


Article

The Possibility of Asking about Dao: On the Philosophical Significance of Dialogue in the *Zhuangzi*

Yiming Wang 

Department of Philosophy, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China; yimingwang1995@pku.edu.cn

Abstract: In contrast to the aphoristic style of the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi* is known for its abundant use of dialogues. These dialogues, especially those found in chapters 21 and 22, are consciously organized around the theme of “asking about Dao”. They bring together the diverse propositions about the Dao that are found independently throughout the *Daodejing*. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the fact that *Zhuangzi* consciously orders these propositions in terms of the different levels of knowledge of Dao. Within this theoretical framework, *Zhuangzi* further ranks the questions and answers regarding these propositions. Certain dialogues are partly dismissed because both participants demonstrate a flawed and shallow understanding of the Dao, while other questions and answers are acknowledged and appreciated for their correct and profound understanding of it. There is a strict corresponding relationship between levels of knowledge of Dao and different attitudes toward dialogues in it. Therefore, the examination of the dialogues about the Dao reveals that *Zhuangzi* places explicit emphasis on the knowledge of the Dao compared to the *Daodejing*, which also sheds light on *Zhuangzi*’s distinctive awareness of the problems surrounding this key concept.

Keywords: Dao; knowledge; insight; dialogue



Citation: Wang, Yiming. 2023. The Possibility of Asking about Dao: On the Philosophical Significance of Dialogue in the *Zhuangzi*. *Religions* 14: 1118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091118>

Academic Editors: Thomas Michael and Robin Wang

Received: 2 August 2023

Revised: 23 August 2023

Accepted: 24 August 2023

Published: 30 August 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

“Dao that can be put into words is not the enduring and unchanging Dao, and the name that can be named on things is not the enduring and unchanging name” (Lou 2008, p. 1; Legge 2008, p. 8). This claim in chapter 1 of the *Daodejing* reveals the complex relationship between Dao and words and names. Although Dao cannot be put into words, this claim is, at the same time, a kind of wording or speech to Dao, and this paradox has become a point of agreement in the academic world regarding the relationship between Dao and words or names (see Ivanhoe 1993, p. 640). Moreover, as many scholars have pointed out, *Zhuangzi* inherited Laozi’s statements and proposed several similar propositions, e.g., “the great Dao cannot be proclaimed” 大道不稱 (chapter 2 of *Zhuangzi*; Guo 2012, p. 83) and “Dao does not admit of being named” 道不當名 (chapter 22 of *Zhuangzi*; Guo 2012, p. 757) (see K. Xu 2005, pp. 85–126)¹. In addition, since Laozi and *Zhuangzi* discuss the content of Dao by means of certain special terms, some scholars, led by the history of ideas, have identified these conceptual terms, such as the “Wu 無-forms” (e.g., *wuwei* 無為 [noncoercive action] and *wuyu* 無欲 [objectless desire]) and some special adjectives (for example, *yaoming* 窈冥 [dark and mysterious]). Through extensive and in-depth research, scholars have made significant progress in understanding these terms and their significance in Daoist philosophy (see, e.g., Ames and Hall 2004, pp. 44–63; B. Wang 2011, pp. 97–102; Fuguan Xu 2013, pp. 298–324; Zheng 2018, pp. 6–16; Yiming Wang 2022).

However, this approach to the history of ideas could, to some extent, conceal the significance of the change in literary styles in thoughts², even though this approach has the advantage of clarifying the meaning of ideas in terms of their development. This becomes more evident when we review modern studies on the relationship between Dao and words in the *Zhuangzi*. As mentioned earlier, most scholars have focused their studies on the concepts and propositions in the *Zhuangzi*. As a result, there are no differences in the research

methods between the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, but this undoubtedly conceals the difference in literary style between aphorism and dialogue.³

In fact, the statements that *yuyan* (imputed words, 寓言) makes up nine-tenths of the book” in chapter 27 have shown that almost the entire *Zhuangzi* consists of dialogues⁴, because dialogue is the linguistic expression of *yuyan* (Zheng 2016, p. 9)⁵. Now, if we focus on discourses on Dao in *Zhuangzi*, it is also apparent that the vast majority of these discourses are embedded in dialogues. Chapter 6 begins the theme of “asking about Dao” in the inner chapters with the question “Can Dao be learned” answered through the dialogue between Nanpo Zikui 南伯子葵 and Woman Groomback 女偶, then the theme is discussed more profoundly and widely in the dialogues presented in the outer and miscellaneous chapters. Whether we consider the question and answer between Confucius and Laozi in chapter 14 or the discussion between Little Understanding and Great Impartial Accord in chapter 25, there is a relatively clear theme in these dialogues, which is “asking about Dao”.

By further observation and analysis, discussions of Dao in question-and-answer format make the *Zhuangzi* distinct from the *Daodejing* by introducing different levels of knowledge of Dao. By means of this difference, *Zhuangzi* consciously orders various propositions of the Dao that exist independently or in parallel with each other in *Daodejing*, written in an aphoristic style. In this regard, this intentional excerpt and rank of these propositions not only shows *Zhuangzi*’s inheritance of Laozi but also suggests a new understanding, namely, its epistemological orientation of Dao, which cannot be found in *Daodejing*. Hence, exploring the theme of “asking about Dao” provides an intriguing and significant research avenue to uncover the novel theoretical direction offered by *Zhuangzi* in its reinterpretation of Laozi’s statements⁶.

2. Dialogues of Ontological Dao and the Shallow Understanding of Dao

2.1. How Dao Cannot Be Asked about and Answered

Although “asking about Dao” has become an important theme in outer and miscellaneous chapters and has been extensively discussed,⁷ it has not been discussed in a focused way because it is scattered in different parts of those chapters. In order to not fragment the discussion, we will first introduce a question presented by the *Zhuangzi* itself, which all discussions under this theme need to theoretically face, as a prompt to start our discussion.

A striking paradoxical phenomenon emerges when one crawls through the outer and miscellaneous chapters in the *Zhuangzi*: although “asking about Dao” is an important theme throughout the chapters, a dialogue in the “Cognition Wandered North” chapter seems to deny the possibility of this theme:

No-Beginning continued, “He who, when asked about Dao, gives an answer does not understand Dao; and he who is asked about Dao has not really heard Dao explained. Dao is not to be asked about, and even if it is asked about, there can be no answer. To ask about what cannot be asked about is to ask for the sky. To answer what you cannot be answered is to try to split hairs”. (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 758; Watson 2013, p. 185)

Here, the truth of Dao rejects both sides of the dialogue, because not only is the answerer considered not to have a correct understanding of Dao, but also the questioner is regarded as having no cognition of Dao. No-Beginning gives a further reason for this rejection: “Dao is not to be asked about, and even if it is asked about, there can be no answer”. Since the Dao itself cannot be asked and answered, it is fundamentally wrong to talk about it by asking and answering. In this case, both characters in the dialogue show their ignorance of Dao.

