

# 從「承給意義」論遊魚之喻 ——一個探究《莊子》實踐意義的 跨領域進路

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## 摘要

本文透過遊魚之喻以解釋《莊子》哲學。我提出要掌握遊魚之喻的意義，必須要探討魚與水之間的關係。本文共分五節。首先，我就既有的解讀方法，也就是分別論魚與論水的譬喻作一概要說明，並指出此一進路在解釋莊書中「道」的概念上的不足。接著，我提出「承給（承擔、給予）意義」，一個替代「價值／意義」的語辭，來發掘遊魚之喻所隱涵的關鍵：立足之地。在第三節，我循承給意義來進行關於遊魚之喻的解讀。第四節透過「脆弱性」的概念，來解釋我們在成心主導下所失去的一種自然能力。我也透過討論莊書中嬰兒與渾沌這兩個對比形象，來說明脆弱性的導引作用。最後，我總結，莊書提供深具實踐意義的建議，讓人——尤其是身處涵蘊多元價值之現代社會的你我——在所處情境中不懈因應，在任一既定社會脈絡內展開充實的生活，採取具創造性的態度去發掘社會世界中的無限可能性。

**關鍵詞：**《莊子》、遊魚、承給意義、脆弱性、實踐

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# The Affordance of the Graceful Fish Metaphor: An Interdisciplinary Approach Exploring the Practical Dimension of the *Zhuangzi*

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## Abstract

This article explains *Zhuangzi's* philosophy by analyzing the metaphor of the graceful fish. I argue that to discover the essence of the graceful fish metaphor, we have to look into the relationship between the fish and the water in which it dwells. The article consists of five sections. First, I start by a brief review of common readings of the metaphors of the water and the fish and their insufficiency to relate to the idea of Dao/daos in the *Zhuangzi*. Second, I propose an interdisciplinary approach based on the notion of “affordance”—a substitute for “value/meaning”—that enables us to unveil the underlying key element pertaining to the image of the graceful fish: the ground. Third, an analysis of the graceful fish metaphor is presented after the explanation of affordance. Forth, I draw on the concept of vulnerability to explain the natural ability we are born with but buried due to a dominant completed heart-mind. I explain how vulnerability steers our way by comparing two images found in the *Zhuangzi*: infants vs. Hundun. Fifth, I sum up my findings and conclude that the *Zhuangzi* provides pragmatic advices for individuals—especially those

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who now live in a modern society that embrace social plurality—to live their lives to the fullest within any given social context by constantly adapting to the situation and therefore creatively exploring the limitless possibilities in the social world.

**Keywords:** *Zhuangzi*, graceful fish, affordance, vulnerability, practical dimension

# The Affordance of the Graceful Fish Metaphor: An Interdisciplinary Approach Exploring the Practical Dimension of the *Zhuangzi*<sup>\*</sup>

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## I. Introduction

This paper examines the graceful fish metaphor by focusing on the relationship between the fish and the environment.<sup>1</sup> There are two important phrases in chapter six of the *Zhuangzi* (“Dazongshi”) comparing the ideal way of living for a person and the ideal way of living for the fish. The fish metaphor manifests the image of a creature in its natural state which is reasonable for commentators

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<sup>\*</sup> This article is an adaptation of my dissertation *The Meaning of the Body in the Zhuangzi: A Discussion of the Practical Basis of Xiaoyao* (NTU: 2016). An earlier form of the article was presented at the conference “Interpreting Chinese Philosophical Texts—Theories, Case Studies and Praxis,” held at Tunghai University, 2018.04.20-21.

<sup>1</sup> The rendering of “graceful fish” is proffered by Professor Wim De Reu of National Taiwan University (personal correspondence). “Graceful” refers to the observable characteristics of the movement of the fish, namely flowing, elegant and smooth. The scope of this paper will not include the conversation between Zhuangzi and Huizi on the fish happiness (魚樂). For a brilliant analysis on the conversation, see Chad Hansen (2003), and Norman Teng (2006).

to connect it with the virtue of *wuwei* (無為).<sup>2</sup> *Wuwei* is widely considered as a spontaneous/untutored way of comporting oneself in the world. More specifically, it is a form of action distinguished by effortless, responsiveness or skill, non-deliberative spontaneity, and enjoyment. As in the case of the fish, it's natural for us to believe that the skill of swimming is innate, that a fish naturally enjoys itself in the water. However, it seems less obvious as in the case of a person: what does it mean by claiming a person has the skill of Dao-ing or he naturally enjoys himself in Dao?

The fish metaphor is surprisingly resourceful in providing us context to answer the above questions. But first we need to stipulate the usage of Dao and dao. I refer to Dao as the subjective state of an ideal person, and dao as various paths taken by individuals. A person in Dao possesses the skill of performing daos accordingly; his cognitive grasping of the content of Dao equipped him with flexibility and creativity to engage the world. The juxtaposition of the fish and humankind in a bad situation is deliberately structured in order to exemplify the catastrophic fact of holding on to a completed heart-mind (*chengxin* 成心)<sup>3</sup>.

