

"Following the Du" and "Having Interstices": A Reinterpretation of the "Zhu" of "Yangshengzhu"



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Abstract: The "zhu" 主 of the chapter title "Yangshengzhu" 養生主 has traditionally been construed either as the governing purport of nourishing life, or else given substance as a "lord of life", the True Ruler (*zhenjun*), the spirit, the foundation of the elixir, and the like. This paper re-examines the chapter title by way of "follow the du and make it your constant" (yuan du yi wei jing 緣督以為經) and the history of its commentary. Guo Xiang and Li Yi gloss "du" as "the middle"; Wang Fuzhi says that it "has the position of a vessel but no form or substance", while Qu Fu glosses it as "the empty places at the joints of the bones" and goes on to quote Cook Ding's "those joints have interstices while the blade has no thickness". On this basis the paper holds that, at the level of the history of interpretation, a demonstrable structural connection obtains between "following the du" and "having interstices", a connection that may be summed up as "empty yet having a position" (xu er you wei 虛而有位): the "empty" in question must become manifest in dependence on an already given structure, while "having a position" refers at once to the object's having a place through which passage is possible and to the agent's not opposing it with form and substance. This account is neither the philological sense of "du", nor is it sufficient to prove that "du is jian". Taking together Hu Wenying's and Liu Fengbao's interpretation, in which "following the du" points out the word "zhu" of the chapter title, this paper further distinguishes two modes of determinacy, "entity" and "pivot", and maintains that "zhu" may first be understood as the pivot of nourishing life, while "following the du" and Cook Ding's "following what is inherently so" and "entering where there are interstices with what has no thickness" constitute, respectively, the positive statement of that pivot and its allegorical presentation.

Keywords: Zhuangzi, "Yangshengzhu", yuan du (following the du), you jian (having interstices), Cook Ding, emptiness (xu)

Introduction

The "zhu" of the title of the Zhuangzi's "Yangshengzhu" has broadly received two kinds of interpretation. On the first, "yangsheng" is taken as a single word and "zhu" as the governing purport or basis of nourishing life; what Guo Xiang calls "the zhu of nourishing life" belongs to this type. On the second, "shengzhu" is read together and the question is pressed further as to what it is that "lords over this life", whence the successive theories of the True Ruler, the foundation of the elixir, essence-qi-spirit, and spirit. The difference between the two bears not only on the parsing of the chapter title, but also on divergent understandings of the very nature of "zhu". The former places "zhu" at the level of the chapter's purport and of a principle of practice, and can indeed

avoid setting up a sovereign entity apart from life; yet if it cannot go on to indicate where "zhu" has its concrete locus within the text, "zhu" readily lapses into a vague designation. The latter assigns "zhu" a comparatively determinate referent, but must demonstrate that the text of the Zhuangzi does indeed intend to establish a lord of life, and must explain how this referent runs through the several sections of the chapter. Otherwise, interpretations such as "True Ruler", "foundation of the elixir", or "essence-qi-spirit" incur the suspicion of construing a pre-Qin text by way of the later concepts of the learning of mind and nature or of internal alchemy. Given this difficulty, the sense of the chapter title may for the time being be sought back from the text itself: first examining what this chapter takes to be

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essential to nourishing life, and then judging on that basis whether "zhu" must be made to rest upon some entity.¹

Following the opening "my life has a limit, but knowing has none", the text at once proposes: "Do good but stay clear of fame; do bad but stay clear of punishment. *Follow the du and make it your constant*, and you may preserve the body, may keep life whole, may nourish your kin, may live out your years". In terms of the sequence of the chapter, "*follow the du and make it your constant*" takes up the preceding warnings against pursuing knowledge and against approaching fame and punishment, and opens onto the four results of "preserving the body", "keeping life whole", "nourishing one's kin", and "living out one's years"; it plainly occupies the crucial position at which admonition passes over into a principle of nourishing life. It is especially worth noting that "*following the du*" is not an isolated metaphysical proposition, but stands within a set of statements manifestly connected to one another: what precedes states why life is readily injured, what follows states the effect of preserving life, and "*follow the du and make it your constant*" sits between them as the pivot. Although recent scholarship largely acknowledges the importance of "*following the du*" in this chapter, opinion remains divided as to whether "du" should be understood from "the middle", from the du-vessel, or from some other sense. Tsai Pi-ming lays stress on uncovering its background in bodily technique, while Luo Anxian takes Cook Ding's "going by the heavenly patterns" and "following what is inherently so" as the dynamic unfolding of "*following the du*". The present paper has no intention of adjudicating the single original lexical sense of "du", nor does it