However, what is not clarified is whether the Dao is in any sense unquestionable and thus unanswerable, or whether there exists, in a certain particular context, the possibility of recognized discussion about the Dao. In other words, we can ask whether the claim that “Dao is not to be asked about, and even if it is asked about, there can be no answer”

can serve as a universal and unconditioned law in the discussion of Dao or if it is just a particular principle when the *Zhuangzi* reflects on some special ways of questioning and answering. To make this point clear, it is not beneficial to theoretically look at this claim out of its specific context; we should first go back to the context where No-Beginning draws this conclusion:

At this point, Grand Purity asked No-End, “Do you understand Dao?”

“I don’t understand it”, said No-End.

Then he asked No-Action, and No-Action said, “I understand Dao”.

“You say you understand Dao—Does Dao has specifications?”

“it does”.

“May I ask its specifications?”

No-Action said, “I understand that Dao can exalt things and can humble them, that it can bind them together and can cause them to disperse. This are the specifications by which I understand Dao”.

Grand Purity, having received these various answers, went and questioned No-Beginning, saying, “If this is how it is, then between No-End’s declaration that he doesn’t understand and No-Action’s declaration that he does, which is right and which is wrong?”

No-Beginning said, “Not to understand is profound; to understand is shallow. Not to understand is to be on the inside; to understand is to be on the outside”.

Thereupon Grand Purity gazed up and sighed, saying, “Not to understand is to understand? To understand is not to understand? Who understands the understanding that does not understand?”

No-Beginning said, “Dao cannot be heard; heard, it is not Dao. Dao cannot be seen; seen, it is not Dao. Dao cannot be described; described, it is not Dao. That which gives form to the formed is itself formless—can you understand that? There is no name that fits Dao”. (chp. 22, Guo 2012, pp. 756–57; See Watson 2013, pp. 184–85)

In this passage, we can clearly see that the background of the dialogue between Grand Purity and No-Beginning is a discussion held between Grand Purity, No-End, and No-Action. No-Beginning’s negation of “asking about Dao” and the answer to this are first of all directed at the question and answer given by Grand Purity and No-Action, respectively. In other words, what No-Beginning negates is dialogue on the topic of whether Dao can be understood. From this alone, it is still not clear why No-Beginning thinks the questioner does not have any understanding of Dao and the answerer does not know it.

In fact, the particular content of the dialogue carried out by Grand Purity and No-Action provides the real reason for No-Beginning’s negation. In this dialogue, Grand Purity asks No-Action whether Dao has specifications, and the latter gives a positive answer, which constitutes the basis for No-Beginning’s judgment. According to Cheng Xuanying’s explanation, the exact meaning of the word “specifications” (*shu*, 數) is “name and specification” (*mingshu*, 名數), which suggests that “name” and “specification” have similar meanings (Guo 2012, p. 756). On this basis, Zhong Tai further interprets “specifications” as “the detailed determinations of name” (*mingzhixiang*, 名之詳) (Zhong 2002, p. 504), i.e., more specific and prescriptive names. In addition, the interpretations by Cheng and Zhong also remind us to understand the “specifications” here as rules and regulations (*dushu*, 度數) appearing in chapters 13 and 14. According to chapter 14, since these rules and regulations express merely orders in a social-political context⁸, they are useless for one to have a real understanding of Dao (chp. 14; Guo 2012, pp. 516–17; Watson 2013, pp. 113–14). The reason for this is simple: all of these specifications belong to the realm of things with a certain form and name⁹, while No-Beginning emphasizes that there is no name or form that fits Dao.

Thus, if all determinations and rules belong to things first, then Grand Purity's question, "may I ask specifications of Dao"? also implies an attempt to understand Dao in the way of understanding things. It is this approach that makes his question doomed to be fruitless. Moreover, if Grand Purity's question about whether Dao has some determinations and rules is only a wrong way of questioning due to his ignorance of Dao, then the positive answer given by No-Action on his confession of knowing Dao is absolutely a wrong answer to the wrong question; at the same time, No-Action also misguided Grand Purity without realizing his problem. It is also in this sense that No-Action is judged by No-Beginning as having little knowledge of Dao.

2.2. Propositions of Ontological Dao and the Shallow Knowledge of Dao

No-Beginning's conclusion that "There is no name that fits Dao" is obviously also directed at the mode of thinking presented by Grand Purity and No-Action, because the formless and invisible character of Dao makes it impossible to be named through the way to understand and determine things with particular forms.

In addition, No-Beginning does not really think that No-Action is absolutely ignorant of the Dao, but rather points out that No-Action's knowledge of the Dao is only "shallow" and "on the outside"¹⁰. This is likely because No-Action's explanation of the specifications of Dao is partly in line with the Daoist understanding of Dao. In the text cited above, No-Action further explains what he knows about Dao: "I understand that Dao can exalt things and can humble them, that it can bind them together and can cause them to disperse". Here, this statement on "specifications of Dao" is a rewriting and development of Laozi's claim that "The Great Dao is universal, it can be left and right", which means that Dao is the foundation of all things.¹¹ This statement is also recognized by No-Beginning. In criticizing the way of understanding Dao by means of naming, to which determinations and rules belong, No-Beginning speaks of a positive proposition: "That which gives form to the formed is itself formless", which obviously suggests that Dao is ontological ground for all things¹². Thus, No-Action's understanding of Dao is not absolutely wrong.

The role of Dao as ontological ground is also positively articulated in Chapter 22. In the dialogue with Dongguozhi, Zhuangzi himself directly exposes the function of Dao on states of things: "[Dao] makes them[things] full and empty..... it causes things to store up or scatter" (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 752). This statement undoubtedly shows the positive attitude of propositions regarding ontological Dao¹³.

Now, we can easily see that when No-Beginning thinks that No-Action does not know about Dao, the reason for his judgment is No-Action's trying to use forms and names (including determinations and rules) to understand Dao, but after all, No-Action's understanding of Dao is in line with the role of Dao as the ground of all things, so he is not completely ignorant but only has shallow knowledge of Dao.

3. From Correct Discourses on Dao to the Embodiment of Dao

3.1. Correct Discourses on Dao as a Shallow Understanding of Dao

If No-Action's mistake only lies in his answer that Dao has specifications, does this mean that if he talks about Dao's role as the ontological ground of all things, his understanding will no longer be merely "shallow" and "on the outside"? In this case, how should we understand the features of being "profound" and "on the inside" that are meant by "not to understand"?