## II. Affordance

The idea of affordance allows us to gain perspective on the reality of a person's life in the social context—the relationship between people and the relationship between human and the social environment. Clearly we cannot practically live on our own: we are dependent in every aspect within the social

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<sup>2</sup> See Edward Slingerland (2003).

<sup>3</sup> See “Qiwulun.” See also “Xiaoyaoyou” for a similar idea: “a clogged heart-mind” (*pengzixin* 蓬之心)

environment. The affordances of the social environment are what it offers us as the inhabitants. Gibson defines affordance as such:

The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the **complementarity** of the animal and the environment. (my emphasis. Gibson, 1979: 127)

Affordance is a term Gibson made up to refer to value and meaning that are *perceivable*. To declare the affordances of the social environment are perceivable equals the exclusion of any absolute subjective/objective meaning or value.<sup>4</sup> The affordances of a social environment are what it affords a person, and that depend on what a person is capable of perceiving.<sup>5</sup> For a thorough discussion of the affordances of Dao, I begin with unfolding the differences between the environment which affords fish and the environment which affords humankind.

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<sup>4</sup> “There has been endless debate among philosophers and psychologists as to whether values are physical or phenomenal, in the world of matter or only in the world of mind. For affordances as distinguished from values, the debate does not apply. Affordances are neither in the one world or the other inasmuch as the theory of two worlds is rejected. There is only one environment, although it contains many observers with limitless opportunities for them to live in” (Gibson, 1979: 138).

<sup>5</sup> What Gibson wants to achieve with his theory is *mutuality*. He claims that the ecological approach to perception is our natural way to perceive the environment. Gibson (1979: 33) rejects the concept of space and abandon the world of physical reality. Because the physical reality does not consist of meaningful things, but the ecological reality does. “If what we perceived were the entities of physics and mathematics, meanings would have to be imposed on them. But if what we perceive are the entities of environmental science, their meaning can be *discovered*.” The inseparability between the environment and its inhabitants is analogous to that between social environment and people. The words people and social environment made an inseparable pair. What I try to establish using Gibson’s theory is the manifestation of mutuality between a person and the social environment he or she dwells in. It describes a world of complementarity that no one could escape.

Though both live on the earth, the fish and the humankind dwell in different spaces—the underwater medium and the atmospheric medium. Medium is one of the three categories that Gibson used to describe the environment.

According to Gibson, “the terrestrial environment is better described in terms of a *medium*, *substances*, and the *surfaces* that separate them.” A *medium* is where animals can move around and breathe; *substances* are something resistant to deformation and more or less impenetrable by solid bodies; the *surfaces* are what separate the substances from the medium. For the sake of brevity, this paper focuses on the difference between the underwater medium and the atmospheric medium. As in the case of fish, they live in the underwater medium. As in the case of humankind, we live in the atmospheric medium.

The underwater medium is bounded both above and below, by a surface of water-to-air and a surface of water-to-mud. The atmospheric medium is bounded only below, by a surface of air-to-earth (or air-to-water), and it has no definite upper boundary. The fish is buoyed up by its medium and needs no surface of support. Our kind of animal must hold itself up off **the ground** with effort, working to maintain posture and equilibrium. The fish is cradled in the water and is never in any danger of falling down or falling off. We are always in such danger. The fish need never make contact with the bottom. But we cannot for long avoid contact with the earth, and only upon the earth can we come to rest. (my emphasis. Gibson, 1979: 21)

The ground is the surface of support for humankind (see figure 1). It is the ground of our perception and behavior. It is also **the ground of our beliefs**, the ground

where we establish the idea of rights and wrongs, namely the heart-mind of *shifei* (是非之心) in the *Zhuangzi*. The comparison between the underwater medium and the atmospheric medium provides us clues to understand the reasons why holding on to one's heart-mind of *shifei* is an unfavorable choice of life: (1) we need to hold ourselves up off *the ground* with effort or we will be in danger of falling down (see figure 1); (2) we can only come to rest upon the ground, unlike the fish who are constantly cradled in the water and therefore never in need of the ground for support or rest (as shown in figure 2).

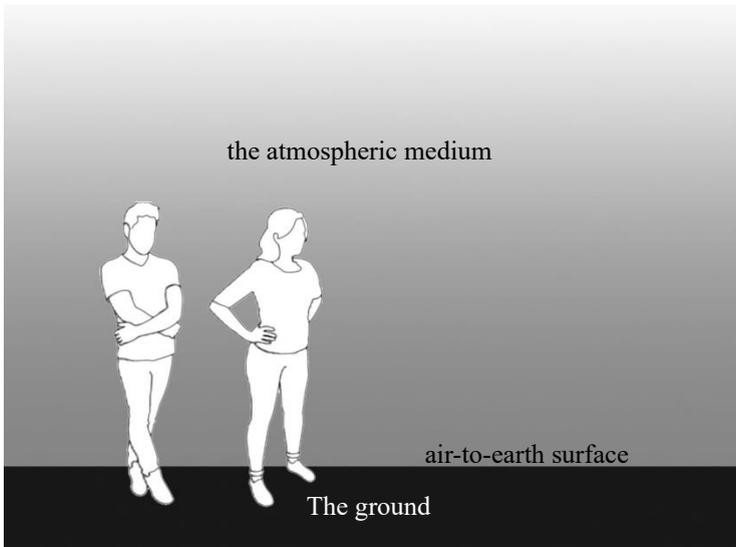


Figure 1

The way humankind lives in the atmospheric medium. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The human outlines are a horizontal flip of *Figure 1* in Amy J. C. Cuddy, Caroline A. Wilmuth, Andy J. Yap, Dana R. Carney (2015: 1288).

