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Reversal Is the Movement of the Way: The Deleuzian Reconceptualization of Daoist Paradox

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Abstract: This paper aims to unravel the underlying resonance between the Daoist Way and the Deleuzian idea of an aleatory point. The Daoist Way is explicated as the *zhong dao* 中道 or the Middle-Way, viewed in terms of interactivity between such Daoist-seeming polarities as *you*/*wu* (determinate/indeterminate) and Yin and Yang. The first part of the paper approaches the Daoist Way in terms of the concept of *zhong* 中 or the "Middle", to explore the functionality of the Way and to comprehend the Chinese philosophical concept of the Middle, using the Deleuzian lens of the "aleatory point". The "Middle" here is understood as process, change, or flux, whose volatility is not representational or repeatable. It is this irrepresentability that renders the concept of the "Middle" comparable with the Deleuzian notion of aleatory point. The second part of the paper probes the most fundamental paradoxes revolving around the Daoist Middle-Way to unveil the relationship between the Way and Chaos and to deconstruct the traditional misconception of Yin/Yang dynamics as unity.

Keywords: Middle; Daoist Way; aleatory point; Chaos; Yin and Yang; Daoist de (power); void

> The void is itself the paradoxical element, the surface nonsense, or the always displaced aleatory point.
>
> —from *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1990, p. 137)

> Cannot the Oriental fold also be defined by what is void and what is full?
>
> —from *The Fold* (Deleuze 1993, p. 34)

1. The East–West Contrasted Thinking Trajectories and Post-Structuralist/Postmodern New Phenomenon: An Introduction

The Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period in ancient China witnessed unprecedented political upheavals, military hostility, and a surge of intellectual energy. Intelligentsia at the time were compelled to discover a proper way whereby the kingdoms could be put into order, and the people's conduct could be regulated. Hence, "What is the *Dao* 道 or Way?" became an urgent question raised by the lords (Graham 1981, p. 4). When they managed to answer this question, philosophers offered not only political guidance that the emperors could employ in ruling a state but also an invaluable philosophical reservoir for the Chinese people ever since. Among these myriad schools, Daoism was second only to Confucianism in the extent of its influence.

Due to the intriguingly mystic and "metaphysical"[1] nature of the Daoist *Dao* 道 (the Way), Daoism has both appealed to many readers and inspired volumes of commentaries throughout Chinese history and ignited considerable interest in the West since the 18th century via cultural dissemination. Furthermore, since Daoism is inspired by *Zhou Yi* (The *Zhou* version of *Yi Jing* or the *Book of Changes*), which succinctly states that *Dao* or the Way is composed by Yin and Yang, the Daoist Way can also be recapitulated as the interactivity between Yin and Yang. However, in the traditional interpretation of Daoism in the West, there has been an age-old misleading view of Daoist Yin and Yang as unity, which has

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given rise to a misconception of the *Dao*. The misinterpretation of Yin and Yang as unity is derived from two important factors: first, the fundamental difference in the thinking trajectories between the East and West, and second, a trap of logical fallacy one is likely to fall into when conducting a cross-cultural comparison.

First, the Western thinking trajectory is linear and anchored in deductive reasoning, whereas Chinese thinking is cyclical and grounded in correlation—"a distinction between a logical and an aesthetic sense of order", as Roger Ames calls it (Ames 2011, p. 11). It is this distinction in the Eastern and Western thinking trajectories that generates the disparate worldviews of the East and West. The Western traditional avenue of thought is grounded in deductive reasoning with piercing analytical force demarcating the ongoing reality into two diametrically opposite and independent realms: the world of appearance and a transcendent world of essence, first envisaged by Pythagoras in his entrenched belief in invariable principles, then established by Plato, and finally culminating in the Judeo-Christian God. Alternatively, Chinese philosophy is anchored in an aesthetic, relational mode of thinking and can be epitomized in the Yin-Yang model. With eternal interdependent dynamics, Yin and Yang cannot exist without being in relation to their opposite. This processual philosophical model presupposes an all-inclusive worldview, which, in the absence of a transcendent realm of eternal essence and truth, envisions nature and man, body and mind, reason and instinct, and inner and outer as variable instantiations of the Yin and Yang rhythms, as nothing but an ongoing collaboration of one with the other.

Secondly, when engaging in cross-cultural comparison, one may be caught in the logical fallacy through which one projects one's own concepts or values onto the "other". At this "mirror-other" stage, instead of seeing the radical differences of the targeted culture, one sees it with "presumed familiarity" via one's own cultural presumptions and views the targeted culture as the "inferior variation" of one's own. For example, a Westerner may think of the concept of "filial piety" in Chinese culture as a variation of love for one's parents, now deteriorated into an excessive subservience. Because of the analytical thinking that grounds the Western intellectual tradition, the Westerner is tempted to view reality in terms of the polarities that were established in Plato's dualistic worlds of forms and senses. Under the influence of dualism/monism and duality/unity, together with the culturally detrimental "mirror-other" effect, it is quite understandable that the West interprets Yin/Yang interactivity as a logocentric unity rather than viewing it on its own terms.

Wittgenstein once said "The limits of the language are the limits of our world". This theoretic, deductive tendency of the West, inherited from the ancient Greeks and embedded in European languages, forges a restrictive lens through which the West sees the world and has had a tremendous impact on Western philosophical tradition until the 19th century. When Nietzsche proclaims, "God is dead", he criticizes not only "the persistent transcendentalism but also the dualistic worldviews that follows from it" (Ames 2021, p. 4). In the 20th century, the leading Western poststructuralists Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze, who resourced the Nietzschean legacy in their own writings, launched a dismantling attack at the age-old Western logocentrism and dualistic thinking trajectory by exploring new thinking possibilities. Intriguingly, poststructuralists such as Gilles Deleuze envision the world in a way strikingly akin to the worldview of the ancient Chinese.

For example, there is an underlying affinity between Deleuzian and Chinese philosophies. Both are grounded in the idea of immanence, which denies any transcendent world beneath/beyond this world of becoming. They try to eradicate dualistic thought without falling into another dialectical trap of totality. Most importantly, the core of Deleuze's thought—which is revealed via the concepts of the Body Without Organs/Desiring Production, the Chaosmos, the Fold, and the Plane of Consistency—echo the metaphysical thought of the Daoist Way, or in a broader sense, the Chinese Middle-Way.[2] All these Deleuzian concepts seem to be comparable to the philosophical concepts derived from the Middle Way. For example, the *Yin/Yang* model looks like two folds enfolded within each other.

Myriad scholars influenced by the poststructuralist intellectual wave in the 1960s began to commit themselves to revisiting traditional Chinese philosophy with a more nuanced thinking trajectory and more productive cultural and philosophical dialogue. Abundant scholarly evidence has begun to surface over the past decades, and there is a subterranean current of convergence between Chinese classical philosophy and Western postmodern philosophical orientation. The postmodernist/post-structuralist trend in the West—with its deconstruction of binary oppositions, mixture of different codes, subversion of the notion of structure, and dissolution of the subject, manifested in various decentering, non-totalizing discourses and media, suggests the possibility of a great cultural and intellectual encountering between Eastern and Western thinkers in this century. This hypothesis is supported by such scholarly works as Roger T. Ames's *Confucian Role Ethics*, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames's *Thinking Through Confucius*, Robert Magliola's *Derrida on the Mend*, A. C. Graham's *Disputers of the Tao*, Brook Ziporyn's *Ironies of Oneness and Differences*, and Peter D. Hershock's *Valuing Diversity*—to name just a few—all of which reinterpret Chinese philosophy by comparing it to Western post-structuralist/postmodern thought.

It is at this timely juncture that it is meaningful to appropriate Deleuzian ideas to illustrate the Daoist Way and Yin/Yang dynamic, both because the thinking trajectory that informs the poststructuralist Deleuzian thought is in deep resonance with that of ancient Chinese philosophy and because via a Deleuzian reading of the cosmos, Chinese cosmology and ontology are made more scientifically accessible to the modern reader. Deleuzian ideas, although opaque at first sight, can be appropriated because Deleuze, as a postmodern thinker, employs findings from a wide range of scientific fields to explicate his abstract ideas. Via a Deleuzian perspective, the unapproachable metaphysical thought of ancient China may be more accessible to the modern reader. For example, the processual character of Chinese cosmology, which views nature as flux—or in Chinese terms, *da hua* 大化, the great transformation—can be approached and illuminated via the Deleuzian concepts of singular points of intensity.

