses a “normative quality” because of its “connection to the Heaven and the Way.”⁹

4. Edward G. Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 186. In emphasizing the metaphorical dimensions of this line, Slingerland is careful to distinguish his argument from the more metaphysical arguments of scholars like Wu Kuang-ming, which postulate different types of selves. For a full discussion of this point, see *ibid.* 184 n. 29. For a representative example of the metaphysical arguments themselves see Wu, *Butterfly as Companion*, 183–85.

5. Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 185–88, 199.

6. For other scholars who explicitly hold the “no self” view or otherwise seem to suggest a similar interpretation through their descriptions of the Way acting through the practitioner, see Graham, *Chuang-tzu: Seven Inner Chapters*; Lee Yearley, “Zhuangzi’s Understanding of Skillfulness and the Ultimate Spiritual State,” in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 152–82; and Erica Brindley, *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 54–63.

7. David Loy, “Zhuangzi and Nagarjuna on the Truth of No Truth,” in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 53.

8. Loy, “Truth of No Truth,” 52–53. As will be seen below, I agree with a number of Loy’s points and also use similar terminology to articulate the text’s claims. However, I argue that the “Inner Chapters” is not concerned with the ontological issue of whether or not the self is an illusion but, instead, with the problems that humans generate through their tendency toward self-definition.

9. Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 201.

Defining the Way as the natural, “patterned relationship” between “things-in-themselves,” Slingerland argues that eliminating false elements of the self is what enables the natural “true self” to “reestablish contact” with that “normative order” (the Way or Heaven) and “thereby escape fallenness and move smoothly through the world.”¹⁰ In doing so, one is able to “follow along with the natural tendencies of things” in a “state of complete ease and unself-consciousness.”¹¹

Similarly, David Loy argues that the key problem of the illusion of the self is that it erroneously separates humans from the world and causes them “to [falsely] experience this world as a collection of discrete things rather than as the Dao.”¹² By contrast, recognizing that there is no self allows one to experience “the world ... as it is before our conceptual thinking divides it up.”¹³ That experience of becoming one with undifferentiated reality provides normative guidance because it allows the cultivated individual to employ moral relativism for the “task of apparently saving all sentient beings while actually doing nothing at all.”¹⁴ Despite their differences, then, both Slingerland and Loy agree that the Way provides a normative foundation for the text’s claims regarding the self, whatever those claims might be.

Like previous studies, this article will also argue that the concept of the Way is an integral element in understanding the vision of the self in the “Inner Chapters.” However, it contends that *dao* is a descriptive term rather than a normative one.¹⁵ This is not to say that the text does not present a normative injunction to understand the Way, simply that the term itself does not refer to an objective or normative order. Instead, the word *dao* simply refers to the totality of existence in all of its ceaseless transformation. Within this ever-changing chaos, there exist regular patterns of activity that lend the cosmos a sense of constancy, even though they too may be subject to change. Consequently, the text’s primary concern is how to map, accord with, and even alter those patterns in order to act successfully.

10. Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 191, 186.

11. Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 210.

12. Loy, “Truth of No Truth,” 54.

13. Loy, “Truth of No Truth,” 57.

14. Loy, “Truth of No Truth,” 58.

15. The text of the “Inner Chapters” does at times use the term *dao* in a clearly normative sense, most notably in the middle sections of the “Qiwulun” and in various passages throughout the “Dazongshi” 大宗師 (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 63–91, 224–87). However, the larger arguments of each chapter clarify that these normative usages are actually objects of critique and not injunctions by the text to treat the Way as a normative order. See below for a fuller discussion of these types of critiques in the context of the “Dazongshi.”

These points are essential for understanding the self because, like the Way, human beings are composite entities characterized by both change and regular patterns. Of those patterns, the text is particularly concerned with the tendency of human beings to create “identities” (*ming* 名, literally “name” or “reputation”) for themselves by reifying transitory preferences and simplifying the complexity of their beings. This tendency is widespread and leads to many of the most problematic elements of human society. Accordingly, one of the text’s most important arguments is how to work with that tendency in order to alter its consequences.

The sections below illustrate these points in detail and demonstrate that the text’s ambiguous stance regarding the existence of the self is due to a lack of concern with strong ontological claims on that topic. Instead, the text’s focus is on “certain undesirable habits of thought or behavior” that humans exhibit regarding the entire notion of self.¹⁶

The Cosmos and the Self

Before exploring the central issue of identity, however, it is necessary to survey the text’s larger cosmological claims in more detail. Of those claims, the most important is the text’s notion of the “Way” (*dao* 道), which refers to the cosmos as a whole.

Prior to its first explicit mention of the “Way,” the “Inner Chapters” provides a series of cosmological passages in the “Xiaoyaoyou” 逍遙遊 and “Qiwulun” chapters that describe the cosmos as being characterized by the interdependency and interconnection of all things, as well as by processes of continuous change referred to as the “Transformation of Things” (*wuhua* 物化).¹⁷

16. Jochim, “Just Say No,” 56. In pursuing this argument, Jochim suggests that the text uses nominalized terms for the self (such as *ji* 己) to designate the habits that inhibit one’s ability to move through the world naturally, but does not “hypostatize these habits” as a false self or “hypostatize other ideal habits” as a true self (Jochim, “Just Say No,” 56). For a somewhat similar discussion on how exemplary modes of behavior in the *Zhuangzi* do not necessarily imply a true self, see Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D’Ambrosio, *Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). Although my argument diverges from the works of both Jochim, and Moeller and D’Ambrosio, I agree that focusing on patterns and habits of self is crucial to understanding the argument of the “Inner Chapters.”

17. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 112. For a fuller discussion of the passage in which this phrase occurs, see below. The most prominent of the text’s early cosmological passages are the opening section of the “Xiaoyaoyou,” and the opening section of the “Qiwulun” discussed in n. 42 below (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 2–22, 43–55). Other important passages include those in the “Dazongshi” that liken the ceaseless transformation of things to a cosmic smith reshaping metal into different forms (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 262–64).

Following these cosmological passages, the text introduces the Way by juxtaposing it with the manner in which human beings limit themselves. By contrast, the text characterizes the Way in comprehensive terms, rhetorically asking “by what was the Way hidden that there is truth and artifice?” (*dao wu hu yin er you zhen wei* 道惡乎隱而有真偽) and “how can the Way go away and not exist?” (*dao wu hu wang er bu cun* 道惡乎往而不存).¹⁸

The Way, in other words, is not a separate entity that can leave or cease to exist. It is the totality of the cosmos as a whole in which all things have an equal place. Accordingly, it is only when that whole is obscured that one can establish dualistic hierarchies that prioritize certain objects over others.¹⁹ Later passages in the “Qiwulun” pick up on these points by stating that the “Way has never begun to have boundaries” (*fu dao wei shi you feng* 夫道未始有封) and that the “Great Way is not named” (*fu da dao bu cheng* 夫大道不稱). As the totality of everything that exists, the Way cannot be delineated or described as if it were a finite, separate object.²⁰

In one of its most extended discussions of the Way as the cosmos, the text describes it as follows:

夫道，有情有信，無為無形；可傳而不可受，可得而不可見；自本自根，未有天地，自古以固存；神鬼神帝，生天生地；在太極之先而不為高，在六極之下而不為深；先天地生而不為久，長於上古而不為老。

As for the Way, it has tendencies and reliability (but) lacks action and form. It can be passed down but cannot be received. It can be obtained but cannot be seen. It was rooted in itself and based in itself before there was Heaven and Earth. It has permanently existed since antiquity. It gave spirit to the ghosts and gave spirit to Di. It generated Heaven and generated Earth. It is above the highest point but is not tall; it is below the six directions but is not deep. It was born before Heaven and Earth but is not long-lasting; it grew since high antiquity but is not old.²¹

18. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 63–65.

19. An alternative interpretation of this line would be that the Way is a natural order whose loss is tied to the development of human “artifice” (*wei* 偽). However, such an interpretation runs contrary to the rejection of hierarchical dualisms within the “Inner Chapters”—articulated most clearly in the “Qiwulun”—as its overall argument rests upon a fundamental dualism between nature and artifice (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 63–91). For a fascinating example of this interpretation, see Kim-chong Chong, “The Concept of *Zhen* 真 in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Philosophy East and West* 61.2 (2011), 324–46. For further discussion on the Way as a comprehensive concept, see pages 22–23.

20. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 83–89.

21. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 246–51. I follow Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 in reading *xian* 先 (“before”) as *shang* 上 (“above”) based on the parallel with *xia* 下 (“below”).

