

Article

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Forgetfulness and Flow: “Happiness” in Zhuangzi’s Daoism

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Abstract | In this paper, I will approach Zhuangzi’s notion of happiness or a well-lived life by ascribing to his concepts of forgetfulness and flow. The paper aims to show that Zhuangzi’s idea of flow, from an experience-process perspective, resembles a certain aspect of the flow defined by Csíkszentmihályi’s motivational psychology, but it is more complicated and more difficult to be conceptualized due to the employment of negative expressions in his philosophy. Zhuangzi’s claim that “The perfect happiness is derived from the absence of happiness” designates two key arguments: (1) Happiness cannot be designed and measured, and (2) There is no single fixed notion of happiness and meaning-making. In conclusion, I attempt to show that flow experiences, in the context of Zhuangzi’s Daoism, point to a fluid and creative mind that transcends the rigidity of conventional mores and life patterns so that a person can respond to the world of flux more effectively and happily.

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Introduction

In recent years there have been some direct or indirect studies of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子在 conjunction with the Daoist conception of happiness from a philosophical, religious or psychological point of view which offer a wide range of interpretations due to the hermeneutical interests of contemporary readers (e.g., Jullien François 2007, Livia Kohn 2010, Yong Huang 2010, P. J. Ivanhoe 2014, and Chris Fraser 2014).¹ Although the question of happiness or human flourishing is one of the major concerns of Daoism in general and Zhuangzi’s philosophy in particular, many Zhuangzi scholars are reluctant to talk about the ethical dimension of happiness since Zhuangzi seems to be quite suspicious about offering a predetermined *telos*, suggesting a single vision of good life or happiness. In this paper, I shall address Zhuangzi’s notion of happiness or a well-lived life by ascribing to the Daoist notion of “forgetfulness,” contending

that Zhuangzi’s happiness exceeds any fixed concepts or limiting horizons that a constituting subject could impose upon it. I shall also avoid a mystical reading of self-forgetfulness that we sometimes find in the *Zhuangzi* exegesis through relating forgetfulness to the phenomenology of flow from an experience-process perspective.

The term of “flow” used by positive or motivational psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi is seen as an established metaphorical expression in the West referring to a particular type of experience characterized by feelings of a dynamic fusion of on-going activity, effortlessness, fluidity, and creativity. According to Csíkszentmihályi, people find genuine life satisfaction or joy during a state of flow consciousness. In this state people are completely absorbed in an activity, especially an activity that involves their creative abilities. During this “optimal experience” they feel “strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious,

and at the peak of their abilities,” as Csíkszentmihályi puts it. (Csíkszentmihályi 1990, 1) At the same time, Csíkszentmihályi insists that happiness in flow does not simply happen; it must be prepared and cultivated.

Then how about the idea of “flow” in Zhuangzi’s Daoism since he also advocates a flow-oriented action and life? What is the relationship between flow and Zhuangzi’s concept of happiness if we need to conceptualize it? In fact, some scholars (such as Christopher Kirby 2017, Edward Slingerland 2014, Chris Fraser 2014, Nathaniel Barrett 2011, Chris Jochim 1998, and PJ Ivanhoe 1993) have connected Zhuangzi’s flow with that elucidated by Csíkszentmihályi. Yet such association has been also challenged since Zhuangzi’s flow is on the condition of so-called “forgetfulness” that suggests a notion of self-oblivion whereas Csíkszentmihályi’s flow is based on the idea of “master self” (albeit a moment of unselfconscious involved) who is orchestrating the flow experience.² Moreover, the idea of flow in positive psychology focuses on two key factors, namely, skills and goals. Zhuangzi’s flow, however, accentuates more the idea of forgetfulness, or to be more exactly, the forgetfulness of both self and the goal. If this is the case, how can we bring clarity to the experiential, conceptual and theoretical formulation of a state of flow in Daoist philosophy when the very idea of “forgetting” seems to defy a conceptual or theoretical apprehension of self and its connection to flow unless one is no longer in flow?

