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# Posthumanism and Cross-species Becoming in Zhuang Zi

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## **Abstract:**

Posthumanism offers a fresh perspective to reconstructing productive relationships between human and non-human beings, but the prospect of posthumanist egalitarianism has its deficiency. Zhuang Zi's concept of "cross-species becoming" is an edifying alternative: its monistic ontology resolves the contradiction of binary oppositions, its transversal subject replaces the enfolded self, and its integration of "equality of things" with becoming paves the way for egalitarian existence. Diachronically, "cross-species becoming" reflects cosmic development, the existence of zero boundary and fluid boundary. Rigid boundary corresponds to different stages of becoming. Synchronically, "cross-species becoming" interacts with myriad things to produce a polymorphic existence that is analyzed from three aspects: its definition, conditions, and manifestations. Zhuang Zi's concept of "cross-species becoming" and posthumanism theory complement each other; together, they aspire us to reconstruct relationships between human and non-human species.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, Cross-species Becoming, Zhuang Zi, Equality, Animal Agency

## 1. Introduction

There is an affinity between Daoism and environmental protection. We are living in an anthropocentric world and consciously or unconsciously, we assume the centrality of human beings and employ human standards to evaluate everything. Nature, in this view, is considered meaningful only when it relates to human life. This anthropocentric exploitation of natural resources results in environmental deterioration and compels people to self-reflect. Daoism seems to be a promising solution to the environmental crisis. In 1998, scholars held an international conference to engage in serious discussions on the relationship between "Daoism and Ecology" at Harvard University. Roger Ames maintains that we should start building a Daoist world through our "full contribution at home in the local and the focal relationships," then make gradual expansions (2001: 279). Russell Kirkland regards "responsible Non-action" as a salutary moral compass to restrain human activities and let nature unfold (2001: 289). Chi-Tim Lai (2001) argues that the cosmological interdependence of "Heaven, Earth and humanity" in Daoism could reorient our attitude toward nature (96). "Thinking Ecologically," a special journal issue devoted to the topic, continues the discussion on "Daoism and Ecology." Unlike anthropocentrism, eco-centrism, as an alternative, endeavors to remove human beings from "the center of the moral universe." It asserts that "the natural world has intrinsic value independent of human existence and

employment" (Yao 2017: 192). Eco-centrism claims nature's own right and value, but it also produces a new question: "why are we humans morally responsible for protecting the environment?" (192) Scholars have responded with different answers. Gao Shan proposes "place-based environmental ethics" (Gao 2017: 232). However, individuals are often attached to a certain place and Gao's provincial approach cannot provide the basis for global environmental ethics. Bo R. Meinertsen contends that "gratitude to nature" goes beyond local attachment and forms the foundation of "global environmental ethics" (2017: 216). Yang Tongjin reads environmental ethics as an identity crisis and recommends two interconnected approaches: "moral philosophy" to reorient human relationships with nature, and "applied ethics" to enhance people's environmental awareness and take initiatives to protect nature (2017: 200). An examination of these eco-centric ethics, however, reveals their buried anthropocentric roots: human condescension and their projection of privilege onto things. Eric Sean Nelson advises us to shift our attention from the values of things to things themselves. "This listening and responding to the innumerable beings of this world constitutes an 'ethics of things'" (Nelson 2009: 297). James Miller further consolidates these ideas. Unlike the biblical notion of the divine being who is responsible for the creation of all things, Daoism maintains that "the value of a thing consists in the process of transformation that is inherent in its own process of being" (Miller 2006: 6).

Both Nelson and Miller make great progress in shifting the focus from human beings to things, yet they have left some crucial questions unanswered: do things have agency? If they do, what are the manifestations of nonhuman agency? How does the will of human beings interact with (the agency of) things? Scholars have answered the latter question in different ways. Nelson contends that human beings should adopt "non-activity" or "non-coercive activity" to accommodate things.<sup>11</sup> Joanna Guzowska goes a step further and accentuates the importance of the spatiality of cognition in Zhuang Zi. Spatial cognition "allows the agent to orient him or herself in an environment" and bestows on the self a "radical openness and infinite fecundity" (416-7). Instead of "fullness," Joanna Guzowska also maintains, that one should choose "emptiness" to be open to "the impact of the environment, novelty, and change" (Guzowska 2015: 422). In fact, Guzowska's productive idea of space turns out merely to be a metaphor. James Miller goes beyond current constraints and emphasizes the "fluid interchange between the body and its environment," such as qi, saliva, semen, and menstrual blood (10), while water is the connecting medium of "three life-forms: humans, animals, plants" (Miller 2006: 11). Despite their insightful foci, these scholars maintain the binary opposition between self and other, humans and things. Can we cross the boundary between humans and things? How do species' boundaries come into existence in the first place? What is Zhuang Zi's philosophy regarding these issues?