First of all, No-Action's understanding of Dao's role can indeed be regarded as a correct statement of Dao. This can be further affirmed by Yan Gangdiao's claim regarding the dialogue between Grand Purity, No-End, No-Action, and No-Beginning:

Yan Gangdiao, hearing of the incident, said "..... How much more so, then, in the case of a man who embodies Dao! Look for it, but it has no form; listen, but it has no voice. Those who discourse on it with other men speak of it as dark and mysterious. Dao that is discoursed on is not Dao at all!" (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 755; Watson 2013, pp. 183–84)

Here, Yan Gangdiao points out that the term “dark and mysterious” (*mingming*) is derived from the formless and silent characteristics of Dao. Since all things themselves are equipped with a certain form and a corresponding name, the use of the phrase “dark and mysterious” is based on an awareness of freeing Dao from form and name, which constitute the core features of things. Moreover, if we take into consideration the propositions of Dao in chapter 22 mentioned above, that “The bright and shining is born out of deep darkness; the determinable is born out of formlessness” (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 741; Ziporyn 2020, pp. 176–77), then in addition to the formless feature of Dao, “dark and mysterious” features also refer to the Dao as the ontological ground of all things.

In fact, there is necessarily a theoretical relation between the formless feature and ontological ground in Daoism. The key point is that things with a certain form and name cannot be grounded on other things with similar characteristics, because in this way, the latter still refers to the other thing to ground it, and this process can be repeated endlessly, which will cause a vicious circle in the existence of things. Thus, if there is an ontological ground for all things, it must be different from things in general. On this basis, a proposition is made in chapter 22: “That which made things and gives to each its form is not itself a thing” 物物者非物. This formless feature is just what makes Dao distinct from things in general, which may be more obvious from the proposition that “that which gives form to the formed is itself formless”. Yan Gangdiao further affirms this way of talking about Dao because “dark and mysterious” (*mingming*, 冥冥) is a proper term for “discourse on Dao”, despite this term and discourse still being distinct from Dao itself.

In this regard, if we put aside the view that the Dao has determinations and rules, there is no problem with No-Action’s understanding of the Dao. This can be further justified by two other dialogues between Laozi and Confucius in chapters 21 and 22, in which Confucius asks Laozi about Dao. On the one hand, Laozi, who appears to be a person who embodies Dao, says that it is difficult to speak about Dao; but on the other hand, he also goes on to explain “the rough outline” of Dao by its function in making the determinations and rules of heaven and earth, as well as the change of life possible (chp. 21, Guo 2012, p. 712; Watson 2013, p. 169; chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 741; Watson 2013, p. 180). This description of the Dao as that which gives birth to all things can indeed be regarded as a correct and admitted statement of the Dao in *Zhuangzi*.

However, it is also true that the discourse on Dao discussed above is not the most profound knowledge of Dao. According to No-Beginning’s suggestion, the latter is possessed by “Who understands the understanding that does not understand”, that is, a man who embodies Dao. In addition, the fact that a man who embodies Dao will keep it unspoken, as emphasized by Yan Gangdiao, is in agreement with No-End’s answer to Grand Purity: “I don’t understand it”, expressing his ignorance of Dao. Likewise, when facing Confucius’s question about Dao in the same chapter, Laozi states that a man who embodies Dao will not take discourse on Dao as the first principle:

The formless takes on a form, the formed veers back to the formless; ... it [Dao] is something everyone has a theory about, but when it arrives there is no more theorizing. So debate about it is no match for silence. ... Dao cannot be learned, so hearing about it is match for plugging up your ears. This is called the Great Attainment. (chp. 22, Guo 2012, pp. 746–47; Ziporyn 2020, p. 178)

The discourse on Dao in terms of its ontological status is not rejected completely, and the reason for this rejection is to put forward another higher understanding or knowledge of Dao, which is expressed as “Great Attainment” in the form of silence. In this sense, correct statements of Dao only belong to a shallow understanding of Dao.

3.2. The Embodiment of Dao, Insight and the Direct Justification of Ontological Dao

As Zhongtai rightly points out, the higher understanding implied by “Great Attainment” is properly the “profound understanding” or “understanding that does not understand” mentioned by No-Beginning (Zhong 2002, p. 504). However, if the embodiment of

Dao is a special expression of “understanding that does not understand”, how should we understand this kind of understanding?

In fact, this kind of understanding is equivalent to cognitive ability, which is named after insight (*ming*, 明) in Daoist tradition. This is not only because insight has the feature of “understanding that does not understand” in the *Daodejing*, chapter 10 (Fancheng Xu 2018, p. 29), but also because *Zhuangzi* establishes a theoretical connection between them in chapter 4:

You have heard of knowing by means of knowledge, but you have never heard of knowing by means of non-knowledge. Consider gaps and cracks and hollows in things, the empty chamber where brightness (of insight) is born! Fortune and blessing gather where there is stillness.¹⁴ (chp. 4, Guo 2012, p. 150)

Zhuangzi here distinguishes two ways of knowing, that is, “knowing by means of non-knowledge” (*yiyouzhizhi*, 以有知知) and “knowing by means of non-knowledge” (*yiwuzhizhi*, 以无知知)¹⁵. The latter way of knowing is the verbalization of “understanding that does not understand”. Moreover, as far as the suggestion “Let your ears and eyes communicate with what is inside and put mind and knowledge on the outside”, the negated knowledge here is perception based on senses and thoughts about understanding, which is in line with the definition of knowledge in chapter 23 that “awareness is originally an interface with the world, but as understanding, it comes to be a kind of scheming” (chp. 23, Guo 2012, p. 810; Ziporyn 2020, p. 192). As a result, the key difference between these two ways of knowing lies in whether or not to use perceptual or intellectual ways of thinking.

The inner mechanism of “knowing by means of non-knowledge” is further clarified in the cited passage. Although Ziporyn translated *zhanbiquezhe* (瞻彼闕者) as “consider gaps and cracks and hollows in things” in terms of Cheng Xuanying’s interpretation, this led to the same mistake appearing in his translation as in the latter. On the one hand, as suggested by Ziporyn, Cheng interpreted the object of seeing or considering as “things” (Guo 2012, p. 150). The problem with this interpretation is that things are never mentioned in this context, while knowing (cognition), as a basic function of the mind (Fuguan Xu 2013, p. 348),¹⁶ is not only mentioned in the above and the passages that follow but also has a theoretical affinity with “the empty chamber”, because “chamber” is an analogous term for “mind” (Guo 2012, p. 151).

On the other hand, since the precise meaning of *que* (闕) is the action of closing the door after the completion of things or affairs in terms of *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字. Both translations of *que*, by Ziporyn and Watson, miss this point; they cannot grasp the meaning of “close” or “end” implied by *que* or realize that what *zhanbiquezhe* means is to intuit the state of mind when its functions of perception and understanding of things with certain forms and names stop.

As a result, this state of mind is analogized to “the empty chamber where brightness (of insight) is born”. This expression is similar to the description of higher cognition being higher than cognition in general in chapter 10 of the *Daodejing*: “With your insight penetrating the four quarters, are you able to do it without recourse to understanding?” (Gao 1996, pp. 267–68; Ames and Hall 2004, p. 106) Obviously, the brightness of insight (*bai*, 白) here is the insight (*mingbai*, 明白) there, and this is also the case with the discontinuation of understanding here and understanding there. Therefore, “understanding that does not understand” and “knowing by means of non-knowledge” refer to the higher cognitive ability named after insight (*bai*) and its function.

