

## Article

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## Courage and Well-Being in Early Chinese Daoist Philosophy

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**Abstract** | This paper presents early Chinese Daoist thought on well-being in the *Zhuangzi*. The *Zhuangzi* focuses on how to live a good life instead of what constitutes a good life. To the *Zhuangzi*, well-being (*le* 樂) comes from maintaining an attitude of acceptance (*an* 安) and performing non-purposive action (*wuwei* 無為), even when dealing with situations beyond human control (*ming* 命). This understanding of living a good life is dramatically different from the purposeful pursuit of well-being through action. Instead, to live a good life, the *Zhuangzi* requires one to uphold a form of courage (*yong* 勇) which requires one to willingly accept what is beyond human control without regret, anger, and useless struggle. Through this courage, one can participate in one's life without avoiding its challenges. By demonstrating how and why one's courage to accept uncontrollable situations provides a means to live a good life, the *Zhuangzi* presents us a different understanding of well-being.

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### Introduction

Concerning the issue of well-being, the *Zhuangzi* asks how to live a good life, instead of what constitutes a good life. In other words, it focuses on providing us proper action and attitudes to live a good life, and to deal with uncontrollable adversities, instead of explaining and justifying the nature of a good life. By the *Zhuangzi*, I refer to the entire anthology totalling 33 chapters edited and compiled by many hands and come down to us through the compilation of Guo Xiang 郭象 (c. 252-312 C.E.). It is considered one of the most important Daoist philosophical works in early China.

To be specific, in this paper, I first analyze the *Zhuangzi's* discussion on ultimate well-being (*le* 樂), where it defines the ultimate well-being through the way of

non-purposive action (*wuwei* 無為), which negate ordinary people's constant pursuit of pleasure (ordinary well-being) assuming certain fixed values. In this section, I also point out how the Zhuangzian ultimate well-being is related to adopting a proper way of dealing with situations that are regarded as not immediately and directly within one's control in life (*ming* 命).

Second, I draw readers' attention to the sagely courage (*yong* 勇) which differs from ordinary bravery expressed through action to overcome difficulties and to fulfil good ends. Sagely courage is seen as an ideal character, and is related to non-purposive action, understanding (*zhi* 知), and accepting (*an* 安) situations beyond human control so as to properly deal with it.

In this paper, I show how the *Zhuangzi* focuses on the

definition of well-being through proper attitudes and action for dealing with uncontrollable situations in life. Such a way of living one's life dramatically differs from the ordinary pursuit of what is good for one's life through action. Instead, by demonstrating how and why one's courage to accept uncontrollable situations can be seen as a proper way of living a good life, the *Zhuangzi* presents us a different understanding of well-being.

Before looking at the Zhuangzian texts, I will briefly summarize some key points. This includes, (1) the problem of ordinary people's pursuit of pleasure; (2) the understanding of non-purposive action as a way of living well; (3) the idea of uncontrollable adversities; (4) the problem of ordinary people's brave action (5) why sagely courage is advocated for properly dealing with uncontrollable predicaments.

(1) The *Zhuangzi* shows that ordinary people pursue well-being with purposeful and restless action, assuming that things such as wealth, social status, and reputation are absolutely good for oneself and one's life. They spend all their time, physical and mental energy, as well as emotional attachment, to seek for those values, even to the extent that they lose their self-control, harm their health, and exhaust their mind.

(2) Instead, the *Zhuangzi* suggests that non-purposive action should be practiced so as to reflect on the pursuit of what they regard as good for them. Importantly, non-purposive action involves dealing with uncontrollable predicaments in life with courage. 'Non-purposive action' is certainly not about negating all kinds of behavior and does not ask people to lay back and do nothing. Scholars agree that it is a kind of action that people perform spontaneously and naturally without interference. However, there are opposite interpretations to explain how people can reach the level of acting spontaneously and naturally.

On the one hand, Slingerland draws our attention to its paradoxical nature, suggesting that one does things in a natural manner (intuitive, quick, embodied, and affective) without pre-existing intentions or will, and without focusing on what they are doing. *Wuwei*, which Slingerland calls effortless action, allows one to act with the greatest efficiency and productivity (Slingerland 2003, 167-203). It is practically paradoxical since once one pays attention to act naturally, one has lost the natural way to perform it. Just as when once

get closer to a rainbow, one loses the best vision to appreciate its beauty. Or when we dance, if we focus on dancing spontaneous and smoothly, we may end up dancing like a robot. Therefore, the most spontaneous dance comes from not thinking of how to dance spontaneously.