2. The Daoist Way Is the Middle-Way Viewed from the Deleuzian Theory of the Aleatory Point

This paper aims to elaborate both on the vital meaning of the Daoist Way via the Deleuzian concept of the aleatory point and on the Daoist paradox, as embedded in the apparent polarities of Daoist Way/Chaos and Yin/Yang dynamics. Before we proceed, further clarification of the idea of the Middle-Way, which echoes the Deleuzian aleatory point, would be helpful. The Middle Way is widely understood as a Buddhist concept; however, it is also indigenous to the soil of Chinese philosophical culture. In this paper, the idea is renamed the "Middle-Way" to differentiate it from its Buddhist connotations. The two characters, *zhong* 中 (middle) and *dao* 道 (way), are placed coterminous to each other because one can illustrate the innermost meaning of the Way via the quasi-concept[3] of the middle. "*Zhong* 中" may be translated as "middle", "between", "inside", or "center", whereas "*Tao* or *Dao* 道" is usually translated as "path", "way", "course", and "process".

Tu Wei-Ming, in his book *Centrality and Commonality*, translates *zhong* 中 into "centrality", which is different from my translation, "the middle". Tu's translation is entirely legitimate because the definition of *zhong* 中 in *Zhong Yong* 中庸 (*The Doctrine of the Mean*) is "not tilted into either side". On the one hand, Tu summarized the Way as manifested in the unity of Heaven (Way) and human (Way), realized by human inner cultivation. And since the unity of Heaven and man "neither denies nor slights a transcendental reality" (Tu 1989, p. 10), Tu argues that the Heaven (Way) is both an ultimate reality and an achieved ideal of given reality for man and that "man is that being which inherits the centrality of Heaven and earth". On the other hand, Tu also defines *zhong* 中 (or "centrality") as "ultimate reality" and "ultimate Ground of existence" (Tu 1989, p. 20). This explanation further confirms that *zhong* 中 ("centrality"), as "an ontological condition" (Tu 1989, p. 20), is the Way. Tu also recognizes the slipperiness of the Way: "[S]ince it is not a static fixity but a dynamic process, its meaning can never be fully comprehended and its potential

never exhausted" (Tu 1989, p. 32). It is in this sense that the translation of *zhong* into "the middle"—which indicates such meanings as "in the middle of", "on the way", "relationality", "mobility", "process", "flux", "becoming", "mutuality", and "inter-penetration"—suggests larger meanings than "centrality", which Tu uses mostly to refer to the refined quality of a profound person. The translation "middle" also aligns with the words Tu associated with the concept of *Zhong* in his own explanation of the text *Zhong Yong* 中庸: "heaven's creative process" (Tu 1989, p. 10). In addition, the translation of *zhong* 中 into "centrality" may entail the misinterpretation of "centrism", which all schools of Chinese philosophy attempt to avoid. *Zhong* 中, by its very definition, should cut off "whatever the extreme happens to be". Even the translation of *zhong* into "the middle" should be accompanied with caution because it also may fall victim to the misconception of the extreme of "middleness" by the uninformed reader. A better approach is to highlight the "middleness" as "in-between the extreme of middleness and the extreme of non-middleness."[4] As a volatile concept, the "middle" designates the functionality of the Way as an ongoing processual movement of worldly phenomena.

The Daoist Way is a metaphysical[5] axis around which all other central concepts of Daoism revolve: the duality of *you* 有/*wu* 無 or determinate/indeterminate—which can also be understood as something/nothing (or void)[6], the concept of *zi ran* 自然 or Spontaneity, *wu wei* 無為 or Noncoercive action, the polarity of *Yin*/*Yang*, etc. Our main task is therefore to unravel the metaphysical dimension of Daoism, the ineffable Way, which can be illuminated by the quasi-concept of the middle. This bold hypothesis is by no means groundless. Besides Wei-Ming Tu's identification of *zhong* with the Way, *zhong* also displays its deep connection with the Way in Daoist texts. Although infrequent, the idea of *zhong* 中 makes its appearance in Daoist texts. In Chapter Five of *Dao De Jing*, Laozi writes "多聞數窮，不若守於中 Hearing too much leads to utter exhaustion;/Better to remain in the center [*the middle*]" (Mair 1993, p. 63). Chen Gu-Ying brings forth the argument that the word *zhong* 中, or middle, should be understood as the word *chong* 沖, and Roger Ames gives the meaning of *chong* 沖 as "surging". On the character *chong* 沖, Ames elaborates:

> And *wu* (indeterminate) further describes an undulating, throbbing, inchoate state of indeterminacy reflected in the term "surging" (*chong* 沖)—*wu* as the yet unformed penumbra that honeycombs each of the myriad things and that explains the emergence of an always novel determinacy in the ceaseless process of transformation. (Ames 2021, p. 440)

In Chapter 14 of *Dao De Jing*, Laozi also attempts to probe into the indefinite, infinitesimal zone of existence by delineating how he envisages the Way:

> Looking and yet not seeing it
>
> We thus call it "elusive".
>
> Listening and yet not hearing it
>
> We thus call it "inaudible".
>
> Groping and yet not getting it
>
> We thus call it "intangible".
>
> Because in sight, sound, and touch it is beyond determination. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 96)

Chang Hua, in his notes on *Jiao Liao Fu*, further attests that the two words *zhong* and *chong* were used interchangeably in classical Chinese texts (Chen 1984, p. 81). In other words, it can also be argued that the ambiguously double meanings of the character *zhong* 中—the "flux" and the "surging" in the state of *wu* or the indeterminate—insinuate an impactful connotation embedded in *Dao De Jing*, regardless of which meaning the character *zhong* 中 references. From the perspective of modern physics, both meanings direct our attention to the same invisible substratum of worldly phenomena, the Deleuzian molecular level of existence, where a novel emergent appears at any shifting moment at its micro-level hidden from the ordinary eye (*chong* 沖 coterminous with *wu* indeterminate). The ever-

shifting, processual arrangement or rearrangement of infinitesimal factors is mobilized by nature's motorizing capacity (*zhong* 中 middle) in the becoming of great transformation. The middle not only designates relationality as the central attribute of the Way but also the energizing flow hidden within all worldly things.

This rich ambiguity further shows the interchangeability of the middle with the state of *wu* 無 (indeterminate) and *xu* 虛 (emptiness/void). In Chapter Three of *Zhuangzi*, Zhuangzi provides us with a similar lesson: "緣督以為經 Trace the vein which is central/middle and make it your standard."[7] Here, central *du* 督 (vein), symbolic of *wu* (indeterminate) or *xu* (emptiness/void), can also suggest the dynamic state of *zhong*中. Ames sees the state of *xu* (informed emptiness) as the inchoate/indeterminate, residing in the determinate and making the process of self-renewal possible (Ames 2021, p. 405). The possibility of growth is necessitated by the innermost flux-like state of the indeterminate within the determinate, activated by the shifting *zhong* or the middle. Zhuangzi advises us that if we enter *wu* (the indeterminate) or *xu* (emptiness/void)—that is, the ever-changing in-between space (the middle) of microlevel existence—we are following the *Dao* or the Way; in Laozi's words, the Way also proceeds in line with indeterminacy:

> Its [The Way] surface is not dazzling
>
> Nor is its underside dark.
>
> Ever so tangled, it defies discrimination
>
> And reverts again to indeterminacy.
>
> This is what is called the form of the formless
>
> And the image of indeterminacy.
>
> This is what is called the vague and the indefinite. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 96)

The Way is always located in the *wu* (indeterminate) or *xu* (emptiness), which encompasses everything in nature, just as Laozi writes in *Dao De Jing*: "道者萬物之注也 Way-making is the flowing-together of all things" (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 173).