propose to use any one later commentary to exclude other interpretations; it examines only one thread in the history of commentary that has clear textual grounding and that suffices to explain the structure of the chapter. The intent of this paper, therefore, is not to rediscover the connection between "*following the du*" and the Cook Ding parable, but to trace the sense of "emptiness" in which this connection is presented in the history of commentary, and thereby to examine how the "emptiness" so called possesses at the same time the structural determination of being followable and passable — and, on that basis, to re-examine the "zhu" of the chapter title.²

1. From "the Middle" to "the Empty": "Following the Du" in the History of Interpretation

Guo Xiang comments on "follow the du and make it your constant": "to go along with the middle and make it constant". Lu Deming's *Jingdian shiwen* likewise quotes Li Yi: "Yuan is 'to go along with'; du is 'the middle'; jing is 'the constant.'" Glossing "du" as "the middle" thus became the most influential line of interpretation in later times. The difficulty is that if "the middle" is understood merely as a compromise point between the two extremes of good and bad, Zhu Xi's objection becomes hard to evade: to "follow the middle" in this way is tantamount to taking up, between doing good and doing bad, a convenient position from which to escape fame and evade punishment. Zhu Xi's charge that Zhuangzi located "the middle" in "the in-between of equivocation and expediency" is argued on just this ground. Yet glossing "du" as "the middle" philologically is one matter, and the manner in which "the middle" operates within this chapter is another. Even if one

¹ On the two kinds of interpretation of the chapter title, see Li Shenglong, "Lidai Zhuangzi Yangshengzhu zhi wenben wenhua yu yishu chanshi pingyi" [A critical review of the textual-cultural and artistic interpretations of the Zhuangzi's "Yangshengzhu" through the ages], *Zhongguo daojiao*, 15 December 2015; for Guo Xiang's note on the chapter title, see Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961, p. 115. Chen Jingyuan, Lin Xiyi, and commentators of more recent times gloss "zhu" as, respectively, the True Ruler (*zhenjun*), the foundation of the elixir (*danji*), essence-qi-spirit (*jing qi shen*), and spirit (*jingshen*).

² Tsai Pi-ming, "'Shou jing du' yu 'yuan du' yi wei jing': yi tiao tixian Lao, Zhuang zhi xue de shenti jishi" ["Guarding the stillness of the du" and "following the du and making it one's constant": a bodily technique embodying the learning of the Laozi and the Zhuangzi], *Taida Zhongwen xuebao* [Bulletin of the Department of Chinese Literature, National Taiwan University] 34 (2011): 1–54; Luo Anxian, "You 'yuan du' er 'jin nian': Yangshengzhu dayi tanjiu" [From "following the du" to "living out one's years": an inquiry into the general purport of "Yangshengzhu"], *Xiandai zhixue* [Modern Philosophy], no. 5 (2023): 126–136.

accepts the traditional gloss "du is the middle", one cannot straightaway understand this "middle" as a quantitative midpoint between two extremes. What Zhu Xi's criticism discloses is precisely what this interpretation has yet to explain: if the content of "the middle" goes no further than a compromise between two extremes, "*following the du*" is all too easily reduced to a technique of calculated pursuit and avoidance. The materials in which later commentators gloss "du" by way of "emptiness" therefore merit re-examination; their significance lies not in refuting Guo Xiang and Li Yi, but in showing that "the middle" still admits, in the history of interpretation, of another line of development.³