On the other hand, Csikszentmihalyi argues for a kind of 'flow experience' which requires one to be fully absorbed and involved in things without reflection, since reflection can only disturb one's immersion in a situation, and influence one's cultivation of skills (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 54-55). This is because, when one acts without questioning the necessity of it or evaluating the reasons for carrying out the action, one can act with optimal satisfaction.

This paper argues that the seemingly contradictory interpretations are both reasonable so as to properly deal with 'good' and 'bad' experiences in life. When the *Zhuangzi* relates ultimate well-being with 'non-purposive action' and reflection on how and why to pursue what they regard as good for them, it agrees with Slingerland that one should not hold pre-existing intentions or fixed way of pursuit. However, when it comes to dealing with undesirable and uncontrollable occurrences in life, efficiency and productivity become irrelevant, and therefore, instead of focusing on the challenges and overcoming them, the *Zhuangzi* requires one to not interfere with the uncontrollable but rather fully participate in what is still within one's control and enjoy what one can do.

In other words, the *Zhuangzi* adopts 'non-purposive action,' on the one hand, to negate the unreflective pursuit of what is regarded as absolutely good for one's life. On the other hand, it stimulates us to reflect on what are regarded as undesirable and uncontrollable situations in life, and therefore pushes us to think how to better deal with them.

(3) In the *Zhuangzi*, uncontrollable occurrences in life are expressed through the term *ming* 命. *Ming* refers to particular situations in life that are regarded as not immediately or directly within one's control. It covers human being's personal, social and political spheres of life. For example, one cannot control what one looks like, or how tall one can grow. Nor can one control a sudden accident that leaves one crippled. Sometimes, the success or failure of one's certain ambition are also beyond one's subjective control.<sup>1</sup> When we talk

about regarding certain situation as beyond control, it means that one has recognized and admitted the limits of what one can do about it. Otherwise, one will regard it as something that one can still fight for, and accordingly, the concept of *ming* will not be attributed to that event. Nowadays, many people choose not to accept one's appearance as uncontrollable and therefore they choose to undergo micro facial surgery to change what they look like.

(4) The *Zhuangzi* presents sagely courage as an ideal character for one to live in peace with undesirable and uncontrollable situations in life so as to live well. Sage-like courage differs from ordinary courageous behavior, which to the *Zhuangzi*, focuses on purposeful action that lead to fighting, resentment, turmoil, and death. Nor can sagely courage be equated with withdrawing from life and being inert in the face of difficulties.

(5) Instead, sagely courage means the strength to face uncontrollable situations with understanding (*zhi*) and acceptance (*an*). It allows one to break through pre-existing value judgments regarding what should and should not happen to oneself. Instead, it allows one to regard a situation as uncontrollable without feeling regret, injustice, and resentment. Accordingly, it allows one to willingly accept it without being anxious towards the unknown. The courage to understand and accept uncontrollable situations, involves the resilience to maintain an affirmation of life with the unknown and uncontrollable parts. It also includes an attitude that upholds non-purposive action, where one does not shrink (*bu bi* 不避) from unavoidable dangers in life, and preserves emotional equanimity, and keeps oneself free from being anxious about the unknown (*bu ju* 不懼).

### Three Different Features

From the above argument, three features in the *Zhuangzi* can be summarized, as comparable with contemporary philosophical discussions on well-being. Among contemporary philosophical discussions, first, scholars focus on explaining and justifying what is ultimately good for a person. They give systematic accounts on theories such as hedonism, desire theories and objective list theories so as to explain what constitutes well-being (Crisp 2017; Haybron 2011).

Second, despite varying scholarly views on the notions of what makes one better off, contemporary discus-

sions tend to deal with what one intuitively considers positive objects and feelings, such as pleasure, desire, talents (Summer 1996,10-13). Therefore, the logic is, the more positive objects fulfilled and achieved, the better life one has.

Third, purposive action is often associated with well-being. This includes the pursuit or experience of pleasure, the fulfilment and attainment of the desired, the achievement of things within the objective list, or maintaining positive emotional conditions. No matter whether it is talent, honor, friendship, pleasure, desire, or health, etc., the scholarly debates on well-being treat what constitutes a good life by identifying, experiencing, and fulfilling active and forward-looking goals. That is to say, it is closely related to purposeful goal-oriented action.

When considering well-being in the *Zhuangzi*, we find the following three different features.

