




2014-12

# "Use of the Useless": Assessing Depictions of Disability in the *Zhuangzi*

Crismon Lewis

Brigham Young University - Provo, [crismonjr@gmail.com](mailto:crismonjr@gmail.com)

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“USE OF THE USELESS”: ASSESSING DEPICTIONS  
OF DISABILITY IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

by

Crismon S. Lewis, Jr.

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment  
of graduation requirements for University Honors

Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages

Brigham Young University

December 2014

Advisor: Steven L. Riep

Honors Representative: Keith Lawrence

ABSTRACT

“USE OF THE USELESS”: ASSESSING DEPICTIONS  
OF DISABILITY IN THE *ZHUANGZI*

Crismon S. Lewis, Jr.

Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages

Bachelor of Arts

This thesis analyzes how persons with disability are portrayed by the philosopher Zhuangzi in the canonical Daoist text which bears his name. In his elucidation of Daoist thought, Zhuangzi draws upon examples of a physically-deformed man, men who are missing feet due to criminal punishment, and a hunchback. While disability carried a stigma in ancient China (be it congenital or through mutilating impairment), Zhuangzi breaks from conventional attitude by depicting disability as an enabling quality for one to harmonize with the universal force known as the *dao*, or “The Way.” Zhuangzi also uses irony to show how disability endows one with greater insight and acuity, such that the disabled person outwits the able-bodied in their understanding and awareness of the *dao* and obtains *de*, which is “virtue” or “power.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express sincere gratitude to my advisor, Steve Riep. His suggestions, edits, and advising were invaluable in every stage of the thesis' development. He has also helped me see how I can expand upon the subject for potential publication.

I acknowledge David Honey and Tim Davis for their assistance in interpreting the *Zhuangzi* and understanding its historical context. Their reference to additional literature enabled me to provide some comparison to Zhuangzi's portrayal of disability.

Additionally, I am thankful to family members and friends who have been encouraging and supportive, one of whom is my brother Dallin, who kindly read the finished draft and offered valuable suggestions to improve its readability.

I would also like to thank the Harold B. Lee Library for the student research grant, as it provided the financial means to complete the thesis.

Most of all, I am grateful to my wife Danielle, who faithfully stood by my side during this endeavor. Her encouragement and love is appreciated every day.

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## INTRODUCTION

The decline of the Zhou dynasty (1046 – 256 BCE) was marked by chaos and military conflict as feudal states sought hegemony in ancient China. The tumult of the time contributed to China's golden age of philosophies, ideas, and methods as a response to the violence and an attempt to create an ordered, harmonious society. Many of these philosophies, such as Confucianism and Legalism, are based on the assumption that harmonious societies are achieved by reforming the behavior and attitudes of the individual person. Yet the philosophy known as Daoism,<sup>1</sup> which also emerged in the latter half of the Zhou dynasty, diverges from such a premise altogether; it rejects the notion that categories of good and bad or desirable and undesirable exist in the first place. Rather, Daoism is based upon the supposition that strife and disharmony exist only because man makes these discriminations. By forsaking the entanglements of man-contrived distinctions, classifications, and attitudes, a person can begin to be in harmony with the *dao* 道, the all-encompassing harmonious flow of nature, and that such a practice will help one to see that ills and misfortunes are “an inevitable part of the course of life” (Watson 4).

While Laozi is accredited with having introduced and established Daoist thought, the philosopher known as Zhuangzi presents his own elucidation in the Daoist canonical text that bears his name, the *Zhuangzi*. Amidst relating fantastical adventures or mythical stories, Zhuangzi also discusses people who experience disability—a physically-deformed man, men who are missing feet due to punishment for criminal offenses, and hunchbacks. Of the many people Zhuangzi uses to present and expound Daoist thought,

why does he choose the deformed and the mutilated? By analyzing five stories, I will discuss how Zhuangzi uses irony to portray disability as an enabling quality for one to align with the *dao*—the ultimate objective in Daoist thought. These accounts portray disability as a characteristic that allows one to transcend the limitations of the physical realm and enjoy harmony with the *dao*. Additionally, Zhuangzi shows how disability endows a person with a deeper level of insight and perceptivity.

## DAOISM

The historical development of Daoism is contested among scholars. According to tradition, a man named Laozi is attributed to have written a record around the sixth century BCE, entitled *Daodejing*, the translation of which is *The Classic of the Way and its Virtue*. The *Daodejing* is a relatively short poetic text divided into 81 sections of which establish the fundamental elements of Daoism in a cryptic, obscure fashion. While several texts refer to Laozi as a single person, many scholars believe the term represents up to four individuals, as *laozi* 老子 may signify “the ancient teachers” personified by one individual (*Daoism* 8-9).

Daoist philosophy is based on the supernal nature of the *dao*, often translated as “The Way.” Definitions and translations of the term are many, but generally speaking, the *dao* is the natural and harmonious flow of the physical and metaphysical universe. Efforts to describe the *dao*, however, paradoxically cause its true meaning to be elusive; Laozi’s explanation that “The way that can be spoken of, / Is not the constant way” suggests the ineffability of the *dao* (Laozi 5), and it is for this reason that the *dao* is sometimes

regarded as “wordless teaching” (*Daoism* 14). In the *Daodejing*, Laozi provides a context for understanding the *dao* and how it operates:

There is a thing confusedly formed,  
Born before heaven and earth.  
Silent and void  
It stands alone and does not change,  
Goes around and does not weary.  
It is capable of being the mother of the world.  
I know not its name  
So I style it ‘the way.’ (Laozi 30)

This passage conveys the significance of the *dao* as the expanse of existence and the harmony of the universe, and because of this, man’s ultimate objective is to free himself of his own man-contrived wisdom in order to align himself with the natural spontaneity of the *dao*. Regarding this Daoist principle, Ronnie Littlejohn states, “It is only when people abandoned oneness with the great *dao* that they began to make distinctions in morality, politics, aesthetics and religion. Humans speak of beauty and ugliness; courage and cowardice; good and evil. But these are discriminations of our own making, they do not belong to the *dao*” (*Daoism* 16). Recognizing the *dao* as the universal force in both the material and mystical universe serves as the central premise for understanding Daoist thought and philosophy.

The second core Daoist term behind the *dao* is *de* 德, which is often translated as “virtue” or “power,” with other less-common renderings being “potency” and “efficacy.”



Like *dao*, the term *de* evades a set definition, yet it is generally regarded as the “virtue” or “power” one receives from being in harmony with the *dao*. Alan Chan notes that the Daoist sense of “virtue” (*de*) supersedes the notion of “moral achievement through repeated effort”—the way Confucians tend to describe virtue. Rather, *de* is “what one has ‘obtained’ from the Dao, a ‘latent power’ by ‘virtue’ of which any being becomes what it is.” For that reason, the *Daodejing* is translated by Arthur Waley as the “Classic of the Way and *Its* Virtue,” (emphasis added) and thus *de* is recognized as something that emanates naturally from the *dao* (Chan).

In order to align oneself with the *dao* and obtain *de*, one must practice *wuwei* 無為, which translates as, “non-action” or “non-purposeful action.” While discrepancies exist concerning the phrase’s exact meaning, *wuwei* is usually regarded as abstaining from the philosophical contrivances of man that inhibit one’s ability to be one with the *dao*. Chad Hansen explains that an alternative rendering of the phrase may mean to “abandon knowledge,” signifying that one should divest themselves of man-contrived wisdom and distinctions (Hansen 786). In addition, the phrase *wuwei* implies that man’s purposeful action is in opposition to the inevitable and harmonious *dao*. Thus, practicing *wuwei* enables one to yield themselves to the *dao* and thereby enjoy a life free from unnecessary friction and pain.