To further envision the Way, we can analogize it to a metamorphic path along which the Daoist 德*de* (or potency/power, which is equivalent to 氣 qi) migrates. From a far-away perspective, the Middle-Way delineates how the Way proceeds—the Way may be deemed as a provisional, obscure path of traces produced by the movement of numberless things, events, and ideas, activated by the workings of the "middle"—the interactivity or reciprocal process of *you* (determinate) and *wu* (indeterminate). In Chapter 21 of *Dao De Jing*, Laozi further delineates the Way:

> As for the process of way-making,
>
> It is ever so indefinite and vague.
>
> Though vague and indefinite,
>
> There are images within it.
>
> Though indefinite and vague,
>
> There are events within it.
>
> Though nebulous and dark,
>
> There are seminal concentrations of qi within it. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 107)

Succinctly put, the Way is always self-renewed due to the new elements emerging from the roughly and loosely configured, temporary, determinate "path", while old elements depart from it—a process nicely captured by Ames in his translation of *Dao* as Way-making. Within the determinate, there is always the indeterminate, and vice versa. Stability and instability co-exist within each other, and the determinate becomes the indeterminate and vice versa at any shifting moment. It goes without saying that either the momentary emergence of the new elements and/or the departure of old elements can facilitate a temporary new construct and destroy an old construct. The process is what we commonly view as "birth", "creation", or *sheng* 生 on one hand, and "death", "destruction",

si 死, or *mie* 滅 on the other. Zhuangzi delineates this process as "Where there is birth, there must be death. Where there is death, there must be birth". "方生方死，方死方生" (Watson 1893, p. 34). Zhuangzi thus continues this theory of their simultaneous generation:

> Their divisions are formations, their formations are destructions.
>
> Thus all things are also free of formation and destruction,
>
> for these also open into one another, connecting to form a oneness. (Ziporyn 2020, p. 15)

Always on the way to becoming other—the forever process of destruction of one thing and creation of another thing—the so-called "things" do not have inherent substantiality.

The states of *wu*, *xu*, and *zhong*—which reinforce the micro-level of the metamorphosis in nature—can be made clearer via the appropriation of Deleuzian concepts. The quality of relationality, with which the energizing middle endows the Way, can be best explained by means of the Deleuzian aleatory point. The Deleuzian concept of the "aleatory point" also underscores an "in-between" status of everything in nature. And the Daoist *de* 德 or power (which will be discussed later) may align with the Deleuzian mobile points of intensity,[8] which also assumes an in-between or middle status (the Deleuzian aleatory point) in the progress of the *Dao* or the Way. Deleuze uses the concept of the aleatory point to delineate the workings of all the singular points of intensity, multiplicities, etc., which refers to the unending flux of nature. To be succinct, the aleatory point is what Deleuze uses to evade all possible entrapment of the forms of identity.[9] From the viewpoint of the entity, there is a sense in which every entity is constantly differentiating itself because of the redistribution of the singular points of intensity. Although self-differentiation seems to cause each entity to be split into two at a time (A is [becoming] non-A),[10] this so-called "two" does not mean a dual concept of dichotomous sub-entities; rather, it entails two ostensible entities with an inexplicable bond between them: the Deleuzian aleatory point with double faces which produces an incorporeal sense of "both ONE and TWO" and "neither ONE nor TWO". In a strict sense, the "becoming-other" renders each entity unable to exist. In terms of time, for example, "every present is infinitely divided by its becoming a past event and its becoming a future" (Colombat 1996, p. 241). From the viewpoint of singular points of intensity, since each singular point is both itself and on its way toward becoming another, it looks as if there were an aleatory point situated within each singularity yet also moving between two singularities. Furthermore, since there is no singular point that is not in the process of becoming a line of singular points, there is a sense in which the aleatory point must also traverse "two heterogeneous series".

Furthermore, the middle status of the Way can also be further illustrated both via the Daoist "One" and the Daoist *you* (determinate) and *wu* (indeterminate) in Deleuzian terms. In *Dao De Jing*, Laozi offers us a vague "image" of the One: the image of indeterminacy (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 96). Then, he delineates the positive effect of One to suggest that if nature achieves oneness, things attain prosperity, and humans obtain happiness.

> Of old there were certain things that realized oneness:
>
> The heavens in realizing oneness became clear;
>
> The earth in realizing oneness became stable;
>
> The numinous in realizing oneness became animated;
>
> The river valleys in realizing oneness became full;
>
> The lords and kings in realizing oneness brought proper order to the world. (Ames and Hall 2003, pp. 137–38)

There are two ways to comprehend this "oneness" via the quasi-concept middle in the Deleuzian language. First, the middle designates the dynamic process (aleatory point) of cosmic flows (points of singularity) that move "between" the virtually existent cosmic singular "One"—both in Daoist terms[11] and in Bergsonian terms—and its endless self-differentiation into myriad actualized entities.[12] In a certain sense, the Daoist One

also echoes the Daoist *wu* (indeterminate) and *xu* (void)—a Deleuzian zone of potentiality or possibilities wherein each inner differentiation is a provisional *you* (determinate) or a Deleuzian zone actualization. What is meant by "middle" or "in-between", from a Deleuzian viewpoint, is that the cosmic flows encompass both the zone of potentiality and the zone of actualization and yet belong to neither of them. Second, since this singular 'One' which contains the dynamic internal energy, refers not only to the infinite universe but also to each entity included within it, at the individual level, the meaning of the middle or the aleatory point may be referred to the quasi-cause of each of the movements of singularities which must be manifested (and always inhere) in the effect of and the subsequent transformation of each entity. To Laozi, when nature acquires the oneness, it is endowed with the continuity of *qi*, and it encounters no obstructions in the process of its creation and destruction, and so there is smooth circulation between two zones of reality; therefore, nature reaches its harmony. It is of great significance that, as humans, we understand the continuity of the two zones—the zone of potentiality and the zone of actualization—and can discern the incipient stage of the transformation of things, both to bring prosperity to ourselves and to avoid danger.

From the viewpoint of the cosmic flux, each time the aleatory point enables an actualization, it creates a new Apollonian face emerging from the Dionysian flux, a zone of Daoist *you* (determinate) eventually indistinguishable from the zone of Daoist *wu* (indeterminate) or even the Daoist *xu* (void). The multiple ones (entities) can also be viewed as a Single One, a Grand Aleatory Point (the Great Middle-Way). It follows that the aleatory point is indistinguishable from the One(s) and that the Daoist *de* (power), which echoes the Deleuzian singular point of intensity, is NOT distinct from the Daoist Way. This argument is strongly supported by Laozi's observation: "Such [is] the scope of the All-pervading Power/That it alone can act through the Way" (Waley 1997, p. 17). Therefore, both the Daoist *de* (or the Deleuzian singularities) and the Daoist Middle-Way (or the Deleuzian aleatory point) are the inter-related and interchangeable concepts of the fluid, mobile points of energy that traverse all fixed entities and sub-exists within (without) them.

In a strict sense, the Daoist Middle or the Deleuzian Aleatory Point does not exist because it only makes itself felt by the self-displacement of the singularities and the resulting phenomenon of the interdependence of an "entity" and its provisional opposite. The aleatory point is infused with and situated within the singularities in such a way that every singularity becomes aleatory. In a broader sense, the Daoist Middle-Way and the Deleuzian aleatory point form a virtual zone of becoming, a pathway along which all the Daoist *de* and the Deleuzian singularities proceed into infinity. There is a sense in which this aleatory point is the transcendent motor, which activates all the floating singularities. It is for this reason that Laozi calls it Mother, and Deleuze grants it a genetic status. The term "transcendent" here does not suggest Plato's otherworldliness but rather a world transcending the dichotomies of mind/body, inner/outer, and materiality/spirituality.