In later commentary one may find another interpretive tendency worth noting: it does not straightforwardly discard "the middle", but lets "du" gradually take on the sense of a position that may be followed precisely because it does not itself obstruct. By "interpretive tendency" is meant no more than the interpretive results of a number of commentators; no demonstrable linear transmission among Guo Xiang, Wang Fuzhi, and Qu Fu is presupposed. Wang Fuzhi's *Zhuangzi jie* argues from the du-vessel, saying: "The du abides in stillness and leans neither to the left nor to the right; it is that which has the position of a vessel but no form or substance". He further glosses "*following the du*" as making the clear and subtle qi "travel along the void". The two phrases "has the position of a vessel" and "no form or substance" especially merit attention: the former indicates that it has a location, while the latter denies that it exists in the manner of a thing possessing form and substance; and "travel along the void" then explains further that this "position" can be followed precisely because it does not obstruct by way of form

and substance. Seen thus, the "du" of which Wang Fuzhi speaks is neither an undetermined vacancy nor a path the agent may open at will, but a place of passage that has its own location and yet cannot be grasped as form and substance. To be sure, this account is deeply shaped by Wang Fuzhi's own theory of qi and of the body, and cannot be taken directly as evidence of the Zhuangzi's original sense; but in the history of interpretation, "du" has by this point passed beyond the meaning of a merely geometrical midpoint and has entered into a closer connection with "position" and "emptiness".⁴

From here, Qu Fu's interpretation in the *Nanhua tong* supplies a further key point. He glosses "du" as "the spinal vessel of a person, the empty places at the joints of the bones", and says as well that "to follow the du is for the spirit to wander in the void". What deserves notice is that Qu Fu does not stop at glossing "du" by way of emptiness in the body, but in what follows quotes directly Cook Ding's "those joints have interstices while the blade has no thickness", using "interstice" to explain the way of dealing with things. In Qu Fu's exegesis, then, "*following the du*" and Cook Ding's "*having interstices*" have explicitly entered a single interpretive context. The importance of this material lies just here: it makes the connection between the two no longer merely a modern conjecture drawn from the structure of the chapter. Qu Fu glosses "*following the du*" by way of "the empty places at the joints of the bones", and explains the place through which entry is possible by way of Cook Ding's "interstice" — in effect placing "emptiness" and "interstice" in a relation of mutual elucidation. This is of course not enough to equate "emptiness", "interstice", and "du" in lexical sense; all that can be confirmed is that the "emptiness" of which Qu Fu

³ Guo Xiang's commentary reads: "to go along with the middle and make it constant."

Lu Deming's *Jingdian shiwen*: *Zhuangzi yinyi* quotes Li Yi: "Yuan is 'to go along with'; du is 'the middle'; jing is 'the constant.'" Both in Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961, p. 117. Zhu Xi, "Yangshengzhu shuo," in *Zhuzi quanshu*, vol. 23, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe / Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002, p. 3284; Zhu Xi says that Zhuangzi "wished to take the in-between of equivocation and expediency as the place where the middle lies, and to follow it."

⁴ Wang Fuzhi, *Zhuangzi jie*, in *Chuan Shan quanshu*, vol. 13, Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2011, p. 121. The passage reads: "The du abides in stillness and leans neither to the left nor to the right; it is that which has the position of a vessel but no form or substance. To follow the du is to make the clear, subtle, and fine qi travel along the void, stopping where it cannot proceed, so that its movement is of itself compliant and thereby attains the middle."

speaks is not sheer nothing, but is closely bound up with the possibility of action that "finds the interstice and enters".⁵

On this basis the present paper provisionally sums up as "empty yet having a position" the structure displayed by the relevant interpretations of Wang Fuzhi and Qu Fu. "Empty" says that it does not stand on its own as a form-bearing entity; "having a position" says that this "emptiness" is not without reference, but is something to be followed along and along which passage is possible. If one speaks only of "emptiness", it is easily generalized into the emptiness and stillness of Zhuangzi's philosophy in its ordinary sense, or even abstracted into some ontological ground; the emphasis on "having a position" is meant to keep the discussion bound throughout to the specific context of "*Yangshengzhu*": the "emptiness" in question must become manifest in dependence on an already given structure, and only within such concrete determinations as the vessels, the joints, and the patterns are there places that may be followed and entered. In other words, it is not that there is first an independent "emptiness" in which things then reside; rather, it is precisely because things have their own patterns and articulation that there appear positions which are not occupied in the manner of an entity and yet may be moved along. The pairing of "no thickness" with "*having interstices*" below may be understood from just this. In sum, "empty yet having a position" is only this paper's analytic summary of the relevant commentarial materials; it is neither the philological sense of "du", nor can it be used to infer that Zhuangzi himself had consciously proposed such a concept. This formulation also clarifies the methodological status of the present argument. The phrase "empty yet having a position" is derived from