## THE ZHUANGZI

While practical, concrete examples of ideal Daoist living are not contained in the *Daodejing*, they are found in the companion canonical Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi*, which

presents relatable, daily-life portrayals of Daoist living in a variety of stories and anecdotes. The primary author of the *Zhuangzi* is a man by the name of Zhuang Zhou, but who is more commonly referred to as Zhuangzi. Unlike the disputed existence of Laozi, scholars recognize Zhuangzi as an actual person recorded in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記). In this historical record, Zhuangzi is described as a contemporary of King Hui of Liang and King Xuan of Qi, which means he would have lived during the fourth century BCE. Additionally, he was said to have written a work of 100,000 words or more that was “mostly in the nature of fable” (Watson 1, 7-8).

The *Zhuangzi* is divided up into three sections: the Inner Chapters (*nei pian* 內篇) (1-7), the Outer Chapters (*wai pian* 外篇) (8-22), and the Miscellaneous Chapters (*za pian* 雜篇) (23-33). Zhuangzi is believed by most scholars to have written the Inner Chapters, while the remaining two sections are likely the work of multiple authors, written within 150 years after Zhuangzi's death. Brook Ziporyn describes these remaining sections as “receptions” and responses” that build upon the concepts of the Inner Chapters (Ziporyn ix). Nevertheless, like the *Daodejing*, the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters still embody the philosophical thought of the man whose name bears the title of the work.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the style used to convey the Daoist principles, the *Zhuangzi* differs from the *Daodejing* primarily in its overt and unmistakable defiance of man-contrived limits and restrictions. Burton Watson, whose translation of the *Zhuangzi* is used in this paper, notes that “freedom” is the one word that best describes Zhuangzi's mode of thought. This is evident in the title of the first chapter, “Free and Easy Wandering,” which

describes a fish that turns into a bird and ascends to an altitude of ninety thousand *li* (about 28,000 miles) such that “nothing can hinder or block him” (*Complete Works* 30). Additionally, Zhuangzi advocates for freedom against man-contrived ideologies and attitudes, and he uses paradoxical conversations that challenge social conventions and logical explanations. Even Watson admits that the best way to understand Zhuangzi “is not to attempt to subject his thought to rational and systematic analysis,” but to reread his words until one has “ceased to think of what he is saying and instead has developed an intuitive sense of the mind behind the words” (7).

One story in the *Zhuangzi* that demonstrates his insistence on independence is when he was invited to serve as an official in the court of the King of Chu. When messengers of the king were sent to invite Zhuangzi to serve as an administrator of the king’s realm, Zhuangzi replied:

I have heard that there is a sacred tortoise in Chu that has been dead for three thousand years. The king keeps it wrapped in cloth and boxed, and stores it in the ancestral temple. Now would this tortoise rather be dead and have its bones left behind and honored? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud? (*Complete Works* 188)

When the officials admitted that the tortoise would rather drag its tail in the mud, Zhuangzi exclaimed, “Go away! I’ll drag my tail in the mud” (188)! The story indicates that Zhuangzi would rather retain his personal freedom and forgo honor, praise, and luxurious living than be at the king’s disposal, an option he compares to a dead tortoise whose remains are honored.

In the analysis section that follows, I will discuss five incidences of disability that are addressed in the *Zhuangzi*. The first incident is a brief sketch about one who experiences physical deformity. The next three examples all deal with former criminals, each of whom had a foot cut off as punishment.<sup>3</sup> While these criminals do not experience congenital disability, the mutilation of having a foot cut off is a physical disability that impedes mobility. The fifth and final example is a conversation between Confucius and a hunchback who lives in the forest. While the stories and anecdotes within the *Zhuangzi* appear to be random and unrelated, the principles and implications of Daoism contained within them are actually interdependent, as the significance of Daoist principles in one anecdote are portrayed similarly in another anecdote but presented with a differing storyline (Davis).

It should be noted that despite the many commentaries that have been written, some passages still remain mysterious and obscure. Reasons for this include the intrinsic difficulty of Zhuangzi's philosophy, the difficulty of the language, as well as the textual corruption that has occurred through the centuries. While some scholars regard Zhuangzi's work as unintelligible and garbled, Watson supposes that this lack of clarity may be because "we lack sufficient knowledge of early Chinese society customs, or religion" (21-22). This is especially true since Zhuangzi frequently refers to folk beliefs and scenes from everyday life.

## CRIPPLED SHU

Zhuangzi's first discussion of disability stems from chapter four, "In the World of Men," in which Zhuangzi gives a brief biographical sketch of a person called "Crippled Shu" (*zhili shuzhe* 支離疏者) stating:

There's Crippled Shu—chin stuck down in his navel, shoulders up above his head, pigtail pointing at the sky, his five organs on the top, his two thighs pressing his ribs. By sewing and washing, he gets enough to fill his mouth; by handling a winnow and sifting out the good grain, he makes enough to feed ten people. When the authorities call out the troops, he stands in the crowd waving good-by; when they get up a big work party, they pass him over because he's a chronic invalid. And when they're doling out the grain to the ailing, he gets three big measures and ten bundles of firewood. With a crippled body, he's still able to look after himself and finish out the years Heaven gave him. How much better, then if he had crippled virtue! (*Complete Works* 66)

Zhuangzi begins this account with a description of Crippled Shu's physical deformity.<sup>4</sup> He notes Crippled Shu's ability for self-sustenance and contribution, such that he can help feed himself and others. His physical condition, however, excludes him from having to be conscripted or engage in work parties—both of which activities often lead to premature death or injury. And as one counted among the ailing, Crippled Shu earns his share of food and firewood. After detailing Crippled Shu's condition, Zhuangzi concludes that Crippled Shu is "still able to look after himself and finish out the years

Heaven gave him,” stating that he can care for himself and live his life normally. This may be an indirect reference to the Daoist quest for longevity and immortality. During the Warring States period, Daoist masters practiced healing and life-extending techniques known as *yangsheng* 養生, or “nourishing life” (*Daoism* 48). As will be discussed in a subsequent account dealing with disability, a person who is aligned with the *dao* will “in his mind never [taste] death” (*Complete Works* 69).

The final sentence of the anecdote, however, takes a drastic turn from extolling Crippled Shu’s ability to apparently condemning him, saying, “How much better, then, if he had crippled virtue!” The original Chinese text of this sentence reads, *you kuang zhi li qi dezhe hu* 又況支離其德者乎 (*Zhuangzi qian zhu* 68), an alternative translation being, “Would it not be fitting if his virtue were crippled like his body!” To better understand Zhuangzi’s intention with this remark, it may help to refer to Confucius’ teachings. Even though Zhuangzi and Confucius were not contemporaries, Zhuangzi was familiar with Confucius’ writings and philosophy and he repeatedly makes attacks both overt and subtle against this familiar Chinese philosopher and his teachings.