Moreover, if we take into account the proposition that “Dao gathers in emptiness (of mind) alone” in chapter 4 (chp. 4, Guo 2012, p. 147; Watson 2013, p. 25), we can easily see that Dao is the content that “insight” or “understanding that does not understand” can access. Since Dao can be seen as the objective content in the empty state of mind, where the brightness of insight as a higher cognitive ability presents itself at the same time, the special and only content of this higher cognition will be Dao itself. From this, it is not difficult to understand why the practical claim “Let your ears and eyes communicate with

what is inside and put mind and knowledge on the outside” can serve as the principle to which *Yu*, *Shun*, and *Fuxi* adhere at all times, because it is in this empty state of mind that Dao presents itself. This can be further justified by a similar statement in Chapter 6 that those sages made Dao their principle of action and achieved some incredible practical results (chp. 6, [Guo 2012](#), pp. 246–47; [Watson 2013](#), pp. 45–46).

Now, the theoretical relation between the embodiment of Dao and insight is more obvious because of the same condition of their presentation, that is, the discontinuance of perception based on senses and thoughts of form and name based on understanding. Insofar as perception and understanding constitute a way of knowing that points to things with particular forms and names, insight, as a non-external object-oriented way of knowing, does not take the forms and names of external things as its content but is an internal way of knowing. This is why this way of knowing is called “knowing by means of non-knowledge” in *Zhuangzi*, because knowledge is based on the forms and names of things. That also means this way of knowing is in agreement with the “invisible” and “nameless” features of Dao in the “discourse on Dao”.

In this sense, Dao can only directly present its “invisible” and “nameless” characteristics in this higher and internal way of knowing. Thus, insight or embodiment of the Dao provides a direct cognition of the “invisible” and “nameless” Dao for discourse on it. This is also the reason why “understanding that does not understand” is regarded as knowledge that is “profound” and “on the inside”, while discourse on Dao is called “shallow” and “on the outside”. From this point, it is more likely that the “embodiment of Dao” and “understanding that does not understand” are expressions invented by *Zhuangzi* to indicate this transcendental cognition of Dao in response to the empirical cognition of things in general.

It is important to note that prioritizing the embodiment of Dao over discourses on Dao does not undermine the complementary relationship between these two aspects. Instead, this prioritization is based on the idea that the two are complementary to each other because, without the latter’s theoretical explanation of Dao, the significance of the invisible Dao as the ground of all things would not be adequately conveyed, and the embodiment of Dao would be reduced to an empty and purely spiritual experience devoid of any content. This is also the reason why *No-End* emphasizes the idea of “understanding that does not understand” while also complementing the proposition that “that which gives form to the formed is itself formless”.

4. The Embodiment of Dao and a Kind of Praised Dialogue

4.1. The Compatibility of Embodiment of Dao and Discourses on Dao

If we reflect on why *No-End* does not give a positive answer about the Dao at the level of knowledge, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the way of knowing referred to by positive discourse can obscure the profound knowledge of the Dao to some extent. Although discourses on Dao correctly reveal its ontological role, it is not helpful for us to attain profound knowledge of Dao in this way, not only because these discourses will objectify Dao as a special thing but also because both insight and Dao can only be achieved in an empty state of mind. *Zhuangzi* Chapter 32 clearly explains this view:

Zhuangzi said, “To know Dao is easy; to keep from speaking about it is hard. To know and not to speak—this gets you to the Heavenly part. To know and to speak—this gets you to the human part. Men in the old days looked out for the Heavenly, not the human”. (chp. 32, [Guo 2012](#), p. 1045; [Watson 2013](#), p. 281)

Zhuangzi even considers it not difficult to have a real understanding of Dao, but what is more noteworthy is the distinction he makes here between “to know and not to speak” and “to know and to speak”, especially when this corresponds to the difference between “heavenly” and “human”. According to the assertion in chapter 17 that “heavenly is on the inside, human is on the outside” ([Guo 2012](#), p. 588; [Watson 2013](#), p. 132), this distinction in chapter 32 is equivalent to the difference between “profound” and “on the inside” understanding and “shallow” and “on the outside” understanding. In this sense, what “to

know and to speak” finally refers to is knowledge “on the outside” of Dao, and “to speak” further indicates that this kind of knowledge is the discourse on the rules and determinations (names) of Dao. Accordingly, the concept of “looked out for the Heavenly, not the human” presented by men in the old days shows the priority of “understanding that does not understand” as being “on the inside”, and does not allow a mode of thinking based on forms and names to obscure the manifestation of direct knowledge of Dao.

However, what men in the old days presented does not mean that a man who embodies Dao must not say anything. This can be supported by a statement in chapter 25 of *Zhuangzi*: “If you talk in a worthy manner, you can talk all day long, and all of it will pertain to Dao” (chp. 25, Guo 2012, p. 917; Watson 2013, p. 226). If we consider this statement in terms of what we discussed above, what the Great Impartial Accord wants to express here is that a man who is aware of the boundaries of discourse on Dao will not let this discourse obscure the manifestation of “the embodiment of Dao”, and only in this way can an accepted discourse on Dao be possible. This can be further seen concretely in several of Laozi’s responses to Confucius’s questions about Dao in chapters 21 and 22 of *Zhuangzi* mentioned above, and now we can explain them more thoroughly:

Lao Dan said, “I was letting my mind wander in the Beginning of things”.

“What does that mean?” asked Confucius.

“The mind may wear itself out but can never understand it; the mouth may gape but can never describe it. Nevertheless, I will try to explain it to you in rough outline. ... Perhaps someone manipulates the cords that draw it all together, but no one has ever seen his form. ... If it is not as I have described it, then who else could the Ancestor of all this be?” (chp. 21, Guo 2012, pp. 711–12; Watson 2013, p. 169)

Confucius said to Lao Dan, “Today you seem to have a moment of leisure—may I venture to ask about the Perfect Dao?”

Lao Dan said, “You must fast and practice austerities, cleanse and purge your mind, wash and purify your inner spirit, destroy and do away with your knowledge. Dao is abstruse and difficult to describe. But I will try to give you a rough outline of it. ... Without this heaven would not be high, nor earth broad; the sun and moon would not move, and nothing would flourish: such is the operation of the Dao”. (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 741; Watson 2013, p. 180)

In the quotation from chapter 21, Laozi’s confession of “letting my mind wander in the Beginning of things” is synonymous with “embodiment of Dao” in chapter 22, because both of these expressions on “the Beginning of things” and “the Ancestor of all [things]” show the ontological role of Dao. Thus, the wandering of the mind suggests the “on the inside” knowledge that has direct access to Dao. Meanwhile, this direct knowledge is also confirmed by Laozi’s additional notes on this state of mind, saying that “the mind may wear itself out but can never understand it; the mouth may gape but can never describe it”, because Dao presents itself in the insight as “understanding that does not understand” alone.