First, instead of explaining what constitutes well-being, the *Zhuangzi* focuses on the proper way and attitude to live one's life well. In other words, it concerns how to live a good life instead of justifying why the experience of pleasure, the gaining of wealth, or the fulfilment of desires, etc. make life good. Second, when thinking of how to achieve happiness and well-being, instead of focusing on purposive action, the *Zhuangzi* suggests non-purposive action for reaching the highest form of happiness. Third, in relation to non-purposive action, instead of focusing on the positive objects that are good for individuals, the *Zhuangzi* pays attention to the adversities and misfortunes in life that influence one's happiness.

Now let us look at the detailed discussions on well-being presented in the *Zhuangzi*.

### The Well-being of Ordinary Persons and Enlightened Persons

In the chapter 'Zhi le' 至樂 (ultimate well-being), we see the most explicit discussion for the idea of well-being (*le* 樂). It starts by questioning the existence of ultimate well-being in relation to how to act, instead of what it is. It is worth noting that the notion of well-being is premised on being alive; keeping oneself alive is a necessary condition for any further possibility of true happiness.

Is there a thing as ultimate well-being in the world or isn't there? Is there some way to keep yourself alive or isn't there? What to do, what to rely on, what to avoid, what to be at ease with, what to follow, what to leave alone, what to find happiness in, what to hate? <sup>2</sup>

Following this series of questions, the text problematizes what ordinary people hold as happiness:

In principle, this is what the world honors -- wealth, eminence, long life, a good name. This is what the world finds well-being in: a life of ease, rich food, fine clothes, beautiful sights, sweet sounds. This is what the world looks down on: poverty, meanness, early death, a bad name. This is what the world finds bitter: a life that knows no rest, a mouth that gets no rich food, no fine clothes for the body, no beautiful sights for the eye, no sweet sounds for the ear. People who can't get these things fret a great deal and are anxious - this is a stupid way to treat oneself. People who have wealth, wear themselves out rushing around on business, piling up more wealth than they could ever use - this is a superficial way to treat oneself. People who are eminent spend night and day scheming and wondering if they are doing right - this is a shoddy way to treat oneself. Man lives his life in company with worry, and if he lives a long while, till he's dull and doddering, then he has spent that much time worrying instead of dying, a bitter lot indeed! This is a callous way to treat oneself. Men of ardor are regarded by the world as good, but their goodness doesn't succeed in keeping them alive. So I don't know whether their goodness is really good or not. Perhaps I think it's good - but not good enough to save their lives. Perhaps I think it's no good - but still good enough to save the lives of others. So I say, if your loyal advice isn't heeded, give way and do not wrangle. Wu Zixu wrangled and lost his body. But if he hadn't wrangled, he wouldn't have made a name. Is there really such a thing as goodness or isn't there? What ordinary people do and what they find well-being in - I don't know whether such well-being is in the end really good for them or not. I look at what ordinary people find well-being in, what they all make a mad dash for, racing around as though they couldn't stop - they all say it is good for them. I do not find it good for them, and I do not find it not good for them.

*Zhuangzi* criticizes what ordinary people regard as good for them by focusing on the way they pursue it. To be specific, when they try to obtain what they

regard as good for them, people not only exhaust their body and mind, used up their energy and time, and sacrifice their life, but also leads them to not be able to stop (*budeyi* 不得已) racing around for objects and wealth. In other words, they have lost control of themselves since their whole life is centered on chasing after and obtaining the objects which they originally regarded as good for them, without realizing the harm it causes to one's body and mind, violating the fundamental premise to happiness in the *Zhuangzi*. Because one often cannot obtain the desired goods, one becomes anxious and concerned. Therefore, though one can live long, it can become a case wherein the person spends his whole life in emotional distress because of the inability to obtain what one regards as absolutely good for them.

The mental and behavioral problem of ordinary people's pursuit of well-being results from the assumption that all people in the world supposedly hold the same value judgments towards what is good for them and what is bad for them, without further reflection of what is really good for oneself. Disputing this understanding of well-being and its problematic premise, the *Zhuangzi*, before proposing a different way to pursue true happiness, first argues against the premise behind what is supposed to be right and wrong, good and bad for an individual.

This challenge to normal well-being results from a re-interpretation of the proper means of achieving and justifying well-being:

In the end is there really well-being or isn't there? I take non-purposive action (*wuwei*) to be true well-being, but ordinary people think it is a bitter thing. I say: perfect well-being knows no-fixed (*wu* 無) well-being, perfect praise knows no-fixed praise. The world can't decide what is right and what is wrong. And yet inaction can decide this. Ultimate well-being, keeping alive - only non-purposive action gets you close to this! Let me try putting it this way. The inaction of Heaven is its purity, the inaction of earth is its peace. So the two inaction combine and all things are transformed and brought to birth. Wonderfully, mysteriously, there is no place they come out of. Mysteriously, wonderfully, they have no sign. Each thing minds its business and all grow up out of inaction. So I say, Heaven and earth do nothing and there is nothing that is not done. Among men, who can get hold of this inaction?