3. Daoist Paradox as a Conceptual Manifestation of the Middle-Way via Para-Logical Language

Interestingly, both Laozi and Deleuze discover the fact that the volatile aleatory point[13] or the Middle Way cannot be captured by human conceptualization and language, as Laozi warns his reader: "道可道，非常道 Way-making (Dao) that can be put in words is not really Way-making (Dao)" (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 77). At best, the human mind can trace the Way via paradoxical language. Paradox, by definition, is the combination of two logically opposite terms, which form a strong incongruity defying reconciliation and unification but somehow co-existing and co-functioning together. Plato, in *Symposium*, intends to harmonize the incongruous elements via human deliberation in the case of human health, but finally utters his anguish in the following statements:

> "That agreements are in opposition is impossible. Things that are in opposition and not in agreement are not in harmony…

> Regarding the One, he (Heraclitus) said that in its opposition to itself it is brought together with itself, as in the attunement of a bow or a lyre. Now it is quite absurd to say that harmony consists in opposition, or even that it results from things being in opposition". (Plato 1993, p. 27)

In everyday human language, cold/hot, wet/dry, life/death, and good/bad, etc., lead to a paradoxical situation because incongruous opposites are necessary to bring out true interdependence and harmony. The dual concepts are rooted in each other. The one is likely to become the other. In Daoism, both Laozi and Zhuangzi make frequent use of paradox, from such general statements as "Reversal Is the Movement of the Way" to such local observations as "Disaster is that whereon good fortune depends/Good fortune is that wherein disaster lurks/… be square but not cutting, bright but not dazzling" (Mair 1993, p. 27). The fundamental paradoxical concepts underlying Daoist texts, such as the co-existence of Yin/Yang, *you*/*wu* (Determinate/Indeterminate), Blessing/Disaster, etc., further suggest the possible pathway between the dichotomies. This discovery may explain why Laozi prefers the Yin principle: non-coercive action, softness, and retreat. In Laozi's profound understanding of the interaction between dual cosmic flows, the Yin side of life may give rise to the Yang side, manifested in action, toughness, achievement, etc. Zhuangzi also elaborates on this intriguing, deep reality:

> There is no thing that is not a 'that.' There is no thing that is not a 'this.' One is oneself also a 'that', an other, but this is not something one can directly see. Rather, it is known through the understanding, which thus says 'Thatness' emerges from 'thisness', and 'thisness' follows from 'thatness.' (Ziporyn 2020, p. 14)

> It is only someone who really gets all the way through them who can see how the two sides open into one another, connecting them to form a oneness. (Ziporyn 2020, p. 15)

Here, the "oneness" that Zhuangzi refers to is not a transcendent essence, a fixed reality, but the dynamic, open-ended, both Daoist and Deleuzian "One" that entails not only continuous internal differentiation within worldly multiplicities but also a stream-like passage between binary oppositions in the human mind.

As mentioned above, the enigma of the Daoist Way (the Middle-Way) or the Aleatory Point lies in the fact that the transcendent condition of all cosmic transformations, the Ideal Problem, or the displacement of the Aleatory Point appears to the human intellect as paralogical or paradoxical. The pressing question is "Why must the mobile points of intensity which traverse the cosmos be, at best, perceived by the human mind as polar extremes and manifested in linguistic paradoxes in human conceptualization of the world?" To answer this question, we must first reject the common understanding of these linguistic paradoxes as the Romantic reconciliation of opposites into a higher Oneness as a transcendental truth or essence. The paradoxical statement of "A is non-A" or "A entails/becomes non-A" (usually known as the underlying ground of Daoism: Reversal is the movement of Dao 反者道之動) indicates the displacement of each singularity in relation to itself, rather than a synthesis that arises from opposites.

Having rejected the Romantic notion of paradox, we may then consider two approaches to the question above. The first approach is concerned with the ontological explanation of the observed universe as a cosmic Paradox: the *wu* (indeterminate) generates the *you* (determinate) and vice versa,[14] a seemingly self-contradictory statement according to our rational thought. On one hand, the huge cosmic flux is constantly dismembered into a momentary organization of worldly entities, and on the other hand, all of the individual bodies must return to the primordial state of flux. However, the contradiction disappears into a self-evident paradox if both the concepts of "flux" and "entity" cease to be entities to which the mind is attached.

This cosmic Paradox is generated by the paradoxical phenomenon that each singularity is caused by the continuing movement of its self-displacement, which can be manifested as the disembodiment of one entity and individuation of another entity—generating the

philosophical concept of *da hua* 大化 or the Great Transformation in Chinese philosophy. From a Deleuzian perspective, we can envisage the universe proceeding in such a way that each point of intensity in the cosmos, due to its speedy movement, has already become a continuum, a flow, a series (which generates more sub-flows via self-differentiation and simultaneously forms an interaction with a counter-flow).[15] That is to say, every flow will ramify itself into two flows without ceasing to possess a mutual dependence of one upon the other. From the standpoint of a developmental genesis, an embryo is ramified into more cells via a process of self-differentiation. However, all the ramified series proceed with the interaction between them. The rational human mind also *thinks* in this way—first differentiating or dichotomizing the natural world into the organic and the inorganic; the organic is then ramified again into plants and animals, etc.

We may ask: "How do we know that what we perceive is what nature really is rather than just our perception of it?" Attempting to answer that question leads us to the second approach: a consideration of the inner flow of human thought. Although we are not certain how much our mind can mirror what happens in the natural world, one certainty is that being an expression of nature, the in-depth workings of the human mind must align with other natural phenomena. While our rational faculty attempts to ossify nature into dichotomies due to our conceptual attachment to entities, our natural mental flows produce the inner aleatory point. Love generates hate, and giving generates getting. To state it briefly, the aleatory point in the human mind makes a pathway between opposites and results in a paradoxical statement in language because the flowing series of inner points of intensity cannot be repressed or imprisoned in determinate signification. When captured in the language of common sense, i.e., in terms of denotation, manifestation, and signification, the path of becoming can only be manifested via nonsense or paradox, i.e., the co-existence of dual extremities. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze calls the identity-forming activity "common sense", whose operation ranges from recognizing objects to forming an individualized entity of the external world and an inner entity subsuming "the various faculties of the soul, or the differentiated organs of the body" into "I" (Deleuze 1990, p. 78). To be succinct, the human rational mind perceives the external chaotic flows as entities and dichotomies and judges this perception as "common sense", but instantaneously, the subliminal self-differentiating process of human mental flows generates the path between these separate entities.

Zhuangzi utters his lament over human intellectual limitation:

> [T]hus is our presumption as we arbitrate right and wrong. Holding fast as if to sworn oaths: thus is our defense of our victories. Worn away as if by autumn and winter: such is our daily dwindle, the flailings of a drowning man unable to get him any closer to the shore. Pressed on all sides as if sealed in: such is the old drainage ditch, the rut in which we're stuck, the mind left on the verge of death with no way back to the bygone vitality. (Ziporyn 2020, p. 12)

Besides his criticism of human mental restrictions, Zhuangzi moves on to identify the limitations of human inner vision due to the dichotomizing dilemma:

> There is no thing that is not a 'that.' There is no thing that is not a 'this'. One is oneself also a 'that', an other, but this is not something one can directly see. Rather, it is known through the understanding, which thus says 'Thatness' emerges from 'thisness', and 'thisness' follows from 'thatness'. This is its theory of the simultaneous generation of the 'this' and the 'that'. However, by the very same token, it can say that their simultaneous generation means also their simultaneous demise, and vice versa. (Ziporyn 2020, p. 14)

Zhuangzi attempts to insinuate the fluid-like passage between conceptual dichotomies in the human intellect, which is an arbitrary by-product of the construction of human reason. Binary opposites exist only interdependently, and when they do exist, they are rooted in each other. Since these dichotomies do not have inherent existence, only when the hu-

man mind glimpses the middle-way, or the relationality between dichotomies, does it align with the in-depth reality.

Furthermore, Deleuze refers to "good sense" as the direction from the most differentiated to the least differentiated and to the force insisting on one direction over the other. However, "the power of paradox", he continues, "therefore is not all in following the other direction, but rather in showing that sense always takes on both senses at once or follows two directions at the same time" (Deleuze 1990, p. 77). That is to say, common sense forms diversity, whereas good sense subsumes this diversity under a primordial unity or God. But here, Deleuze, instead of treating the concept of God as a fixed concept, implicitly associates God with the virtual singularity or the realm of the plane of consistency. The painful feeling of inner conflict is generated by the rational dilemma that common sense, while producing one entity, also produces its opposite, and good sense insists on the validity of only one entity. Common sense produces polarities; good sense assures the fixity of the duality into dualism. However, both Daoists and Deleuze visualize the Middle-Way (in which cosmic flows travel) as present in the concept of the nonsense[16] which, rather than producing conflict, oppositions, or contradiction, recognizes the value of paradox by reinstating the validity of both flows of extremities with the enlightened awareness of their inter-movement, both between the variety of worldly modalities and the virtual zone of Oneness; and between the future and the past of the singular points.