To provide tentative answers to the above-mentioned questions, the present study adopts a posthumanist perspective to examine *The Zhuang Zi*. Posthumanism, a recent intellectual trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, comprises three main branches: "becoming-animals, becoming-earth, and becoming-machine" (Braidotti 2013: 66). Despite their different emphases, these share certain posthumanist tenets: the decentering of anthropocentrism, species equality, and non-human agency. According to Philip Armstrong, one of the missions of posthumanism is to establish "a

complex and widely dispersed network of actants, both human and other-than-human” (Armstrong 2008: 196). Posthumanism not only becomes an effective methodology to investigate nonhuman agency in *The Zhuang Zi* systematically; it also suggests an enlightening concept of “becoming” in its elusive description, which unfortunately stops short of further development. Given this deficiency, Zhuang Zi’s idea of “wuhua” (cross-species becoming) becomes a useful supplement to posthumanism. But cross-species becoming is more than just a supplement: it constitutes the underlying philosophy of posthumanism. If we regard anthropocentric decentering, the parity of things, and nonhuman agency as manifest content, then cross-species becoming is latent content. Some critics might argue against applying a new theory to the interpretation of ancient Chinese texts. Posthumanism is a new theory of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, the question posthumanism aims to address is nothing new. It is “a continuation of a long tradition of reflection ... on the relationship between nature and culture” and “a rethinking of the human position in nature” (Yao 2017: 191). Posthumanism provides a systematic methodology with which to explore *The Zhuang Zi* and to illuminate many neglected ideas in this Daoist masterpiece, especially nonhuman agency. At the same time, Zhuang Zi’s cross-species becoming provides an ontological foundation for posthumanism. In the cosmos of Zhuang Zi, things have undergone three stages, namely, zero boundary, fluid boundary and rigid boundary, and they are connected by cross-species becoming. Therefore, cross-species becoming and posthumanism complement each other and represent a unified whole. The present study argues (1) that Zhuang Zi’s idea of wuhua (物化), translated as “cross-species becoming,” can be interpreted as a form of environmental ethics with distinctive cosmology and epistemology, and (2) that the ethics in (1) can serve as a supplement or even foundation to posthumanism. The first section of the paper situates cross-species becoming within the broad framework of Zhuang Zi’s cosmos. This is followed by an examination of the relationship between posthumanism and cross-species becoming in terms of definition, conditions, and manifestations.

## 2. The Cosmos in Zhuang Zi

A preliminary investigation of Zhuang’s concept of cosmos is indispensable for comprehending “cross-species becoming.” For Zhuang Zi, there are three stages of cosmic development, the first being the creation of things: “some of them [the men of ancient times] believed that things have never existed.” Zhuang Zi continues to elaborate on the process from nothingness to the appearance of things: “Those at the next stage thought that things exist but recognized no boundaries among them” (Zhuang 1968: 41). At this initial phase, things come into existence, however, they refuse fixed demarcations and embrace the fluidity of constant becoming. The second stage is the emergence of human beings. “Those at the next stage thought there were boundaries but recognized no right and wrong” (41). The assessment criteria of “right and wrong” indicate the arrival of humans in the world, when men join myriads of things and become equal members of plural species on the earth. Without the procrustean bed of “right and wrong,” each species, including human beings, gradually formulates its own boundary, enjoys equal status with others, and keeps open the potential of becoming. The third stage is anthropocentric domination.

“Because right and wrong appeared, the Way was injured, and because the Way was injured, love became complete. But do such things as completion and injury really exist, or do they not?” (41). With evaluation standards of “right and wrong,” human beings have established a hierarchy of the world and occupy the central place on the earth. Their likes and dislikes further categorize things into various divisions and consolidate ranking systems.

The three stages, in the philosophy of Zhuang Zi, are a factual report of cosmic development, but they also refer to levels of human cognition.<sup>[iii]</sup> Despite the sagaciousness of the ancient sages, there are variations in their intellectual cultivation. “Some of them” believed in the original nonexistence of things, “those at the next stage” recognized the existence of things without separating boundaries, and other masters acknowledged boundaries but denied intrinsic attributes of “right and wrong” (Zhuang 1968: 41). Zhuang Zi skillfully integrates external cosmos with the human world and leaves ample room for intellectual advancement.