*Zhuangzi* proposes a pursuit of ultimate and true well-being through non-purposive action based on the idea that there are no fixed judgments for right and wrong (*shifei* 是非). Also, there are no fixed values for what is good or bad for an individual's life. Therefore, only the way of non-purposive action allows one to obtain a true and ultimate well-being. In other words, ultimate well-being is not about revising the content that constitutes it, but about the way that one lives a life.

Non-purposive action is not about negating all kinds of behavior and does not ask of people to lay back and do nothing. Instead, it negates the unreflective pursuit of what one regards as absolutely good for oneself. It negates the kind of behavior that leads to mental, physical, and emotional harm to the extent that one no longer has oneself and things under control, possibly even leading to one's death. In other words, non-purposive action is about not living according to fixed standards and value judgments in action.

Non-purposive action, however, also provides us with positive functions for other possible kinds of action and attitudes. It leads us to transform one's mind to think free of fixed frameworks, enabling new action, attitudes, and perspectives, free of anxiety and unstoppable pursuit, and free of mental exhaustion. Therefore, while negating the negative side effects of pursuit, at the same time it pushes us to affirm the true basis of well-being (a healthy and undisturbed life) and find other possible ways of achieving it.

Now let us go back to the series of questions proposed in the beginning in relation to ultimate happiness and how to act. If, according to the *Zhuangzi*, we assume there to be an ultimate happiness, this implies a number of premises: We have ways to keep alive; We perform non-action; We rely on no fixed value standards; We do not hate certain fixed conditions such as poor or low-status; We do not admire fixed goodness. Most importantly, the possibility of happiness lies in the possibility that non-action provides us.

However, among the questions regarding how to truly live well, there is one set of questions that remains unclear, namely what to avoid and what to be at ease with (*xi bi xi chu* 奚避奚處) ---questions directly targeted at uncontrollable situations in life. In other words, when the *Zhuangzi* considers the issue of ultimate well-being, uncontrollable situations should also

be considered seriously together with the proper ways of pursuit.

## Debating Courage and Acceptance

To be specific, when non-purposive action enables one to pursue ultimate well-being and health, what to do when facing predicaments in life, especially when they are beyond one's control? Does that mean that when undesirable things inevitably happen to us, as long as it may harm my health and life, we should unreflectively accept it because it is not necessarily bad without avoiding it? Or should we just entirely withdraw from things that may hurt our life since a good life is only obtained when one is alive? Does non-purposive action lead one to inertia and extremely passivity when facing uncontrollable situations? How to live a good life with the uncontrollable and undesirable situations?

For most Western philosophers, the encouraged solution to challenges in life is to overcome them, and then to rise above it with courage. Therefore, in the West, the idea of 'courage' is frequently related to one's ability to act in spite of fear for fulfilling good ends (Tillich 1952; Walton 1985). We can agree that, first, courage is mostly seen as a good quality and does not tend to reflect a bad character. Second, it is seen as concerned with acting towards fulfilling good ends. We simply do not tend to praise someone as courageous when they commit a crime. Third, courage is closely related to action instead of merely to ideas. Fourth, courage is closely related to the overcoming of fear and anxiety.

In accordance with the idea of courage to overcome challenges, the ideas of 'acceptance' and of 'being at ease with' what one has been given and beyond control are generally considered unacceptable, since it devalues human effort and suggests that one should give in and not fight against unjust or undesirable situations. As Sophia Botros pointed out, 'accepting the circumstances of one's life and its attendant miseries is, if not positively repugnant to modern ears, at least utterly puzzling' (Botros 1983, 433-453). Scholars such as Isaiah Berlin believe that the idea of accepting what is beyond one's control justifies resignation to cruel and cold-blooded behavior, leading to inertia. Therefore, they tend to focus on defying an unjust social order (Berlin 2013,16). They seek freedom and well-being, by rejecting the idea of acceptance (Berlin

1969,129). In other words, acceptance is seen as contrary to acting to bring about a better result, and to fighting against what is given.

However, to the *Zhuangzi*, such a kind of courage focusing on purposive courageous action is problematic. It not only leads to resentment, but also leads to social turmoil and death.

Instead, the *Zhuangzi* proposes a sagely courage, without aiming at solving and overcoming the challenges. When one has gone through years of trying, and life experience somehow shows that one cannot really solve the problem, or when a sudden tremendous difficulty happens to one's life, the *Zhuangzi* proposes a kind of sagely courage expressed through non-purposive action of 'acceptance' and 'not to avoid' so as to live well.