One foundational principle of Confucian thought is filial piety, which refers to the proper way of treating family members and leaders (*Confucianism* 25). Its import is elucidated in the *Classic of Filial Piety*, which was written in the early Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). The short text is purported to be a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Zeng Zi, the former of whom describes filial piety as “the root of virtue and the source of civilization,” noting:

In serving his parents a filial son renders the utmost reverence to them while at home. In supporting them he maximizes their pleasure. When they are sick he takes every care. At their death he expresses all his grief. Then he sacrifices to them with full solemnity. If he has fulfilled these five requirements, then he is truly able to serve his parents. (“Classic of Filial Piety” 66)

As evident in this passage and in other Confucian texts, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of performing one’s filial duty to parents. The implication of Confucius’ words is that one achieves virtue *because* they engage in prescribed duties and obligations. But analyzing Cripple Shu’s condition in light of Confucian principles interrogates this assumption by posing the question: Can a disabled person who is physically incapable of caring for their parents still be considered “filial” in the Confucian sense? The *Classic of Filial Piety* draws a clear line between those who are filial and those who are not, yet it fails to account for those who are simply unable to provide such service, with disabled persons being one such example. Thus, with respect to observing filial piety and performing one’s obligatory duties, disabled persons either occupy an ambiguous middle ground or are deemed as unfilial. For this reason, Zhuangzi wittily and sarcastically notes of the convenience of Crippled Shu having “crippled virtue” to signify his inability to perform Confucian duties, which would eliminate the chance of having someone occupy “middle ground” in the black-and-white perception of Confucian filial piety.

But while Crippled Shu may be considered “useless” in light of Confucian values, other anecdotes in the *Zhuangzi* serve to clarify the “use” of the seemingly useless. Earlier in the same chapter, Zhuangzi discusses an incident where Carpenter Shi and his apprentice pass a large oak tree that was tall and “broad enough to shelter several thousand oxen.” While his apprentice was amazed by it, the carpenter merely scoffed at its useless, unusable wood. That night, however, the oak tree appeared to Carpenter Shi in a dream and explained that being useless is his intention all along. Of “useful” trees, the oak tree said, “Their utility makes life miserable for them, and so they don’t get to finish out the years Heaven gave them, but are cut off in mid-journey.” Being of “no use” has been of “great use to me,” the tree says, and it concludes by asking, “How do you know I’m a worthless tree?” When Carpenter Shi awoke the next morning, he shared with his apprentice the dream, asserting, “It [the tree] protects itself in a different way from ordinary people. If you try to judge it by conventional standards, you’ll be way off” (*Complete Works* 63-65).

This story provides a valuable comparison to the account of Crippled Shu in clarifying the Daoist principle of longevity. In this latter story, while the carpenter initially is doubtful of the utilitarian value of the tree, he eventually sees the paradoxical “use” of the tree as being considered useless in the sense that it avoids being mangled and cut down like other trees. Similarly, the physical deformity experienced by Crippled Shu is advantageous such that he evades the potentially fatal activities able-bodied individuals were mandated to participate: military service and labor on government public works projects. In both cases, it is the “useless” quality that proves to be most “useful” for



practicing *wuwei* and in aligning with the Dao. This phenomenon also appears in the aforementioned story of Zhuangzi's refusal to serve in the king court, for he would rather "drag his tail in the mud" than be a venerated, dead tortoise. Zhuangzi's concluding remark in the same chapter that contains these two anecdotes establishes the irony of these accounts: "All men know the use of the useful, but nobody knows the use of the useless" (*Complete Works* 67).

The account of Crippled Shu portrays the ironic advantage enjoyed by disabled persons in practicing *wuwei* and in following the *dao*. As one who possesses no utilitarian value to the conscription officer or to the work party leader, Crippled Shu manages to escape activities that cause premature death to the able-bodied. Yet paradoxically, such uselessness serves as a great "use" for Crippled Shu, as he is able to "look after himself and finish out the years Heaven gave him." As many fail to recognize the "use of the useless," Crippled Shu's physical deformity becomes a desired trait that enables him to practice *wuwei* and thus align himself with the *dao*.

#### WANG TAI

The story of Wang Tai is the first account in the *Zhuangzi* to discuss a person who has had a foot cut off due to criminal punishment, and it is the first anecdote contained in chapter five, "The Sign of Virtue Complete." As noted, a severed foot was a penalty for serious offense during Zhuangzi's time. It was an obvious and enduring mark of one's misdeed. Such a punishment epitomizes the word *stigma*, as the Greeks originated the term to refer to "bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the

moral status of the signifier” (Goffman). Thus, Wang Tai and the other one-footed former criminals that will be discussed subsequently carry a definite stigma, and this is evident in how these individuals are treated in society. This type of stigma does carry weight in Confucian society, which values a life devoted to prescribed laws and statues, as will be discussed later. But because of their aim to free themselves of man-contrived schemes and systems, Daoists do not consider this or other forms of punishment as dishonorable. Despite the stigma associated with this punishment, my analysis will focus primarily on how the disability of mutilation serves as an enabling trait for being one with the *dao*.

The anecdote is a conversation between Confucius<sup>5</sup> and Chang Ji, and it begins as the latter asks Confucius why the one-footed former criminal Wang Tai had attracted as many followers as Confucius himself. “He doesn’t stand up and teach, he doesn’t sit down and discuss,” Chang Ji explains, “yet they go to him empty and come home full. Does he really have some wordless teaching,<sup>6</sup> some formless way of bringing the mind to completion” (*Complete Works* 68)? Confucius responds by describing Wang Tai as “a sage” and mentions that he has not visited him yet. Confucius then adds: “But if I got to him as my teacher, how much more should those who are not my equals” (68)! In this anecdote, Confucius simultaneously exudes knowledge of Daoist thought while also maintaining the mindset of Confucian hierarchy and social standing, as evident in describing others as “not [his] equals.” Chang Ji reinforces the Confucian attitude by stating, “If he’s lost a foot and is still superior to the Master, then how far above the common run of men he must be” (68)!<sup>7</sup> The conversation also reflects the Confucian ideal of preserving one’s body from the effects of criminal punishment. The importance

of this principle is evident in the *Analects*<sup>8</sup> as Master Zeng, lying on his deathbed, orders his disciples to expose his hands and feet to demonstrate his filial piety as he preserved his body from the mutilating punishments that occurred in ancient China (*Analects* 54).

When Chang Ji again asks Confucius about Wang Tai's "unique way...of using his mind," Confucius explains:

Life and death are great affairs, and yet they are no change to him. Though heaven and earth flop over and fall down, it is no loss to him. He sees clearly into what has no falsehood and does not shift with things. He takes it as fate that things should change, and he holds fast to the source.  
(*Complete Works* 68-69)

Confucius' reply suggests that Wang Tai recognizes fate as inevitable, and because of this, Wang Tai becomes adaptive to fate's manifestation. Zhuangzi commentator Guo Xiang also notes that Wang Tai "alters together with every alteration, so life and death make no alteration in him" (qtd. in *Zhuangzi: Essential Writings* 178).

As Chang Ji is still confused by this explanation, Confucius clarifies that Wang Tai perceives of everything being one, and because of that, he does not see the loss of things:

If you look at them from the point of view of their differences, then there is liver and gall, Ch'u [Chu] and Yüeh [Yue]. But if you look at them from the point of view of their sameness, then the ten thousand things are all one. A man like this doesn't know what his ears or eyes should approve—he lets his mind play in the harmony of virtue. As for things, he sees them

as one and does not see their loss. He regards the loss of a foot as a lump of earth thrown away. (*Complete Works* 69)

Rather than attributing value to one thing over another, Wang Tai is said to see the harmonious unity of “the ten thousand things”<sup>9</sup> and does not perceive their loss. It is this perception that enables him to let his mind “play in the harmony of virtue” and regard his missing foot as “a lump of earth thrown away.”<sup>10</sup> In the chapter “Discussion on Making All Things Equal,” Zhuangzi asserts that to see things harmoniously is an element of a Daoist perspective, comparing it to a hinge: “A state in which ‘this’ and ‘that’ no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly” (*Complete Works* 40). Wang Tai’s acuity for seeing the unity of things suggests his alignment with the *dao*.