a comparison of later commentarial descriptions; it is not proposed as a recovered technical term of the Zhuangzi. Its value is therefore explanatory rather than lexical: it identifies a recurrent way in which later readers made sense of a locus that is traversable without being constituted as another substantial thing. Keeping this distinction in view allows the commentarial evidence to illuminate the text without silently converting a history of interpretation into a claim about original word meaning. A further consequence follows for the relation between "middle" and "emptiness". The later language of emptiness need not be treated as a rival gloss that simply displaces the older explanation of du as "the middle". Rather, it can be read as addressing a question left open by that gloss: what kind of middle can actually function as a course of action? If "middle" names only a point between two opposed alternatives, it remains unclear why following it should preserve life. Wang Fuzhi's emphasis on a position without form or substance and Qu Fu's emphasis on the empty places between joints shift attention from numerical mediation to practicable passage. In that interpretive setting, the middle is no longer important merely because it lies between extremes; it matters because it marks a way of proceeding that does not collide with the determinate configuration of things. This does not establish that Guo Xiang, Wang Fuzhi, and Qu Fu were articulating one continuous doctrine. It only explains why the later materials can illuminate a functional dimension of "following the du" that the bare gloss "middle" by itself leaves underdetermined.

2. "Following the Du" and "Having Interstices": From the Commentarial Thread Back to the Cook Ding Parable

When Cook Ding relates that after nineteen years of using his knife "the blade is as though freshly off the whetstone", what he speaks of first is not strength but "following the patterns of Heaven (tianli 天理)" and "following what is inherently so"; only then does he come to "those joints have interstices, while the blade has no thickness; entering

⁵ Qu Fu, *Nanhua tong*, "Yangshengzhu." The text has been checked here against the *Qingzhaotang congshu* edition printed by the Liu family of Chaoyi in the fifteenth year of the Daoguang reign (1835); the Chinese Text Project holds images and a transcription of this edition. Qu Fu says: "The du is the spinal vessel of a person, the empty places at the joints of the bones. To follow the du is for the spirit to wander in the void." In what follows he goes on to quote directly "those joints have interstices while the blade has no thickness."

where there are interstices with what has no thickness, there is vastness — surely more than enough room for the blade to wander". This order of statement is well worth weighing. "*Having interstices*" is not an abstract space posited in advance by Cook Ding, but a place of passage recognized on the premise of "the patterns of Heaven" and "what is inherently so". Accordingly, "*having interstices*" should not be interpreted in isolation from "the patterns of Heaven" and "what is inherently so": it is neither a realm of vacancy lying outside the ox's body, nor a gap artificially produced by Cook Ding's skill, but a place of entry presented by the ox's own structure. Were there no sinews, bones, joints, or their patterns, there would be no "interstice" at all; it is precisely because the constraints are real that the "interstice" has a determinate position. In this respect "interstice" and "the solid" are not flatly opposed: the interstice exists in dependence on structure, yet is not identical with the substance that constitutes that structure.