The attitude of acceptance allows one to live at ease with situations beyond human control without anxiety, without action against it, and with enjoyment of what is still within one's control. To be specific, sagely courage firstly requires one to rationally analyze the given case and to recognize one's limitation to overcome the challenge. After rational deliberation, more importantly, it allows one to willingly accept the existence of uncontrollable predicaments without being anxious towards the unknown or blaming one's incapability to solve the problem. Accordingly, when one holds the courage to accept one's limitation and direct one's attention away from struggling against it, it allows one's mental space to reflect on and enjoy what is within one's control. With this kind of sagely courage, one can live in peace with the uncontrollable predicaments in life with an affirmation of life as a whole.

When suggesting the sagely courage to 'accept' what is beyond control, one may easily criticize it as a way to give up completely. In fact, after one regards certain situation as beyond human control, in contrast with purposively fighting against it, the *Zhuangzi* suggests non-purposive action to "not avoid" the uncontrollable situations in life. This means, on the one hand, a negation of purposive action of fighting. On the other hand, it affirms one's life as whole. One still participates in life with the anticipation of the existence of uncontrollable situations without being mentally and emotionally disturbed by them. This is why, it is a conscious and courageous choice that allows one to not avoid uncontrollable situations but live in

peace with them.

Before looking at how sagely courage is related to dealing with situations beyond human control with non-purposive action, let us firstly look at the Zhuangzian criticism of action-oriented *yong* 勇.

### Ordinary *Yong* and Sagely Courage in the *Zhuangzi*

Traditionally, the study of *yong* in early China is normally a topic discussed within Confucian and military texts. For example, Van Norden analyzed the Mencius's portrayal of courage (*yong*) as good character, focusing on its relation to action and fear, as well as virtues (Van Norden 1997, 237-256). Yearley compared Mencius's courage with Aquinas's (Yearley, 1990). Manyul Im, disagreeing with Van Norden, pointed out the negative side of *yong* and argued that *yong* can possibly lead to unruliness (Im, 2008). Within military texts, Filipiak argued that courage is seen as a crucial companion to military knowledge (Filipiak 2015, 39-42). Different from Filipiak's idea, Edward Lewis in his book *Sanctioned Violence* argued that in the *Wenzi* and *Sunzi*, commanders were urged to block the eyes of soldiers as well as their conscience so that they would blindly follow orders; accordingly, soldiers did not require volition or courage of their own, apart from listening to their commanders' orders (Lewis 1971,105-106).

Without entering into the debates on courage in the Confucian, or military traditions, one may observe that there is no consistent attitude towards *yong* in the Confucian and Military texts, as in the *Zhuangzi*. Just as the differentiation of ordinary and ultimate well-being, *yong* is also differentiated into ordinary bravery and sagely courage.

Ordinary *yong* is closely related to action. It often involves showing one's superiority over others, and therefore it can lead to fighting and resentment. Due to such undesirable consequences, it is often not considered a good quality to possess. In these cases, I translate *yong* as physical bravery.

For example, in the chapter 'Lie Yu Kou' (列禦寇), we are informed that when one demonstrates that one's bravery is superior to others, the result will be trouble. 'Beauty, a fine beard, a tall stature, brawn, strength, style, bravery, decisiveness – when these are

all superior compared to others, one will have trouble' (Guo 2007, 1058-1059). Even worse, being brave leads to resentment: 'People who are brave and active will arouse resentment' 勇動多怨 (Guo 2007, 1058-1059). The experience of Sun Xiu 孫休 demonstrates the validity of the above argument. In the chapter 'Da Sheng' 達生 (Mastering Life), we see a person, Sun Xiu, who believes himself to have a sufficiency of bravery: 'When facing trouble, no one has ever said that I am not brave (Guo 2007, 663-664). But instead of being praised, he is exiled by his countrymen. This is because Sun Xiu attempts to show his superiority through being brave.

Moreover, when one believes that one is physically braver than others, one becomes aggressive, which leads to fighting and turmoil. In the chapter 'Robber Zhi' (盜蹠), the text says that, 'Being brave, strong, resolute, and decisive, accumulating people and leading troops, is the lowest level of virtue' (Guo 2007, 993). This means that when one's bravery is related to war and fighting, it becomes the lowest level of virtue. The reason that bravery will lead to undesirable consequences is because it comes a characteristic that people use to show off in times of need: 'Those who are brave and valiant exert themselves in times of calamity' which, to the *Zhuangzi*, is pathetic (Guo 2007, 834).