With this explanation, Chang Ji acknowledges Wang Tai’s skill for harnessing his mind into viewing all things as one, but presses Confucius about why Wang Tai attracts followers. To this Confucius explains,

Men do not mirror themselves in running water—they mirror themselves in still water. Only what is still can still the stillness of other things. Of those that receive life from the earth, the pine and cypress alone are best—they stay as green as ever in the winter or summer. Of those that receive life from Heaven, Yao and Shun<sup>11</sup> alone are best—they stand at the head of the ten thousand things. Luckily they were able to order their lives, and thereby order the lives of other things. (*Complete Works* 69)

As Confucius explains in this section, those things that exhibit stillness and constancy are desired and sought after, for “Only what is still can still the stillness of other things.” An initial reading of this sentence may appear confusing, but reference to the original Chinese text illuminates Zhuangzi’s intention, as it reads *wei zhi neng zhi zhong zhi* 唯止能止眾止 (*Zhuangzi qian zhu* 74). A contemporary translation of *zhi* 止 renders “to stop/to prohibit” (“Zhi 止”), but an annotation of the text indicates that this word is referring to the description of still water found in the preceding sentence. The symbol of still water and its ability to have men mirror themselves in it symbolizes the desired quality of stillness in a person’s life.

In the Daoist perspective, stillness is one way of practicing *wuwei* and align with the *dao*. Because Wang Tai is missing a foot and is largely immobile, he remains constantly in a stationary position. But as Confucius infers, Wang Tai’s stationary position enables him to practice stillness, thus attracting followers who seek to be attain this same quality. Meditation has long been a common practice in Daoism as it provides a way to concentrate fully on The One (*taiyi* 太一), or “primordial state of great unity” (“Guarding the One” 127). As Wang Tai remains in a state of stillness, he sees things “as one and does not see their loss” (*Complete Works* 69). The value of stillness and placidity is elucidated elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*, as it states, “The sage’s mind in stillness is the mirror of Heaven and earth, the glass of the ten thousand things. Emptiness, stillness, limpidity, silence, inaction—these are the level of Heaven and earth, the substance of the Way [*dao*] and its Virtue” (*Complete Works* 142). Additionally, the stillness Wang Tai exhibits enables him to nourish his *qi* 氣, the vital force that allows him to form a

“spiritual body devoid of the blemishes of mundane existence” (Chan). As Wang Tai exhibits perfect stillness, Confucius compares him to the constancy found in the pine and cypress trees, which remain green year-round. And as people come to Wang Tai seeking to emulate his harmony with the *dao*, the one-footed former criminal resembles Yao and Shun as he orders his life and can “thereby order the lives of other things” (*Complete Works* 69).

As further evidence of his oneness with the *dao*, commentator Lü Huiqing (1032 – 1111) notes that to study the *dao* is to “study what cannot be studied” and to walk the *dao* is to “walk what cannot be walked.”<sup>12</sup> Confucius’ disciples “knew how to follow him [Confucius] in the way he could walk, but not how to follow him in the ways he could not-walk” (qtd. in *Zhuangzi: Essential Writings* 180). Thus, the one-footed Wang Tai serves as a metaphor for discovering the elusive nature of the *dao*, for his disciples could *not* imitate his walk and had to discover the *dao* for themselves.<sup>13</sup>

What Confucius says next suggests the irony between Confucianism (as espoused by the disciple Chang Ji) and Daoism (as espoused by Wang Tai) with regard to how these two persons view fame and honor among men. Because he is aligned with the *dao*, Wang Tai manages to attract as many followers as Confucius himself. But Confucius explains to Chang Ji that receiving honor is not Wang Tai’s intent, as he relates an analogy to show that fame can come in other ways: “A brave soldier will plunge alone into the midst of nine armies. He seeks fame and can bring himself to this” (*Complete Works* 69).<sup>14</sup> What Wang Tai desires is the immortality afforded by the *dao*, in which he,

governs Heaven and earth, stores up the ten thousand things, lets the six parts of his body be only a dwelling, makes ornaments of his ears and eyes, unifies the knowledge of what he knows, and in his mind never tastes death. He will soon choose the day and ascend far off. Men may become his followers, but how could he be willing to bother himself about things? (*Complete Works* 69)

The stillness possessed by Wang Tai allows him to transcend his bodily frame and taste immortality—thereby attaining the freedom that Zhuangzi consistently advocates. As already discussed, Wang Tai exhibits stillness because his one-footed condition contributes to a stationary lifestyle. While a superficial understanding of Wang Tai's condition/disability may render him immobile and unsuited for common manual labor or other activities, the former criminal actually enjoys a great deal of mobility by aligning himself with the *dao*, being still, and thus having the anticipation that he will one day “ascend far off.” And finally, while he may achieve fame by attracting disciples seeking to attain the *dao*, “how could he be willing to bother himself about things”<sup>15</sup> (*Complete Works* 69)? In other words, while Wang Tai may attract the attention of men because of his attainment of the *dao*, he does not care to bother himself with such things.

The conversation between Confucius and Chang Ji illustrates the irony of how Wang Tai's transcendent mobility is a result of his impairment. While Confucius and Chang Ji regard Wang Tai as inferior to them because of his status as a former criminal, Wang Tai's physical impairment actually serves as an enabling quality for him to follow the *dao*. His perceptivity stems from the stillness he exhibits, a quality obtained because

his physical mutilation prevents him from walking or moving freely. As a result, many people come to him in search of the *dao*, for he emanates a form of “wordless teaching” by remaining still and by walking “what cannot be walked.” Thus, it is Wang Tai’s physical immobility that ultimately serves to help him become free and have the anticipation that he will one day “ascend far off.” And while Chang Ji fixates on Wang Tai’s unusual ability to attract followers, the latter is more keenly aware that being one with the *dao* is much preferred.

#### SHEN TUJIA

The anecdote that immediately follows Wang Tai in the fifth chapter deals with another one-footed former criminal named Shen Tujia. The anecdote is a conversation between Shen and Zichan of Zheng, both of whom are studying under a master named Pohun Wuren. In his translation, Watson notes that Zichan was prime minister of the state of Zheng in the sixth century BCE. It begins with Shen and Zichan having a conversation. Zichan tells Shen, “If I go out first, you stay behind, and if you go out first, I’ll stay behind.” The next day, Zichan repeats his instructions from the day before, followed by, “Now I will go out. Are you going to stay behind or aren’t you? When you see a prime minister, you don’t even get out of the way—do you think you’re the equal of a prime minister” (*Complete Works* 70)?

Zichan’s distances himself from the former criminal Shen because Zichan regards himself as being superior in rank to Shen and because Shen’s missing a foot due to criminal offense stigmatizes him. Even though Zichan and Shen are both students to the



master Pohun Wuren, in society they occupy conflicting social ranks. The fact that Shen is a former criminal only compounds the difference in their social statuses. Along with the stigma associated with former criminals, evidence suggests that there was a definite stigma toward disability in ancient China—whether the disability was congenital or due to mutilation. While some disabled persons occupied a role in society, such as the blind musicians during the Zhou dynasty (*The Book of Songs* 280), most were ostracized because of their disability (Milburn 22).