In the realms of language and thought, the Daoist Middle-Way, in Deleuzian language, is a 'blank word', running forever throughout two realms in an effort to bring them forever closer without fusing them. It is also an attempt to split what was pre-established as the Romantic notion of "Oneness" (Monism) without forming "Two" (Dualism). What is meant by "the two series of events" in Deleuze, if occurring in human conceptualization, is usually what we take to be the binary combinations of two elements in one identity. For example, signifier and signified as the inseparable dual parts of one word simultaneously suggest the duality and the unity of two sides of words. Other disturbing conceptual oppositions in the human mind are man/nature, good/evil, self/other, etc. Deleuze attempts to escape the old model by inventing the "blank word". Coincidentally, this "blank word", in its profound resonance with the Chinese Daoist ineffable Middle-Way, reveals a paradoxical (non)sense circulating between two things: either A or non-A, both A and non-A, and neither A nor non-A. The word "reversal" in the Daoist statement, "Reversal is the movement of the Way", indicates this sense of incorporeal circulation. In Deleuze's view, with the passion of paradox, language attains its highest power (Deleuze 1990, p. 79). In the Daoist view, paradox is the only means through which the cosmic flow can be captured in language.

Daoist paradox, as the linguistic embodiment of the ineffable Middle-Way, echoes the indeterminacy of the Deleuzian aleatory point traversing dual flows. When the paradox unveils the fact that A is non-A, it is not the holy moment of a Supreme Oneness; rather, it indicates the self-differentiating process of every singular point, every flow, every series, every entity, every zone of becoming, in which both polar extremes must be valid but only to the extent of not being recognized as having an 'identity'. Based on this rich concept of paradox, the remainder of this essay employs Deleuzian concepts to illustrate the two tasks of Daoist paradox: First, to unveil the relationship between the *Dao* and Chaos, and second, to deconstruct the concept of unity via the *Yin*/*Yang* model.

4. The Deleuzian Chaosmos Applied to the First Task of the Daoist Paradox: Unveiling the Relationship between the *Dao* 道 (Way), *De* 德 (Power), and *Hundun* 渾沌 (Chaos)

Underlying Daoist metaphysics is the concept of *Dao* or the Way. Although "a cosmic first principle", (Girardot 1974, p. 50) the Way appears to be obscure in *Dao De Jing*. It is "eluding" and "vague", "invisible" and "inaudible."[17] However, from the following passages in *Dao De Jing*, the essential quality of the Way can be discerned:

There was some process that formed spontaneously.

Emerging before the heavens and the earth.

> Silent and empty,
> Standing alone as all that is, it does not suffer alteration.
> [All pervading, it does not pause.]
> It can be thought of as the mother of the heavens and the earth.
> I do not yet know its name (ming).
> If I were to style it,
> I would call it way-making (dao).
> And if forced to give it a name, I would call it grand.
> Being grand, it is called passing,
> Passing, it is called distancing.
> Distancing, it is called returning. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 115)

The first sentence in the above passage "有物混成" carries the import of the first attribute of the Way. The character *hun*混 holds the meanings of confusion, mixture, and chaos. The ambiguous phrase "有物混成", which literally suggests that there is something created and completed in the chaotic confusion, indicates a connection between the Way and Chaos. That is, the Way is either produced out of *hun dun* 浑沌 (Chaos) or formed as Chaos.[18] The second attribute of the Way is its constancy and emptiness, which calls to mind the concept of *xu* (emptiness/void). The third attribute of the Way is its capability of returning/reversing.

Therefore, the fundamental paradox in Daoism, underlying all other Daoist linguistic forms of paradox, is the equation of the Way and Chaos. N.J. Girardot confirms the value of Chaos in Daoism:

> [T]he oddity of early Daoist thought was its strange solicitude for chaos, its mystically austere passion for confusion… The Daoists affirmed that the silent, hidden, or real order of *Dao* embraced both chaos and cosmos, non-being and being, nature and culture. (Girardot 1974, p. 2)

As mentioned above, paradox results from the co-existence and co-functioning of incongruous dichotomies. The Way and Chaos are conceptually opposed to each other in that the Way may designate a constant and unchanging "order", whereas Chaos, in a Western sense, is absolute disorder. However, there is a sense in which the Way and Chaos are logically contradictory terms only when one term suggests absolute order and the other suggests total confusion. Therefore, the question arises: what if classical Daoists mean by Chaos something other than disorder? At this point, N.J. Girardot suggests that Chaos looks antagonistic to order only because the Western mind is driven by "the overwhelming cultural compulsion to distinguish cosmos and chaos respectively in terms of absolute order and disorder, meaning and nonsense". The English word "chaos" is derived from a Greek term that did not carry the connotation of absolute disorder or nonsense (Girardot 1974, p. 3). Even in terms of modern chaos theory developed within scientific disciplines, a chaotic system is not defined by total instability; rather, it observes that no natural pattern repeats itself without small variations each time (Gleick 1987, p. 15).

Just as the Western pre-rational tradition did not polarize everything into dichotomous realms, neither did the ancient Daoists. To them, the Way did not suggest the absolute order characterizing all organizational systems, nor did Chaos suggest complete disorder. Textual evidence from both *Zhuangzi* and *Dao de Jing* supports this argument. In the closing story of the inner chapter of *Zhuangzi*,

> The emperor of the southern sea was called Swoosh. The emperor of the northern sea was called Oblivion. The emperor of the middle was called Chaotic Blob. Swoosh and Oblivion would sometimes meet in the territory of Chaotic Blob, who always waited on them quite well. They decided to repay Chaotic Blob for such bounteous virtue. "All men have seven holes in them, by means of which they see, hear, eat, and breathe", they said. "But this one alone has none.

> Let's drill him some". So, every day they drilled another hole. Seven days later, Chaotic Blob was dead. (Ziporyn 2020, p. 72)

The Chaotic Blob is a personification of Chaos itself. Chaos dies from the human intention of creating order for it. The theme of the fable is that Chaos if seen as representing the Way or the primordial state giving birth to the Way, is not compatible with the order. However, in *Dao De Jing*, Laozi depicted the Way as constant and unchanging, which suggests that the Way is not pure disorder. In other words, Chaos/the Way is neither order nor disorder. Hence, the identification of the Way with Chaos in Daoism compels the modern reader to redefine Chaos (as well as to reinterpret the Way) in terms of "chaos–order" or the Deleuzian "Chaosmos" to characterize the nature of our cosmos.

Before entering a Deleuzian explication of the concept of Chaosmos (the Way), it will benefit our understanding of this chaos–order if we construe it in terms of a "flowing process of energy". At this point, another Daoist notion must be introduced into our discussion: *qi* 氣, or energy, which is defined as "the breath of the universe" in *Zhuangzi* (Chan 1963, p. 180), and as "the pulsation of the cosmos itself" in modern Chinese medicine (Kaptchuk 2000, p. 43). According to Daoist cosmology, the universe is not structured by inert substance; rather, as A.C. Graham explains, it is a "pool of energetic fluid, the *qi*, of which through their endless cycles things condense and into which they dissolve". Both Laozi and Zhuangzi call this flowing energy "*de* 德", which Graham—concurring with Coutinho—translates to "power" and is portrayed as "free-moving air" to further emphasize its roaming nature (Graham 1981, p. 18). This transformative process at any moment assumes new configurations via the movement of condensation and dispersion. The understanding of *qi* or energy generates the awareness that all worldly modalities lack interior substance, which may guarantee their durable stability in a spatio-temporal sense. In *Zhuangzi*, this fragility of things is illuminated by the following argument:

> To the extent then that power stands out, we lose sight of the bodily shape. When men do not lose sight of what is out of sight but do lose sight of what is in plain sight, we may speak of "the oversight which is seeing things as they are. (Graham 1981, p. 80)

Besides the common translation of *de* as a virtue, Graham's translation of *de* as power inspires us to reinterpret "what is out of sight" as the shifting movement of the minute points of intensities (energy) in Deleuzian terms, which are the foundation of worldly activities. Hence, "oversight" designates the perception of the energy underlying all phenomena, which is the true reality.

