Discerning *De* 德

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"Way-making (*dao*) that can be put to words is not really way-making," declares the opening statement of the *Daodejing*, Taoism's foundational text.[1] The dao, nevertheless, can be discerned in the *de*, the "insistent particularity" of human and non-human beings.[2] Commentators of Daoism compare de to bodies of water such as puddles, lakes, and dams in contrast to dao which is likened to water in general.[3] Dao, according to Laozi, is like "an easy flowing stream which can run in any direction,"[4] "universal like a flood."[5] Ames and Hall report that the word dao first appeared in the *Book of Documents* within the context of

[1] Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall*, Daodejing Making this Life Significant: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 77.

[2] Ibid., 59.

[3] Fung Yu-Lan, *Chuang-tzu* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), 9.

[4] Ames, *Daodejing Making this Life Significant*, 130.

[5] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* trans. John C.H. Wu (Boston: Massachusetts, 1961), 69.

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"cutting a channel" and "'leading' a river to prevent the overflowing of its banks."[6]

The Chinese character for dao 道 is composed of the radical *shu* 辶 and the phonetic *shou* 首. The former is the word for "foot," while the latter depicts a human head with hairs on it.[7] It is translated as "way-making," in order to "denote the active project of 'moving ahead in the world,' of 'forging a way forward'."[8]

The soft power of water is the primary analogate to explain dao. Water overcomes the obstacles that restrict its fluidity, until it finds spaces that can contain its potency. These spaces become temporary sanctuaries of tranquillity (*jing*) that mirror the depth, breadth, and height of its surroundings.

Traditionally translated as power or virtue,[9] de 德 is the concentration of dao in particular things, as they seek to realize their fulfilment (*zhe*). It is composed of three characters: the radical *chi* 彳, an ideogram depicting "a step forward with the left foot," and a compounded phonetic character: *zhi* 直, which means being straight or forthright, and *xin* 心, an ideogram of the heart-mind. Xin is located

[6] Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 57–58.

[7] Ames, *Daodejing Making this Life Significant*, 57.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Arthur Waley trans., *The Way and its Power* (New York: Grove Press, 1958). Paul Carus and D.T. Suzuki, trans., *The Canon of Reaon and Virtue* (La Salle, Illinois: OpenCourt, 1991).

below zhi to indicate the submission of the heart-mind to the exigencies of forthrightness. Those who successfully attain de become "paragons of achieved excellence."[10]

Zhuangzi illustrates human receptivity to dao in the story of Khing, a master carver. When Khing was commissioned to make a bellstand by the Prince of Lu, he tried to guard his spirit from irrelevant trifles. He forgot about gain and success, praise and criticism, his body, and all his limbs. Only after collecting his thoughts did he stand up and enter the forest, in search of the tree that would embody the bellstand. After completing his work, all who saw his masterpiece attributed it to "the work of spirits." When asked how he was able to make such an astounding work of art, he explained that "My own collected thought encountered the hidden potential in the wood. From this live encounter came the work which you ascribe to the spirits."[11]

Aside from the story of the wood carver, Zhuangzi also exemplified the efficacy of the dao in the practices of butchering ("Cutting up an Ox"), music-making ("Symphony for a Seabird"), and praying ("The Sacrificial Swine").[12] The essays in this volume extend the application of Daoism to

[10] Ames, *Daodejing Making this Life Significant*, 61.

[11] Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1965), 110.

[12] Ibid., 45, 103, 108.

the experiences of feeding, singing, and healing in the Philippine context.

The first essay, Felice Sta. Maria's "A Vocabulary of Philippine Food and Well-being," collected, from Philippine dictionaries, words that refer to feeding. She classified them according to the dimensions of health (*kalusugan*), contentment (*kaginhawahan*), and happiness (*nayanaya*). Like Zhuangzi's expert cook whose cleaver cuts through the joints of meat without breaking bones, Sta. Maria's conceptual distinctions "cut like a breeze"[13] while aligning the other terminologies under their proper headings. Like sinews, her category of *nayánayá* ties together the various concepts of well-being. She suggests that happiness is achieved "by giving food to others."

The second essay, Amosa Velez's "The Silence of *Nayanaya* in Cebuano songs," confirms Felice Sta. Maria's description of the person of *nayánayá* as someone who was "happy, of good humor, who entertained and was affable, as well as benign or content." For Velez, the silence of *nayanaya*[14] is "a 'way' of dealing with stifling facticities by way of indirect confrontation (*wei wu-wei*), dodging them through diversive moves called *lingaw-lingaw* (recreation)."[15]

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[13] Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, 45.

[14] According to Amosa Velez, Cebuanos pronounce the word "nayanaya" without accents.

[15] This quotation is cited from the abstract of Amosa Velez's dissertation, entitled *Phenomenology of Nayanaya : A Filipino philosophy of survival interpreted in the light of silence in Zhuang Zi* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos, 1998).

Reminiscent of Daoist paintings that highlight nature's grandeur, Velez showcases the practices of *nayanaya* in the lyrics of Cebuano songs that express the healing power of trees, nipa huts, beaches, mountains, and the moon.