As the aggregate of everything that exists, the Way possesses no distinct form, nor does it engage in (deliberate) “action” (*wei* 為) as would a separate entity.²² At the same time, it cannot be described by relativistic adjectives because such descriptions rely on the contrast between different entities or objects. Similarly, the Way can be said to precede any particular entity (such as Heaven and Earth) because whatever preceded those entities would be equally part of the Way since it is simply a designation for everything that exists. As such, it can also be described as the generative source of those entities in addition to being comprised by them.

The Way, then, is the continually unfolding and transforming cosmos understood as a whole. However, despite its changes, the Way also exhibits patterns of motion (referred to in this passage as “tendencies” *qing* 情),²³ the relative regularity of which lends the cosmos a certain degree of “reliability” (*xin* 信, literally “trustworthiness”):

日夜相代乎前，而莫知其所萌。已乎，已乎！旦暮得此，其所由以生乎！非彼無我，非我無所取。是亦近矣，而不知其所為使。若有真宰，而特不得其朕。可行已信，而不見其形，有情而無形。

Day and night replace each other in front, and none know where they begin. Stop! Stop! As for dawn and dusk, we obtain them.²⁴ They are

22. For an extensive discussion of “no action” or “effortless action” (*wuwei* 無為) in the *Zhuangzi*, see Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 175–215.

23. My rendering of *qing* as “tendencies” follows the work of Michael Puett who, in contrast to scholars who argue for a single definition of the term such as Chad Hansen and A. C. Graham, suggests that early texts exploited *qing*’s broad semantic range by emphasizing different definitions in order to defend their argumentative positions. Of those definitions, Puett focuses on the meaning of “dispositional responsiveness,” which is articulated most explicitly in the *Xing zi ming chu* 性自命出 and refers to the habitual ways that humans respond to the world. Importantly, these dispositional tendencies can be both learned and altered. My translation as “tendencies” is meant to capture the larger argument in the “Inner Chapters” that both humans and the Way possess mutable patterns of movement and activity. As will be discussed below, the text also uses other meanings of the term in order to emphasize that larger argument. For a complete discussion of Puett’s argument see Michael Puett, “The Ethics of Responding Properly: The Notion of *Qing* in Early Chinese Thought,” in *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 37–68.

24. I read “dawn and dusk” (*danmu* 旦暮) as the object of this clause based on the presence of “we” (*wo* 我) in the subsequent clauses. However, the text is ambiguous, and it is possible that the two characters are actually the subject of the clause. In that case, the passage would read as follows: “dawn and dusk obtain this [stopping, which is] the source by which they live.” It is possible that the ambiguity of the subject is a deliberate device to reinforce the text’s argument regarding the ambiguity of a controlling agent. I am indebted to Wayne Kreger and Chris Foster for drawing my attention to these points.

the source by means of which we live! If not for them there would be no me, if not for me there would be nothing that they obtain. This is indeed close [to the matter], but I do not know that which they are made and caused by. If there is a True Controller, I simply do not obtain its traces. That it can act, I already believe, but I do not see its form. It has tendencies [*qing*] but lacks form.²⁵

Although the ultimate cause of their existence remains impenetrable to human understanding, cyclical patterns such as day and night (which are examples of cosmic tendencies) lend a sense of constancy to the ever-changing cosmos. Curiously, that constancy also gives human beings the sense that those patterns are caused by an intentional agent or “True Controller” (*zhenzai* 真宰).

Human beings share all of the defining features of the Way, namely its composite nature, mutability, and regular patterns of activity. Like the cosmos, humans are composite entities whose bodies exhibit great physical variety and contain numerous components, including the “heart-mind” (*xin* 心), “spirit” (*shen* 神), “ethereal soul” (*hun* 魂), “essence” (*jing* 精), the undefined “Numinous Storehouse” (*lingfu* 靈府), and cultivated attitudes such as “virtue” (*de* 德).²⁶

Collectively, the above elements make up the *shen* 身.²⁷ Literally meaning “body,” *shen* refers to the total matrix of a human being and is thus frequently used in a way that suggests the translation of “person.”²⁸ Because the text’s holistic vision emphasizes that one must embrace the entirety of one’s *shen*, instead of prioritizing and identifying with a single aspect of it, this study renders it as “self.”²⁹

25. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 51–57.

26. Because the “Inner Chapters” does not discuss many of these terms in great detail, my renderings follow conventional translations. In many cases, however, translations such as “spirit” or “soul,” may imply a greater degree of dualism than the text’s vision of a composite physical form suggests. Chris Jochim refers to this composite vision of human beings as the text’s “pluralistic conception of the person” (Jochim, “Just Say No,” 68). For more on the role of physical difference in the text, see Franklin Perkins “Of Fish and Men: Species Difference and the Strangeness of Being Human in *Zhuangzi*,” *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 17.1 (2010), 126.

27. Although these elements make up the self, they are not fixed within it. Certain components, such as the *hun*, can exit and enter the *shen* (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 51). As such, the *shen* exists as a permeable entity engaged in constant exchange with the larger cosmos, but is nevertheless still defined by those permeable boundaries. See n. 42 below for further discussion of this point. For an illuminating discussion of notions of the body as a permeable entity in early China, see Jane Geaney, “Self As Container? Metaphors We Lose By in Understanding Early China,” *Antiquorum Philosophia* 5 (2011), 11–30.

28. For examples, see *Zhuangzi jishi*, 221, 155.

29. Other appropriate translations might be “being” or “organism.”

In addition to being a composite entity like the Way, the self is defined, again like the Way, in terms of mutability as it experiences “myriad changes without limit” (*wanhua er wei shi you ji* 萬化而未始有極).³⁰

In a final mirroring of the cosmos, the human self also exhibits consistent patterns of behavior in spite of its myriad changes:

百骸，九竅，六藏， 賅而存焉，吾誰與為親？汝皆說之乎？其有私焉？如是皆有為臣妾乎？其臣妾不足以相治乎？其遞相為君臣乎？其有真君存焉？如求得其情與不得，無益損乎其真。

The one hundred bones, the nine openings, the six repositories come together and exist here [as my body]. With which am I closest? Do you delight in all of them? Is there one that is favored among them? If it is like this then are all of them serving as ministers and concubines? Aren't ministers and concubines insufficient to govern each other? Do they each in turn serve as lord and minister? Do they have a True Lord present among them? Whether, in seeking it, one obtains its tendencies [*qing*] or not does not add to or detract from its truth.³¹

Much like the cosmic tendencies of the Way, the regular tendencies of the self give the sense that they are under the control of a single agent, referred to in this case as the “True Lord” (*zhenjun* 真君). For whatever reason, this explanation appears more intuitive to human beings than the idea of self-organizing, interactive systems. In other words, humans exhibit a tendency (*qing*) to regard patterns of activity (which are themselves examples of *qing*) as evidence of single, controlling agents.³² This interpretative tendency functions at both the cosmic and personal levels, resulting in the concepts of the “True Controller” and “True Lord.”

30. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 244. The precise subject of this phrase is actually the “form” (*xing* 形), but there appears to be enough overlap between the terms *shen* and *xing* to justify applying this interpretation to the *shen* as well. For an insightful discussion of the text's different terms for the body and self, see Deborah A. Sommer, “Concepts of the Body in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983; rep. Dunedin: Three Pines Press, 2010), 212–27.

31. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 55–62. I follow Burton Watson's translation of *gai er cun yan* 賅而存焉 (Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 38).

32. This is only one of many such tendencies that human beings exhibit. For example, in the “Renjianshi” 人間世, Confucius (*Kongzi* 孔子) describes a number of different human tendencies that he has observed (ranging from patterns of behavior in drinking ceremonies and games to how humans respond when employing messengers) in order to illustrate how one might navigate those tendencies (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 156–60).

Curiously, while the text's focus on dynamic systems suggests that such an interpretation may be in error, this suggestion is not definitive.³³ Thus, it is possible that a True Controller of the cosmos or a True Lord of the human body really does exist. Moreover, the tendency to posit such an entity is, by itself, not necessarily problematic. As will be discussed below, the text's chief concern is that this tendency has the potential to intersect with another human tendency: the predilection for identity.

Self, Identity, and Sense of Self

The tendency of human beings to interpret themselves as unique entities under the control of a unitary agent can be termed their "sense of self."³⁴ Although the "Inner Chapters" does not discuss this idea explicitly, the notion that each human sees himself or herself as a distinct being appears implicit in many of its discussions, including the statement by Nanguo Ziqi mentioned above.