After Zichan puts forward a rhetorical question regarding Shen's equality to a prime minister, Shen poses a question of his own, saying,

Within the gates of the Master, is there any such thing as a prime minister?  
 You take delight in being a prime minister and pushing people behind you.  
 But I've heard that if the mirror is bright, no dust settles on it; if dust settles, it isn't really bright. When you live around worthy men a long time, you'll be free of faults. You regard the Master as a great man, and yet you talk like this—it's not right is it? (*Complete Works* 70)

Shen's response attempts to expose the fallacies of Zichan's request. His own rhetorical question implies that all "within the gates of the master" are equal, and he follows with a critique of Zichan as one seeking authority over Shen by means of his position. Shen's analogy of a bright mirror not gathering dust signifies that a moral ruler brightly reflects the Confucian values onto the people, but that if he is tarnished by the "dust" of malevolent desires, then he no longer brightly reflects those virtues. This is followed by Shen admonishing him that living among "worthy men" (those who regard all persons to

be equal) will cure him of his faults, and he concludes by chastising Zichan for the impropriety of his request.

Whereas Confucianism maintains a distinction of social hierarchy, Daoism assumes the equality of all things, as evident in the paradigm espoused by Wang Tai. A.C. Graham describes how the sage “treats everything as one” (*Chuang-tzŭ* 20), and Zhuangzi notes that the “ten thousand things are all one” (*Complete Works* 69). What Shen says in response to Zichan’s request demonstrates Zhuangzi’s ironic use of Confucian rhetoric. In Confucian philosophy, a person is to be subjugated to the ruler, yet the ruler is also obligated to govern with morality and righteousness, a part of the principle of filial piety. It is through such virtuous leadership that the ruler empowers his subjects to acquire the desired traits of benevolence and virtue. This is evident in Confucius’ admiration of King Wen, who governed in righteousness and benevolence in the early days of the Zhou dynasty (Yao 166). But as Zichan appears to “take delight in being a prime minister and pushing people,” Shen points out to Zichan that he lacks the essential qualities of a Confucian leader, not to mention his lack of Daoist understanding about all persons being equal.

The irony is that Zichan’s attempt to subjugate Shen is based on Confucian principles, yet Zichan himself is deficient of the essential qualities that he ought to espouse as a Confucian leader, thus undermining his basis of argument. Although he does not espouse Confucian thought but believes that all “within the gates of the master” are equal, Shen outwits Zichan by using Confucian rhetoric to reveal Zichan’s own lack of Confucian observance. Zhuangzi uses structural irony to create a role-reversal in the

story, where the former criminal Shen possesses a greater depth of acuity and knowledge than the prime minister, Zichan. Literary scholar Chris Baldick describes this mode of irony as “the use of a naïve or deluded hero . . . whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances recognized by the author and readers” (114).

To this Zichan gives a livid response, accusing Shen of assuming himself superior to Yao and demanding that he examine his virtue. Shen replies by describing two different people and sharing another analogy:

People who excuse their faults and claim they didn't deserve to be punished—there are lots of them. But those who don't excuse their faults and who admit they didn't deserve to be spared—they are few. To know what you can't do anything about, and to be content with it as you would with fate—only a man of virtue can do that. If you play around in front of Archer Yi's target, you're right in the way of the arrows, and if you don't get hit, it's a matter of fate. (*Complete Works* 70)

The description of the two types of people refer to Zichan and Shen; Zichan is at fault for attempting to subjugate Shen and for failing to recognize his error, while Shen acknowledges the just punishment he received because of his crime. Despite this, however, Shen explains that a virtuous person learns to be content with their fate. The analogy of playing in front of an archer's target reiterates the inevitability of fate, and how the acceptance of fate precedes the obtaining of virtue. While Shen may have disobeyed the man-contrived laws of society, Zhuangzi depicts Shen as one who accepts

his punishment (a reference to fate) and thus, in the Daoist sense, aligns himself with the universal and harmonious force of the *dao*.<sup>16</sup>

Shen continues with his remarks by describing the anger he feels when able-bodied men laugh at him for having only one foot, followed by an acknowledgment that his master, Pohun Wuren, helps him to feel calm. Shen also states that in the nineteen years they have spent together, the master “never once let on that he’s aware I’m missing a foot.” Shen concludes with a pointed question for Zichan: “Now you and I are supposed to be wandering outside the realm of forms and bodies, and you come looking for me inside it—you’re at fault, aren’t you”<sup>17</sup> (*Complete Works* 71)?

This final portion of Shen’s remarks underscores the Daoist interpretation of equality—both among people and all things generally. While in public Shen is disparaged as being less than able-bodied folk, the master helps him feel as though he has no impairment. This correlates with the attitude found in the account of Wang Tai, who regarded, “the loss of a foot as a lump of earth thrown away” (*Complete Works* 69). After suggesting that all things are equal, Shen turns his attention back to Zichan by stating that they are supposed to be “wandering outside the realm of forms and bodies,” but that Zichan is “looking for [Shen] inside of it.” This concluding remark displays a central objective in the Daoist philosophy. To wander “outside the realm of forms and bodies” reflects the Daoist ambition to transcend the mortal, physical body in pursuit of the *dao*. This transcendence is desired by Wang Tai, the one-footed former criminal who, because he aligns with the *dao*, “will soon choose the day and ascend far off” (69).

Despite the ideal of wandering outside of the physical body, however, Shen notes that Zichan has come “looking for [him] inside [the body],” suggesting that Zichan is seeking to identify Shen based on his deformity—a view that correlates with the Confucian belief that having one’s foot cut off due to a crime implies that the person’s virtue is impaired (*Complete Works* 71). The irony, therefore, is found in the attitudes of Shen and Zichan, and how each views a person’s virtue in relation to the completeness of their body. The able-bodied Zichan believes that a person’s value corresponds with the wholeness of their physical body. This perception is reflected in the semantic elements of the Chinese script; Emma Stone explains how the Chinese character *zheng* 正, which means orderly, proper, regular and orthodox, “encapsulates the essence of Confucianism as a philosophy which prizes orthodoxy and the middle way, leaving no room for excess, extreme or deviation. As regards the bodymind, any variation or difference is undesirable *because it is unorthodox*” (143). In that sense, Zichan’s paradigm is limited as he fixates his attention on the body. The one-footed and mobility-impaired Shen, however, exhibits a liberating perspective, such that *all* people are equal, and that the main objective is to be wandering *outside* of the realm of forms and bodies instead of being confined within it.

The conversation between Shen Tujia and Zichan of Zheng exemplifies the Daoist attitude toward physical deformity and disability. As Zichan, a prime minister, sought to impose social ranking based on status against Shen due to his physical deformity and former criminal behavior, Shen responded by explaining how all persons “within the gates of the master” are equal. Shen also managed to outwit Zichan by undermining his Confucian premise in showing how he, Zichan, lacked the qualities of a model Confucian

leader. He then explains that a “man of virtue” learns to recognize and accept fate, and in this respect, Shen has learned to regard his mutilating punishment as evidence of fate and is thus able to better align himself with the *dao*. While Zichan’s views about social standing are limited because he is fixating on the body as a measure of one’s virtue and status, Shen’s impairment is an enabling quality such that he remembers the objective of “wandering outside the realm of forms and bodies”—which again suggests the freedom and mobility that he enjoys because of his disability. Thus, it is the disabled Shen who sets his sights on transcending the physical limits of the body, while the able-bodied Zichan’s perception and understanding of virtue is in fact limited to the body.