The inaugural chapter of *The Zhuang Zi* illustrates the cosmic development with attractive stories. The title of the chapter, “Free and Easy Wandering,” captures an unobstructed flow of becoming. The beginning tale of “fish-bird transformation” exemplifies a constant process of changing:

In the Northern Darkness there exists a fish and his name is K’un. The K’un is so huge there is no knowing how many li he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is P’eng. The back of P’eng measures there is no knowing how many thousand li across and, when he rises up and flies off, his wings are like clouds all over the sky. (Zhuang 1968: 29)

Unlike its English counterpart, the original Chinese verb, “有” (exist) in “北冥有鱼,” has no specific tense. The original story omits the time dimension, unlike the record in *The Universal Harmony* which refers to figures in history (T’ang the first emperor of the Shang dynasty and his minister Chi). The fish in the Northern Darkness is ceaselessly becoming, not only in the usual sense of homeomorphic growth but also in the sense of heteromorphic transformation. As mentioned previously, the absence of categorical boundaries is a feature of the first phase. The tiniest roe first metamorphoses into a gigantic fish, then the fish transforms itself into an enormous bird, and the bird is launching a journey to the Southern Lake: “When the sea begins to move, the bird sets off for the southern darkness, which is the lake of Heaven” (29). The fish-bird transformation concretizes Zhuang Zi’s idea of becoming: since everything is the process of cross-species becoming, all things in nature are interconnecting with each other, formulating a symbiotic existence. In a vertical manner, the fish/bird entangles itself with the storming ocean tides, soars from the bottom of the sea into the empyrean, and clouds the land with its immense wings. If the fish/bird links together the ocean, land and sky on a vertical dimension, its flight from the Northern Darkness to the Southern Darkness connect two polar regions on a horizontal level. The Northern Lake and Southern Lake symbolize polarized geographical spaces in Chinese philosophy; therefore, the arduous journey connects these two extremes and unifies the incompatible into a symbiotic existence.

The recording of *The Universal Harmony* delineates three characteristics of the second stage: wonder, plurality, and transformation. First, human beings are open-minded to the wonder of

nature. Long before the appearance of mankind, there had been a world of animals, trees, and oceans on the earth. When human beings came into the world, they became a member of the things on the earth. *The Universal Harmony* is an account of initial human encounters with the "marvelous world." Although "marvelous" is used to indicate phenomena that go beyond the ambit of human comprehension, human beings acknowledge their ignorance and remain open-minded to appreciate and admire natural wonders. "South of Ch'u there is a caterpillar which counts five hundred years as one spring and five hundred years as one autumn" (Zhuang 1968: 30). If the lifespan of the magic animal astonishes mankind, the longevity of an incredible rose completely transcends human comprehensibility: "Long, long ago there was a great rose of Sharon that counted eight thousand years as one spring and eight thousand years as one autumn" (30). In contrast, the longest human lifespan is eight hundred years: "Now Progenitor P'eng is famous for his more than seven hundred years of longevity." If mankind chooses human criterion as the universal standard to measure other species, or as the solo valid yardstick, it would be "pathetic" (30). This naturally leads to our discussion of the next point.

Another trait of the second stage is the plurality of species criteria: each species has unique organs to perceive the world, and therefore each of them experiences reality in a special way. The absence of "right and wrong" legitimizes the validity of multiple species standards. Mankind looks up to the sky and perceives its color to be blue; however, a bird that perceives the empyrean with aviary organs might have a different impression. As Zhuang Zi writes, "The sky looks very blue" to human beings, but "is azure the true color of the sky?" Zhuang Zi's thought-provoking question compels us to detach ourselves from the monopoly of human experience and re-examine the simple fact from an aviary perspective. The following considerations consolidate this interpretation: if mankind could only look up to the sky from the ground, what is the possible view for a gigantic bird who is soaring at the "height of ninety thousand li" in space? "When the P'eng looks down at the sky from above, it must appear just the same as when we look up" (Zhuang 1994: 4). The speculative mood of "must appear" evinces human eagerness to experience the world from the bird's vision and embraces the plurality of species criteria. Zhuang Zi artistically employs polarized perspectives of up and down to accentuate the disparity between species and then celebrates the richness of the world brought about by species diversity.