The careful phrasing of Nanguo Ziqi's statement, "I lost myself," suggests that Ziqi retains enough of a sense of self to remain cognizant of having lost something.³⁵ Accordingly, the character *wu* 吾 refers to the totality of Ziqi's self (his *shen*) that is aware of that loss. Were he to truly lose his entire sense of self, he would have no sense of an "I" and could not conceptualize or be aware of that loss. By contrast, the character *wo* 我 ("myself") refers to the much narrower idea of "identity" (*ming* 名).³⁶

33. Kim-chong Chong also notes the ambiguity in the text's description of the "True Lord," but agrees with Feng Youlan that such an entity does not exist and that the passage as a whole is a refutation of the idea that the heart-mind is the true ruler of the body as argued by Xunzi 荀子 (Chong, "Concept of *Zhen*," 324 n. 2).

34. Unlike the other terms that this paper discusses (such as "self" and "identity"), the text does not provide an explicit name for this concept.

35. As Brook Ziporyn notes, this passage exhibits a "both/and equivocation on the question of the existence of the self," which, I argue, becomes sensible when it is read according to the distinction between identity, self, and sense of self. See Brook Ziporyn, "How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things and I? Relativism, Mysticism, and the Privileging of Oneness in the 'Inner Chapters,'" in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 41.

36. Although I do not read it in terms of a true or natural self, my interpretation of this passage thus runs closer to Edward Slingerland's metaphorical reading discussed in n. 4 above. The line as a whole seems to emphasize the slippage that occurs between sense of self and identity as *wu* and *wo* are used relatively interchangeably in the "Inner Chapters" as first-person pronouns. For a fuller discussion on the grammatical structure of this line see Paul Kjellberg, "Review of *Butterfly as Companion: Meditations on the First Three Chapters of the Chuang Tzu* by Kuang-ming Wu," *Philosophy East and West* 43.1 (1993), 127–35. For a more recent, and very nuanced, discussion of the grammatical function of these terms and their potential philosophical implications see Thomas

In order to explain this point, it is necessary to provide a more detailed discussion of the meaning of *ming* within the “Inner Chapters.” Often translated as “name” or “reputation,” *ming* is one of the first concepts that the text introduces in its opening lines:

北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。化而為鳥，其名為鵬。

In the Northern Darkness, there is a fish. Its name [*ming*] is Kun. I do not know how many thousands of *li* its size is. It transforms and becomes a bird. Its name [*ming*] is Peng.³⁷

Here *ming* is used to designate distinct entities. Accordingly, it is entirely tied to physical form. When that form changes (from fish to bird), there is a corresponding change in designation (from Kun to Peng).

While this usage of *ming* is relatively narrow, the text quickly enlarges its scope by depicting a dialogue in which the sage-king Yao 堯 attempts to cede his throne to the eremitic Xu You 許由 based on the rationale that the latter is truly responsible for the ordered state of the world. Xu You, however, rejects Yao’s offer and responds as follows:

子治天下，天下既已治也。而我猶代子，吾將為名乎？名者，實之賓也，吾將為賓乎？

You govern All Under Heaven and All Under Heaven is already well-governed. But, if I were to replace you, would I be doing it for a name [*ming*]? Name [*ming*] is the guest of substance. Would I be doing it to be a guest?³⁸

Here, Xu You draws a contrast between *ming* and “substance” (*shi* 實), and implies that the latter refers to the ordered state of the world while the former refers to who is deemed to be responsible for that order. Unlike its first occurrence in the Kun and Peng passage, here *ming* is not tied to physical form, but rather acts as a designation for one’s social position and reputation, irrespective of whether or not that reputation is accurate. Consequently, the text implies that *ming* is a social or mental construct that defines a given person.

Ming, “Who Does the Sounding? The Metaphysics of the First-Person Pronoun in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 15.1 (2016), 57–79. See also the incisive responses to Ming’s article in volume 17.4 (2018) of *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*.

37. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 2–4.

38. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 24–26.

The text expands upon the latter point in the famous butterfly dream passage:

昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也，自喻適志與！不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與，胡蝶之夢為周與？周與胡蝶，則必有分矣。此之謂物化。

Once, Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly, a happily fluttering butterfly. He delighted in himself and did as he pleased. He did not know Zhou. He started awake and was suddenly Zhou. He did not know if he was Zhou dreaming that he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhou. As for Zhou and a butterfly there necessarily is a difference. This is called the "Transformation of Things."³⁹

This brief narrative mirrors the opening discussion of the Kun fish transforming into the Peng bird. However, instead of depicting the physical transformation of one entity into another (along with the corresponding change in *ming*), it demonstrates how an individual, in this case Zhuangzi, might replicate the "Transformation of Things" within his or her imagination. Although the passage does not explicitly use the term *ming*, it uses Zhuangzi's *ming* (Zhou 周) as a kind of metonym for his entire self.⁴⁰

As the only instance in which the text refers to Zhuangzi in this way, and not by the honorific of "Master Zhuang," this narrative works together with the above passages to define *ming* as an imaginative construct that defines a given entity and can be either directly tied to that entity's physical form and actions or decoupled from them. Consequently, this study uses the broader translation of "identity" instead of "name" or "reputation." As will be seen below, even this translation

39. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 112–14. I follow Guo Xiang and Li Yi 李頤 in reading *yu* 喻 ("analogy") as meaning *kuai* 快 ("happy"). For fascinating studies on this passage, see Hans-Georg Moeller, "Zhuangzi's 'Dream of the Butterfly': A Daoist Interpretation," *Philosophy East and West* 49.4 (1999), 439–50; Harold David Roth, "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the 'Qiwulun Chapter 齊物論' of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子," in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New Press, 2003), 28–29; Jung H. Lee, "What is it Like to be a Butterfly? A Philosophical Interpretation of Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream," *Asian Philosophy* 17.2 (2007), 185–202; Xiaoqiang Han, "Interpreting the Butterfly Dream," *Asian Philosophy* 19.1 (2009), 1–9; and Robert Allinson, "The Butterfly, the Mole and the Sage," *Asian Philosophy* 19.3 (2009), 213–23.

40. It is also possible that the use of Zhuangzi's name in this passage has a temporal function that situates the narrative prior to Zhuangzi's other appearances in the "Inner Chapters" and indicates that he has not yet mastered the practices that the text advocates. If so the passage could be read as depicting both the beginning and end points of the text's self-cultivation program.

is somewhat too narrow as the creation of a *ming* is a complex process involving multiple steps.⁴¹

Returning to the butterfly narrative, we can see that the passage presents a single self (Zhuangzi's entire physical and mental being) but two distinct identities: the butterfly and Zhuang Zhou. When dreaming, Zhuangzi ceases to define his identity as that of a particular human being and, instead, thinks of himself as a butterfly.

Relating this point back to Nanguo Ziqi, we can see that both passages depict a loss of identity in which the practitioner lets go of the construct by which they define themselves (referred to in the former passage as "myself" *wo* 我 and the latter as "Zhou" 周). The principal difference is that while Nanguo Ziqi temporarily lets go of his identity and exists for a time in an identity-less state, Zhuangzi replaces his identity as a human with that of a butterfly.⁴² Consequently, the latter can be described as an act of imaginative empathy in which Zhuangzi imagines what it would be like to exist as another entity.⁴³

As will be discussed in more detail below, the imagining of different identities is a key practice for the text and doing so effectively is one of the highest goals to which its practitioners might aspire. At the same time, however, this passage explains that decoupling one's sense of self and one's identity is a potentially disorienting practice. Within the dream, Zhuangzi's sense of himself as an entity is synonymous with his specific identity (the butterfly). It is only when he awakens, transi-

41. Using Chris Jochim's terminology, *ming* can thus be understood as a mental habit of definition (Jochim, "Just Say No," 56).

42. The larger context of the former passage, which serves as the first section of the "Qiwulun," explains that Ziqi is able to let go of his identity by reflecting on the fact that he and all things are not singular entities, but rather on-going interactions between physical multiplicity and the unifying life force bestowed by Heaven. He refers to this phenomenon as the "panpipes of Heaven" (*tianlai* 天籟) (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 43–50). For a somewhat similar reading see Steven Geisz, "Anscombe's 'I', Zhuangzi's Pipings of Heaven, and the Self That Plays the Ten Thousand Things: Remarks on Thomas Ming's 'Who Does the Sounding?'" *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 17.4 (2018), 583. For helpful alternative readings of this passage see Scott Cook, "Harmony and Cacophony in the Panpipes of Heaven," in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 75; Fung Yu-lan [Feng Youlan], *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 110; and Chad Hansen, "A Dao of 'Dao' in *Zhuangzi*," in *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, ed. Victor H. Mair, 39.