However, it is equally erroneous to believe that the world is just a constant flux where nothing can be relied on, for the Daoist concept *de* also designates the provisional state in which things obtain momentary organization and come into existence (Chan 1963, p. 202). David Hall and Roger Ames further confirm the nature of *de* as a momentary congelation of energy by offering the translation of *de* as "an event", or "an arising". In view of the Daoist literature, "[*de*] denotes the arising of the particular as a focus of potency in the process of existence such as horse, dynasties, famili es" (Hall and Ames 1987, pp. 218–19). This understanding of the Daoist Way as the path along which the *de* travels and of the Way as the chaos–order of our cosmos suggests that it is situated—in Deleuzian terms—both between an ultimate deterritorialization of all organizational entities and an immediate reterritorialization of them, and between a total confusion of chaotic flows and a differentiation of the underlying patterns beneath it.

This proposition can be understood in two ways. First, the Way with a minimalist structure is a self-activated (*zi ran* 自然) course from the chaotic flow of energy toward the momentary organization of things and vice versa. Girardot further affirms this observation by claiming that "*Dao* is somehow and in some way that something which is neither being nor non-being" (Girardot 1974, p. 2). Girardot's "being" and "non-being" here refer to *you* and *wu*, and the "neither being nor non-being" also insinuates the movement between the organization of entities and their dissolution. Zhuangzi articulates the same awareness:

> The filling of a contour by whirling water, still water, flowing water, water bubbling up, water dripping down, water gushing from the side, water dammed and diverted, stagnant water, water with several sources, makes the same deep pool. (Graham 1981, p. 81)

The image of water, which symbolizes the Daoist *qi* or Deleuzian singular points of intensity, may form myriad entities; however, it flows from and into the "same deep pool", which symbolizes the Daoist Way, the Deleuzian virtual zone of limited deterritorialization.[19]

Second, the cosmic transformation proceeds in a course (the Way) which is neither purely chaotic nor purely orderly. This interpretation can be further illuminated by the Deleuzian concept of Chaosmos. As mentioned above, the Daoist *de* echoes the Deleuzian singular points of intensity, whereas the Daoist Way echoes the Deleuzian Chaosmos or Plane of Consistency. Laozi articulates a metaphor of the Way quite similar to that of Deleuze: "Heaven's net is vast;/Though its meshes are wide, nothing escapes" (Mair 1993, p. 48). From a Deleuzian perspective, the ambiguity of the Way in terms of order/disorder results from the fact that the Way, like the Plane, is a virtual realm of limited conditions or possibilities of becoming in which different collections of entities are actualized. It is the "limitation" of possibilities that forms a minimum degree of order of the Way (Plane), but it is its direct connection with Chaos that always gives rise to novel possibilities so that the formation of complete systems of laws is impossible. Thus, the Way is the perpetual continuation of the cosmic process of transformation, which is neither purely chaotic nor capable of being organized into any completely enclosed structure of laws.

In Deleuzian philosophy, what resembles the Daoist *Dao* 道 (Way) or *hun dun* 渾沌 (Chaos) is not Deleuzian Chaos but the Deleuzian Chaosmos. To Deleuze, Chaos and Chaosmos are both the same and different. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze defines chaos by its infinite speeds but immediately suggests that it must be situated between existence and non-existence in its relation to the Plane:

> Chaos is defined not by its disorder but by infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanished. It is a void which is not a nothingness but a virtual, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference. (Deleuze 1991, p. 118)

> Chaos does not exist; it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something emerge from it. (Deleuze 1993, p. 76)

Just as Laozi equates the Way with *xu* (emptiness/void), Deleuze first calls Chaos a "void" and then merges this void with the screen (Chaosmos, Plane, or the Way). By acknowledging Chaos as "infinite" speeds that defy any idea of order and by connecting Chaosmos with a feature of Chaos (but not identical to Chaos), Deleuze intriguingly suggests that the Chaosmos possesses a certain consistency (order) without losing its various speeds to infinity. Deleuze implies that natural laws do exist, but only to the extent that they must be subject to constant change. This in-between status of Chaos indicates that the Way as well as Chaosmos—as a virtual zone containing the sum of a certain range of possibilities of new organization existing between the disappearance and emergence of things—can always be reduced to a certain pattern but it also happens that something new will emerge from a black hole to subvert the total scheme. Additionally, when the personified *hundun* 渾沌 (Chaos) dies because of the seven holes dug for him by his human friends, Zhuangzi suggests two directions of thought: First, the *hundun*, as a Deleuzian virtual zone of possibilities, is broken up (dies) into actual worldly entities. Second, the natural laws discovered via human effort dispel the shadow of Chaos. But in both cases, the apparition of *hundun* will return, and return eternally, both to disorganize each entity and to subvert each well-established law.

The identification of The Way (the Plane or the Chaosmos) with *hun dun* or Chaos does not suggest a Hegelian "higher unity", nor does it suggest a perpetual sense of duality. To delineate their relationship strictly, one must insist that they are either the same or different,

and neither the same nor different. The paradoxical relationship between the Way and Chaos indicates that the cosmos is somehow linked with chaos. One is within/without the other. There is a sense in which both Deleuze and Laozi would agree that a system of laws can always be constructed but that it must be constantly modified since Chaos will return. It is this creative power of Chaos that underlies the Leibnizian final affirmation of the world as the "best of all possible worlds". Correspondingly, Jonathan Smith claims that "chaos is never finally overcome. It remains as a creative challenge, as a source of possibility and vitality over against, yet inextricably related to, order and the Sacred" (Smith 1978, pp. 97–98). In *Dao De Jing*, Laozi reiterates the boundless creativity and resourcefulness of the Way as Chaosmos in the following statements:

> The Way-making being empty,
> You make use of it
> But do not fill it up.
> So abysmally deep—
> It seems the predecessor of everything that is happening.
> It blunts the sharp edges
> And untangles the knots;
> It softens the glare
> And brings things together on the same track.
> So cavernously deep—
> It only seems to persist.
> I do not know whose progeny it is;
> It prefigures the ancestral gods. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 83)

Both the Daoist Way and the Deleuzian Plane suggest that the interaction between the appearance and disappearance of things, due to the infinite speed of the movement of energy or the perpetual redistribution of intensities, produces the course of individuation out of chaos and that of the dissolution of all entities into Chaos. This great interplay of cosmic forces was conceived by Nietzsche as the primordial conflict between the Dionysian flux of Oneness and the Apollonian individuation of multiplicity. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that they happen simultaneously and spontaneously. Underlying this antagonistic terror is a harmonious synthesis because neither of these polar extremes will vanish and must depend on the other for its own increase in power (Nietzsche 1967, p. 33). The Nietzschean cosmic view corresponds to the Daoist Way, which is paradoxically embodied in the interaction between the *Yin* and *Yang* principles of life.

5. The Deleuzian Concept of Rhizome Applied to the Second Task of Daoist Paradox: Deconstructing the Concept of "Unity" within the Daoist Concepts of Yin陰/Yang陽

The polar concepts of Yin and Yang characterize the primordial rhythms of nature in Daoist cosmology—akin to the Dionysian and Apollonian impulses of Nature that Nietzsche identifies in Greek tragedy—and run parallel to the polar concepts *you* (determinate) and *wu* (indeterminate). Although Yin and Yang do not make frequent appearance in Laozi's *Dao De Jing*, they are manifested in paradoxical language throughout the work.[20] It can also be argued that Daoism, in particular, is anchored in the *Yin*/*Yang* cosmology, and Chinese culture, in general, is a tradition deeply immersed in this Yin/Yang "thinking paradigm" (Wang 2012, p. 5). If the middle is a dynamic manifestation of the relationality of the Way, then Yin and Yang represent the polar ends between which the dynamic middle traverses. In other words, the movement of the Way, as characterized by its "returning/reversal" of the middle, in a sense, displays the cosmic pulsation of Yin and Yang. The middle, along with Yin/Yang, are the essential elements that construct a minimalist structure of the Way.

Ten Wings—attributed to Confucius and later attached to T*he Zhou Book of Changes*—is widely acknowledged as the text in which the Yin/Yang concept makes its first appearance. However, the Yin/Yang cosmology may have existed prior to the time of Confucius despite the fact that the exact characters Yin 陰 and Yang 陽 were not in use then. Shaoming Lian verified in "The Textual Inscriptions on the West Zhou Bronze Vessels" that concepts of polarity inscribed on the bronze vessels in the middle and late West Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE) included both "*jin* 靜 stability (stillness)/*sheng sheng bu xi* 生生不息 (eternal flux or change of nature)" and "*tian* 天/*ren* 人 (heaven/human)" (Lian 1994, p. 14).