#### SHUSHAN WUZHI

Like the two accounts that precede it, this third anecdote in the fifth chapter of the *Zhuangzi* deals with another former criminal missing a foot named Shushan Wuzhi.<sup>18</sup> The first half of the story deals with Shushan’s brief exchange with Confucius followed by a conversation Shushan has with Laozi. As Shushan comes “stumping along” to see Confucius, the latter reprimands Shushan for his former conduct and asks Shushan what he could possibly expect to gain from their visit. Shushan explains:

I just didn’t understand my duty and was too careless of my body, and so I lost a foot. But I’ve come now because I still have something that is worth more than a foot and I want to try to hold on to it. There is nothing that heaven doesn’t cover, nothing that earth doesn’t bear up. I supposed,

Master, that you would be like heaven and earth. How did I know you would act like this? (*Complete Works* 71)

Confucius' chastising of Shushan portrays the perception Confucians had toward having one's foot cut off: that it symbolized criminal behavior. Even before Shushan speaks, Confucius dismisses the mutilated Shushan for his former misconduct and assumes that there is nothing Shushan could gain from visiting with him. Shushan, meanwhile, is convinced that he still possesses something "worth more than a foot" for which he seeks to preserve. The Chinese text *you you xun zuzhe cun* 猶有尊足者存 indicates that Shushan is seeking something that is "beyond" or "more honorific" than a missing foot (*you you zun* 猶有尊) (*Zhuangzi qian zhu* 78). In this context, it can be assumed that Shushan has come to Confucius genuinely seeking some type of power or virtue that supersedes the value of a completed body. Furthermore, Shushan expresses confidence that heaven and earth can support him in this effort. In Confucian thought, the harmony existing in heaven and earth serves as a model "to maintain or restore the harmony of the world" (Yao 139) and the pattern of heaven and earth is a "source of the meaning and value of human life" (Yao 140). Thus, Shushan expected Confucius to be like heaven and earth by helping him know how he can retain the "something" that is worth more than a foot.

But as Confucius dismisses Shushan as one with impaired virtue,<sup>19</sup> Zhuangzi uses irony to show how these two persons perceive virtue and the body; the able-bodied Confucius is confined to thinking that one's virtue or morality is equated to the completeness of the physical body, while the mutilated Shushan possesses the acuity to

look *outside* of the body and seek for something worth more than a missing foot. Of this phenomenon, Daoist scholar Lu Xixing (1520 – 1606) noted,

[Shushan Wuzhi] still had something worth more than a foot, which he sought to keep intact. With that intact, he could look on the loss of his foot as the casting off of useless soil.<sup>20</sup> But Confucius thought instead that he was trying to make up for the ugliness of his previous behavior, not understanding that this sort of man never gives the slightest thought to good or evil, beauty or ugliness. This is something that is very different from those fettered by their own ideologies. . . . One becomes fettered and cuffed through the restrictions of one's own ideas about the differences between one being and another (qtd. in *Zhuangzi: Essential Writings* 181).

As Lu explains, Shushan is striving to obtain something worth more than having a complete physical body, and in that sense, his acuity is not limited to the body. The able-bodied Confucius, meanwhile, has become fettered by ideology and his perception is thus limited to one's body—as he considers the wholeness of the body as an accurate indicator of virtue. A.C. Graham reiterates this point by explaining that Shushan “is learning the accepted code of manners as a practical convenience, without any inner allegiance [to the legitimacy of the accepted code of manners]. The real cripple is Confucius himself . . . [who was] born a defective man, mutilated and imprisoned by heaven” (*Chuang-tzŭ* 79). As Lu and Graham both indicate, Shushan's insight for seeking virtue contrasts with Confucius' limited perception and which focuses on man's physical appearance.<sup>21</sup>



Although Confucius entreats Shushan to stay and listen to him, Shushan leaves, and Confucius exhorts his disciples to observe Shushan's example: "He's striving to learn so he can make up for the evil of his former conduct. How much more, then, should men whose virtue is still unimpaired" (*Complete Works* 71)! Confucius signifies that Shushan's criminal conduct has ultimately disqualified him from achieving perfection; his missing foot therefore becomes a lasting symbol regarding the "impairment" of his virtue, and Confucius supposes that Shushan is simply trying to retain the limited virtue he still possesses.

Shushan relates his encounter with Confucius to Laozi and adds, "Confucius certainly hasn't reached the stage of a Perfect Man, has he? . . . He is after the sham illusion of fame and reputation and doesn't know that the Perfect Man looks on these as so many handcuffs and fetters" (*Complete Works* 71-72). Laozi replies, "Why don't you just make him see that life and death are the same story, that acceptable and unacceptable are on a single string? Wouldn't it be well to free him from his handcuffs and fetters?" To this Shushan says, "When Heaven has punished him, how can you set him free" (*Complete Works* 72)?

While it is not explicit how or in what ways Confucius seeks fame and reputation, it is clear that Daoism regards such things as "handcuffs and fetters." As the *Zhuangzi* repeatedly makes a case for seeking freedom and to not be restricted by man-induced limitations, the image of "handcuffs and fetters" signifies the antithesis of what *Zhuangzi* teaches about the concept of freedom. Laozi urges Shushan to help Confucius realize that life and death are the same and that acceptable and unacceptable "are on a single string,"

thus enabling him to shake off the symbolic handcuffs and fetters. This again alludes to the perception that “the ten thousand things are all one” (*Complete Works* 69), a paradigm that is said to free a person from unnecessary pain due to man’s own discriminations (Watson 4). To this Shushan gives a peculiar response, one that refers back to the conversation he had with Confucius. When Confucius first saw Shushan, he immediately dismissed him as one who was punished for a crime and who lacked the ability to make up for his “impaired virtue.” What Shushan says here suggests a reversal of retribution; he claims Confucius is punished<sup>22</sup> by Heaven for his lack of awareness with regard to virtue, and his “sham illusion of fame and reputation” inhibits the opportunity to “set him free” (*Complete Works* 72). The irony is that while Shushan may have been punished according to laws established by men, it is Confucius’ obtuseness to what truly constitutes “virtue” that causes him to be punished by Heaven and experience confinement.

This brief anecdote of Shushan and Confucius displays the irony between the able-bodied and the disabled, such that the disabled enjoy a unique advantage in being aligned with the *dao*. Confucius’ belief that one’s virtue parallels the completeness of the body prevents him from seeing the one-footed Shushan as none other than having “impaired virtue.” In addition, Confucius’ “sham illusion of fame and reputation” serve as “handcuffs and fetters” that hinder his freedom to discern clearly. Meanwhile the one-footed Shushan exhibits keen awareness of the *dao* as he understands that there is something “worth more than a foot.” He is not concerned with man-contrived fame and reputation and is thus free and uninhibited from man’s wisdom and distinctions. In this

case, Shushan's impairment enables him to look beyond the realm of the body and strive to be associated with the movement of the *dao*, a prerequisite for obtaining *de* (virtue). This case is further conveyed by the title of the chapter it is in, "The Sign of Virtue Complete," because while Shushan's body may not be physically complete, his actions and acuity demonstrate a completeness of virtue.