Realizing the problem of physical bravery, the *Zhuangzi* argues for a kind of sagely courage negating active action. In the chapter 'Qiushui' 秋水 (Autumn Floods), sagely courage is discussed. This story begins with a situation featuring abnormal behavior – Confucius being at ease and singing when surrounded by troops from the state of Song, and continues with his disciple Zi You's (子由) questioning of this behavior. The story develops with Confucius' discussion of four cases of courage. With this, Confucius argues that his decision is comparable to the courage of the sages. Finally, the story ends with Confucius' safety. Let us first examine the text.

When Confucius was passing through Kuang, the men of Song surrounded him with several encirclements of troops, but he was playing his lute and singing without stopping. Zi Lu went in to see him and said, 'Master, how can you still entertain yourself?' Confucius said, 'Come, I will explain to you. For a long time, I have tried to stay out of the way of hardship. That I have not managed to escape. I then re-

gard it as an uncontrollable situation. For a long time, I have tried to achieve success. That I have not been able to do so. Then I regard it as an uncontrollable timing. If it happens to be the age of a Yao or a Shun, then there are no men in the world who face hardship – but this is not because their wisdom saves them. If it happens to be the age of a Jie or a Zhou, then there are no men in the world who achieve success – but this is not because their wisdom fails them. It is time and circumstance that make it so. To travel across the water without shrinking from the sea serpent or the dragon – this is the courage of the fisherman. To travel over land without shrinking from the rhinoceros or the tiger – this is the courage of the hunter. To see the bare blades clashing before him and to look upon death as though it were life – this is the courage of the man of ardour. To understand that hardship is a matter of fate, that success is a matter of the times, and to face great difficulty without anxiety – this is the courage of the sage. Be at ease with it, Zi Lu. There are limitations in my life.'<sup>3</sup> Shortly afterwards, the leader of the armed men came forward and apologized. 'We thought you were Yang Hu, and that was why we surrounded you. Now that we see you aren't, we beg to take leave and withdraw.'

#### *Courage and situations beyond human control*

This story shows that sagely courage is about dealing with situations that are not immediately and directly within human control (*ming*).<sup>4</sup> When Confucius chooses to sing and play his lute instead of fighting or trying to escape, he realizes and accepts the fact of limitations (*zhi* 制) in life. From the description of the passage, we have reason to assume that Confucius did not know why the Song troops were there; otherwise it would have been easy for him to claim that he was not Yang Hu. Therefore, Confucius at that moment choose to regard this difficult position as something beyond his understanding and direct control.

The idea of situations beyond human control do not imply that things are pre-determined in the sense that one cannot act otherwise. Confucius and his disciples could have fought or tried to escape from the Song troops. Rather, it emphasizes the realization of the individual's limitation towards certain things, and therefore through the recognition of one's limitation, one accepts and regards things as truly beyond human control, without unnecessary struggle that would harm one's body and mind.

For example, one can regard one's inability to swim as an Olympic champion as an uncontrollable situation. This means that one accepts the fact that after years of training, one is incapable of reaching that goal and regards it as one's limitation. Certainly, one can reject to admit such a limit and therefore continues to try breaking through one's physical limit for a certain goal. But if this kind of effort has been influencing one's emotional and physical health, to the *Zhuangzi*, it means that one has been living one's whole life with anxiety, disappointment since one cannot fulfil that goal.

It is worth noting that Confucius realization of the existence of situations beyond human control. The realization comes from deliberating on his own experiences and on historical precedents. Before the acceptance of the uncontrollable situations, Confucius struggled long to avoid what he believes as hardship (*qiong* 窮), and to seek what he thinks as good for his life's success (*tong* 通). But all his years of trying failed. He also reflected on the historical development of Yao and Shun's age. He concludes that even a virtuous person like Yao cannot control all the hardship and success of the world. Only at that time, he realized that one should regard certain things situations beyond human control so that one can understand how to deal with them better.

### *Courage and understanding*

Reflections on personal and historical incidents are important since it helps us to cultivate sagely courage through proper understanding (*zhi* 知) of the situations beyond human control, so that one can willingly accept them without harming one's body and mind.

First, such an understanding is not merely about recognizing a certain fact, such as recognizing that one was born a deformed body, but also about willingly accepting it, without further asking such questions as, Why am I the one who is facing such a difficult situation and born with a deformed body? Why has this happened? Why me? When people are able to accept the situation they find themselves in, those people cease to question why they were the ones to be put in such a situation in the first place, as discussed before.