To answer these questions, I will point out different uses of the “flow” concept in a variety of contexts of the *Zhuangzi*, and then explicate the relationship between flow experiences and the concept of “happiness” in Zhuangzi’s Daoism. I am not suggesting, however, that a complete and systematic understanding of the Daoist idea of happiness can be reduced to a psychological state of the mind, although both forgetfulness and flow in the *Zhuangzi* are directly associated with the idea of the transformation of the mind.

Flow Experiences

In the *Zhuangzi*, we find stories that denote the idea of “flow,” and all of which point to a metaphorical expression for the dynamic flowing nature of experience that lends to joy and life satisfaction. Sometimes, flow is linked to the idea of fluidity in water image, indicating an experience of “going with the current” (*you*

游) or a spontaneous action (*ziran* 自然);³ sometimes, flow describes an activity that entails skilfulness (*ji* 技) and spiritual fulfillment (*shen* 神); sometimes, flow is associated to the idea of constant change (*liubian* 流變) and a transformation of the *qi*-energy (*qihua* 氣化), and sometimes, flow can be identified with a mentality of being care-free (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) that goes beyond the scope of a specific action.

The flow that involves skilfulness and life satisfaction are known as “knack stories,” such as Cook Ding carving an ox and Woodworker Zi Qing making a bell stand. In those narratives, the agent is less concerned with an ultimate goal, nor following the rules of a method. Instead, he just focuses on his activity. Flow as an embodied knowing delineated in “knack stories,” I think, can be understood as a humanistic model of self-fulfillment rather than a mark of “mystical” or “daemonic” experience despite that we see the words like *shen* 神 (spiritual) in the case of Cook Ding and *guishen* 鬼神 (ghost-spirits or gods) in the case of Woodworker Zi Qing. Accordingly, the idea of flow in the *Zhuangzi* is not that different from the experience argued by Csíkszentmihályi’s motivational psychology. For Csíkszentmihályi, flow is a source of mental energy in that it focuses attention and motivates action, and he thus sees flow as “the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake” (Csíkszentmihályi 1990, 6). For Zhuangzi, all as “knack stories” indicate the importance of life-energy (both physical and mental) that enables a person to attain a transformative skill and efficacy. In other words, flow provides a model of skillful spontaneity that serves as a reference point of an intrinsic satisfaction one experiences not conditioned by external factors (e.g. honor and wealth). Csíkszentmihályi uses the term “autotelic” (from the Greek words “auto” for self and “telic” for goal) to refer to activities which are in themselves rewarding. Obviously, Zhuangzi’s knack stories also suggest the connection between skill and enjoyment, as well as the connection between the subject and the object in the flow process. No wonder Csíkszentmihályi cites the story of Cook Ding in his book on the flow theory.

In the flow experience the notion of “focus” or “attention” in motivational psychology can be translated as “mindfulness” or “quieting of the mind” (*qingxin* 靜心) in the Daoist context. For example, in the story of Woodworker Zi Qing, he is asked how he can

make a bell stand that looks like a work of gods, he answers, “I always fast so as to still my mind. ...My skill is concentrated and all outside distractions have faded away.” (*Zhuangzi*:19). Here, flow is described as a mode of action characterized by a state of complete, undistracted immersion. Therefore, Zhuangzi would not reject the idea held by motivational psychology that energy in flow gains more via engagement characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption, nor would Zhuangzi deny the possibility of an inner joy brought by such kind of vitality and engagement. Nevertheless, “focus” or “attention” in motivated psychology is problematic from the perspective of Zhuangzi’s spontaneity in twofold aspects: (1) to design exercises to “produce” flow, and (2) to see the result-oriented action as the key mark of flow.