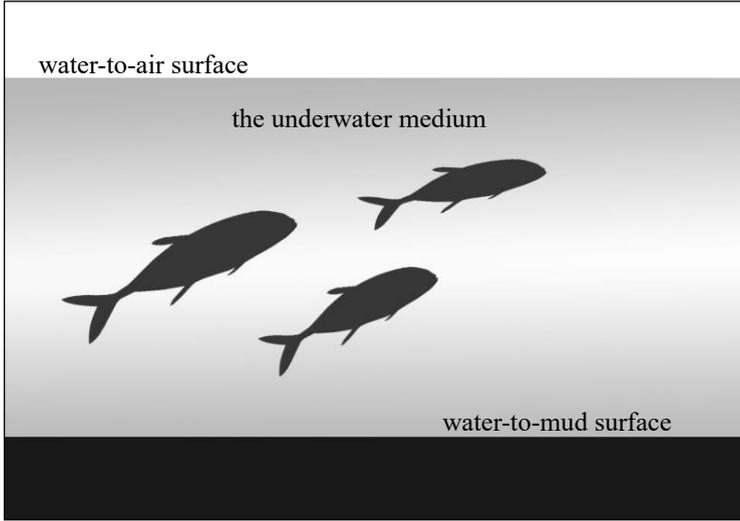


Figure 2

The way fish live in the underwater medium.

The fish gain encompassing support in the underwater medium, the fact bears metaphorical significance which illustrating the concrete advantages of not having to hold on to the ground. The restful characteristic of the underwater medium is similar to that of the potter's wheel of Heaven.

狙公賦芋，曰：「朝三而暮四。」眾狙皆怒。曰：「然則朝四而暮三。」眾狙皆悅。名實未虧而喜怒為用，亦因是也。是以聖人和之以是非而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行。是以聖人和之以是非而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行。（“Qiwulun”）

The monkey keeper distributed nuts, saying: “Three in the morning and four in the evening.” All the monkeys got angry. “Alright, then

four in the morning and three in the evening,” he said. The monkeys were delighted. Joy and anger had been put to use without a change in the name or actuality. It, too, is an instance of the “adaptive ‘this.’” This is how the sage blends/harmonizes them with a “this/*shi*” and a “not-this/*fei*” and puts himself to rest on the potter’s wheel of Heaven. This is what is called “walking both paths.”<sup>7</sup>

By adapting to the situation, the monkey keeper dissolves the tension between him and the monkeys. The text suggests that the adaptive demeanor of the monkey keeper towards argument is sagely. One’s sagely demeanor earns one a restful ground to be open to the choices of “this” and “not this.” Resting on the potter’s wheel is a sagely way per terms of the *Zhuangzi*’s dealing with the world. Instead of holding on to a fixated point of view, one resting on the potter’s wheel of Heaven blends both opposite point of views by staying at the center. “Walking both paths” is an ideal way of comporting oneself to the world. A conversation between *Zhuangzi* and *Huizi* in chapter 26 (“*Waiwu*”) regarding the use of words (*yan* 言) could be taken as an evidence to support my reading into the metaphorical meaning of the ground.

惠子謂莊子曰：「子言无用。」莊子曰：「知无用而始可與言用矣。天地非不廣且大也，人之所用容足耳。然則廟足而墊之致黃泉，人尚有用乎？」惠子曰：「无用。」莊子曰：「然則无用之為用也亦明矣。」（“*Waiwu*”）

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<sup>7</sup> Translations in the article are mainly Wim De Reu (2010, 2015), for his rendering is most well-constructed on a textual base and it retains crucial elements that are of great importance to my discussion. I also refer to Brook Ziporyn (2009), Angus C. Graham (1981) and Burton Watson (1970). In the case of the graceful fish metaphor, I proposed a translation based on the concept of affordance.

Huizi said to Zhuangzi: “Your words are useless.” Zhuangzi said: “It is when someone knows the useless that one can first talk to him about use. The earth, for sure, is wide and big, yet what man uses is only the space needed to hold his feet (the ground). So then, if one were to dig away what is beside the feet and reach all the way down to the netherworld, would the space occupied by man still be useful?” Huizi said: “It would be useless.” Zhuangzi said: “If so, then, it is also clear that the useless counts as useful.”

Based on my analysis of the metaphor of the ground, the way one see the surface of the ground just enough for our feet as useful, reflects the way one hold on to the ground of one’s own belief of rights and wrongs. If one regards only one’s own ground of beliefs as useful, then others’ ground of beliefs is discarded as useless. As illustrated by the act of digging away all the earth around one’s feet—symbolize the denial expressed by Huizi towards Zhuangzi—the act of discarding others’ ground of belief literally isolates oneself from the entire social network. How could one possibly communicate with others if one regards one’s own point of view as the only valid ground? The meaning of a person’s life is not socially fulfilled until he recognized the significance of interacting with other persons in a way that provide mutual and reciprocal affordances.