The fundamental understanding of the energy of yin 陰 is receptivity, and that of yang 陽 is creativity. Schroeder further offers the following classification: Yin is "contractive, passive, dark, watery, soft, still, female" and Yang is "expansive, active, light, fiery, hard, moving, and male" (Schroeder 2022, p. 9). In Daoism, Zhuangzi compares the vital *Yin/Yang* model as two cosmic contrary energies to the archetypal parents of things (Graham 1981, p. 88), without which nothing in the world can reach its fruition. Schroeder argues "There is no actual development, either physical or metaphysical, that does not occur through the interplay of these primordial energies" (Schroeder 2022, p. 19). In Yin/Yang correlative thinking, all things in nature, as well as in the human world, are operative and "structured" in a complex interrelatedness so that nothing is independent of anything else.

Yin/Yang thinking involves not only the concepts of polarity—dual aspects of a phenomenon—but also the volatility of one polar end *becoming* the other. Robin Wang identifies six complex features of the Yin/Yang dynamic: (1) contradiction and opposition, (2) interdependence, (3) mutual inclusion, (4) interaction, (5) complementariness, and (6) change (Wang 2012, pp. 8–15). Among these six fundamental features of Yin/Yang, three of them can be used here to explicate the reversal of the Middle-Way. The most fundamental feature is the "interdependence" (Wang 2012, p. 9) of these contrary human mental concepts, from which relativism is derived. For example, Laozi points out the lack of an intrinsic nature in human conceptualization:

> As soon as everyone in the world knows that the beautiful are beautiful,
>
> There is already ugliness.
>
> As soon as everyone knows the able,
>
> There is ineptness.
>
> Determinacy (*you*) and indeterminacy (*wu*) give rise to each other,
>
> Difficult and easy complement each other,
>
> Long and short set each other off,
>
> High and low complete each other,
>
> … (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 110)

Regarding the insubstantiality of our mental concepts, Zhuangzi also says "There is no thing that is not a 'that'. There is no thing that is not a 'this'. One is oneself also a 'that', an other" (Ziporyn 2020, p. 14). This echoes the Deleuzian disjunctive synthesis or differential relations, wherein opposite concepts exist only in differential relation to each other. Even the concept of identity is built upon the rational exclusion of the rest of the world. Differential relations or disjunctive synthesis generated by the differences between two opposites presupposes the potential crack that inheres in both entities.

The fourth feature of Yin/Yang—as the "interaction" (Wang 2012, p. 10) of polar extremes—illustrates the precariousness of the relationship. When one pole moves to its extreme or to excessiveness, it is likely to turn into its opposite. Thus, Laozi writes the following:

> Warped then true,
>
> Hollow then full,
>
> Worn then new,
>
> Modest then satisfied,

Demanding then bewildered. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 110)

It seems that when a polarity becomes "full", or "crosses over its prime", it tends to move to its opposite like the pendulum of a clock swinging from one side to the other. For example, a human begins his journey at birth and then moves into infancy, adulthood, old age, and death. Laozi thus warns us "福兮禍所依，禍兮福所伏 (It is upon misfortune that good fortune leans. It is within good fortune itself that misfortune crouches in ambush" (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 167). In daily existence, too much pleasure may be likely to generate misery, and giving mostly entails receiving. Due to the instability of the becoming-each-other polar aspects of things, Laozi provides us with living strategies:

Whatever is weakened

Must first be made strong;

Whatever is abandoned

Must first be joined;

Whatever is taken away

Must first be given. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 132)

In other words, to launch the process of reversal, one needs to begin with the undesirable end in hopes of reaching what is desired. If you want to receive, first you must give. Like Heraclitus with his metaphor of the attunement of a bow (Plato 1993, p. 27), Laozi in *Dao De Jing* explicitly illustrates this volatility of the middle via the metaphor of a bow:

The Way is like archers drawing their bows,

To hit something high in the air, they pull the string downward,

To hit something low in the air, they pull the string upward,

When they have drawn the string too far back, they let some go,

And when they have not drawn it far enough, they pull harder.

The way of tian is also to let some go where there is excess.

And to augment where there is not enough. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 196)

But to grasp the middle and identify the excess proves to be an unprecedented challenge. The task is unnerving because an accurate measurement of the process is impossible. It is easily known that the Way will "return" when the middle goes to the extremes, but where the extreme is remains an uncertainty. The idea of height in Laozi's metaphor is only an approximation, and veering our action toward an opposite direction is only an orientation. Attempting to balance the extremes becomes a formidable act.

The most intriguing of Wang's six features is the "contradiction" of Yin/Yang polarity, which both generates a seeming internal contradiction with the rest of the features—especially "mutual-inclusion", "interdependence", and "complementariness"—and dismantles Western notion of logocentric unity in the *Yin*/*Yang* model.[21] The two opposing rhythms of *Yin* and *Yang* seem to form a quasi-unity by continuously flowing into each other. In this regard, Graham's observation that "in contrasting A with B the West tends to see them as conflicting, China as complementary, a difference which reveals itself on attention in the *Yin-Yang* classification" (Graham 1989, p. 227) would appear to miss the mark. This is because—echoing the Deleuzian fold—these two primary cosmic energies can be seen as two folds forever enfolding into and unfolding out of each other. The relationship between *Yin* and *Yang*, in other words, is both *complementary and conflicting*, and simultaneously neither complementary *nor* conflicting. This view aligns with Heraclitus' mysterious idea of logos, which is delineated as "the coming together in struggle" (Jaspers and Arendt 1957, p. 12). Heraclitus further illustrates the logos, an ostensible unity of opposites, in terms of self-contradictory language: "Whole and not whole—drawing together and drawing apart, concord and discord" (Jaspers and Arendt 1957, p. 11).

This observation is supported by Deleuze's elaboration on the void in *The Logic of Sense*: "But a final response yet remains, which challenges the undifferentiated primitive

ground [*wu* or indeterminate] and the forms of the individual and the person [*you*, or determinate] and which rejects their contradiction as well as their complementarity" (Deleuze 1990, p. 140). Hence, this quasi-unity is at any moment on the border of collapsing and re-organizing due to the infinite movements of conflict and reconciliation in their perpetual mutual overcoming and constituting. This is because these polar energies, as man and woman in their ambivalent relationship, are attracted and repelled simultaneously, each depending on the other for its being while simultaneously seeking its own independence. The fluctuating point is always in the middle between polarities, moving toward alterity. The direction of the traveling point between these two extremes is indeterminable. The same point of movement that proceeds toward the opposite pole may also be turning back to the original pole[22], which makes the formation of unity impossible. Deleuze elucidates this point quite clearly both in *What Is Philosophy?* and in *Difference and Repetition*:

> to turn towards does not merely imply to turn away, but to confront, to lose one's way, to move aside. (Deleuze 1991, p. 37)

> Each contrary must further expel its other, therefore expel itself, and become the other it expels. Such is the movement of contradiction as it constitutes the true pulsation of the infinite. This goes beyond the simple identity of contraries as the identity of the positive and negative. (Deleuze 1994, p. 45)

In short, *Yin* and *Yang* are both conflicting (mutually overcoming) and complementary (mutually constituting). From the standpoint of mutual dependence, it seems that *Yin*/*Yang* in *Dao De Jing* forms a unity: "In olden times, these attained unity/Heaven attained unity, and thereby became pure/Earth attained unity, and thereby became tranquil" (Mair 1993, p. 5). But from the alternative standpoint of their mutual repulsion, the unity never reaches the form of enclosure due to the perpetual process of being constructed and deconstructed simultaneously. Hence, Laozi also observes "It implies that/If heaven were ever pure/it would be likely to rend/It implies that/if earth were ever tranquil/it would be likely to quake" (Mair 1993, p. 5).