43. For a fascinating discussion of the role of imagination in the *Zhuangzi* see Paul J. D'Ambrosio, "Imagination in the *Zhuangzi*: The Madman of Chu's Alternative to Confucian Cultivation," *Asian Philosophy* 27.1 (2017), 30–42. D'Ambrosio bases his argument on the discussion of imagination by Michael Puett. See, for example, Michael Puett and Christine Gross-Loh, *The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About The Good Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 150–52.

tioning back to his ordinary identity as a human being, that he becomes disoriented. To understand why that disorientation occurs, and why it must be managed, we must turn to more detailed accounts of identity and its formation.

The Formation of Identity

We have seen that the “Inner Chapters” presents a vision of the self as a composite, physical entity. Furthermore, the self retains a sense of itself as a unique being and can be defined according to a specific identity. While it is possible to attenuate or alter that identity, as Nanguo Ziqi and Zhuangzi do, the passages discussed below explain that most humans remain wedded to specific versions of their identities throughout their entire lives.

The locus of the imaginative construct of identity is the “heart-mind” (*xin*). Thus, when Nanguo Ziqi loses himself, his attendant, Yancheng Ziyou 顏成子游, remarks that Ziqi’s heart-mind has become “like dead ash” (*ru sifu* 如死灰). Similarly, the “Renjianshi” 人間世 opens with a dialogue in which Confucius’ disciple, Yan Hui 顏回, requests permission to reform the immoral conduct of the ruler of the state of Wei 衛.⁴⁴ Confucius criticizes his disciple’s plans as inevitably leading to failure and subtly suggests that their flaw is Yan Hui’s implicit assumption that his own identity is a moral one.⁴⁵ Confucius summarizes this issue by stating that Yan Hui is “still taking the heart-mind as a teacher” (*you shixin* 猶師心)—a key point that will be explored in greater detail below.⁴⁶

Since the heart-mind is the locus of identity, Confucius instructs his disciple in the “fasting of the heart-mind” (*xinzhai* 心齋) so that Yan Hui might rid himself of the egotistical preoccupation with identity that endangers him. After hearing Confucius’ description of how to empty his heart-mind, Yan Hui remarks:

回之未始得使，實自回也；得使之也，未始有回也；可謂虛乎？

Before I, Hui, attained your instruction, I was certain of myself as Hui.
Having obtained your instruction, [I realize] there has never been Hui.
Can this be called emptiness?⁴⁷

44. The entirety of this dialogue can be found in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 131–52.

45. As Edward Slingerland notes, Confucius’ critique likely has a double meaning, as it implies that Yan Hui is attempting to use the trip as an opportunity to enhance his reputation (thereby cementing his identity as a moral person) (Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 183).

46. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 145.

47. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 147–48. Although it is not uncommon in Classical Chinese to refer to oneself in the third person I have rendered the first part of this sentence as “I, Hui,”

Here, we see that Confucius's description offers Yan Hui a glimpse of a state in which his heart-mind is temporarily emptied of the identity of "Yan Hui." As with Nanguo Ziqi, Yan Hui still retains a sense of himself, it is simply that that sense is no longer tied to a specific identity.

The imagery of these examples stands in sharp contrast to the text's descriptions of how most people live their lives. The "Qiwulun" explains that most people become so attached to their physical individuality (their "completed forms" *chengxing* 成形) that they construct "completed heart-minds" (*chengxin* 成心) to match. In other words, each individual fills or "completes" (*cheng* 成) his or her heart-mind with a specific version of his or her identity.⁴⁸

Elsewhere in the text, the figure of Zhuangzi explains the process of constructing identity as "using one's likes and dislikes to inwardly harm the self" (*yi haowu nei shang qi shen* 以好惡內傷其身).⁴⁹ In other words, the process of constructing an identity involves reifying one's transitory preferences, which likely result from specific circumstances, into an enduring identity that is understood as the sum total of those preferences.

What is most problematic is that individuals do not recognize that their identities are constructs of their greater selves. Consequently, they conflate their more nebulous and undefined sense of self with the specific construct of identity to produce the reified notion of a true or essential self. In doing so, they use their identities to define the "True Lord" that may or not exist within themselves, treating it as if it were synonymous with a narrow and reified collection of preferences.⁵⁰ According to the "Qiwulun," most people maintain that specific image of themselves throughout their lives, even though it leads to the cessation of personal growth, mental exhaustion, and death.⁵¹

The "Qiwulun" provides a specific example of this reification in the case of the "three masters" (*sanzi* 三子), individuals who excelled in specific fields and wasted their lives trying to defend and advance what

because the use of Yan Hui's *ming* seems to parallel that of Zhuangzi's *ming* (Zhou) in the butterfly dream as a means to emphasize the construct of identity.

48. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 56.

49. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 221.

50. This point is similar to Loy's argument regarding the construction of the self discussed above. However, I diverge from Loy by suggesting that the text does not presume that the cosmos is undifferentiated (the human self is a distinct, physical entity despite its changes) and that the text emphasizes the conflation of a specific identity with sense of self rather than the more general notion of constructing an illusory self.

51. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 56.

they preferred simply because they preferred it.⁵² Tellingly, one of those three masters, the logician Huizi 惠子, not only defends the idea of a reified “human essence” (*renqing* 人情) but is also described by Zhuangzi as having a “heart-mind of weeds” (*peng zhi xin* 蓬之心), an image that contrasts starkly with the empty heart-mind advocated by Confucius or Nanguo Ziqi’s heart-mind of “dead ash.”⁵³

Of greatest concern to the text is that the completed heart-mind is described as the prerequisite for normative or evaluative judgements. Those who possess heart-minds that are filled with reified identities regard them authoritatively, “taking them as teachers” (*shi zhi* 師之) just as Yan Hui did when developing his plans to reform the ruler of Wei.⁵⁴ In other words, having reified their preferences into a stable identity, most humans regard that identity as the authoritative foundation for normative, evaluative frameworks that are referred to as “right and wrong” (*shifei* 是非, literally “this-not this”) frameworks. From that point onward, individuals who possess such identities consider themselves able to “arbitrate right and wrong” (*si shifei* 司是非) and, like the three masters, seek to impose their own preferences upon the world based on the conceit that those preferences actually reflect normative goods.⁵⁵

In order to fully explain the nature of identity, the “Qiwulun” offers a complex description of how those normative frameworks are formed from an individual’s preferences:

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是方生之說也

Things do not have no “that,” things do not have no “this.” If [one looks from] “that” then [one] doesn’t see, if one knows oneself then one knows it. Therefore, I say: “that” arises from “this,” “this” also relies on “that.” This is the explanation that “that” and “this” are simultaneously generated.⁵⁶

52. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 74–75. The three masters in question are the *qin* 琴 player, Zhao Wen 昭文, the Music Master Kuang (*Shi Kuang* 師曠), and the logician Huizi 惠子.

53. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 220–23, 37. Huizi’s claim regarding “human essence” in his debate with Zhuangzi at the end of the “Dechongfu” 德充符 is an example of the text using different definitions of *qing* to advance its argument. In this case, Huizi exhibits the ultimate expression of the human tendency toward identity by reifying that tendency into the definitional essence of what it means to be human and thus constructing a species-level identity of humanity.

54. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 56.

55. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 56, 51. Another example of this tendency is the endless debate between the followers of Confucius and Mozi 墨子 over what is good (*ibid.*, 63).

56. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 66–67.

The text begins its explanation by discussing an alternative type of framework, a “descriptive framework” that is composed of the pairing of “that” (*bi* 彼) and “this” (*shi* 是). Crucially, the latter term can also mean “right” and is used in the compound “right and wrong” (*shifei*). These two interdependent terms exist within the perspectives of all creatures (“things” *wu* 物) in the world who use them to distinguish themselves (“this”) in relation to other entities around them (“that”). Thus the precise referent of “that” varies from situation to situation but “this” tends to remain relatively constant within the perspective of a given entity as it typically refers to the self that possess that perspective.

These descriptive frameworks are a means of understanding, as things must first understand themselves as distinct entities (“know themselves” *zizhi* 自知) in order to understand the distinctiveness of others and how to relate to them. Since all entities, and particularly all humans, perceive the world in this way, everything is simultaneously a “this” (from within its own perspective) and a “that” (from within the perspectives of others).