What other persons afford, comprises the whole realm of social significance for human beings. (Gibson, 1979: 128)

Behavior affords behavior. (Gibson, 1979: 135)

The other animal and the other person provide mutual and reciprocal affordances at extremely high levels of behavioral complexity. (Gibson, 1979: 137)

Behavior is a primary constituent of affordances. The interaction between individuals varies based on their behavior. I am able to afford the behavior of other persons provided I actively involve myself in the social environment. If I were to retreat myself from the social environment and live a secluded life, there is no way I can live my life to the fullest. My assumption here is that social environment is essential to the fulfillment of lives. Both Gibson and the *Zhuangzi* recognized that social connection is vital for individuals. Gibson's idea of affordance focuses on the complementarity of both parties in a relationship. The idea of performing complementarity in order to gain advantage upon living gracefully is rather obvious in the *Zhuangzi*. How does one get to steer one's way through a tough situation? How do we recognize the opportunity to make a difference?

We pay closest attention to the optical and acoustic information that specifies what the other person is, invites, threatens, and does. (Gibson, 1979: 128)

A person is born with the ability to perform meaningful behavior that fully utilized our optical and acoustic information of the environment and other persons within the environment.<sup>8</sup> If that is the case, why do we find it difficult to behave the way we are born to be? The reason is plainly that we are restricted, by normative regulations, so that we no longer pay enough attention to the perceptive information. Instead, we succumb ourselves to normative regulations and habitually fit in to a formulaic interaction with

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<sup>8</sup> Recent study has provided further evidence for the theory of affordance, see Jessica K. Witt, Michael A. Riley (2014).

other persons. Unlike the majority, the ideal person in the *Zhuangzi* is highly responsive. He has the skill of performing meaningful behavior in a particular social context. He is not trapped by patterned behavior because he recognizes the harm of holding on to the heart-mind of *shifei*. By paying attention to the environment and to other persons, he is capable of steering himself through either in the social environment or a particular situation<sup>9</sup>, he is responsive at the point when one faces the dilemma of having to retreat or advance. Based on the flexibility of his demeanor, he creates new possibilities in connecting to other persons.

In conclusion, the affordances of Dao enable a person to live a graceful life by interacting with other persons responsively without being fixated on the ground, namely restricted by the completed heart-mind.

### III. The graceful fish metaphor

Based on the above explication of the theory of affordance, in what follows I offer an interpretation of the graceful fish metaphor. Instead of focusing on the image of the fish (that portrayed the ideal person) or the image of the water (that symbolized the ideal way/Dao) respectively, I look into the relationship between the fish and the water in which it dwells.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> By recognizing the significance of a situation, a person is able to recognize the situational aspect rather than the personal/subjective aspect of whatever choices in his life. See François Jullien (2011: 14-15).

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Allan (1997: 78-79) recognizes “people who are in dao are likened to fish in water,” but by resorting to the image of water as the primary interpretive source of dao, his theory is only capable of explaining the advantages of being in the Dao which nourishes and encompasses us, but the way to be in Dao remains unknown to us.

魚相造乎水，人相造乎道。相造乎水者，穿池而養給；相造乎道者，无事而生定。故曰，魚相忘乎江湖，人相忘乎道術。  
（“Dazongshi”）

Fish afford fish through the water, people afford people through Dao. Those who afford others in the river get to stroll and have enough food, those who afford others through Dao stay easy and live peacefully. Hence the saying: fish disregard one another in the river and pond, people disregard one another [the ground of self as well as the ground of others] in their daos.<sup>11</sup>

Water affords fish to stroll and be full; Dao affords people to be at ease and self-affirmative. The meaning of “disregard one another” (*xiangwang* 相忘) remains unclear until we analyze the other passage depicting a fatal situation of the fish.

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相响以濕，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。與其譽堯而非桀也，不如兩忘而化其道。（“Dazongshi”）

When the springs dry up, the fish left stranded on the ground together, gasping on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet; but that is no match for disregarding one another in the rivers and lakes. Compared to their praising Yao and condemning Jie, it would be better to disregard on both sides and thereby to dissolve the bearing of their daos.

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<sup>11</sup> The passage is extracted from a story describing what Zhongni learned from an extraordinary act of mourning. Through witnessing men mourned the death of their friend by singing in front of a dead body, Zhongni realized norms are not applicable for those who have attained Dao.

If a fish is out of water, then it is destined to die. If a person is out of Dao, then he is destined to live a miserable life. The action taken to keep a stranded fish damp showed mercy but it is not helpful at all. Similarly, the establishment of a standard of rights and wrongs—to praise the good king and condemn the evil king—appears to be beneficial but detrimental indeed.