Thus, these notes sufficiently show Laozi’s awareness that this empty state of mind, or “on the inside” knowledge, in which Dao appears, itself cannot be grasped by the way of thinking based on forms and names. Based on this awareness, the following “rough outline” of Dao’s ontological status given by Laozi is only indirect and “on the outside” knowledge of Dao, which can be admitted only if it is grounded in “on the inside” knowledge.

In his reply to Confucius question about Dao in Chapter 22, Laozi first admonishes Confucius to fast his mind and abandon knowledge in general. This practice required by Laozi is just the necessary action to wake up insight and Dao, because these two only appear in an empty and clear state of mind without any interruption of knowledge in general. In addition, the statement “Dao is abstruse and difficult to describe” also implies that discourses can achieve only “on the outside” knowledge. The discourse on Dao as ontological ground in the following is secondary. Thus, a man who embodies Dao can

also talk about Dao because he can make sure this discourse does not interfere with his direct knowledge of Dao.

Since discourses on Dao in the ontological sense are dependent on secondary understanding and knowledge, it is possible to talk about Dao without resorting to its ontological role, just focusing on how to wake it up in our minds. When Nie Que asked Pi yi about the Dao, the answer Pi yi gave had nothing to do with the ontological role of the Dao but only referred to how to adjust one's state of mind and body in order to make the Dao come (chp. 22. [Guo 2012](#), p. 737; [Watson 2013](#), p. 179).

At this point, it is not difficult to realize that the discourse on the ontological features of Dao (formless and nameless features of Dao as ontological ground) is only shallow knowledge, in contrast with insight as profound knowledge. Even if a person who embodies Dao refers to such discourse, he or she will be able to recognize its limitations.

4.2. *A Kind of Praised Dialogue That Enlightens the Embodiment of Dao*

Profound knowledge of Dao also opens the possibility for an admirable kind of question and answer about Dao in *Zhuangzi*, which focuses on how to allow the presence of Dao and insight by adjusting the state of one's body and mind. If the dialogue between Nie Que and Pi yi only provides a recognizable answer, the difference in the two dialogues between the Yellow Emperor and Master Guang Cheng reveals a more complete dialogue regarding this possibility:

The Yellow Emperor had ruled as Son of Heaven for nineteen years, and his commands were heeded throughout the world, when he heard that Master Guang Cheng was living on top of the Mountain of Emptiness and Identity. He therefore went to visit him. "I have heard that you, sir, have mastered the Perfect Dao. May I venture to ask about the essence of the Perfect Dao?" he said. "I would like to get hold of the essence of Heaven and earth and use it to aid the five grains and to nourish the common people. I would also like to control the yin and yang in order to ensure the growth of all living things. How may this be done?"

Master Guang Cheng said, "What you say you want to learn about pertains to the true substance of things, but what you say you want to control pertains to things in their divided state. Ever since you began to govern the world, rain falls before the cloud vapors have even gathered; the plants and trees shed their leaves before they have even turned yellow; and the light of the sun and moon grows more and more sickly. Shallow and vapid, with the mind of a prattling knave—what good would it do to tell you about the Perfect Dao!"

The Yellow Emperor withdrew, gave up his throne, built a solitary hut, spread a mat of white rushes, and lived for three months in retirement. Then he went once more to request an interview. Master Guang Cheng was lying with his face to the south. The Yellow Emperor, approaching in a humble manner, crept forward on his knees, bowed his head twice, and said, "I have heard that you, sir, have mastered the Perfect Dao. I venture to ask about the governing of the body. What should I do in order to live a long life?"

Master Guang Cheng sat up with a start. "Excellent, this question of yours! Come, I will tell you about the Perfect Dao. The essence of the Perfect Dao is deep and darkly shrouded; the extreme of the Perfect Dao is mysterious and hushed in silence. Let there be no seeing, no hearing; enfold the spirit in quietude, and the body will right itself. Be still, be pure, do not labor your body, do not churn up your essence, and then you can live a long life. When the eye does not see, the ear does not hear, and the mind does not know, then your spirit will protect the body, and the body will enjoy a long life. Be wary of what is within you; block off what is outside you, for much knowledge will do you harm". (chp. 11, [Guo 2012](#), pp. 379–81; [Watson 2013](#), pp. 78–79)

Here the Yellow Emperor asks Master Guang Cheng about Dao twice, and the latter has a negative attitude about the first question and a positive attitude about the sec-

ond question. The change in attitude is rooted in the different interpretations of Master Guang Cheng as a man who embodies Dao and the way the Yellow Emperor asks about Dao.¹⁷

When he first asks about Dao, the Yellow Emperor emphasizes that his purpose is to “get hold of the essence of Heaven and earth and use it to aid the five grains and to nourish the common people”. This purpose shows his focus on Dao’s function of producing and nourishing all things and how to use this function to achieve good effects of ruling, because Dao is the ground that harmonizes the functions of heaven and earth as well as Yin and Yang to make the existence of all things possible, as found in chapters 21 and 22 and discussed above.

On the one hand, the first answer given by Master Guang Cheng affirms that the Yellow Emperor is not focused only on things but on Dao, and on the other hand, he is criticized for only focusing on shallow knowledge of Dao as ontological ground, especially making use of this knowledge to control Yin and Yang, which will destroy the ideal order of things. Moreover, from Master Guang Cheng’s view, the pursuit of control over everything (including Yin and Yang as well as Heaven and Earth) represents “the mind of a prattling knave” who is devoted to external and secular things and their uses, where Dao and insight can never be present.

After abstaining from the pursuit of the world and “the mind of a prattling knave” behind it for three months, the Yellow Emperor asked Master Guang Cheng about Dao once again. This question was clearly approved by the latter, as he directly praised it by saying “Excellent, this question of yours”. As we can see, the content of the question is “I have heard that you, sir, have mastered the Perfect Dao. I venture to ask about the governing of the body. What should I do in order to live a long life?”. The reason why this question is praised by a man who embodies the Dao is that the Yellow Emperor shifted his focus from how to exploit the ontological role of Dao to how to cultivate the body and heart–mind so that Dao can present itself directly. At the same time, “living a long life” is only the practical effect of body and mind being in harmony with the Dao, which is a theoretical development of a statement in chapter 52 of the *Daodejing*: “When one knows that he is his mother’s child and proceeds to guard (the qualities of) the mother that belong to him, to the end of his life he will be free from all peril” (Lou 2008, p. 139; Legge 2008, p. 94).

The importance of the relationship between Dao and the governing of body and mind can also be seen in what Master Guang Cheng says after affirming the way the Yellow Emperor asked about Dao. In the following, Master Guang Cheng points out that the prerequisite for realizing the unity of body and spirit lies in the following practices: “be still, be pure, do not labor your body, do not churn up your essence” and “the eye does not see, the ear does not hear, and the mind does not know”. The practical achievement of these practices is an empty state of mind, where Dao and insight appear alone. Thus, Dao, insight, and unity of body and spirit appear together. Specifically, in the empty state of mind, insight (understanding that does not understand) emerges spontaneously as a higher cognitive ability, which is manifested as the unity of body and spirit in a man who embodies Dao, and it is in such a state of body and mind as well as this kind of cognitive ability that Dao will manifest itself. All three appear at the same time and follow each other like shadows.