#### A HUNCHBACK IN THE FOREST

The final anecdote dealing with disability to be analyzed demonstrates how the social effects (or otherwise stigma) of being disabled provide a special advantage in following the *dao*. This example is found in chapter nineteen, which is part of the outer chapters and thus most likely not written by Zhuangzi himself. The anecdote is about a hunchback who lives in the forest catching cicadas, and whom Confucius meets as he travels through the forest on his way to Chu.

The story begins as Confucius and his disciples are traveling through the forest on their way to Chu, and in the process they happen upon a hunchback catching cicadas with a sticky pole "as easily as though he were grabbing them with his hand" (*Complete Works* 199). Confucius asks the hunchback how he manages to catch the cicadas so easily, and the hunchback describes how he learned to balance balls on the end of a pole, progressively stacking more on the end of the pole as he harnesses the ability to balance. For "the first five or six months" he practices balancing two balls, then three, and then five balls, by which time he is certain that catching cicadas "will be as easy as grabbing them with [his] hand." The hunchback then explains:

I hold my body like a stiff tree trunk and use my arm like an old dry limb. No matter how huge heaven and earth, or how numerous the ten thousand things, I'm aware of nothing but cicada wings. Not wavering, not tipping, not letting any of the other ten thousand things take the place of those cicada wings—how can I help but succeed? (*Complete Works* 200)

It is to this that Confucius turns to his disciples and says, “He keeps his will undivided and concentrates his spirit—that would serve to describe our hunchback gentleman here, would it not” (*Complete Works* 200)?

The hunchback's response to Confucius' question regarding his ability to catch cicadas has two key parts; the hunchback understands that to effectively catch cicadas, he must first master the ability to concentrate. Once he has learned to fully concentrate, the hunchback seeks to imitate the natural stature of a tree, as his body resembles a tree trunk and his arm (likely holding the sticky pole) is “like an old dry limb.” The hunchback clarifies that he is not distracted by heaven and earth or the ten thousand things, but is “aware of nothing but cicada wings.” By maintaining a still, motionless position that comes from impeccable concentration, the hunchback cannot help but succeed in his effort and Confucius expresses agreement.

This simple account detailing the hunchback's ability to catch cicadas suggests an ideal method of aligning with the *dao*, specifically that one must master the ability to concentrate and then imitate the natural state of things—a process by which one obtains virtue (*de*). I will first discuss the ways in which these actions help one to align with the

*dao* and how the hunchback's physical deformity is an enabling feature for him to be one with the *dao*.

As the hunchback explained to Confucius, his first objective was to concentrate upon a single task, which would enable him to seamlessly imitate the stillness of a tree (as a means to catch cicadas). In the Daoist sense, the hunchback is seeking to empty himself of everything and thus be "aware of nothing but cicada wings." Since man-made distinctions and schemes inhibit one's ability to effortlessly follow the *dao*, it is incumbent for one to empty themselves of such distinctions and man-contrived knowledge—the unnatural elements of life. It is these distinctions that "tie us in knots and erupt in the desires that are the source of our human suffering, violence, and immorality" (*Daoism* 19).

Earlier in the *Zhuangzi*, one anecdote depicts emptiness as a "fasting of the mind." When Yen Hui, a disciple of Confucius, desired to go to Wei to help rectify a ruler's conduct, Confucius expressed concern that the young disciple had "too many policies and plans" and that he did not see what was truly needed. When Yen Hui was stumped as to the proper method for fulfilling the task, Confucius told Yen Hui that he must first have a "fasting of the mind." Such fasting allows one's mind and spirit to be empty. "The Way gathers in emptiness alone," Confucius explains, "emptiness is the fasting of the mind"<sup>23</sup> (*Complete Works* 57-58). In a similar manner, the hunchback's method of concentration allows his spirit to be empty of man's knowledge and thus enable the *dao* to fill the void.<sup>24</sup>

Once his concentration is harnessed in a way necessary to fulfill the task, the hunchback exhibits an emptiness that is necessary for imitating a tree. In describing this phenomenon, Littlejohn states,

Emptiness means one reverts to a natural state, having forgotten human distinctions. The Daoist adept becomes like . . . uncarved wood that has not been tampered with, bent or shaped. . . . Uncarved wood is also an effective comparison to the sage because the sage must act and live naturally, not be obsessed with carving or refining himself according to the standards of the world. (*Daoism* 19)

By emptying himself of man's wisdom and knowledge, the hunchback can imitate what is natural and is therefore successful at the task of catching cicadas, thereby becoming a sage. The hunchback's imitation of a tree and becoming one with the forest also serves as a symbolic representation of the Daoist objective to become one with the *dao*.

In the previous four examples of disability, it was apparent that a physical impairment served the person by giving them an advantage in following the *dao*. But in this last instance, it is actually the social status of the hunchback that gives him an advantage in practicing *wuwei*. The fact that the hunchback is secluded in the forest, can devote five to six months balancing balls on a stick, and is "aware of nothing but cicada wings" all suggest that his residence in the forest rarely (if ever) affords him association with other people. Rather, his disability may likely cause him to be ostracized from society and live in seclusion. In her article about the semantic element within Chinese characters, Emma Stone shows how the animal radical is found in characters used to

denote physical and/or mental disability, which infers that the ancient Chinese perceived disability as a dehumanizing quality.<sup>25</sup> This perception may explain why the hunchback lives in such seclusion. While a Confucian may observe a secluded life as an impediment to the important duty of filial piety, the Daoist perspective is that the seclusion enables him to be unsullied from the harmful influence of man-contrived affairs and supposed wisdom. As a result, it is because of the stigma surrounding the hunchback's physical impairment that he lives in solitude, which enables him to live in harmony with the *dao* and be a possessor of *de*.<sup>26</sup>

In light of the hunchback's advantage to Daoist living, Zhuangzi employs a bit of irony to demonstrate a role-reversal regarding the true "sage." A fundamental Confucian principle for obtaining virtue is through self-cultivation (*haoxue* 好學), which entails that one must consistently pursue learning and the refinement of their character (*Confucianism* 31). It can thus be inferred that Confucius and his disciples were on their way to Chu to seek increased wisdom and knowledge. Since Littlejohn explains that uncarved wood is "an effective comparison to the sage because the sage must act and live naturally, not be obsessed with carving or refining himself according to the standards or the world" (*Daoism* 19), it is actually the hunchback—the one lacking associations, wealth, status, or the wisdom of men—that lives naturally and becomes a sage. The irony of the story is that although Confucius and his disciples may have been traveling through the forest in pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, they failed to recognize the sage within their midst.

The story of the hunchback gathering cicadas points to the Daoist belief that emptying one's mind and heart of man's affairs precedes alignment with the *dao*. Because of the hunchback's life of seclusion and freedom from the affairs of men, he possesses a natural advantage for following the *dao* by imitating the natural state of things (in this case, a tree). The irony is that while Confucius may have been the esteemed model of knowledge and virtue by his disciples, Zhuangzi infers that it is the lowly hunchback that possesses the true measure of sage hood.

## CONCLUSION

Zhuangzi's depiction of persons with disability suggests that the disabling quality offers one a natural advantage in following the *dao*. While some may view disability as a less-than-desired attribute, Zhuangzi portrays disability as a valuable quality for living a life free of unnecessary friction and pain. In addition to this, Zhuangzi also uses irony to show how the disabled person possesses a stronger sense of acuity than the able-bodied person, implying that disability brings about a heightened sense of consciousness and insight. Zhuangzi shows that the physical *disability* of a person actually serves as an *enabling* trait that allows them to be in harmony with the *dao* and experience the unfettered freedom he advocates.