Second, when one ceases to ask why such a thing has happened, it means that one has abandoned the previous belief that certain things should not happen to one, or that one was supposed to have a certain kind

of life. In other words, one has given up one's previous fixed mind-set on how things should be.

Third, when one is capable of freeing one's mind from what is not supposed to happen, one can start thinking of what else one can do about it, and what there still remains in life to enjoy. That is to say, when one holds the proper understanding towards situations beyond human control, one can stop fighting against hardships and to stop seeking to fulfil one's ambition. Instead, one accepts the undesirable occurrences in life without either blaming one's capability or pushing oneself too hard to fight against it. As long as one can accept the uncontrollable situations, one's attention can be directed to what one can still enjoy about and what else is still within one's control.

The negation of purposive seeking and purposive fighting, and the call for acceptance, does not mean that one should completely withdraw from what one has been doing. Just as the fisherman mentioned in the text knows that there will be dragons and water serpents in the water, he still chooses to work as a fisherman instead of withdrawing from the water altogether. This is because, when one chooses certain role in society, one can no longer escape the anticipated difficulties involved. Therefore, the *Zhuangzi* suggests the non-purposive action of "not avoiding."

### *Courage and "Not avoiding"*

As described in the beginning of the passage, when surrounded, Confucius did not choose to fight against the danger. He did not act to resolve this problem. Nor did he think hard about how to escape. Instead, he chose 'not to shrink from' (*bu bi* 不避) danger.

The courage not to shrink from the danger means an attitude of facing a situation that cannot be avoided. In other words, it is a form of 'participation' in life with 'affirmation'. By anticipating possible dangers and acting without anxiety, one does what is necessary to deal with a problem regardless of the danger, and fully experiences the process. In this sense, when one knows the danger and acts regardless, one has accepted the premise of what it entails to be a fisherman and affirms it, and therefore participates in life fully as a fisherman.

Confucius chose to face the situation by singing and playing music, which to his disciple Zi You seemed almost offensive, but it meant that Confucius was still

valuing the moments of life even when facing circumstances beyond his control. Although Confucius was facing death, he did not waste his or his disciples' life by fighting or trying to escape. Instead, he affirmed and cherished the moment by doing the only things that could still be done: singing and making music. He accepted the moment with peace and with an unperturbed mind. He directed his attention to things that he could still do and could still enjoy; therefore, even though he was surrounded, he was doing things that he liked and thereby affirmed the moment.

## Courage, Anxiety and being at ease

In order to uphold the courage to affirm one's life together with the acceptance of situations beyond human control, the text informs us of another crucial element that needs effort to cultivate, namely the ability to be free from anxiety *bu ju* (不懼). What does it mean?

When relating courage to fear, Philippa Foot makes a distinction between acting in spite of fear, and not being afraid at all (see also, Van Norden 1997, 238). She asks, 'We both are and are not inclined to think that the harder a man finds it to act virtuously, the more virtue he shows if he does act well.... Who shows the most courage, the one who wants to run away but does not, or the one who does not even want to run away?' (Foot 1978, 10). In the previous three cases, we have no clear evidence to decide whether the fisherman, the hunter, and the man of ardour decided to act with no fear or in spite of fear. What we can speculate is, due to their experience, they can anticipate what kind of danger they will face, even though they do not know exactly when and where the danger will appear, and how severe it is.

This paper, however, argues that, when it comes to the sage's way of participating free of *ju*, we find that to the *Zhuangzi*, the emphasis lies not on fear (which is expressed through *kong* 恐), but on freedom from anxiety (*bu ju*).

Fear describes an emotion towards a clear object and towards situations that can be analyzed, avoided, and tackled (Guo 2007, 502). Anxiety, however, is a feeling related to something that cannot be analyzed and predicted. That is to say, instead of really feeling anxious about the thing that one cannot obtain, one's anxiousness is related to the uncertainty of not know-

ing whether one will ever be able to obtain the thing. Such anxiety is related to something that cannot be analyzed or predicted.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the courage to participate in life free from anxiety refers to a mental state wherein one calmly faces uncertainty and the unknown. Only by doing so, can one then participate in life without being distracted by anxiety over the what, when, and, how of the things that are beyond one's control or worrying about how bad the situation might be. We see from the text that the idea of freedom from anxiety is in line with Confucius' teaching of being at ease (*chu* 處).

## Conclusion

From the previous analysis, we see that the *Zhuangzi* talks about ultimate well-being focusing on how to live in peace with undesirable and uncontrollable situations in life. It focuses on the negation of purposive and non-stoppable pursuit of outer goods, which in return leads to uncontrollably harming one's mind, body and emotions. To the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, ordinary brave action that focus on overcoming challenges for certain good ends, lead to fighting, death and resentment.