Finally, it is important to note that the question and answer between Knowledge and the Yellow Emperor also revolves around the theme of “the governing of body” and Dao, but the interpretation of the latter, that “you and I in the end are nowhere near it [Dao]” (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 734; Watson 2013, p. 177), does not negate this theme and the questions and answers around it. Rather, this interpretation emphasizes that the ultimate purpose of the theme is to practice, not to achieve an objective scientific knowledge that can exist independently of humanity.¹⁸ As the Yellow Emperor states, the reason they are nowhere near Dao is “because we know”, that is, they still try to objectively and scientifically understand the practice of mind and body that presents Dao, thus ignoring the

fact that the ultimate purpose of the theme is to practically awaken the simultaneous appearance of “understanding that does not understand”, unity of body and spirit, and Dao. Thus, this is another indication that discourses on the Dao cannot obscure a higher understanding of it.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, although Zhuangzi seems to deny the possibility of dialogues about the Dao in chapter 22 with the claim that “Dao is not to be asked about, and even if it is asked about, there can be no answer”, this claim should not be understood as a universal law applying to all dialogues about the Dao. Rather, it denies the attempt made by Grand Purity and No-Action to understand the ontological Dao through the use of names or specifications that belong to things because “there is no name that fit Dao”. However, since No-Action’s explanation of Dao’s specifications is in agreement with the propositions of ontological Dao, he is not completely ignorant of Dao.

Additionally, by clarifying propositions of ontological Dao that have a theoretical affinity with correct discourses on Dao (“dark and mysterious”), the former can also be regarded as a variant of the latter. Nevertheless, Zhuangzi partly rejects even this way of talking about the Dao because it does not contribute to a profound understanding of the Dao, also known as “Great attainment”, “the embodiment of Dao”, “understanding that does not understand”, and “insight”. This profound understanding is more crucial and fundamental because it can provide direct access to the nameless and formless Dao and thus epistemologically justify the nameless and formless Dao as merely talked about by shallow understanding, despite the theoretical discourses on ontological Dao that keep the embodiment of Dao from being reduced to a mystical experience without any content.

Furthermore, since Dao appears in the special empty state of mind alone, and the latter could only be achieved by practically harmonizing body and mind, the embodiment of Dao must involve practical understanding. In this regard, if a kind of dialogue can enlighten this practical understanding, it will be praised. For instance, when the Yellow Emperor asked Master Guang Cheng about Dao with the question “governing of the body”, his answer was praised. Later on, as a man who embodies Dao, Master Guang Cheng also explains Dao from the perspective of harmonizing body and mind. It is important to note that if the practical orientation of this kind of recognized dialogue is neglected, then the recognized status of this dialogue imparted by “insight” or “understanding that does not understand” as profound and “on the inside” knowledge will be denied and it will be downgraded to knowledge in general.

In conclusion, there is a strict correspondence between different levels of knowledge of the Dao and the various attitudes towards dialogues about the Dao in the Zhuangzi. This sheds light on Zhuangzi’s distinctive awareness of the problems surrounding the concept of the Dao.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ In this paper, both the personal name “Zhuangzi” and the book name “*Zhuangzi*” refer to the received text of thirty-three chapters. It is widely believed among scholars that these chapters were written by Zhuangzi and his disciples. However, as Yang guorong 楊國榮 who after an extensive review and a careful analysis of the different approaches to the Zhuangzi reasonably concludes, “seen either internally from its coherent body of [philosophical] thoughts or externally from its influences throughout the history [of Chinese philosophy], the Zhuangzi stands primarily with a historical character that is integral and coherent” (Yang 2018, p. 14), this paper takes the received text as one integral and coherent philosophical text. References to it cite *Zhuangzi*

Jishi 莊子集釋 [Collected interpretation of Zhuangzi] compiled by Guo (2012). To differentiate between the original texts and the commentaries both in this book, this paper will use the notation “ch”. when quoting specific chapters from the original texts. For instance, (chp. 22, Guo 2012, p. 758). In contrast, when the commentaries are cited, there will be no such notation, e.g., (Guo 2012, p. 756). Additionally, translations cite mainly the Watson (2013) translation, but when judged as more appropriate according to Guo’s Chinese text, Ziporyn (2020) translation is used instead. When still necessary, the English translations are also modified. When they are modified or paraphrased, they are indicated with an additional word “see”, e.g., (chp. 22, Guo 2012, pp. 756–57; See Watson 2013, pp. 184–85).