First, Csíkszentmihályi suggests the idea of “effortless control.” Is this the same as the Daoist idea of “acting without action” or “trying without a try”? not exactly. Motivated psychology tends to emphasize the notion of “purpose” that is clearly future-oriented and goal-oriented. To a certain extent, it is an “interventionist approach” which aims at maximizing the flow experience so that one’s life can be “thriving and flourishing” (Fredrickson and Losada 2005, 678-686). In contrast, Zhuangzi’s Daoist flow focuses on each moment of the action without being confined to either the past or the future. As Edward Slingerland observes, the Daoist philosophy of *wuwei* 無為 (acting without action) points to an effortless action in the sense that the world will carry us along if we can stop controlling and open ourselves up.⁴ According to Daoist philosophy, a “passive technique” like *wuwei* emphasizes the effectiveness of spontaneity. It means one needs to “let things go” instead of being obsessed with controlling things.⁵ Perhaps, letting thing go is also a form of “controlling.” But instead of controlling and influence others, it means controlling oneself. In other words, an inner stillness and open-mindedness are prerequisite for outer influence and efficacy.

Alan Fox makes a good argument when he interprets Zhuangzi’s *wuwei* as “becoming sensitive to a broader and finer range of the subtle demands, constraints, and inevitabilities of unique situations” and such sensitivity “allows us to respond [*ying*] most appropriately to every unique situation in the way that most or best respects subtleties of novelty and necessity” (Fox 1996, 59). Here, the idea of “responsiveness” (*ying* 應) reflects another dimension of flow which requires a

caliber of doing things well suited to our skills but also dealing with situations around us creatively.

Secondly, while motivational psychology centers on planning in order to optimize the action and attain the goal, Zhuangzi’s flow focuses on the spontaneous order in a process.⁶ The effectiveness of the result is a byproduct instead of a premeditated aim prior to action. As a result, very often following the rules of the method is not sufficient to executing a skillful action in a given situation, and too much worry about a pre-designed goal can be an obstacle to attain an effective action. Mindfulness is the first step for one to enter into flow, for the genuine flow requires a higher mind-set that enables one to transform skills to the *dao*/way (*youji rudao* 由技入道) which allows a harmonious unity between skill and action. In the story of the wheelwright Bian, we read a passage where the wheelwright describes what he is doing to respond to Duke Huan’s question concerning the uselessness of the reading the words of the sages:

I look at it [my life] from the point of view of my own work. When I chisel a wheel, if the blows of the mallet are too gentle, the chisel slides and won’t take hold. But if they’re too hard, it bites in and won’t budge. Not too gentle, not too hard you can get it in your hand and feel it in your mind. You can’t put it into words, and yet there’s a knack to it somehow. I can’t teach [explain] it to my son, and he can’t learn it from me. So I’ve gone along for seventy years and at my age I’m still chiseling wheels. When the men of old died, they took with them the things that couldn’t be handed down. So what you are reading there must be nothing but chaff and dregs of the men of old. (*Zhuangzi*: 13; Watson 1968, 152-153)

Wheelwright Bian’s account of his experience above indicates that he can describes the basics of the craft, yet the question regarding how to be a wheelwright cannot be transmitted simply by words or by following the words of the past, namely, the artistic spirit cannot be copied from a recipe. To put it differently, flow is a matter of the *mode* of action rather than the *content* of action, if I borrow the expression used by Fraser (Fraser 2014, 543-544). The wheelwright Bain’s observation is also echoed by Cook Ding when he insists that what he cares is the *dao*/way which “goes beyond skill” (*Zhuangzi*:3). In Daoism, what is “going beyond” or “transcendent” dimension is also called the transformative nature of spirit. When Cook Ding

claims that he does not look the ox with his eyes, but “goes at the ox by spirit,” and when Woodworker Zi Qing tells us that he can make the spirits-like wood works by “matching heaven with heaven,” they both speak of a level of flow experience that goes beyond skill. It is at this level of action that the Daoist idea of “forgetfulness” is introduced.