Because “this” and “that” are mutually dependent, they are said to be “simultaneously generated” (*fangsheng* 方生), an idea that applies to other dichotomies as well:

雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。

Even though this is the case, simultaneously there is life and simultaneously there is death, simultaneously there is death and simultaneously there is life, simultaneously there is acceptability and simultaneously there is unacceptability, simultaneously there is unacceptability and simultaneously there is acceptability. Relying on right is relying on wrong, relying on wrong is relying on right.⁵⁷

This list of mutually defining dichotomies demonstrates an escalating normative quality. Having begun above with the relatively neutral terms of “that” and “this,” the text here moves through “life” (*sheng* 生) and “death” (*si* 死)—which could be understood both neutrally and normatively depending on one’s perspective—and terminates in the explicitly normative dualisms of “acceptable” (*ke* 可) and “unacceptable” (*buke* 不可) and “right and wrong” (*shifei*).⁵⁸ Accordingly, the list illustrates a

57. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 66–67.

58. The text emphasizes the ambiguity of life and death as a normative dualism by repeatedly questioning the view that the former is necessarily better than the latter (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 103–4, 127–30, 241–51, 264–273).

slippage from relatively neutral, descriptive terms to hierarchical, normative terms.

Relating this slippage back to the notions of the completed heart-mind and fixed identity, we can see that the origin of *shifei* frameworks is the moment when an individual reifies his or her own identity, which consists largely of transitory preferences, into a permanent “this” (*shi*) and then normatively privileges that identity as being “right” (*shi*). Accordingly, anything that that individual encounters is no longer a “that” (*bi*) but rather a “not-this” (*fei*) that is inherently “wrong” (*fei*) simply because it is not identical to that individual’s reified identity. Therefore, the only way for something to be considered “right” (*shi*) is for it to resemble the identity (the reified and normatively privileged “this” *shi*) of the individual that now acts as the standard of “right” (*shi*).

Put another way, we can say that individuals only regard others as right if those others possess preferences that match those of the evaluating individual and therefore mirror his or her own reified identity. In the “Renjianshi,” Confucius sums up this tendency by saying that, when filled with identity “the heart-mind stops at matching” (*xin zhi yu fu* 心止於符).⁵⁹ In other words, a person who has filled their heart-mind with a reified identity evaluates the world according to his or her own frameworks, affirming those elements that match those frameworks and dismissing or denigrating those that do not.⁶⁰

The text provides an example of this way of thinking in the “Xiaoyaoyou”:

窮髮之北有冥海者，天池也。有魚焉，其廣數千里，未有知其脩者，其名爲鯤。有鳥焉，其名爲鵬，背若泰山，翼若垂天之雲，搏扶搖羊角而上者九萬里，絕雲氣，負青天，然後圖南，且適南冥也。斥鴳笑之曰：「彼且奚適也？我騰躍而上，不過數仞而下，翱翔蓬蒿之間，此亦飛之至也。而彼且奚適也？」

In the barren north, there is a dark sea, which is the Heavenly Pool. There is a fish there. Its breadth is several thousand *li*, and I do not yet have knowledge of its length. Its name is Kun. There is a bird there. Its name is Peng. Its back is like Mount Tai (and) its wings are like the hanging clouds of Heaven. It wheels on the whirlwind and tornado and rises up to ninety thousand *li*. It cuts through the vapors of cloud,

59. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 147.

60. *Fu* 符 literally refers to a tally that is broken in half and used for contracts, an apt image for expressing the manner in which the completed heart-mind only affirms those behaviors and frameworks that match its own. For a helpful discussion of this point see Franklin Perkins, *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane: The Problem of Evil in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 169.

shoulders the blue Heaven and, after that, sets course for the south. It will go to the Southern Darkness. The scolding quail laughs at him, saying: "Where will he go? I run and jump up, and do not surpass several *ren* and then come back down. Fluttering and circling amidst the weeds and underbrush, this is indeed the pinnacle of flight. But where will he go?"⁶¹

In this passage, the "scolding quail" (*chiyan* 斥鴳) remains so locked into its own perspective that it belittles and dismisses the Peng bird simply because the latter's size and abilities are different from its own. Consequently, the quail doesn't believe the Peng bird can achieve the "pinnacle of flight" (*fei zhi zhi* 飛之至) that is fluttering amongst the "weeds" (*peng* 蓬)—the imagery of which recalls Huizi's "heart-mind of weeds."⁶²

At this point, we are able to step back and consider the formation of identity as a whole. Humans begin with the sense that the tendencies of their composite forms are actually indicative of the existence of a unitary agent. While that unitary agent may or may not exist, humans act as if it does and think of themselves as unitary individuals. More problematically, humans resist the notion that they will change. Instead, they reify their transitory preferences into a fixed image of themselves (an identity) and use that identity to define the agent whose existence they suspect. In doing so, they conflate identity with sense of self and produce the notion of the true self.

This process explains the disruption that occurs in the butterfly dream. Because individuals think of the entirety of their beings as synonymous with identity, replacing that identity with another identity (as Zhuangzi does with the butterfly) can disrupt their entire sense of self. As will be seen below, the fact that imagining other identities runs

61. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 14–16. I follow Cheng Xuanying in reading *fuyao* 扶搖 as a compound meaning "whirlwind."

62. Accordingly, I would argue that the chief object of critique in this passage is the attitude of the scolding quail and that the sizes of the creatures involved are not meant to invoke either a normative hierarchy or an argument for perspectival equality. For fascinating discussions of the former position see Robert Allinson, *Chuang-tzu for Spiritual Transformation: An Analysis of the Inner Chapters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 42–44; and Bryan W. Van Norden "Competing Interpretations of the Inner Chapters of the 'Zhuangzi,'" *Philosophy East and West* 46.2 (1996), 257–61. For an equally intriguing argument for the latter position see Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 273. Feng Yu-lan and Karyn Lai also provide illuminating arguments that attempt to strike a balance between the two extremes. See Fung [Feng], *A Short History*, 105–10; and Karyn Lai, "Philosophy and Philosophical Reasoning in the *Zhuangzi*: Dealing with Plurality," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33.3 (2006), 369–74.

counter to ordinary habits of thought is one of the reasons that the text considers it to be such a valuable exercise.

Because humans normatively privilege their constructed identities, those identities transform flexible descriptive frameworks into normative frameworks. That change is problematic because, while the former can foster communication and understanding, the latter result in judgmental condemnation based on the fact that other creatures are not identical to oneself. Reifying identity, therefore, not only curtails the potential growth of individual human beings by trapping them within repeated patterns of self-identification, but also inhibits their ability to understand other entities in the world. Perhaps most importantly, identity's establishment of consistent judgements that are applied regardless of situational differences means that those who maintain a fixed identity are potentially blind to the ongoing changes within themselves and in the larger world around them.

By presenting the origin of *shifei* frameworks as a slippage from descriptive to normative dualisms, the text clarifies that there is no compelling need for them to arise. Instead, they are generated by habits of reification, and as such they can be altered by the practices that the text advocates. Before addressing this latter point, however, it is necessary to consider the implications of the text's vision for human society as a whole.

Identity and Society

The fact that any human can possess an identity that they consider to be a "teacher" means that every person can grant themselves the authority needed to make normative judgements.⁶³ Therefore, the construction of identity fractures humanity into a collection of atomistic, identity-based perspectives that seem to preclude a species-level perspective.⁶⁴ Moreover, since humans appear driven to impose their normative

63. The "Qiwulun" notes this point by stating that even "the foolish" (*yuzhe* 愚者) have such an authority due to their completed heart-minds (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 56).

64. This point is stated explicitly in the "Qiwulun" by the character Wang Ni 王倪, who contrasts the species-level preferences regarding habitation and taste in animals like deer, monkeys, and fish with the chaotic and confused debates over right and wrong among human beings and the subsequent impossibility of determining what is "universally right" (*tongshi* 同是) (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 91–97). For excellent discussions of other epistemological concerns in the Wang Ni passage and their relationship to issues of perspectivism and skepticism see Paul Kjellberg, "Sextus Empiricus, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi on 'Why Be Skeptical?'" in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 8–10; and Eric Schwitzgebel, "Zhuangzi's Attitude Toward Lan-

judgements on others, as in the case of the three masters above, that atomistic situation continually generates contention and—as illustrated by the passages discussed below—even violence.

However, the text clarifies that, because humans do not construct their identities in social isolation, that perspectival atomization is reduced. Most importantly, while each identity is unique in its specifics, most humans rely upon the social context that they inhabit in order to define themselves and, thus, generate their identities. This point has already been seen in the dialogue between Yao and Xu You above.