With a negation of constant pursuit and ordinary bravery, the *Zhuangzi* draws our attention to undesirable and uncontrollable situations in life to which it calls for a proper attitude and action to deal with so as to live well. It informs us the sagely courage so as to live at ease with the situations that are regarded as beyond human control. The sagely courage is different from acting for the purpose of fulfilling good ends and overcoming difficulties. Instead, sagely courage is related to non-purposive action, and includes:

- (1) Willingly accepting what is beyond human control without regret, anger, and useless struggle. When one can willingly accept what is beyond control, it means one no longer holds onto pre-existing value judgments towards what should happen and what is absolutely good. In this sense, acceptance means non-purposive. It is an attitude without acting against or for certain purposes.
- (2) To participate in life without avoiding its challenges, and with affirmation of what one can still do. When one does not avoid the challenges, it means one does not give up what one has been living with.

And with the courage to enjoy what is within control, one will not live one's life with constant disappointment, anxiety, but to affirm one's life through thinking of what one can still enjoy and do.

Suppose a child was born with certain fatal illness that only allows this child to live less than 15 years. What should the parents and this child do to live well? Certainly, no one will doubt that they should fight against the illness and look for possible new ways to extend the life of this child. However, it could be the case that after years of trying, just as Confucius, there is still no way to cure this particular illness within the foreseeable future. Should they continue to fight, and use up the 15 years of remaining family time to search for new ways, assuming that they are financially capable of doing that? When they continue to fight, to look for treatment, this family probably cannot stop feeling disappointed and angry. Should they spend their 15 years living like that? (I am certainly not suggesting that they should give up treatment completely. Rather, it is about whether they should spend their lives trying to pursue possible new treatments.)

The *Zhuangzi* may suggest that at a certain point, they should learn to hold the courage to accept, and to enjoy life in its limits. It means that when this family chooses to regard this illness as a situation that is truly beyond human capability to cure, such an acceptance also gives them the courage to fully participate in the moment when they are still together without being anxious about when this beautiful family time will come to an end. When they do so, they will no longer blame themselves for not doing enough. Instead, they are able to fully enjoy bedtime stories or dinner table hours with the anticipation that this cannot last as long as 50 years. By doing so, even it is only one year left, it is in full affirmation of their life.

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## Endnotes

[1] As for my wish to be a super model in the States: Probably, my limited height does not allow my ambition to be realized no matter how hard I try. And we should not deny that often, family environment, talent, and social support hugely influence a person's fulfilment of certain ambition. As in the 60s, if a man wants to be a ballet dancer, he needs luck in addition to effort.

[2] All the English translations of the *Zhuangzi* are adapted from Watson, Burton trans. 1968. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press.

[3] In this case, I read *ming* 命, as life (*shengming* 生命) instead of fate so as not to confuse the Zhuangzian idea with fatalism.

[4] For a detailed discussion of *ming* in the Confucian tradition, please see for example, Kwong-loi Shun's distinction in relation to its prescriptive and descriptive dimension. *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 19-21, 77-83. For a more general discussion of *ming* from a comparative perspective, please see Lisa Raphals, 'Fate, Fortune, Chance and Luck in Chinese and Greek: A Comparative Semantic History,' *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2003): 537-574. Raphals identified six types of *ming* by incorporating the attitude towards it, such as *sui ming* (遂命), following or mastering fate, or *zhi ming* (知命), the possibility of understanding fate. Liu Xiaogan once defined the Zhuangzian attitude towards *ming* as fatalistic, using the term *su ming lun* (宿命論). See Liu, *Zhuangzi Zhaxue Ji Qi Yanbian* 莊子哲學及其演變 (Zhuangzi's philosophy and its changes), Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010, p. 144. But in his recent publication, he disagreed with this fatalistic view, defining *ming* as referring to 'naturally given situations' referring to situations that are uncontrollable and meaningless to life. See Liu, 'Zhuangzi's

philosophy, a three-dimensional reconstruction,' in Liu Xiaogan, ed., *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, Netherlands: Springer, 2014, p. 201. For the idea of *ming* and acceptance in the *Zhuangzi*, also see Ai YUAN, 'On Acceptance,' *Soo Chow Journal of Philosophical Studies* 東吳哲學學報, Vol. 33 (2016): 97-121.

[5] One can also feel *ju* towards not being able to obtain an object: 'If one cannot obtain (what one feels pleasure about), one will then be greatly worried and anxious' (若不得者則大憂以懼). GuoQingfan, *Zhuangzi Ji Shi*, p. 609.