- 2 Donald Holzman once identified three features of “Chinese philosophical conversations”: (1) “they are short”; (2) “they are copied down in the spoken with evident care to preserve the flavor of the living conversation”; and (3) “they are conversations in the most ordinary sense of word, short episodes taken from life” (Holzman 1956, p. 229). However, if we specifically examine the dialogues on the Dao in *Zhuangzi*, it becomes apparent that the third feature may not apply accurately. This is because these dialogues primarily revolve around the most abstract concepts in Chinese philosophy, and *Zhuangzi*, particularly in Chapter 22, introduces its own theoretical interests within these dialogues. In contrast, Wagner’s study on Wang Bi’s commentary on *Daodejing* is more illuminating. He not only notices the interlocking parallel style of Wang Bi’s commentary (the basic feature of this style is that two elements of thought are interlocked in parallel and eventually reach a general conclusion), but also points out the effective role of this stylistic structure in dealing with the question of “that-by-which” (*suoyiran*, 所以然) such that this style was developed by scholars in the Wei and Jin dynasties as “a form of metaphysical discourse”. He also explains how Wang Bi himself consciously tried to use this style to discuss the ontological ground for all things. This research digs deeper into the close relationship between literary expressions and philosophical thinking in the *Daodejing* (Wagner 2000, pp. 110–13; 2003, pp. 57–62). Motivated by Wagner’s research, this paper wants to clarify the Zhuangzi’s philosophical thinking presented in its use of dialogues of Dao. See below for more details.
- 3 Wang Bo 王博 has already pointed out the similarity between the literary style of the *Daodejing* and the *Shangshu* 尚書, *Shijing* 詩經, and *Yijing* 易經 by citing specific words and phrases (B. Wang 1993, pp. 58–72). In this sense, this paper follows Han Guoliang’s advice and classifies the *Daodejing* as having an “aphoristic style”, which also is the style of the *Shangshu*, *Shijing*, and *Yijing* (Han 2006, pp. 51–55). Moreover, Liu Xiaogan also judges the *Daodejing* as one formed in the late spring and autumn period according to the syntax, rhetoric, and rhyme presented in books during this era (Liu 2007, pp. 14–51). This conclusion is in line with the discovered Guodian bamboo slip 郭店竹簡 version of the *Daodejing*, and I accept this conclusion.
- 4 Because of this, Ziporyn also translates *yuyan* as “words lodged everywhere directly” (Ziporyn 2020, p. 225).
- 5 According to Watson’s opinion, *yuyan* refers to “words put into the mouths of historical or fictional persons to make them more compelling” (Watson 2013, p. 234). However, if *yuyan* is only understood as “imputed words”, its role in literary style will be neglected. Zheng Kai noticed this role and stated that “*yuyan* should be understood as dialogue” (Zheng 2016, p. 9). Zheng’s view can be supported by the fact that most historical or fictional persons’ words are embedded in dialogues.
- 6 Lai Hsi-san 賴錫三 shows a similar direction of thought as in this paper. According to his view, what makes the *Zhuangzi* distinct (from the *Daodejing*) is its special focus on and clarification of the experience of Dao by means of imputed words (*yuyan*) (Lai 2010, pp. 67–107). Although Lai’s observation is correct on the whole, in this paper I will argue that the uniqueness of *Zhuangzi*’s discourses on Dao lies not in imputed words, but in its emphasis on “understanding that does not understand” (*buzhizhizhi*, 不知之知) as practical wisdom, as well as the difference between this understanding and theoretical knowledge of Dao and the priority of the former over the latter. Eventually, this ranking of knowledge represents itself as a ranking of dialogues under the themes of different aspects of knowledge.
- 7 While the theme of “asking about Dao” is scattered throughout the various chapters of *Zhuangzi*, it becomes a consistent theme in chapter 22. Chen Guying pointed out that “the theme of chapter 22 is to talk about Dao” (Chen 2007, p. 595). In addition, Zheng Kai further added that “chapter 22 also talks much about knowledge, and its key concern is how to know Dao”, which expresses the theme of “asking about Dao” more clearly and particularly (Zheng 2016, p. 107). Thus, Chapter 22 can be regarded as the core chapter on the theme of “asking about Dao”, so the discussion in this paper will mainly be based on this chapter, though the important passages of the other chapters in *Zhuangzi* will not be neglected.
- 8 Chapter 33 also suggests that “rules and specifications” (*dushu*, 度數) are the regulations recorded in ancient books or records with the statement, “The wisdom that was embodied in their policies and regulations [*shudu*, 數度] is, in many cases, still reflected in the old laws and records of the historiographers handed down over the ages” (Guo 2012, p. 1067; Watson 2013, p. 288). Taking this text into consideration, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 defines *shudu* 數度 as “orders recorded in ancient books” (Liang 1989, p. 3). In this sense, it is also correct for Zheng Kai to interpret “specifications” (*shu*) here as certain rules and laws (Zheng 2016, p. 108).
- 9 The juxtaposition of “rules and specifications” (*dushu*, 度數) with “forms and names” (*xingming*, 形名) in chapter 13 has shown the theoretical affinity between them (Guo 2012, p. 468; Watson 2013, p. 101).
- 10 Many scholars in academic circles have the tendency to confuse language with name. For example, Lai Hsi-san equates name with language (Lai 2010, pp. 104–5). This view is debatable, because names, which are characterized by their distinction, are only part of the function of language. Thus, the rejection of names in the *Zhuangzi* does not mean a complete rejection of language. This is exemplified by two propositions in chapter 22: “That which gives form to the formed is itself formless” and “There is no name that fits Dao”. These two propositions reveal the way in which Dao should not be understood. In this sense, it is more

accurate for Zheng Kai to distinguish name from language and suggest “a special function for guidance or reference” (Zheng 2016, pp. 119–20). Chad Hansen expressed this function as the “indexicality of language” (Hansen 1992, p. 282).

- 11 Schwartz also mentioned that those propositions in chapter 22 developed Laozi’s claims of Dao as ontological ground (Schwartz 1989, pp. 216–17).
- 12 At this point, Chad Hansen’s claim that Zhuangzi never really talks about the Dao in a metaphysical sense is very problematic (Hansen 1992, pp. 268–69; also see, Youru Wang 2003, pp. 44–51). His claim was also criticized by Ivanhoe. In Ivanhoe’s opinion, “there is considerable truth to the claim that Zhuangzi never talks about the Dao, but this is because, by its very nature, one cannot say precisely what the Dao is. However, this does not mean that one cannot talk about the Dao” (Ivanhoe 1993, p. 640). Although scholars, represented by Ivanhoe, reject Hansen’s deconstruction of “Dao” as ontological ground into various specific “daos” as guidance for human action, their view that Dao is embodied in the various actions of the sages is actually a variant of Hansen’s conclusion. This is because they did not explain the theoretical relationship between the metaphysical Dao and the governing of body and mind. This makes them talk about Dao only in terms of the specific actions of the sages, and Dao can only show itself in these actions, which makes the formless and nameless Dao as ontological ground epistemologically disintegrated (Ivanhoe 1993, pp. 645–52; Huang 2010, pp. 1051–56, 1064–66). This paper attempts to reveal the cognitive relation between the unity of body and mind, insight, and metaphysical Dao.
- 13 In this paper, ontology is understood as the doctrine that is concerned about the ground of all things, which is consistent with its main meaning in the seventeenth century. In this perspective, any discourse on the ground of existence of all things can be regarded as an ontological discourse. Thus, the proposition that “that which gives form to the formed is itself formless” 形形者不形 in chapter 22 of *Zhuangzi* undoubtedly belongs to the scope of ontological discourses. This is also the case with many propositions mentioned in this paper.
- 14 This translation is my own, because there are some problems in the translations made by Watson and Ziporyn. I will explain and correct these problems more specifically.
- 15 Watson understood both *yiyouzhizhi* (以有知知) and *yiwuzhizhi* (以無知知) as noun phrases, and thus translated them as “knowledge that knows” and “knowledge that does not know”, respectively (Watson, 26), but this translation has a causative construction implied by these two phrases. This problem also appears in Ziporyn’s translation (Ziporyn 2020, p. 37).
- 16 This is further supported by the apposition of mind and knowledge in the following and the proposition made in the chapter 26 of *Zhuangzi* that “the mind that is penetrating has understanding” 心徹為知 (Guo 2012, p. 939; Watson 2013, pp. 26, 232).
- 17 Wei Qipeng 魏啟鵬 used this dialogue as an example of the fact that “the outer and miscellaneous chapters of the *Zhuangzi* include the pursuit of immortality in the late Warring States period” (Wei 2004, pp. 336–37). However, since what the Yellow Emperor asked about is “the essence of Perfect Dao”, it is more appropriate to determine the theme of this dialogue as the relationship between Dao and “governing body”. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 pointed out acutely and correctly that this dialogue can be cross-referenced with the statement in chapter 28 that “the truth of Dao lies in cultivating the body; its fringes and leftovers consist in managing the state and its great families; its offal and weeds consist in governing the empire” (S. Wang 2007, pp. 388–89). However, his direct interpretation of “the essence of Dao” here as “the Way to cultivate one’s body” prematurely binds Dao with “cultivating one’s body”, so that the cognitive meaning of the latter accesses the former and the objective reality of the former is neglected.
- 18 Graham’s interpretation of “Taoist art of living” is beneficial to understanding the primacy of this practical knowledge of Dao. According to his interpretation, this art emphasizes a supreme intelligence that would be undermined by analyzing and choosing, and for this intelligence, grasping Dao is an unverbalizable “knowing how” rather than “knowing that” (Graham 1989, p. 186). However, Graham’s focus in this context is on how sages act in accordance with Dao, specifically by adapting to the natural course of things instead of attempting to impose their will upon it (Ibid., p. 187). This is different from the topic discussed in this paper, which delves into the practices that enable sages to access the invisible and nameless Dao and the inner workings of such practices.