Although the *Zhuangzi* was written over two millennia ago, the text still provides valuable insight for the discussion of disability and its treatment in society. As the Western world tends to classify persons as simply "able-bodied" or "disabled," considering Zhuangzi's alternative perspective on disability may help reduce the



recurring stigma it receives as well as broaden the inquiry into the benefits of having a disability. As Simi Linton, a woman who became paralyzed from a car accident, describes in her book, *My Body Politic: A Memoir*, “it wasn’t until some time after I sustained the injury to my spine that immobilized my legs, [and] after I learned to use a wheelchair . . . that I gained the vantage point of the atypical, the out-of-step, the underfooted” (3). Linton’s remarks about living with a disability relates to Wang Tai, whose physical impairment allows him to be still and thereby realize that “the ten thousand things are all one” (*Complete Works* 69). While disability may cause physical and emotional pain for those who experience it, Zhuangzi’s alternative portrayal contains noteworthy insight into the sociological assessment of physical and mental impairment. And as Zhuangzi aims to jolt the mind into an “awareness of truth outside the pale of ordinary logic” (Watson 5), analyzing Zhuangzi’s description may help one to reconsider and rethink the subject of disability.

## Notes

1. The Wade-Giles Romanization of the term is “Taoism,” but in this paper I will be using the Hanyu Pinyin Romanization.

2. Burton Watson notes that some scholars are suspicious of chapters 28-31 since they lack commentary from noted annotator Guo Xiang and have little to do with Zhuangzi’s school of thought (Watson 15).

3. The Book of Documents (*shang shu* 尚書) outlines the five punishments administered in the Zhou vassal state of Lu, which are (in decreasing order of severity): execution, having two feet severed, the left foot severed, the nose severed, and tattooing (“The Marquis of Lü on Punishments” 262). As having a foot cut-off appears to be one of the more severe punishments, it is likely that only a significant offense would warrant such a penalty, which indicates that the disabled persons described in the subsequent analysis were guilty of some serious crime.

4. Brook Ziporyn translates “Crippled Shu” as “Shu the Discombobulated,” denoting one who is mentally incoherent. I have decided to stick with Watson’s translation, which infers only physical impairment.

5. As Zhuangzi is “unapologetically fictional,” the reader will find that Zhuangzi employs both characters that are fictional and some who actually lived, with examples of the latter being Confucius, Zichan (a prime minister of the state of Zheng in the sixth century BCE), and even Zhuangzi himself. However, there is no consistency between the characters and what they say; at times Confucius speaks the words of “conventional Confucian morality,” and other times he speaks the words of a “true Daoist sage.”

Zhuangzi himself on occasion occupies the role of the “convention-ridden fool” (Watson 24). Because of this, the reader must remember that the characters’ words are inconsistent and that they should not trifle with understanding the speaker’s true intent.

6. As mentioned previously, the *dao* is sometimes translated as “Wordless Teaching,” but in this instance, Cheng Ji asks Confucius if Wang Tai is able to teach without using words (*gu you bu yan zhi jiao* 固有不言之教) (*Zhuangzi qian zhu* 72).

7. Hierarchy and defined social status (such as being filial to one’s elders and rulers) is considered a key component for maintaining harmony in Confucian philosophy (“The Classic of Filial Piety” 66).

8. The *Analects* is a collection of Confucius’ sayings and conversations he has with his disciples.

9. “The ten thousand things” simply refers to the cosmos (Hall and Ames).

10. Commentator Wang Fuzhi (1619 – 1692) emphasizes Wang Tai’s awareness of the unity of the “ten thousand things” by noting, “the source of the transformations of things, the expanding and contracting of all existents, are the dust and dirt and dregs and leavings within it, all unified in the totality of transformation” (qtd. in *Zhuangzi: Essential Writings* 179).

11. Yao and Shun are legendary emperors of Chinese mythology who Confucius regarded as models of “integrity and resplendent virtue” (“Yao”).

12. This premise is based on the opening lines of the *Daodejing*, which reads, “The way that cannot be spoken of,/ Is not the constant way” (Laozi 5).

13. Obtaining the *dao* is purely an individual practice, as seen in the story of Wheelwright Pian, whose skill for making wheels comes naturally and which he cannot explain in words or teach his son (*Complete Works* 153).

14. As evident in the previous anecdote about filial piety, duty is a fundamental belief in Confucian thought. In the *Classic of Filial Piety*, it reads, “In serving his superior the man of honor makes every effort to be faithful when he is in office” (“The Classic of Filial Piety” 68).

15. Here, “things” refers to fame, honor, and the distinctions of men.

16. Livia Kohn describes how “complete harmony” with one’s “inner nature and fate” enables one to harmonize with the *dao* (*Introducing Daoism* 42).

17. The original text reads, *jin zi yu wo you yu xinghai zhi nei, er zi suo wo yu xinghai zhi wai, bu yi guo hu* 今子與我遊於形骸之內，而子索我於形骸之外，不亦過乎 (*Zhuangzi qian zhu* 77), indicating that the English translation should actually read, “Now you and I are supposed to be wandering *inside* the realm of forms and bodies, and you come looking for me *outside* it—you’re at fault, aren’t you” (emphasis added)? In his translation, Watson notes, “Following the suggestion of Wang Mao-hung, I reverse *nei* and *wai*.” Translations performed by Brook Ziporyn and A.C. Graham confirm this interpretation.

18. The second half of Shushan Wuzhi’s name means “No Toes” or “Toeless” (*wuzhi* 無趾), and conventional translators such as Burton Watson and A.C. Graham refer to him with these names respectively. However, I have decided to simply refer to him as Shushan.

19. Later in the anecdote, Confucius infers that Shushan has impaired virtue (*Complete Works* 71).

20. A perspective shared with Wang Tai (*Complete Works* 69).

21. A parallel incident is found in the conversation between Shen Tujia and Zichan of Zheng. Zichan's attempt to equate Shen's social status with his mutilated body causes Shen to point out that they are "supposed to be wandering outside the realm of forms and bodies, and you [Zichan] come looking for me inside it." Like Confucius, Zichan fixates his attention on Shen's mutilated physical form when the objective is to be wandering "outside the realms of forms and bodies" (*Complete Works* 71).

22. In asserting that Confucius is "punished," Shushan uses the word *xing* 刑, which signifies that Confucius receives a mutilating punishment from Heaven. This same word is used to describe the foot- and nose-severing punishments of ancient China. In this respect, Shushan affirms that Confucius' punishment from Heaven is similar to a foot being cut off in that it leaves a permanent mark.

23. To be clear, in this instance Confucius represents Daoist thought in his comments.

24. This relates to the simple admonition Zhuangzi gives in chapter seven: "Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not strong. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself" (*Complete Works* 97). By being empty, the hunchback is able to "win out over things" and catch cicadas.

25. For example, one character for “stupid” (*yu* 愚) contains the element for monkey (*yu* 禺), and another character referring to physical/moral deformity (*chou* 醜) possesses the radical for devil or ghost (*gui* 鬼). In assessing these instances, and given the low status of animals and the unwelcome company of ghosts and spirits in Confucian society, Stone explains, “It is highly probable that such characters communicate/d the diminished personhood of people and social groups with visible body/mind variations, whether those variations relate/d to physical or mental attributes...or speech patterns” (Stone 141).

26. Erving Goffman describes stigma as “an undesired differentness from what [is] anticipated” or expected (Goffman).

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