What can terrestrial animals like us learn by scrutinizing the lives of the fish? The ground is the point. Human being are literally attached to the ground, figuratively, people are restricted in many ways by the ground we live by—namely our heart-mind of *shifei*. If we were to learn one thing from the fish, that must be to cut ourselves loose from the restriction of the ground. It is indeed a profound task which reminds me of a phrase from the *Zhuangzi*: “It is easy to wipe away your footprints, but difficult to walk without touching the ground” (*jue ji yi, wu xing di nan* 絕迹易，无行地難).<sup>12</sup> The graceful fish metaphor suggests that we set aside the figurative ground of beliefs, which means not holding on to a fixated ground of value. The underwater medium exemplifies a non-fixated stance of value—it supports a person in a way that is secured, enabling him to be flexible and responsive. A person with non-fixated stance resembles the fish which is cradled in the water, thereby is no longer in any danger of falling down or falling off—he does not need to constantly hold himself up off the ground with effort, he has become resilient when it comes to dealing with different points of view.<sup>13</sup> A person gains a restful attitude by adopting a non-fixated stance. This is a person who

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<sup>12</sup> “Renjianshi”.

<sup>13</sup> An ideal state of heart-mind that resembles the cradling state of a graceful fish enables one to move with wider amplitude, thereby widen the meaningful space of life literally and figuratively. Following this line of thought, I proposed a practical strategy which I called “Dao-embodiment posing” for reader who seeks self-transformation. See Pong (2018).

has the skill of Dao-ing, who naturally enjoys himself in Dao. Whoever enjoys himself in Dao affords other persons regardless of the extent to which they may differ.

方舟而濟於河，有虛船來觸舟，雖有愾心之人不怒；有一人在其上，則呼張歛之；一呼而不聞，再呼而不聞，於是三呼邪，則必以惡聲隨之。向也不怒而今也怒，向也虛而今也實。人能虛己以遊世，其孰能害之！（“Shanmu”）

If a man, having lashed two hulls together, is crossing a river, and an empty boat happens along and bumps into him, no matter how hot-tempered the man may be, he will not get angry. But if there should be someone in the other boat, then he will shout out to haul this way or veer that. If his first shout is unheeded, he will shout again, and if that is not heard, he will shout a third time, this time with a torrent of curses following. In the first instance, he wasn't angry; now in the second he is. Earlier he faced emptiness, now he faces occupancy. If a person could succeed in making himself empty, and in that way wander through the world, then who could do him harm?

The image of an empty boat illustrates a person with a non-fixated stance of values who engage with a hot-tempered man (by running into his boat) and not getting yelled at. The story reminds us of the graceful fish metaphor. In a world full of obstacles as well as opportunities, the ideal way for a person to steer a course through is definitely not retreating, but gracefully engaging in it.

## IV. How vulnerability steers our way

In the previous section, I concluded that social engagement is essential in achieving the ideal state per the terms of *Zhuangzi's* Dao. Within the context of affordance, we understand that the interaction between two parties (be it person to person or person to the environment) determines the content of affordances. Affordance allows one to achieve as much as one's living context affords, which means possibilities and creativity to life fulfillment. The social engagement required, as to perceive what other person provides, implies one has to expose oneself to others as well as to the social world. Contrary to the non-social interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*, the idea of affordance claims indispensable social embeddedness. One may argue that social embeddedness is in conflict with one of the *Zhuangzi's* main themes namely to live out one's life span (*zhong qi tian nian* 終其天年). To engage in a social world means exposure to the world, that implies higher possibilities of getting hurt. In other words, social exposure threatens one's chance of living out one's life span. I will say that social engagement not necessarily brings about higher risk of getting hurt.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, it not only opens up a person's perspective but also strengthens a person's capacity to be open to wounds as well. In what follows I introduce the concept of vulnerability.

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<sup>14</sup> As I understand that the notion of self-preservation is evident in the *Zhuangzi*, I also hold that the notion of self-realization is also clearly presented in the *Zhuangzi*; the tension between the two of them will be resolved if we understand self-realization not in terms of established values but affordances of individuals.

## A. vulnerability

According to Bryan S. Turner (2008), a British sociologist, “the concept of vulnerability is derived from the Latin for ‘wound.’ Wounds are open and they open us to life; the wound is a metaphor of the human condition.” What Turner offers here is not what we normally have in mind when we think of wounds.

Vulnerability [...] refers to human capacity to be exposed to psychological or moral damage. It refers increasingly to our ability to suffer (morally and spiritually) rather than to a physical capacity for pain from our exposure or openness to the world (Turner, 2008: 244).

We normally take vulnerability as disadvantages and obstructions which we would very much like to deny or conceal. Turner, however, presents vulnerability as a metaphor that indicates our ability to steer our way. It is our moral and spiritual capacity rather than physical capacity. In the *Zhuangzi*, the story of a drunken man who falls from a cart exemplifies the power of vulnerability.<sup>15</sup> The reason a drunken man suffers less than a conscious person does when falling from a cart is that his body is relaxed and therefore responsive to the environment, thereby lessening the impact of the fall. The relaxed body of a drunken man is analogous to a non-fixated heart-mind; the tensed body of a conscious person is analogous to a fixated/completed heart-mind. Simply put, the vulnerability of a person equips one with responsiveness mentally or spiritually rather than physically. One may consider the responsiveness of vulnerability as a passive feature and regard it as of little significance in terms

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<sup>15</sup> “Dasheng”.

of social engagement. However, vulnerability indeed plays an instructive role in terms of social engagement.