The *Yin*/*Yang* model, reflective of the movement of the *Dao* or the Way, serves as a model of all the infinite movements of cosmic becoming. Laozi also points out "Unity (One) gave birth to duality/Duality gave birth to trinity/Trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures" (Mair 1993, p. 9). This Daoist understanding of the proliferation of the Way resonates with the Deleuzian idea of rhizome and multiplicity. Although the cosmic movements of transformation appear to be bi-directional—dispersion/condensation, or unfolding/folding—they actually radiate in web-like "retroactions, connections and proliferations in the fractalization of this infinitely folded up infinity" (Deleuze 1991, p. 37).

In this regard, the Daoist One is likewise not the logocentric Oneness that Deleuze endeavors to dissociate himself from, but rather, it is a "whole of these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity of all these particular parts but does not unify them" (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, p. 43). This "One" is the Daoist Way, and it is also the Deleuzian Chaosmos and Plane on which the variable speeds of movement form a network—the "rhizome"—which is identical with multiplicity because "any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, p. 7). The image of "rhizome" conveys the sense of "directions in motion" with "neither beginning nor end, but always a middle" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, p. 21). If every point is a fold-point, and multiplicity suggests not only multiple folds but also the folding in multiple ways, the traditional *Yin*/*Yang* model can be extended not only into multiple folds within one plane but also a three-dimensioned space full of a rhizome-like network of folds.

6. Conclusions

The Daoist paradox does not indicate a pre-determined pattern in the reversal of dualist realms, nor does the *Yin*/*Yang* cosmology entail an enclosed system of unity or totality. On the contrary, what the Daoist paradox suggests is the self-contradiction of each identity (*Yin is Yang*), which facilitates a process of destabilization through which possibilities for

the emergence of new things are created. The *Yin*/*Yang* dynamic echoes the Deleuzian fold in which the inside is the double of the outside. The unfolding (*Yang*) is the extension of the enfolding (*Yin*), both of which suggest the concomitant processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the inside. On the one hand, the unfolding is the moment when the inside energy (the enfolded difference) explicates "itself in qualities and quantities, manifesting itself in physical systems in general as the passage of metastable states into stable states and in biological systems as the simultaneous process of specification and individuation" (Bogue 1989, p. 63). On the other hand, both deterritorialization and reterritorialization may simply be the result of a human intellectual construct created by our rational mind for the convenience of understanding the cosmic flow of forces. Deleuze maintains that "the soul is the expression of the world (actuality), but because the world is what the soul expresses (virtuality)" (Deleuze 1993, p. 26), there is a paradoxical sense that the mind and the world are both the same and different. In this regard, both Laozi and Deleuze would rather disregard the dualistic language and suggest that the Way or the Chaosmos is no more than "extensions [which] effectively are forever moving, gaining and losing parts carried away in movement. [T]hings are endlessly being altered" (Deleuze 1993, p. 79).

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Notes

1 The *dao* 道or the Way is "metaphysical" insofar as the Way, like metaphysics, addresses the "fundamental nature of reality", but the Way is not metaphysical in that it does not abstractly rationalize the "fundamental nature of reality".

2 The *dao* 道 or the Way is defined as *Yin* and *Yang*, as stated in *the Book of Changes*. 一阴一阳之谓道。To be more specific, the *dao* 道 (the Way) is the pathway whose operation is characterized by the *zhong* 中 or in-between state in the *Yin*/*Yang* interaction. In this article, it is named: the middle. This "middle" state—not as a mathematical middle point—will be further discussed in the following passage.

3 Here the "quasi-concept" is used to underline the fact that the middle or aleatory point is not a concept in its deeper sense. A concept is an abstract, intellectual idea which is produced by human reason where the middle or aleatory point refers to the flow of inner reality.

4 This passage is derived from a direct email communication with Robert Magliola, a distinguished poststructuralist commentator and the author of the book *Derrida on the Mend*. (Tues., 19 September 2006).

5 Please see note 2.

6 Roger Ames (2021) in *A Conceptual Lexicon of Classical Confucian Philosophy* elaborates thoroughly on these polar concepts: "And *wu* is language that describes an "emptiness" or "nothingness" within the bounds of determinate yet always changing form captured in the term "empty" (*zhong* 盅) as in an empty vessel". p. 440. There is always a new determinate emerging from the state of old determinate in the process of transformation.

7 The *du* 督 meridian is the metaphor for the concept of *wu* 無 (Indeterminate) or *xu* 虛 (void or emptiness) which is identified with the concept of *zhong* 中 or the middle/centrality. See Graham (1981, p. 62).

8 In *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, Mou (1983) emphasizes the character *xu* 虛 or Void as the "unattachment of any direction (or point)" of both the mind and the external world. This argument fits into our understanding of the Way as the *xu* 虛or void which can be viewed as corresponding to the Deleuzian "void", identified with both the aleatory point and the singular mobile points of intensity in a flux-like motion, "never present, but always already in the past and yet to come". (*The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze 1990, p. 136) This concept of the void, both in Daoism and in Deleuze, assumes a double role of both being the infinitely maximum zone of becoming, the ultimate deterritorialization, and being the infinitely minimum point.

9 The aleatory point, derived from the Plato's concept of "simulacra", is the result of a Deleuzian attempt to twist the original concept from a derogatory to a celebratory sense. For more detailed explanation, see my article: Tu (1998).

10 This is the true meaning of the Daoist line "Reversal is the movement of the Way."

11 In *Dao De Jing*, we frequently encounter the identification of Daoist Way with "One". (e.g., chapter thirty nine and chapter forty-two). The Daoist notion of "Oneness" or "Unity", as translated in English, should not be recognized as the transcendent Being, or truth, or essence, in a Western rationalist sense.

[12] This Deleuzian virtual "One" can designate the cosmic "One", the ultimate undifferentiated flux, the Body Without Organs; it can also designate the individual entity, the desiring machine, which is characterized as an individual virtual one due to its lack of substantiality.

[13] Here the 'aleatory point' can enable intensive actualizations. Deleuze creates the term 'aleatory' to indicate that it is capable of both physically (objectively) ramifying itself into infinite sub-series and mentally (subjectively) displacing itself between two heterogeneous series.

[14] To explain this 'objective' fact, we must admit a presupposed fact that there is no unmediated knowledge in the empirical world, since everything must be "known" through the assistance or interference of language and rational thinking. This whole problem of representation, although it has been to some extent resolved by Deleuze himself through his explanation of the two-fold operation of the physical and mental worlds, still exerts a powerful hindrance in our effort to explain objectively the nature of the cosmic flows. However, it seems that if the representation of the cosmos is the representation of event ("representation must encompass an expression which it does not represent, but without which it itself would not be 'comprehensive,'" Deleuze 1990, p. 145), which occurs both in the physical and mental world, the question whether we really see reality in itself becomes inconsequential, because the reality that appears to us and the reality in itself are ultimately indistinguishable as the cosmic flow of singular points.

[15] At this point, we can also view each "flow" as a "plane" which is transformed into a counter-plane due to the redistribution of singularities.

[16] This concept of nonsense implies both the para-logical propositions in language and the singular points of intensity in human mind.

[17] Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, trans. Victor H. Mair (New York: Bantam, 1993), p. 150. (This is an entirely new translation based on the recently discovered Ma-Wang-Tuei manuscripts.)

[18] According to Wing-Tsit Chan, the Chinese character Hun 混 means "undifferentiatedness" and according to A.C. Graham, it should be "confusion". Both of these translations suggest the concept of chaos. The undifferentiated flux of cosmic forces is also identified as the Daoist One, which is another term for the Way.

[19] Deleuze conceives this zone of undifferentiation as Event, which "is the smallest time, smaller than the minimum of continuous thinkable time, but it is also the longest time, longer than the maximum of continuous thinkable time" (Deleuze 1990, p. 63). This thought produces the same image as that of the Daoist Way, which is manifested as *de*, the smallest point of power and as a cosmic container which does not have an outside. (*Zhi Da Wu Wai, Zhi Xiao Wu Nei* 至大無外，至小無內).

[20] Yin and Yang, according to Ames, are "the vocabulary of contrast". Roger Ames, *Dao De Jing*, p. 144.

[21] The Daoist *Yin*/*Yang* model is traditionally represented with this symbol: 

[22] What occurs in the in-between path of *Yin* and *Yang* forces is the indeterminacy of each point along the line of polar movement. There are various directions of movements to the points of intensity on different levels to form a complicated, dynamic system of infinite levels of force and movement within and between *Yin* and *Yang*.

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