The third essay, Joseph Sta. Maria's "The Dao Admits of No Admixture: Mysticism and Moral Realism in Zhuangzi's Writings," discusses how "Genuine Human Beings" (GHBs) abide by the dao, "the ontological ground and normative order of the universe." By receiving, imitating, and cultivating the dao through dietary, physiological, and spiritual exercises, GHBs learn to discern the expressions of dao in the gestures of de in the myriad things.

Daoist practitioners imbibe dao and sharpen their perception of de through "knowledge by acquaintance."[16] This kind of knowledge is not learned by mere acts of intellectual cognition, but rather, acquired by constant practice of de and familiarity with dao. When Zhuangzi was challenged to show how he knew what makes fishes happy, he responded that "I know the joy of fishes in the river through my own joy, as I go walking along the same river." Since all possible experiences − of fishes, rivers, and humans, among others − are immersed in dao, the silhouettes of de in the myriad things are discernible by those who have become as placid as dao.

[16] Joseph Sta. Maria, *Being Sent by Dao: A Defense and Exposition of Zhuangzi's Mysticism and Mystical MetaEthics* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University MA Thesis, 2018), 250.

Finally, Vida Mia Valverde's essay, "*Sema* as *Zikr*: The Language of the Whirling Dance," describes the mystical paths of "remembering God" through dance and poetry. Although her texts were drawn from the popularized translations of Rumi's poetry, [17] her insights about the whirling dervishes and the therapeutic effects of the silence borne out of Rumi's poetic language outweigh the limitations of the translations. [18] Valverde highlights the relevance of Sufism's religious initiations to silence by pointing out that "*paghilom*," the Visayan injunction to "Be quiet!" is the same Tagalog word for healing. She then muses: "Silence heals." Her musings resonate with Amosa Velez's conclusion in her essay that *nayanaya* is meant to be a way of silencing "the turmoil within."

Valverde's contribution pays tribute to Islamic constituencies, and welcomes their ways of worshiping God, their cyclical conception of the universe, and their manner of handling the difficulties encountered in daily life. Sufism is extensively practiced in Mindanao and Southeast Asia. Valverde, who hails from Mindanao, expands our collection of insights to include the third main group of islands of the Philippine archipelago.

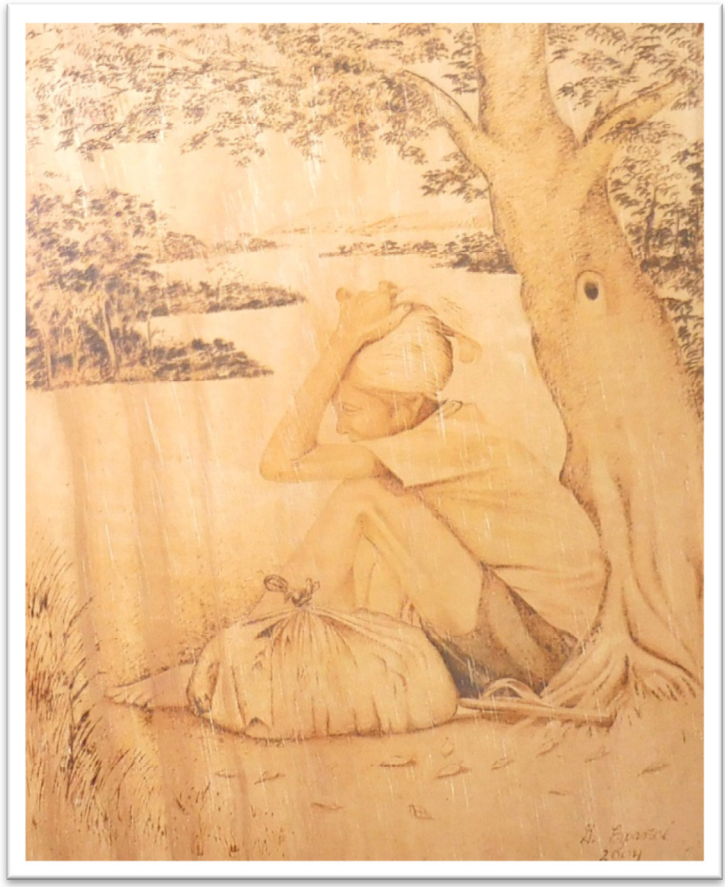
[17] Valverde used Coleman Barks' translations in *The Essential Rumi* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

[18] The complete Arabic texts with an English translation of Rumi's work can be found in Reynold A. Nicholson's translation of *The Mathnawí of Jalálúddin* Rúmí, vols. I-VI (Teheran: So'ad Publisher, 2002).

The books reviewed in this volume address some of the traumatic events that haunt our collective memory: the Philippine-American War, the Second World War, and President Duterte's War on Drugs. Their narratives are punctuated by moments of enlightenment, and cut new sluices that could open wider spaces for national emancipation and international understanding.

We cannot simply dismiss and forget these dark moments of our history. We must come to terms with them with actions borne out of our own practices of contemplative silence. Zhuangzi's story, "Flight from the Shadow," is instructive on this point. He tells the story of a man who was once running away from his own shadow and footsteps. He could not get rid of them, because he thought he was not running fast enough. He then ran as fast as he could, until he collapsed and perished. Zhuangzi laments that "If he merely stepped into the shade, his shadow would vanish, and if he sat down and stayed still, there would be no more footsteps."[19]

[19] Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, 155.



G. Español, "Untitled,"
(Muntinlupa: National Penitentiary, 2004).
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