To be vulnerable as a human being is to possess a structure of sentiments, feelings and emotions by which we can steer a passage through the social world. (Turner, 2008: 244)

We see vulnerability as destructive, Turner depicts vulnerability as instructive. Only if we are willing to open up and embrace that we would open ourselves to a resourceful world. In other words, affordance implies vulnerability. To be vulnerable, is to be able to open to others so that we are in a position to perceive and to afford. The openness comes along with vulnerability is natural for infants. In order to further clarify my discussion of vulnerability, I present an analysis of the image of infants followed by a contextualized analysis of Hundun, a figure seemingly shares the pre-socialized features of the infants, not as a supplementary but as a counter image to the concept of vulnerability.

## B. the vulnerability of infants

The proposition of “infants manifest vulnerability” is inferred from the *Zhuangzi*'s text quoted below:

嬰兒生無石師而能言，與能言者處也。（“Waiwu”）

Infants, despite not having had master-teachers since birth, are able to communicate, this is because they dwell with those who are able to communicate.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> I rendered “言” as “communicate,” for infants barely speak but uttering sounds or syllables that do

The image of Infants unequivocally conveys that there are inevitable dependencies between self and other. It is impossible for an infant to live without the care of others. Similarly, it is also impossible for an infant to communicate without the company of others. Infants need the company of people who have the skills to communicate, so that they will have someone to learn from, and babble to. The point of the passage is the company infants not only enjoy, but also benefit from. Infants are born vulnerable and vulnerability entails openness. The openness of infants reflects the openness of us who live in the social environment. As opposed to the non-social interpretations of the *Zhuangzi*, the image of infants suggests social embeddedness of the ideal person. Also, the openness of vulnerability resembles the emptiness (*xu* 虛) that is important in *Zhuangzi*'s concept of *you* (遊).<sup>17</sup> The way to gain emptiness is to discard one's completed heart-mind (*qu chu cheng xin* 去除成心), meaning stop relying upon a limited view.

去小知而大知明，去善而自善矣。（“Waiwu”）

Stop using small knowledge then the great wisdom will manifest. In getting rid of being good (in a regular way), you will become good-of-yourself.

The narrative is a preceding line in the *Zhuangzi*'s text to the previous quoted text regarding infants. The image of infants illustrates the features of great

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not convey clear meaning but do help to communicate.

<sup>17</sup> “*you* (遊) indicates a movement between positions whereby each position is only temporarily adopted.” See De Reu (2015: 287). “The association of *you* with the movement of animals, however, suggests not only a ‘free and easy wandering’ but also a capacity for intense perception. [...] Thus *you* connotes not only the absence of stress but also excellence in adaptation and sensibility.” See Moeller (2017a: 166).

wisdom and good. A person who uses small knowledge will demonstrate regularity while interacting with others, and expect regularity in return. A person who behaves in a regular patterned way could bring harm to himself, regardless of how effective his knowledge and how encompassing his mind he thinks he is,<sup>18</sup> the *Zhuangzi* minds us “there are cases where knowledge encounters difficulties, and there are cases when mind falls short” (*zhi you suo kun, shen you suo bu ji* 知有所困，神有所不及). Great wisdom is what manifested upon infants, their seemingly passivity in fact actively invites others to form connections with them. Their heart-minds are empty—meaning not restricted by biased views—while interacting with other. Infants are not restricted by small knowledge for they are yet to be tutored. Infants live a good life (get fed, nurtured etc.) without having made to conforming to social norms.

Before moving on to the next section, let us go through the various important concepts proposed so far. Based on the concept of vulnerability, I use the image of infants to establish the connection between vulnerability, openness, as well as emptiness. From the previous section, we also understand that openness contributes to responsiveness. In what follows, I proceed to a contextualized analysis of a well-known story where the protagonist Hundun (渾沌) often treated as the emblem of the ideal figure of the *Zhuangzi* in common readings.

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<sup>18</sup> Contrary to the infants, a numinous turtle is designed to illustrate someone with small knowledge who is in pursuit of a good result (to get itself out of trouble) in a patterned way (by appearing in a dream to Lord Yuan which means appealing to the authorities) and fails. For a thorough contextual analysis of the passage, see De Reu (2015: 260-264).

### C. the implications of Hundun's death

Before we launch ourselves into the Hundun narrative, let me tell you a story. There were three people who lived in different places. One of them was known as Kaonashi.<sup>19</sup> Kaonashi lived in the middle and had no face. When the other two of them, met in the middle land of Kaonashi, the latter treated the former quite nicely. These two grateful guests came out with the idea of granting Kaonashi a face to repay his kindness. The story ends when Kaonashi died of being drilled a hole a single day for a lengthy seven days. What does the story tell us? You may say that Kaonashi represents the most precious primordial state of human mind of us, and it is destroyed by ourselves. But how do we know? Obviously, we are resorting to our prerequisite knowledge of the origin of Hundun (ignoring the fact that I have replaced Hundun with Kaonashi), which refers to a cosmological primordial, ideal, natural state.<sup>20</sup> Rather than crucially informing our view of the story, we actually read the passage to confirm what we already know about Hundun. Only if we are able to escape from the grip of the Hundun image, that we are able to inform our view of the story based on the story itself.