That Cook Ding has "ample room for the blade to wander" likewise lies not in transcending or abolishing the constraints of sinew and bone, but in his being able to discern where passage is possible and where nothing is to be forced. After "following what is inherently so" and "the ligaments and tendons I have never touched, still less the great bones", the text goes on to compare the good cook and the ordinary cook with Cook Ding: the good cook "slices", and so changes his knife once a year; the ordinary cook "hacks", and so changes his knife once a month; Cook Ding's knife, after nineteen years, is as if new. What distinguishes the three lies precisely in the manner in which the blade meets the structure of the ox's body. Cook Ding does not overcome sinew and bone by greater force, but so far as possible avoids meeting head-on what cannot be passed through. More important still, even when his skill has "gone beyond skill", "whenever I come to a complex knot" he still "grows wary and takes caution, his gaze comes to rest, his movement slows, his handling of the blade becomes very slight". It is thus clear that "ample room for the blade to wander" is not unconstrained freedom; the "room" in question

rests precisely upon a careful discernment of constraints. Where passage is possible he wanders; where nothing is to be forced he stops, slows, and works minutely. Cook Ding's "wandering" has never departed from "what is inherently so", but takes it throughout as its condition.⁶ The same point can be stated from the side of the object. An interstice is not the negation of structure or a residue left once constraint has disappeared. It is identifiable only because the structure is determinate: joints, sinews, bones, and their articulations make some courses possible and others impossible. Thus the 'room' in which the blade moves is relational rather than absolute. It emerges where the blade's manner of movement answers to distinctions already present in the ox. This is why the language of 'following what is inherently so' is indispensable to the argument: without the prior articulation of the object, there would be neither a determinate interstice to enter nor a meaningful sense in which the blade could have room to wander.

Looking back from here at Qu Fu's glossing of "du" as "the empty places at the joints of the bones" and his ensuing citation of "those joints have interstices", the thread of his exegesis becomes fairly clear: what "*following the du*" and "entering where there are interstices" jointly stress is not that the subject fashions another path of his own accord, but that he goes along with an already given structure and moves where passage through it is possible. Yet "going along with" is not passive inaction either. Cook Ding must "look", must distinguish "complex knot" from "interstice", and must adjust his movements to the particular situation; his "not forcing" does not cancel action, but only makes

⁶ For the text of the Zhuangzi's "Yangshengzhu," see Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961, pp. 119–124. The present paper's interpretation of "having interstices" rests solely on the textual sequence, within this passage, among the phrases "going by the heavenly patterns," "following what is inherently so," "the ligaments and tendons I have never touched, still less the great bones," "the good cook changes his knife once a year — he slices; the ordinary cook changes his knife once a month — he hacks," "those joints have interstices," and "whenever I come to a complex knot"; it does not draw on materials outside this passage.

action conditional upon recognizing the structure of the object. Hence there is an internal connection between "following what is inherently so" and "having interstices": the object has its own inherent so, and so action has something it can follow; and only by following its patterns can one find its "interstice". Luo Anxian's summing up of Cook Ding's "following the patterns of Heaven" and "following what is inherently so" as the dynamic mode of "*following the du* and making it one's constant" proceeds from just this relation among the parts of the chapter. If one further brings in Qu Fu's material glossing "*following the du*" by way of "emptiness", this dynamic mode may be understood further as an "empty yet having a position" that holds in dependence on structure.⁷ This also explains why the contrast among the ordinary cook, the good cook, and Cook Ding is more than a celebration of technical mastery. The three knives encounter the same kind of structured body, yet their modes of engagement differ. Cutting and hacking repeatedly bring the blade into direct opposition with what resists it; Cook Ding's practice, by contrast, depends upon discriminating where resistance must not be met head-on. The episode therefore makes preservation intelligible through a relation between discernment and restraint. His caution at a complex knot is especially important in this respect. Skill does not render attention unnecessary, nor does familiarity with the ox license indiscriminate movement. The more accomplished action becomes, the more precisely it remains answerable to the concrete configuration before it. Accordingly, "following what is inherently so" should not be reduced either to passivity or to effortless spontaneity detached from circumstances. It names a mode of action whose apparent ease is achieved only because action remains responsive to distinctions that it does not itself create.