References

- Ames, Roger T. 安乐哲, and David Hall 郝大维. 2004. *Dao Bu Yuan Ren: Bijiao Zhexue Shiyu Zhong de Laozi*. 道不遠人：比較哲學視域中的《老子》. [Daodejing: Making This Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation]. Translated by Jinli He 何金俐. Beijing: XueYuan Publishing House 學苑出版社.
- Chen, Guying 陳鼓應. 2007. *Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi*. 老子今注今譯. [Modern Commentary and Translation of Zhuangzi]. Beijing: The Commercial Press 商務印書館.
- Gao, Ming 高明. 1996. *Boshu Laozi Jiaozhu*. 帛書老子校注. [A Proofreading and Commentary of Mawangdui Silk Version of Laozi]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.
- Graham, Angus Charles. 1989. *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company.
- Guo, Qingfan 郭慶藩. 2012. *Zhuangzi Jishi*. 莊子集釋. [Collected Interpretations of Zhuangzi]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.

- Han, Guoliang 韓國良. 2006. Cong Laozi Dao Lunyu: Xianqin Zhuzi Wenti Bianyi. 從《老子》到《論語》——先秦諸子文體辯議. [From Laozi to The Analects: An analysis of literary style of philosopher in Pre-Qin]. *Journal of the University of Jinan* 4: 51–55.
- Hansen, Chad. 1992. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holzman, Donald. 1956. The Conversational Tradition in Chinese Philosophy. *Philosophy East and West* 6: 223–30. [CrossRef]
- Huang, Yong. 2010. Respecting Different Ways of Life: A Daoist Ethics of Virtue in the Zhuangzi. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69: 1049–69. [CrossRef]
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. 1993. Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Dao. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61: 639–54. [CrossRef]
- Lai, Hsi-San 賴錫三. 2010. Cong Laozi De Daoti Yinyu Dao Zhuangzi De Tidaao Xushu—You Benjamin De Shuoshuren Quanshi Zhuangzhou De Yuyan Zhexue. 從《老子》的道體隱喻到《莊子》的體道敘事——由本雅明的說書人詮釋莊周的寓言哲學. [From the Metaphor of the Laozi to the Narrative of the Zhuangzi—Zhuangzi's Narrative Philosophy and Walter Benjamin's View]. *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 40: 67–111.
- Legge, James. 2008. *Dao Te Ching or The Dao and Its Characteristics*. Auckland: The Floating Press.
- Liang, Qichao 梁啟超. 1989. Yinbingshi Heji (Di Shi Ce). 飲冰室合集(第十冊) [Ice-Drinking Room Collected Works (vol. 10)]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.
- Liu, Xiaogan 劉笑敢. 2007. Laozi: Niandai Xinkao Yu Sixiang Xinquan. 老子：年代新考與思想新詮. [Laozi: A New Research of Its Period and New Interpretation of Its Thought]. Taipei: Dongda Book Company 東大出版社.
- Lou, Yulie 樓宇烈. 2008. Laozi Daodejing Zhu Jiao Shi. 老子道德經注校釋. [The Proofreading and Interpretation to Wang Bi's Interpretation of Laozi Daodejing]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.
- Schwartz, Benjamin I. 1989. *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge and London: Belknap Press.
- Wagner, Rudolf G. 2000. *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Wagner, Rudolf G. 2003. *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue)*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Wang, Bo 王博. 1993. Laozi de Shiguan Tese. 老子的史官特色. [The Historian Features of Laozi]. Taipei: Wenjin Book Company 文津出版社.
- Wang, Bo 王博. 2011. Wu de Faxian yu Queli—Fulun Daojia de Xingshangxue yu Zhengzhizhexue. 無的發現與確立——附論道家的形上學與政治哲學. [Discovery and Establishment of nothingness, and On Daoism Political Philosophy]. *Beida journal of Philosophy* 12: 95–110.
- Wang, Shumin 王叔岷. 2007. Zhuangzi Jiaquan. 莊子校詮. [A Proofreading and Interpretation of Zhuangzi]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.
- Wang, Yiming. 2022. On Philosophical Meaning of Negative Terms in Laozi: Revolving around 'Truthful Words Seem Contrary' (正言若反). *Religions* 13: 1158. [CrossRef]
- Wang, Youru. 2003. *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Watson, Burton. 2013. *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wei, Qipeng 魏啟鵬. 2004. Mawangdui Boshu Huangdishu Jianzhen. 馬王堆帛書<黃帝書>箋證 [A Proofreading and commentary of Books of the Yellow Emperor in Books of Mawangdui Silk]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.
- Xu, Fancheng 徐梵澄. 2018. Laozi Yijie. 老子臆解. [A Private Interpretation of Laozi]. Wuhan: Chongwen Publishing Bookstore 崇文書局.
- Xu, Fuguan 徐復觀. 2013. ZhongGuo RenXing Lun Shi. XianQian Pian 中國人性論史：先秦篇. [Chinese History of Human Nature. Chapter of Pre-Qin]. Beijing: Jiuzhou Press 九州出版社.
- Xu, Keqian 徐克謙. 2005. Zhuangzi Zhexue Xintan: Dao, Yan, Ziyou yu Mei. 莊子哲學新探：道，言自由與美. [A New Research of Philosophy of Zhuangzi: Dao, Word, Freedom and Beauty]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局.
- Yang, Guorong 楊國榮. 2018. Zhuangzi de Sixiang Shijie. 莊子的思想世界. [Zhuangzi's World of Thought]. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company 生活·讀書·心知·三聯出版社.
- Zheng, Kai 鄭開. 2016. Zhuangzi Zhexue Jiangji. 莊子哲學講記. [Lectures On the Philosophy of Zhuangzi]. Nanning: Guangxi People's Publishing House 廣西人民出版社.
- Zheng, Kai 鄭開. 2018. Daojia Xingershangxue Yanjiu (Zeng Ding Ban). 道家形而上學研究（增訂版）. [A Study of the Daoist Metaphysics (Revised Edition)]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press 中國人民大學出版社.
- Zhong, Tai 鍾泰. 2002. Zhuangzi Fawei. 莊子發微. [A Profound Exposition of Zhuangzi]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press 上海古籍出版社.
- Ziporyn, Brook. 2020. *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.