Forgetting and Flow

In her study of Daoism, Livia Kohn elucidates the neurophysiological dimension of Daoist meditation, especially the meditative practice on forgetfulness.⁷ In the *Zhuangzi* we encounter two methods of meditative practice, that is, “fasting of mind” (*xinzai* 心齋) and “sitting in forgetfulness” (*zuowang* 坐忘): The former works on the concentration while the latter on the emptiness (forgetfulness). To a large extent, both are an integral part in Zhuangzi’s concept of flow. For Zhuangzi, the cultivation and transformation of the heart-mind (*xin* 心) constitute not only the correlativity of body-mind but also the transformative nature of spirit that is needed for a creative mind that transcend conventional norms and limits.

As a matter of fact, forgetfulness (*wang* 忘) is one of the recurring themes in Zhuangzi’s arguments. Very often Zhuangzi employs the concept “forgetfulness” to explicate his Daoist challenge of conventional moral norms. Here is a famous dialogue between Confucius and his favorite disciple Yanhui fabricated by Zhuangzi as a parody to the Confucian value system:

Yan Hui called to Confucius and said, “I’m improving!” Confucius said, “What do you mean by that?” Yan Hui said, “I’ve *forgotten* humaneness and rightness.” ...Another day, the two men met again, Yan Hui said, “I’m improving!” Confucius said, “What do you mean by that?” Yan Hui said, “I’ve *forgotten* rituals and music.” ...Another day, the two men met again, Yan Hui said, “I’m improving!” Confucius said, “What do you mean by that?” Yan Hui said, “I can sit in *forgetfulness*” Confucius looked very startled and said, “What do you mean?” Yan Hui said, “I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare....” Confucius said, “If you’re identical with it, you must have no more likes! If You have been transformed, you must have no more

habitual ways of acting. So you really are a worthy man after all! With your permission, I’d like to become your follower.” (*Zhuangzi*: 6; Watson 1968, 90-91; minor changes made and emphasis added)

The parodic conversation highlights an anti-Confucian stance when the fictional Confucius asks his student to *forget* all the teaching about virtues. However, forgetfulness in flow experience entails an epistemological implication that goes beyond a simply rebellious gesture. It is here that Zhuangzi advocates alternative way of thinking and acting, as Cook Ding says when he explains his flow experience in cutting off an ox:

What I care about is the dao/way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now -- now I go at it by spirit and don’t look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants (*Zhuangzi*: 3; Watson 1968,51, emphasis added).

Another passage from the *Zhuangzi* where Woodworker Zi Qing makes the idea of forgetfulness in his flow experience more explicit:

When I have fasted for three days, I no longer have any thought of congratulations or rewards, of titles or stipends. When I have fasted for five days, I no longer have any thought of praise or blame, of skill or clumsiness. And when I have fasted for seven days, I am so still that I *forget* I have four limbs and a form and body. By that time, the ruler and his court no longer exist for me. (*Zhuangzi*: 3; Watson 1968, 205, emphasis added).

Zi Qing’s statement “I forget that I have four limbs and a body” reminds us of the beginning passage of Chapter Two of the *Zhuangzi*, where there is an account of a master who is practicing the meditation of forgetfulness. The practitioner tells his friend that the method of forgetfulness has made his body “like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes” [indicating the state that he “has lost himself”] and that he is able to hear “the piping of heaven” (*Zhuangzi*: 2). Obviously, the master is talking about “emptying the mind” as a way to free oneself from epistemological

limits and artificial constraints so as to have an understanding of the nature of things. This is a process of transformation from self-differentiation to self-identification *qua* an elimination of formulaic rules and personal biases that prevent a person from attaining *ming* (illumination), that is, an insight or great knowledge. To follow this line of thinking, Zhuangzi argues that forgetfulness points to open-mindedness that enables us to embrace “great knowledge.”