The scope within which this interpretation can

hold, however, must be strictly delimited. Qu Fu's account can establish that an explicit connection between "*following the du*" and "*having interstices*" had already appeared in Qing-dynasty Zhuangzi scholarship, but it cannot yield the conclusion that "du" and "jian" were synonymous in pre-Qin Chinese, still less can "du is jian" be treated as a philological conclusion. The accounts of Wang Fuzhi and Qu Fu can likewise serve only as materials in the history of interpretation, and cannot, across the difference of eras, stand directly as evidence of Zhuangzi's original meaning. Given the present materials, the safer formulation is this: Cook Ding's "*having interstices*" may be regarded as one concrete presentation of the mode of operation to which "*following the du*" refers, and this correspondence already has explicit grounding in later commentary. The "structural connection" so called is limited to the two passages having been assigned a similar logic of operation within the history of interpretation; it is not a mutual philological gloss. Delimited in this way, one avoids on the one hand substituting the history of interpretation for the history of philology, and on the other relieves the proposal of "empty yet having a position" of etymological conclusions it cannot prove.

From here, the place of "no thickness" in the argument also becomes clearer. In the text of the Zhuangzi, "no thickness" is first of all a property of the blade, and, absent other evidence, should not be converted straightaway into a state of a person's character. Paired with "*having interstices*", what it directly states is a condition of non-collision: the object has a place through which passage is possible, and the blade for its part does not contend with it by means of a thick and heavy body — hence "ample room for the blade to wander". Neither of the two may in fact be dispensed with. If there is an "interstice" but the blade is too thick, entry is not assured; if there is only "no thickness" without discerning where the "interstice" lies, meeting sinew and bone cannot be avoided either. What the Cook Ding parable presents is therefore less a one-sided "emptying" of the subject than a mutual fit between a

⁷ Luo Anxian, "You 'yuan du' er 'jin nian': Yangshengzhu dayi tanjiu," *Xiandai zhixue* [Modern Philosophy], no. 5 (2023): 126–136. Luo states explicitly: "Following the patterns of Heaven' and 'following what is inherently so' are the dynamic mode of 'following the du and making it one's constant.'"

mode of action and the structure of the object. Later figures such as Wang Fuzhi did indeed extend "no thickness" into an account of conduct in the world, but this already belongs to a further extension within the history of interpretation, and should not be written back as the direct sense of the Zhuangzi's own text. The use of "empty yet having a position" in this paper must observe the same limit: it describes the mutual fit just discussed, and not some universal ideal of character.

3. From "Following the Du" Back to the "Zhu" of the Chapter Title

Traditional commentators have in fact given fairly explicit indications of the relation between "*following the du*" and the "zhu" of the chapter title. Discussing the opening of this chapter, Hu Wenying says that between the two layers of good and bad the sentence "*follow the du and make it your constant*" is "squeezed out", thereby "tacitly pointing to the word 'zhu'"; Liu Fengbao likewise says that the purport of nourishing life within the chapter "lies wholly in the sentence '*follow the du and make it your constant*'", and takes the passage on Cook Ding carving the ox as its proof. The two accounts show at least that, within the Qing-dynasty understanding of the chapter's structure, the "zhu" of the title need not be sought outside the text, since "*following the du*" was itself regarded as the phrase that points out the root of nourishing life. This fact in the history of interpretation gives a fairly direct warrant for looking back from "*following the du*" to the chapter title. Even if one need not accept the whole of Hu's and Liu's exposition of the doctrinal content of "*following the du*", their judgment concerning the structure of the chapter still suffices to indicate that, in interpreting the word "zhu", one should first examine which passage in the text bears the principal explanatory weight of the chapter, rather than first positing a "lord of life" outside the text and then filling the title back in with it.⁸