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<sup>19</sup> Kaonashi is a well-known character in *Spirited Away*, a Japanese animated film. His name Kaonashi means “no face,” one of his monstrous traits is the ability to swallow human beings. Simply put, Kaonashi is definitely not an ideal figure compared to the mythological Hundun. While I have replaced Hundun with Kaonashi, we should have a very different understanding if we are to resort to the features of the protagonist based on his name so as to understand the story.

<sup>20</sup> I am not concerned with the authenticity of the mythological Hundun, what I question is the connection between mythological Hundun and Hundun as protagonist in the *Zhuangzi*. De Reu (2015: 294) has pointed out that Chapter 26 of the *Zhuangzi* deliberately undermines fixed views towards Zhuangzi and Zhongni on the reader's part by presenting ambivalent portrayal of these figures. Similarly, fixed view towards the emperor of the middle Hundun is probably also unfavorable for grasping the content of the story.

南海之帝為儵，北海之帝為忽，中央之帝為渾沌。儵與忽時相與遇於渾沌之地，渾沌待之甚善。儵與忽謀報渾沌之德，曰：「人皆有七竅以視聽食息，此獨无有，嘗試鑿之。」日鑿一竅，七日而渾沌死。（“Yingdiwang”）

The Emperor of the southern sea was called Shu. The emperor of the northern sea was called Hu. The Emperor of the middle was called Hundun. Shu and Hu would sometimes meet in the territory of Hundun, who always attended to them quite well. Shu and Hu decided to repay Hundun for his virtue. “All men have seven holes in them, by means of which they see, hear, eat, breathe; but this one alone has none. Let’s drill him some.” So each day they drilled another hole. After seven day, Hundun died.

As a regular reader of the *Zhuangzi*, I see men’s irrational performance of strict adherence to norms in the Hundun story. The two kings who are guests of Hundun are definitely irrational by doing harm upon other out of goodwill, namely by imposing their judgements upon other. Hundun, however, is the most striking norms follower among all three characters. He started off treating his guests nicely and died of accepting a deadly gesture of goodwill, without being able to recognize the harm and danger he was enduring, not to mention being able to response.<sup>21</sup> In other words, Hundun exemplifies one who is insanely restricted by social norms at the expense of one’s natural fight or flight response. Hundun’s death is an unwanted consequence of a person with completed heart-mind who has lost his natural responses. Hundun does not

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<sup>21</sup> “He is incapable of perceiving correctly the reality of what they do to him and happily allows them to slowly kill him,” Moeller (2017b, 798).

possess the instructive power of vulnerability. Vulnerability implies openness, responsiveness. It opens our way towards a flourishing life instead of an enclosed secluded life; it does not mean unresponsive to fatal attacks or total submission to others.

The narrative of Hundun shows us an extreme example of a person who rigidly conforms to social norms. Hundun is well-known for his hospitality, namely he attained good names in hospitality, his virtue (*de* 德) was recognized, he knows the rules and takes it as ultimate guide of action. Simply put, Hundun is one of those men who live by their rules that the *Zhuangzi* often criticized. This result, like the Hundun as ideal image alternative, does fit the story into a coherent (but alternative) picture of the philosophical claims of the *Zhuangzi*. I sited below an immediate preceding passage of the Hundun story, to show how we can read the two passages into a coherent piece.

无為名尸，无為謀府；无為事任，无為知主。體盡無窮，而遊无朕；盡其所受乎天，而无見得，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。（“Yingdiwang”）

Not being a medium possessed by your name; not being a stockroom for schemes; not being taken the weight of affairs on your shoulder; not being the man-in-charge of your own understanding. In this way, wholeheartedly embody the endlessness and roam where there is no sign, fully realize whatever is received from Heaven, but without gaining in sight. The utmost man uses his heart like a mirror, rejecting nothing, welcoming nothing; responding but not storing. Thus he can handle all things without harm to himself and other.

The first line gives advices of avoiding burden of all sorts; the second line encourages one to explore life yet remains in the state of emptiness. The final line concludes with the ideal way of engaging in the world, which is the reason why the utmost man is able to handle all things without harm. The concept of emptiness is often related to the concept of *you*. As I have articulated in the previous section, the ground of *you* is to set aside the standard set of rules and makes possible the responsive manner of interacting with others. In the above description of the utmost men, the *Zhuangzi* provides another clue to the way of *you*, that is to use our heart-mind as if it is a mirror so as to reflect, and illuminate the situation we are involve with.<sup>22</sup> The reflective feature of the utmost man is demonstrative in his actions: they are neither rigidly fixated on a normative ground nor responsive with ingrained rules. The utmost man will, therefore, acts in respond to the situation—his heart-mind are empty of predisposition. Emptiness of the heart-mind allows one to be responsive, to *you* gracefully like a fish in the water.