For the text, the most important feature of the human social context is what might be termed its “social frameworks.” Much like individual normative frameworks, these structures are constructs or dreams of the heart-mind:

且有大覺而後知此其大夢也，而愚者自以為覺，竊竊然知之。君乎，牧乎，固哉！

Furthermore, there [will be] a great awakening and afterwards we will know that this [i.e. human society] is a great dream. But the foolish consider themselves awake, furtively assuming that they understand it. Lords! Shepherds! So certain [are they]!⁶⁵

Social frameworks function according to stable identities, which include social roles such as “lords” (*jun* 君) and “shepherds” (*mu* 牧) and which are arranged into hierarchies of relative worth. Accordingly, social frameworks are both generated by stable identities and help to generate them. Although both these roles and frameworks are constructs (“dreams” *meng* 夢), most people remain dependent on them for their own identities and regard them as if they were fixed elements of the world.

The “Dechongfu” 德充符 abounds with examples of characters who move through the world according to the guidance of social frameworks and attempt to apply the identities that they generate to other people, irrespective of the circumstances. Thus, Confucius berates a character named Shushan No-Toes (Shushan Wuzhi 叔山無趾) for his past crimes and proves unable to see No-Toes as anything but a convict.⁶⁶ Similarly,

guage and His Skepticism,” in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Paul Kjellberg and Philip J. Ivanhoe, 77–79.

65. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 104–6.

66. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 202–6. In the narrative, Confucius’ failing becomes apparent when, even after being admonished by No-Toes, he tells his disciples that No-Toes is seeking instruction to make up for his past transgressions. In other words, he continues to think of No-Toes as a criminal and does not learn from him.

the prime minister Zichan 子產 insists that another convict named Shentu Jia 申徒嘉 should treat him with the deference due to his rank, despite the fact that both individuals are students of equal status who share the same master.⁶⁷

The figure of the convict illustrates that social frameworks are inherently coercive and use both “punishments” (*xing* 刑) and rewards as ways to enforce the identities that they create and upon which they are built. Accordingly, mutilations such as cutting off a person’s foot (as in the case of No-Toes and Shentu Jia) are not simply acts of punishment or retribution. Rather, they are mechanisms that construct visual reminders of identity that prompt people to treat those who have been punished as perpetual criminals. Similarly, more positive mechanisms such as “fame” (*wen* 聞) force identities upon others by positing a “stable self” (*ji* 己) to which they can assign credit for “meritorious actions” (*gong* 功) that can be used to establish an identity (*ming*).⁶⁸

While these mechanisms exhibit superficial differences, the text suggests that they are equally coercive measures designed to trap individuals within social frameworks. Unsurprisingly, it warns its readers that if they perform good actions, they should avoid identity or reputation (*ming*) and, if they perform bad actions, they should avoid punishment since both lead to the destructive consequence of having a stable identity imposed upon one.⁶⁹

Ironically, the purpose of social frameworks seems to be to nourish human beings and protect them from the potential violence of contending normative frameworks:

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相响以溼，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。與其譽堯而非桀，不如兩忘而化其道。

When the streams dry up, fish are stranded together on land. They breathe on one another in order to moisten and wet each other with spit. This is not as good as forgetting one another in the rivers and lakes. As for praising Yao and condemning Jie, this is not as good as forgetting both and transforming [in] the Way.⁷⁰

67. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 196–201.

68. As a result, the text states that the “Perfect Person has no stable self, the Spirit Person has no meritorious actions and the sage has no identity” (*zhiren wu ji, shenren wu gong, shengren wu ming* 至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名) (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 22). This process is at work in the dialogue between Yao and Xu You and explains that the latter refuses the throne because accepting it would entail his entrapment within identity-based, social frameworks.

69. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 115.

70. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 242.

This description occurs in the “Dazongshi” 大宗師 as part of a lengthy series of passages that contrast limited and expansive definitions of the Way in order to demonstrate that any “Way” that is understood as encompassing less than the entire cosmos will inevitably fail and degenerate. Here, the passage presents the Way as a relatively broad term for patterns of behavior that are elsewhere defined in the chapter as consisting of flexibility, egalitarianism, and friendship.⁷¹ When those patterns break down, as is inevitable given their limited nature, humans create social frameworks in order to care for others in the same way that fish attempt to save each other from drying out when stranded on the land.

However, despite this seemingly altruistic purpose, the most that social frameworks can achieve is the stabilization of conflict and violence between individuals by establishing shared, normative standards such as what constitutes a good king (Yao) or a bad king (Jie 桀). The fact that they do so according to fixed identities means that the underlying issue (the reification of changeable patterns into rigid structures) remains unresolved. Therefore, they not only help blind people to the ever-changing patterns of the Way, but can also perpetuate the very violence that they attempt to curtail:

南海之帝為儻，北海之帝為忽，中央之帝為渾沌。儻與忽時相與遇於渾沌之地，渾沌待之甚善。儻與忽謀報渾沌之德，曰：「人皆有七竅，以視聽食息，此獨無有，嘗試鑿之。」日鑿一竅，七日而渾沌死。

The Thearch of the Southern Ocean was Shu, the Thearch of the Northern Ocean was Hu, and the Thearch of the Centre was Hundun. Shu and Hu would often meet with one another in the territory of Hundun (and) Hundun treated them extremely well. Shu and Hu planned on how to repay Hundun’s virtue, saying: “All people have seven openings in order to see, hear, eat and breath; he alone has none. Let us attempt to bore them.” Each day they bored another opening and (after) seven days Hundun died.⁷²

71. This definition is supplied by a later passage that depicts three friends who are able to create a community of peace and equality that is separate from the greater social world. Picking up on the imagery of the above passage, the text states that “fish fashion each other in water and humans fashion each other in the Way” (*yu xiang zao hu shui, ren xiang zao hu dao* 魚相造乎水，人相造乎道) and presents the community as a metaphorical “pond” (*chi* 池) that is all that remains of the great Way that has long since dried up (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 264–73). The passage ties in with the larger argument of the chapter because the community of friends is still insufficient compared to a more encompassing understanding of the Way. In other words, if the Way includes both the (metaphorical) water and dry land, then it can never be lost.

72. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 309–10. For discussions of the translation of *di* 帝 as “thearch” see John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the*

This passage, which acts as a somber closure to the “Inner Chapters,” highlights the fact that violence and destruction are inevitable parts of identity-based frameworks, because such frameworks motivate those who operate within them to see the world according to themselves. Accordingly, even gestures of caring or gratitude can become destructive as individuals act according to their own preferences and seek to impose upon others what they themselves might desire or believe to be good, even if it is to the detriment of others.

As the above analysis demonstrates, the human tendency toward reified identity presents a crucial problem for the text. At an individual level, it inhibits growth and understanding. At a social level, it plays a key role in the formation and maintenance of coercive frameworks that contain and encourage an inherent potential for conflict and violence. It is in response to these issues that the text presents its techniques for retraining that tendency.

Virtue and the Mirror-Like Mind

The text depicts the generation of identity as an inexplicable, and perhaps even inescapable, human tendency. As the term “fasting of the heart-mind” implies, being empty of identity is a temporary state—after a time, the heart-mind will fill up with identity once more. Instead of fighting that tendency, the text advocates that its practitioners take advantage of it by imaginatively filling their heart-minds with different identities in order to enhance their understanding of others and gradually disassociate their identities from their sense of self.

While the butterfly dream served as one example of that alternation, there are numerous other examples in the text such as the character of Clansman Tai (*taishi* 泰氏) or the group of friends in the “Dazongshi” who are said to “borrow from different things and entrust them to the same body” (*jia yu yiwu tuo yu tongti* 假於異物託於同體).⁷³

In order to overcome the disorientation to one’s sense of self that alternating identities can engender, practitioners must develop the cultivated attitude of “virtue” (*de* 德), for which Confucius offers a succinct explanation:

Huainanzi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 18; and Michael Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002), 225–58.

73. For the former example see *Zhuangzi jishi*, 287–89. For the latter, see *ibid.* 268. In both examples, the characters are depicted as imaginatively taking on other identities to the point that they do not even think of themselves as human.