This does not, of course, mean that "zhu" and "du" may be directly equated. "Zhu" marks the purport and the crux in the chapter title, while "du" is the specific word in the text that expounds this pivot; the two must not be conflated in lexical sense. What is more worth distinguishing are two different modes of determinacy: "entity" and "pivot". To take "zhu" as a pivot is not to demote it to a vacuous "governing purport": so long as one can point out in the text some principle that continuously bears the explanatory function of "preserving the body" and "keeping life whole", "zhu" already has a concrete locus. Conversely, to gloss "zhu" by such entities as the True Ruler or the spirit, though seemingly more determinate as a noun, still requires demonstrating that such an entity is necessary to the argument of this chapter. The accounts of Hu Wenying and Liu Fengbao at least supply one warrant in the history of interpretation, allowing us first to understand "zhu" as the pivot of nourishing life, and to take "*following the du*" as the text's concentrated statement of that pivot. Thus "zhu" neither thins out into a "purport" without reference, nor needs at once to be made to rest upon the True Ruler, the spirit, the foundation of the elixir, or essence-qi-spirit. Understood as a pivot, "zhu" may perhaps have explanatory force extending to other materials in the chapter as well, though the strength of the evidence must be distinguished. The Commander of the Right's "it was Heaven, not man", the marsh pheasant's "not seeking to be kept in a cage", and Qin Shi's "resting in one's time and dwelling in the natural course" may all be brought into comparison with the direction of "not forcibly altering what is inherently so"; these passages, however, do not also contain a term such as "*having interstices*" that could be read directly against "*following the du*". This paper therefore regards them only as possible corroboration, and does not claim on that basis that the chapter as a whole has already formed a single set of conceptual structures.

⁸ Hu Wenying, *Zhuangzi dujian*, collated by Li Hualei, Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011, p. 19. Liu Fengbao, *Nanhua xuexin bian*, in the edition included

in Yan Lingfeng, ed., *Wuqiubeizhai Zhuangzi jicheng chubian*, Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1972.

In this sense, "zhu", "*following the du*", and "empty yet having a position" must be assigned to different levels. In the chapter title, "Zhu" serves as the designation of the pivot of nourishing life, whereas "following the du" constitutes the text's concentrated formulation of that pivot; "empty yet having a position" is merely this paper's analytic summary of its structure of operation, made by means of such materials in the history of interpretation as those of Wang Fuzhi and Qu Fu. It does not rename "zhu" as some sort of "empty-position entity", still less does it replace the True Ruler or the spirit with "emptiness" so as to set up another ontological ground. "Position", here, refers only to the fact that a place of passage must become manifest within a concrete structure; "emptiness" refers to the fact that this place of passage does not stand alongside the given structure in the manner of another entity. Cook Ding's "following what is inherently so" and "entering where there are interstices with what has no thickness" may thus serve as the allegorical presentation of this mode of operation, but cannot conversely prove that "zhu", "du", and "jian" are identical in lexical sense.

Conclusion

In sum, this paper does not seek to establish anew a connection between "*following the du*" and the Cook Ding parable, but rather examines how, within the history of commentary, this connection was explained by way of "emptiness". Wang Fuzhi's "has the position of a vessel but no form or substance" and "travels along the void", and Qu Fu's "the empty places at the joints of the bones" and "the spirit wanders in the void", let "*following the du* — *having interstices*" appear as a structure that may be called "empty yet having a position". This summary does not set up a new gloss for "du"; its aim is to show, on the one hand, that "*following the du*", though it inherits the tradition of "the middle", need not be understood solely as a mechanical compromise between the two extremes of good and bad, and, on the other hand, that Cook

Ding's "*having interstices*" is likewise not an unconditioned vacancy, but the room that may be gone along with within "the patterns of Heaven" and "what is inherently so". Looking back from here at the chapter title, "zhu" need not point to an entity that lords over life, but may first be understood as the pivot of nourishing life that this chapter discloses; "*following the du*" is the concentrated statement of that pivot within the text, and "empty yet having a position" is this paper's analytic summary of its structure of operation. On this reading, the problem brought into focus by "*Yangshengzhu*" lies less in seeking a lord of life hidden behind bodily form than in explaining how life may avoid injuring itself within limits already given. That Cook Ding proceeds by following what is inherently so, and that "whenever he comes to a complex knot" he still "grows wary and takes caution", shows precisely that preservation is not the abolition of limits, but the maintenance of a careful discernment of them. The argument of this paper stops here: the connection in later commentary among "has the position of a vessel but no form or substance", "the spirit wanders in the void", and Cook Ding's "*having interstices*" suffices to help us understand more finely the structure of this way of nourishing life; as for the original lexical sense of "du", and whether the Zhuangzi consciously possessed the concept of "empty yet having a position", these still await adjudication by more rigorous philological and intellectual-historical materials.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflicts of interest to this work.

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