On that account, “forgetfulness” in the *Zhuangzi* basically constitutes two things: Self-forgetfulness (*wangwo* 忘我) and forgetfulness of both self and things (*wuwo liangwang* 物我兩忘). When Woodworker Zi Qing says, “I am so still that I forget I have four limbs and a form and body,” he is talking about self-forgetting, and when he says, “the ruler and his court no longer exist for me,” he is talking about forgetting things external to himself. In other words, Zi Qing is in a state of flow when neither he himself nor the ruler as well as his court exists. The question for us is: How can one give an account of a flow experiences and make an evaluative judgment when he/she is in a state of “forgetfulness”? It is quite obviously that those experiences are only apprehended after the fact, when one is no longer in flow. My suggestion to solve this dilemma is to make a distinction between [flow] experience itself and the post-experiential account, interpretation and evaluation of that experience. Very often, flow is reconceptualized in as precognitive or trans-cognitive engagement. I have to admit that our language about the experience of “forgetfulness” tends to be “textual” and “conceptual,” which cannot be exactly the same as the lived experience. Nevertheless, “forgetfulness” should not be understood as a doctrine for Zhuangzi; it is methodological rather than metaphysical. Let us take a look at the following statement where Zhuangzi expounds the concept of “forgetfulness” in a metaphorical way:

You *forget* your feet when the shoes are fit. You *forget* your waist when the belt is fit. Understanding *forgets* right and wrong when the mind is fit. ... (*Zhuangzi*: 19; Watson 1968, 206–207, minor changes made).

The purpose of forgetfulness is to find the “fit” (*shi* 適). Self-forgetfulness, according to Zhuangzi then, does not mean “no-self” *per se*; instead, self-forgetfulness is way to self-fulfillment. In other words, Zhuangzi’s talk on self-forgetfulness does not mean an annihilation of a physiological self in a conventional sense, but

as a radical transformation of the latter. Ultimately, one needs to transcend binary distinctions of self and other, and the loss of self (*wuji* 無己) and self-fulfillment (*zide* 自得) in order to see things as they are. This is what Zhuangzi means by finding the fit, or to more exactly, “the fitting of the mind” (*xinzhishi* 心之適). For Zhuangzi, genuine flow is possible only way one finds the fit.

Concurrently, it should be noted that Zhuangzi’s take on fit suggests an unusual reversal of the conventional subject-object logic. The entities that belong to the category of the objective i.e., the shoe and belt, are prioritized as what they are while the subjective (the foot and belly) should be forgotten. When the self-egoistic judgment is suspended, the distinction between “this” and “that” is forgotten. Here, I follow Robert E Allinson’s observation that self-forgetfulness means self-transformation (Allinson 1998, 144). For Zhuangzi, flow is associated to the idea of constant change and the transformation, not only the world, but also the concept of self. Such kind of transformation of mindset is clearly illustrated by the ending passage of Chapter Two in the *Zhuangzi*, known as the butterfly dream story. The question asked by Zhuangzi as who [Zhuangzi or the butterfly] was dreaming about whom aims to subvert the conventional way of thinking with reference to subject-object structure. Namely, the statement “if Zhuangzi dreamt about butterfly” becomes “if the butterfly dreamt about Zhuangzi.” In the final chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, it says, “He opens himself broadly to the vastness of the root of things, abandoning himself to it even unto the very depths” (*Zhuangzi*: 33). And such an opening of oneself requires insuring that the understanding mind comes to rest or suspense in judgment in what it does not know.

That being so, Zhuangzi’s account of forgetfulness would be at odd with positive psychology, although Csíkszentmihályi does acknowledge the value of momentary forgetting or self-loss in spontaneous action. Nevertheless, I think both Zhuangzi and Csíkszentmihályi would accept Charlie Parker’s statement when he says, “don’t play the saxophone. Let it play you.” They would agree that Parker is saying something profound about the automatization of actions in flow. The inversion of the conventional subject-object logic is made explicit as well.

Flow and Happiness

I am approaching the idea of happiness in Zhuangzi’s

Daoism in the light of flow for two reasons: (1) flow is centered on the mode of action (i.e. the question of how), not the content of the action (i.e. the question what), and (2) Flow is used as a symbol for a spiritual ideal in the *Zhuangzi* which is closely associated with the Daoist view of happiness.