自事其心者，哀樂不易施乎前，知其不可奈何而安之若命，德之至也。

As for serving one's own heart-mind, [if] sorrow and joy do not change or shift in front of one, [and one] knows what one can do nothing about and is at peace with it as if it were fate—this is the pinnacle of virtue.⁷⁴

Virtuous individuals are those who are able to protect themselves from the vicissitudes of the cosmos by cultivating a state of emotional invulnerability. They do so by reformulating their responses based on an acceptance of what they cannot control, treating any such event “as if it were fate” (*ruoming* 若命).⁷⁵

The relative constancy of the attitude of virtue means that it can be easily mistaken for a stable identity. For example, when explaining the virtue of one Wang Tai 王駘, Confucius offers the following description:

夫保始之徵，不懼之實。勇士一人，雄入於九軍。將求名而能自要者，而猶若此，而況官天地，府萬物，直寓六骸，象耳目，一知之所知，而心未嘗死者乎！彼且擇日而登假，人則從是也。彼且何肯以物為事乎！

The proof of preserving the beginning is the substance of not being afraid. A brave soldier will plunge alone into nine armies. [If] one who seeks identity and is able to consider himself essential is like this, how much more so one who considers Heaven and Earth to be a palace, the myriad things to be a storehouse, simply considers the six parts of the body to be a lodging, considers the ears and eyes to be images, unifies that which he knows and whose heart-mind has never tasted death? Furthermore, he will select a day and ascend far off. [Even if] people follow him, why should he consider things to be relevant matters [to himself]?”⁷⁶

Here, Confucius draws an explicit parallel between a soldier who pursues identity on the basis of social renown and Wang Tai. Moreover, Confucius' description disregards Wang Tai as a whole by suggesting that the latter possesses an essential self that merely inhabits his body.⁷⁷

74. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 155.

75. This definition of virtue is reiterated in the dialogue between Shentu Jia and Zichan discussed above and the importance of acceptance more generally is a running theme in the text, as in the discussion of the death of Lao Dan 老聃 (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 196–201, 127–29).

76. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 193.

77. As Jane Geaney has noted, it is not unusual for early Chinese texts to describe substances or components of the self (such as the spirit) entering and leaving the body. Nevertheless, this passage is distinctive because it depicts the entirety of Wang Tai's

The remainder of the “Dechongfu” continues to describe virtue as if it were a disembodied or essential self.⁷⁸ However, the chapter also depicts virtue’s emotional equilibrium as enabling an active and timely engagement with the larger world.⁷⁹ While the pattern of thought that constitutes reified identity could also be defined as a pattern of responsiveness, it is one marked not by timely adaptation, but by the consistent application of fixed concepts regardless of the unique aspects of a given situation.

More importantly, virtue is not rooted exclusively in the heart-mind. Instead, it is described as a metaphorical space that surrounds the heart-mind. For instance, Confucius states that Wang Tai “allows his heart-mind to wander in the harmony of virtue” (*you xin yu de zhi he* 游心於德之和).⁸⁰ The phrase “allow the heart-mind to wander” (*you xin* 游心) also occurs in the “Renjianshi” and “Yingdiwang” 應帝王 and the term “wander” (*you* 游) is used throughout the “Inner Chapters” to describe an imaginative participation in, and alternation between, different frameworks and spaces.⁸¹ Accordingly, this key phrase helps clarify the difference between identity and virtue.

being as existing as a separate entity within his greater, physical self (Geaney, “Self As Container?” 16).

78. Confucius, for example, offers a lengthy description of virtue’s primacy over the body and refers to it as what “causes form” (*shi qi xing* 使其形) (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 206–16). Commenting on these and other passages, Paul Goldin has interpreted their imagery more literally, arguing that the *Zhuangzi* as a whole presumes the existence of a disembodied, immortal self. For a full discussion of this point, see Paul Rakita Goldin, “A Mind-Body Problem in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, ed. Scott Cook (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 226–47.

79. For example, in his discussion of Ai Taituo 哀駘它, Confucius explains that a virtuous person is able to continuously harmonize and connect with things so as to “generate timeliness within the heart-mind” (*sheng shi yu xin* 生時於心) (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 212).

80. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 191. That Confucius’ description of Wang Tai both explains the position of the “Inner Chapters” while also misunderstanding portions of it is characteristic of the text’s portrayal of Confucius as a tragically flawed spokesperson for its ideas. A particularly salient example of this portrayal occurs in the “Dazongshi” wherein Confucius describes himself as “one who wanders within the realm” (*you fang zhi nei zhe* 游方之內者), and considers that position as inferior to “those who wander beyond the realm” (*you fang zhi wai zhe* 遊方之外者) (*ibid.* 267). This portrayal suggests that Confucius is aware of the limitations in his understanding but is, nevertheless, unable to escape them. For a helpful discussion of the text’s presentation of Confucius see Ronnie Littlejohn, “Kongzi in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, ed. Victor H. Mair, 175–94.

81. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 160, 294. Although written with the water radical in the Wang Tai passage, the text generally writes “wandering” with the character *you* 遊 as the two characters were synonyms for one another in this period. For a discussion of this point

Identity is a dream dreamt by the self and located in the heart-mind. By contrast, virtue is a cultivated space in which the heart-mind can wander. Therefore, we can understand virtue as a cultivated version of the sense of self that all entities possess. Unlike uncultivated versions of that sense, the emotional equilibrium of virtue means that those who cultivate it possess an invulnerable sense of self that cannot be disrupted by the vagaries of the cosmos or alterations to their identities. While that sense of constancy does bear a superficial resemblance to identity, the fact that virtue is a general attitude means that it is empty of the types of specific details (particularly preferences) that comprise an identity. Accordingly, to relate this point back to the “Qiwulun,” we can characterize virtue as the cultivated “I” (*wu*, one’s sense of self) that is disentangled from the “myself” (*wo*) of identity.

Because virtue is a cultivated attitude empty of identity, practitioners can pair it with their cultivated heart-minds:

無為名尸，無為謀府，無為事任，無為知主。體盡無窮，而遊無朕，
盡其所受於天，而無見得，亦虛而已。至人之用心若鏡，不將不迎，
應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷。

Do not act as an impersonator of identity, do not act as a storehouse of schemes, do not act as an undertaker of affairs, do not act as a master of knowledge. Embody the inexhaustible to the utmost and wander where there are no traces. Exhaust that which you receive from Heaven but do not display [your] gain. Simply be empty and that is all. The Perfect Person uses his mind like a mirror, neither sending things off nor welcoming them. He responds but does not store, therefore he can defeat things and not be injured.⁸²

see Hans-Georg Moeller, “Rambling Without Destination: On Daoist ‘You-ing’ in the World,” in *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, ed. Roger T. Ames and Takahiro Nakajima (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 248. Particularly clear illustrations of “wandering” as an imaginative act can be found in the “Xiaoyaoyou” (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 39–42), the “Qiwulun” (*ibid.* 96–97), the “Dazongshi” (*ibid.* 243–46), and the “Yingdiwang” 應帝王 (*ibid.* 292–95). Many scholars have also noted the importance of “wandering” for the text. For particularly helpful discussions see Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 175–215; Michael M. Crandell, “On Walking Without Touching the Ground: ‘Play’ in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, ed. Victor H. Mair, 99–121; Moeller, “Rambling without Destination”; and Alan Levinovitz, “The *Zhuangzi* and *You* 遊: Defining an Ideal Without Contradiction,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 11.4 (2012), 479–96.

82. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 307–9. A common interpretation of this passage is to read it as describing the constant inner state of the sage by which he flawlessly reflects, and responds to, objective reality. For representative examples, see A. C. Graham, “Daoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’,” in *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*,

If practitioners attenuate their own identities and empty their heart-minds, they can use their heart-minds to imagine the identities of other entities that they encounter. Their heart-minds thus become mirror-like as they no longer “store” (*cang* 藏) a reified identity and its attendant constructs but, instead, temporarily take on the identities of other entities in the same way that a mirror temporarily holds a reflected image.

A heart-mind engaged in such an ongoing, imaginative activity can be said to “wander,” and virtue, as an emotionally stable attitude, provides a cultivated space of safety in which that wandering can occur. In other words, when adept practitioners alternate between identities, they retain an enduring, harmonious sense of self that prevents the type of disorientation seen in the butterfly dream.⁸³ By doing so, practitioners decouple identity from sense of self, enhance their understanding of those whose identities they mirror, and imaginatively emulate the “Transformation of Things” that characterizes the Way. Conversely, “virtue is disrupted by identity” (*de dang hu ming* 德蕩乎名), because when the fixed and narrow nature of the latter is conflated with sense of self it renders a person blind and vulnerable to the fluctuations of the cosmos.⁸⁴

Thus, the argument of the text is not that humans should work to eliminate their human tendency toward identity, but that they should retrain it so that they adopt different identities and thereby avoid “using likes and dislikes to inwardly harm the self.” While this might appear to characters like Huizi to be an impossible and paradoxical elimination of “human essence” (*renqing*), such an objection arises only when one reifies the tendency toward reification into a stable definition of what it means to be human.⁸⁵

While space precludes a full description of the implications of such a retraining, the pivotal role of identity in human affairs suggests their magnitude. Among the many consequences that the text discusses, one of the most important is that a tenuous heart-mind and invulnerable

ed. Victor H. Mair, 9–11; Harold H. Oshima, “A Metaphorical Analysis of the Concept of Mind in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, ed. Victor H. Mair, 74–80; Yearley, “Ultimate Spiritual State”; Scott Cook, “Zhuang Zi and His Carving of the Confucian Ox,” *Philosophy East and West* 47.4 (1997), 535–36; and Erin M. Cline, “Mirrors, Minds, and Metaphors,” *Philosophy East and West* 58.3 (2008), 338–41.