Reading the last two passages as a coherent text, my interpretation of Hundun illustrates a foil to the ideal persons: Hundun is incapable of avoiding the burden of names and virtues, most importantly, he is incapable of “to deal with things without harm.” If we take Hundun as the emblem of the ideal state, then the story is a nostalgic lament at best. The reason is simply that the world, including us as habitats, is subject to change: ever since we started learning to distinguish (*fun* 分) we destroyed the Hundun within us. However, it will be a thought-provoking parody if we read the story against its context. The

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<sup>22</sup> See Cline (2008) for a discussion on a comparison of the mirror metaphor in the *Zhuangzi* and in the *Xunzi*.

Hundun story informs us of the pervasive strength of completed heart-mind that operates upon the characters and readers of the story: readers are inclined to ignore the obvious fact (that Hundun died) and embrace the information of the implication of the name (Hundun); characters are too competent in following social norms but incompetent in finding their ways/daos.

Table 1  
An analysis of Hundun as a 1) approving or 2) disapproving character

	Approving	Disapproving <sup>23</sup>
Premise	Hundun is a Daoist ideal.	Hundun is a person with completed heart-mind / a strict norms follower.
Conclusion	Hundun's death reminds us that we are ripped away from the primitive ideal state of life (by our senses and knowledge gained).	Hundun's death signifies the catastrophic harm of his extreme adherence to social norms.
What does the story call for?	To regain the original chaotic features within us.	To approach an empty state of the heart-mind so that we are able to deal with things without harm.
What does it inform us?	1) The well-intended brutality of the two emperors. 2) The frailty of Hundun.	1) The well-intended brutality of the two emperors. 2) The insanity of Hundun.
Underlying concepts or theories	The myth of a chaotic Cosmo.	One of the main themes in the <i>Zhuangzi</i> : to discard the completed heart-mind.

<sup>23</sup> Contents of the disapproving stance are based solely on my interpretation.

Table 1 presents two rival stances on the Hundun narrative. The approving stance is adopted by common reading, and it points to at least four trajectories for interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Moeller (2017b) follows a fifth trajectory, to see the story as comedy, he recognizes Hundun as a fake Daoist sage.<sup>25</sup> While Moeller and I follow the same disapproving path, we diverge on who Hundun really is.<sup>26</sup> While I am fully aware that the text lends itself to endless interpretations, my reading of the Hundun narrative offers a critical line of thought that suggest a pragmatic, social interpretation of the story. It urges the reader to reexamine our state of heart-mind to which guiding opinions and teachings are leading. Also, it turns the focus of the story from an irredeemable lost state to a thought-provoking suicidal submission.

## V. Conclusion

The interpretation of the *Zhuangzi* put forward in this article is centered on a metaphor. I draw on the theory of affordance from environmental psychology to explore the meaning of the graceful fish metaphor. By analyzing two kinds of relationship—between the fish and their underwater medium, and between

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<sup>24</sup> See Moeller (2017b: 785-790).

<sup>25</sup> As does Yang Rur Bin 楊儒賓 (2016: 47), who agrees that the “real Hundun” could not have been killed. Yang describes Hundun as primitive and the death of primitive Hundun is unavoidable as it is the way to real Hundun.

<sup>26</sup> Moeller (2017b, 794) reasons Hundun as an “all-too Daoist Daoist” whose perfectly emptied heart-mind results in his total lack of sensory receptiveness. Moeller further suggests that the death of Hundun implies the failures of a Daoist who fails to keep a distance and not getting involved. From my point of view, fruitful social engagement involves openness (that implies vulnerability) and involvement. Moeller, on the contrary, proposes a not-getting-involved (thereby not vulnerable) strategy. It is a specific strategy for social engagement which he depicts as a “sane skill of living in an insane world (2017b, 796).” This skill stresses on distancing ourselves in order to operating on a “genuine pretending” mode. See Moeller (2017a).

humankind and its atmospheric medium, I argue that “the ground” is the key element to explain the affordances of Dao. Affordances mean value or meaning that is mutual and reciprocal, involving both sides of a relationship. The affordance of Dao is what Dao affords a person in Dao. The *Zhuangzi* uses “the graceful fish in the water” to exemplify “the effortless person in Dao.” Being like a fish in the water, a person in Dao is no longer restricted by a rigid ground of rights and wrongs. Dao affords a person with adaptability and creativity. A person with a non-fixated stance of values turns out to be adaptive to every situation and creative in interacting with others, like the monkey keeper.

Also, the graceful fish metaphor implies a social context that is in line with the reciprocity of affordance. The text suggests that an ideal person is not a secluded hermit but an individual living in the social context. A discussion of the image of infants connects the concept of vulnerability from sociology to the *Zhuangzi*'s openness and emptiness, as well as responsiveness. On the contrary, Hundun lacks any of the aforementioned features. The death of Hundun urges the reader to reexamine our state of heart-mind. For us, modern readers living in a pluralistic society, the *Zhuangzi* provides pragmatic advices to live our lives to the fullest within any given social context. The adoption of a non-fixated stance of values enables us to interact with others, in a graceful way that allows us to steer a passage through the social world, and nourishes the affordances of our lives as well as the affordances of others.

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