As noted above, Zhuangzi recognizes the dimension of an inner joy and self-fulfillment of flow experiences in mundane activities. Yet for Zhuangzi, there is a broader sense of happiness in life that is more complicated than building up a repertoire of rules and principles for the purpose of achieving happiness. As Fraser insightfully points out, Zhuangzi is more concerned with the prescriptive and pragmatic nature of happiness whereby the question is “how” not “what.” Thus, Zhuangzi rejects the idea of a single vision of the good life since different agents, with different capacities, may experience life satisfaction in a variety of ways (Fraser 2014, 543-44). For that reason, the flow experience points to the ideas of refuting, marking off, and negating the content of action in terms of conceptualization and measurement, things often emphasized by positive psychologists. In the contrary, Zhuangzi speaks of going along with the patterns, processes, and the rhythms of the *dao*/way as a gesture of flow and a representation of happiness which, no doubt, gives the concept of flow a multidimensional perspective. P. J. Ivanhoe summarizes Zhuangzi’s position on happiness as follows:

True happiness requires one to recognize, value, and to some extent give oneself over to the patterns, processes, and rhythms of a certain kind of life: a life that hooks one up with the greater and deeper patterns, processes, and rhythms of the Dao. In other words, according with the Dao requires one, to some extent, to lose oneself in a form of life, and at first this seems odd to regard the *loss* of myself as the way to fulfill and *make myself happy* (Ivanhoe 2014, 265).

Again here, we see that Zhuangzi’s recommendation of good life focuses on “how to do” (i.e. following the patterns, processes, and rhythms of the *dao*) rather than “what to do” (i.e. what things that worth doing). As a matter of fact, most “*dao*-persons” described in the *Zhuangzi* are not engaged in professions or activities that are valued as “noble” or even “decent,” such as cooks, carpenters, ferrymen, and cicada-catchers. This “content-thin” approach to the definition of happiness

intends to reject a single and fixed vision of good life or happiness. Thus, flow promises no predetermined design and definite *telos*. Instead, it accentuates self-so, freedom and creativity.

Motivational psychology also recognizes the correlation between flow and happiness, defining flow as “an intrinsically enjoyable experience” that “shares the enjoyment of valuing of peak experience and the behavior of peak performance” (Privette and Bundrick 1987, 1361). However, it differs significant from Zhuangzi’s philosophy in that motivational psychology puts stress on goal-oriented and choice-making action. As such, a person needs to invest in consciously chosen goals, and it is important to plan according to result areas instead of operating on random actions.⁸ However, Zhuangzi seems to tell us that a long-term happiness does not simply mean “being in good mood” or “feeling happy” for the enduring happiness or contentedness in life is not simply a present-indexed thing. Obviously, Zhuangzi’s view of happiness or flow is more complicated and more difficult to conceptualize than speaking about the performative nature of action or a choice that optimize the effectiveness of action.

In addition, personal freedom in the face of social constraints is a major concern for Zhuangzi’s idea of happiness which is symbolized by the notion of “free and easy wandering” (*xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊). In Chinese the character denoting “wandering” 遊 (*you*) is the same as the character denoting “flow” 游 (*you*).⁹ Therefore, Zhuangzi often identifies “free and easy wandering” with “flow” in the sense that wandering means flowing along with the fluctuations of natural processes. That is, flow is a way of “becoming sensitive to a broader and finer range of the subtle demands, constraints, and inevitabilities of unique situations” and such sensitivity “allows us to respond most appropriately to every unique situation in the way that most or best respects subtleties of novelty and necessity” (Fox 1996, 59). A well-lived life, then, shows “our capacity to wander—to discover, shift between, explore, and play along various paths through the world— [which] is the fullest expression of human agency” (Fraser 2014, 555). Nevertheless, Zhuangzi would agree with Csíkszentmihályi that happiness and skillfulness (whether in or outside forgetfulness) do not just happen, they require constant self-cultivation.