83. For fascinating studies that also link virtue (and the philosophy of the “Inner Chapters” more broadly) to mental and emotional health, see Moeller and D’Ambrosio, *Genuine Pretending*, 171–79; Chris Fraser, “Emotion and Agency in the *Zhuangzi*,” *Asian Philosophy* 21.1 (2011), 97–121; and Chris Fraser, “Wandering the Way: A Eudaimonistic Approach to the *Zhuangzi*,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 13.4 (2014), 541–65.

84. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 135.

85. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 220–23.

sense of self automatically detach the practitioner from the social frameworks discussed above that function according to stable identities.⁸⁶ Accordingly, the widespread development of those traits has the potential to generate an entirely new vision of human society.

Conclusion

Having worked through some of the most relevant passages of the “Inner Chapters,” we are now in a position to step back and consider the text’s overall argument regarding identity and the self. The basis of the text’s argument is the Way: the composite, ever-changing totality of all that exists. Although the cosmos exhibits regular patterns or “tendencies” (*qing*), these patterns do not provide normative guidance for the entities that exist within, and help comprise, the Way. Like the Way, each human “self” (*shen*) exists as a composite, mutable entity that also includes regular tendencies of thought and behavior.

Those tendencies include the human predilection for interpreting regular patterns as evidence of unitary agents, whether that be at a cosmic or personal level. This tendency is related to each person’s sense that they are a unique entity with the cosmos—their “sense of self.” By itself, this tendency is not necessarily problematic, and the text is ambiguous as to whether not the agents that it posits actually exist. What is more concerning is the potential for this tendency to intersect with the tendency of humans to define themselves using the imaginative construct of “identity” (*ming*).

Identity is a pattern of self-identification comprised of one’s preferences and aversions that is located within the heart-mind. As a pattern of thought, it can be either flexible or static. When used flexibly, identity provides a useful way to navigate and interpret the world as it furnishes

86. Commenting specifically on the issue of social role, Hans-Georg Moeller and Paul J. D’Ambrosio have advanced a somewhat similar argument concerning what they term “genuine pretending.” Moeller and D’Ambrosio argue that the *Zhuangzi* was written in response to Confucian claims that individuals should conform themselves to their social roles. By contrast, the *Zhuangzi* argues that cultivated individuals are able to use their empty selves to skillfully perform social roles without allowing their identities to be conditioned by them. At the same time, they do not attempt to locate a true or authentic self but maintain that inner emptiness for the adaptability that it offers (Moeller and D’Ambrosio, *Genuine Pretending*). Despite this article’s differences—such as the claim that identity is a broader concept than social role and that the text presents its formation as a common human tendency—I very much agree with Moeller and D’Ambrosio that the text claims great efficacy for its practices, particularly with respect to social frameworks, and that it demonstrates a lack of concern with locating an authentic self.

“descriptive” (*bishi*) frameworks that facilitate dialogue and interaction with other entities by recognizing the distinctiveness of both self and other. However, most people do not possess flexible identities because they become wedded to specific visions of themselves and so reify their transient preferences into a stable self-image, thereby “completing” (*cheng*) their heart-minds.

When the tendency toward reified identity intersects with the tendency to posit unitary agents, it results in the conflation of identity with sense of self. This causes individuals to define themselves exclusively by their fixed identities, thus producing notions like the true self. Such notions not only blind individuals to their greater selves, but also preclude growth as any change to one’s reified identity is perceived as a problematic disruption of one’s entire being.

Those individuals who reify their transitory preferences into stable identities accord those identities a normative status, utilizing them as the authoritative basis for passing judgement on the world. The text refers to this process as “taking the heart-mind as a teacher” (*shixin*). The elevation of an individual’s personal preferences to normative judgements of right and wrong transforms descriptive frameworks into “normative” (*shifei*) frameworks. These frameworks are static as they rest upon the application of judgements that arise from specific contexts but are applied to all contexts irrespective of circumstantial differences.

In addition to blinding individuals to changing circumstances, the transformation from descriptive to normative frameworks precludes egalitarian interaction with others because individuals who possess them only recognize the worth of those who resemble their own identities and denigrate those who do not. Even more troubling is that individuals appear driven to impose their judgements on others, thereby creating contention and the potential for violence.

Since it includes elements such as an individual’s social role, identity serves as a fundamental building block of human social frameworks. Such frameworks not only arrange identities into hierarchies of relative worth, but also employ measures such as “fame” (*wen*) and “punishment” (*xing*) in order to reinforce and generate those identities. In doing so, such frameworks establish shared standards of right and wrong in an effort to control and limit the potential violence of competing, identity-based perspectives. However, because they are based on identity, the efficacy of such frameworks is limited. On the contrary, they further blind humans to change by encouraging reification and also encourage the type of violence that they are intended to prevent.

All of the above constructs and their consequences arise from tendencies that appear deeply engrained in human beings. And humans thus tend to regard them as inevitable or even normative. However, the

text is at pains to point out that within the ever-changing and normatively neutral cosmos of the Way, tendencies need not have inevitable outcomes. Accordingly, the “Inner Chapters” encourages its readers to retrain their tendencies toward different outcomes.

Although humans seem incapable of existing without identities, they can render their identities more flexible. In order to do so, they must train themselves to accept the vicissitudes of the cosmos so as to cultivate an invulnerable sense of self known as “virtue” (*de*). Virtue provides an emotionally and mentally safe space that is empty of specific content. As a result, humans can empty their heart-minds and allow them to “wander” (*you*) within that space.

Wandering is an imaginative act in which the practitioner temporarily takes on the identities of others like a mirror reflecting images. As such, it can be thought of as empathetic practice. Because such reflective acts occur within the space of virtue, they do not disrupt the practitioner’s sense of self the way that they might in individuals who have conflated their reified identities with their greater selves. Consequently, practitioners can wander endlessly, refining their ability to understand and adapt to other entities and the ever-changing patterns of the Way.

In advocating this approach, the text does not claim that the human tendency toward identity should be eliminated, or that there exists a definitive normative order that one should follow. Instead, it offers an argument for how humans might work with a seemingly inescapable tendency, training it toward alternative ends and potentially effecting widespread change on the societal structures that result from it.

As a result of this argument, the text does not offer a clear answer on the ontological issue of “true self” versus “no self.” Instead, it focuses its attention on the consequences of acting based on a claim of reified essence, and it appears to conclude that, whatever the true nature of the human self, it is better to cultivate understanding and adaptation in order to foster egalitarian interactions and personal growth—normative valuations that are, within the context of the cosmic Way, ultimately groundless.

自我之夢：《莊子·內篇》中的“身份”問題

安天皓

提要

本篇文章討論《莊子·內篇》中的自我與身份問題。先前研究常常傾向於將“道”定義為某種常規秩序的體現或者外在的客觀現實。本文則認為“道”指涉多層次且不斷變化的萬物之理，它不具傾向性、也不為世界運行提供準則。

在這樣的宇宙觀中，人之自我，即“身，”亦可被定義為以多層、可變的形態存在，它展現出個人行為與情感的某種傾向，即“情”。其中的一個思維傾向是確定單一主體，而另一個是身份（“名”）的創造，也就是為自我定義而存在的虛構概念。當人們結合並且僵化這兩個傾向時，身份和更廣泛意義上的自我開始混淆。其結果便是一個簡單化、本質化的自我概念的出現，進而產生出評判標準，讓人們無視常變的世界，並且創造不合理的社會結構。

《莊子》文本認為人們應該重新訓練自己以參與到“身份”形成的過程，其方式是培養一個未曾分割自我意識，即“德，”它獨立於任何具體的身份認同之外。“德”成為一個情感上的安全區，這裡人們如鏡的思維可以暫時選取並且進入其他生物的“身份”。如此的思維實踐可以增進人與世界的共情，使人脫離有害的社會結構，並發掘重塑人類社會的潛能。

Keywords: *Zhuangzi* “Inner Chapters”, identity, self, *qing*, virtue
莊子內篇, 身份, 自我, 情, 德