In fact, Zhuangzi does not systematize characters

traits of flow experiences except telling us different stories. Zhuangzi's dictum that "The perfect happiness is derived from the absence of happiness" (*zhibile wule* 至樂無樂) functions in the same fashion as "acting without action", or "trying without a try." The negativity here aims at a strategy of a linguistic twist that breaks away from a conceptual thinking between happiness and absence of happiness. The purpose of such negativity is not to denounce happiness but to avoid confining happiness to a conceptual scheme, as Zhuangzi says, "A good swimmer is one who has forgotten the water" (Zhuangzi:19). If flow is the way of enjoyment, then each temporal and spatial journey is always the *dao* in a sense that it is always a journey on the way of happiness. What matters is joyfulness of the journey itself rather than its destination. As the *Zhuangzi* tells us, life is like leaping into the playfulness of boundless traveling, and our happiness comes from each moment of life and our capacity of transcending our limits to experience life in its fullest form.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explicated Zhuangzi's idea of happiness in the light of his view on flow and forgetfulness. I point that there are some similarities between flow experiences defined by Csikszentmihályi's motivational psychology and explored by Zhuangzi's Daoism. I also point out that Zhuangzi's flow is much broader and more complicated than that in motivational psychology as the scope of the flow experience discussed in the *Zhuangzi* goes beyond the study of motivated actions or concentrated activities. In addition, the notion of "forgetfulness" indicates a form of negativity frequently used in the *Zhuangzi*, which functions as a double strategy. On the one hand, Zhuangzi attempts to subvert the conventional discourse on happiness, illustrated by his statement, "the perfect happiness is derived from the absence of happiness." On the other hand, Zhuangzi is engaged in the discourse by lodging himself within language (albeit his use of non-representational terms) and affirming the possibility of happiness and meaning-making. Zhuangzi insists that to lead a good life means to transcend dogmatic doctrines, including the doctrine of happiness, recognizing the transformative nature of things in the world and embracing the idea of responsiveness."

In a Daoist fashion, Zhuangzi's happiness does not

point to a single meaning of happiness or a well-lived life that is pre-determined by a definite purpose. Instead, in some cases, it requires a gesture of self-forgetfulness that allows a fluid and creative mind needed for finding the fit and living in agreement with the unfolding of *dao*/way at a decisive moment. After all, for Zhuangzi, life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved.

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Endnotes

[1] The Zhuangzi text used in this paper has consulted *Zhuangzi jishi* 《莊子集釋》 (*Collected Commentaries of the Zhuangzi*), edited by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985). Translations are based on Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Some modifications have been made for the sake of textual consistency.

[2] For example, Chris Jochim has pointed out that Csikszentmihalyi's conception of flow is different from Zhuangzi's philosophy for the latter suggests a form of happiness interventions characterized by structured exercises and designed theorists of positive psychology to create a more fulfilling life. See Jochim's essay in Ames 1998, 35-74.

[3] See the example in the *Zhuangzi* where a swimmer was able to navigate waters in such a way that even fish, turtles, and crocodiles avoid him. When asked how he made it, he replied that he just followed the inflow and outflow. See the *Zhuangzi*: 19.

[4] In his book *Trying Not to Try: Ancient China, Modern Science, and the Power of Spontaneity*, Edward Slingerland links Daoist ideas of spontaneity to contemporary cognitive science and psychology. See Slingerland, 2014.

[5] *In positive psychology, researchers tend to believe that a regimented, goal-oriented life generates high well-being* See Diener et al., 1999.

[6] It should be noted here that Csikszentmihályi also recognizes that in some creative activities, goals are not clearly set in advance. Nevertheless, a person must

develop a strong personal sense of what he or she intends to do in order to optimize the action.

[7] Kohn outlines the history and intricacies of the meditation of oblivion or forgetfulness, an essential form of Daoist meditative practice, contending that meditation is an important dimension to understand both philosophical and religious Daoism. She attempts to work out the implications of certain meditative experiences in Daoism, which will help us to understand the correlation between meditative practice and philosophical categories. See Kohn 2010.

[8] I would say that Zhuangzi sees such action as "petty knowledge" although he would not deny that the result of such activities may lead to joy and satisfaction in a short term.

[9] See the definition of *you* given by Lu Deming 陸德明, the commentator of the *Zhuangzi*. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 1985, 1.