The third attribute is "cross-species becoming." *The Universal Harmony* retains the fish-bird transformation and keeps open the potential of cross-species becoming. In the previous stage, "there is no knowing how many thousand li" the huge bird measures. Now, mankind endeavors to comprehend the unknown creature: "When the P'eng journeys to the southern darkness, the waters are roiled for three thousand li. He beats the whirlwind and rises ninety thousand li, setting off the sixth-month gale" (Zhuang 1968: 29). Three in Zhuang Zi's cosmology symbolizes the perfect order of the primordial world. In chapter seven, before the creation of the world, there are three emperors who live in great harmony. The emperor of the Central Region, Chaos, unifies the emperors of two polarized areas (the South Sea and North Sea) into the primordial oneness, which resembles the Southern and Northern Lake in the current situation. The number three links the duality together and simultaneously preconditions the creation of the world and the multiplication

of myriad things. This is an accurate depiction of things with boundaries: things have formulated their categorical perimeters yet their propensity for cross-species becoming remains open. If three represents a perfect order, three $\diamond$ three, nine,<sup>[iii]</sup> symbolizes the perfection of perfection. Nine indicates “completion or wholeness — in a sense, a return to the primordial condition of one” (Girardot 1978: 33). In this specific context, the bird’s soaring distance of ninety thousand li connects ocean, land and sky into a unity, and mobilizes all surrounding things into a dynamic whole. The “galloping gusts and motes of dust” as well as “the breath of living organisms,” all become interconnected and formulate a symbiotic existence (Zhuang 1994: 3). The vacancy of the ethical judgment of “right and wrong” enables myriad things to coexist in an equal and peaceful way, as indicated by the title of the book, *The Universal Harmony*. However, the situation gradually changes as men move into political society.

The third stage is anthropocentric domination. In the evolutionary process, human beings learn to organize themselves to hunt animals and divide labor for agriculture. These social organizations allow them not only to become more competitive in nature and occupy the centrality of the earth but also to establish civilized societies with political systems that guarantee human superiority to nonhuman counterparts. Anthropocene, according to Paul Crutzen, comes after “the Holocene” and refers to the “human-dominated, geological epoch” (Crutzen 2002: 23). Scholars have since expanded the meaning of Anthropocene to embrace a series of cultural clusters in which human beings play a pivotal role in their escalating influence on surrounding things. “A question put by T’ang, the first emperor of the Shang dynasty, to his wise minister Chi is similar.” Zhuang Zi synchronizes anthropocentrism with political society. In the anthropocentric account, the fish-bird story undergoes a significant alteration:

“In the barren north, there is a dark sea, the Lake of Heaven. In the sea, there is a fish named K’un that is several thousand li in breadth, but no one knows its length. There is also a bird named P’eng, whose back is like Mount T’ai” (Zhuang 1994: 4).

In this version of the story, the fish’s cross-species becoming into the bird has been blocked or deliberately eliminated. Instead, we have two separate and distinctive species: “there is a fish” and “there is also a bird.” In addition, the enormous bird is anthropomorphized into familiar human terms “whose back is like Mount T’ai.”

The miraculous bird is being contained unperceivably into human knowledge. In previous stages, the P’eng bird had its volition to travel to the southern lake: it beat the water, rose to the sky, and initialized a series of actions to achieve the goal. The animal had agency and its marvelous deed paralyzed even human comprehension. In contrast, the independent bird in the anthropocentric account loses agency and becomes a metaphor to illustrate human life.

“A marsh sparrow laughs at the P’eng, saying, ‘Where does he think he’s going? I spring up into the air and come back down after not much more than a few yards. Flitting about amidst the bushes and brambles is the ultimate in flying! So where does he think he’s going?’”

The gigantic P'eng now becomes a foil, or even a laughing stock, to the little sparrow. The beginning of "where does he think he's going" reverberates the end of the monologue and shifts the tone from respect to that of disdain. The sublimity of animal feat fades away and the animal becomes a fable to teach human lessons. The allegory of the P'eng and the sparrow "shows the difference between the great and the small" (Zhuang 1994: 5). Animal metaphors are anthropocentric in nature, for they deprive animals of agency and renders non-human species into empty vessels for human imagination.<sup>[iv]</sup>

The establishment of evaluative measures ("the great and small"), along with the acknowledgement of "right and wrong," naturally leads to the institution of ranking systems. "Thus there are those whose knowledge qualifies them for an office, those whose conduct is suitable for overseeing a village, and those whose virtue befits them for rulership and who can win the confidence of an entire country" (Zhuang 1994: 5). Indeed, men build up a system of rating in almost every scenario. Within human society, the king represents the Olympic height; within species on the earth, mankind occupies the centrality of the world. Human beings become the center and human standard becomes universal. Things in nature become "objects" whose solo value is judged by their object-subject relationship with mankind. That is, if things satisfy human needs, they will be considered worthy; otherwise, they are useless. Hui Tzu concretizes such an anthropocentric attitude:

"I have a big tree of the kind men call *Shu*. Its trunk is too gnarled and bumpy to apply a measuring line to, its branches too bent and twisty to match up a compass or square" (Zhuang 1968: 35).

The "measuring line" and the "compass or square" exemplify human yardsticks which are designed to serve human needs. This gnarled tree is "big and useless" because it is not able to yield appropriate timber for carpenters: "You could stand it by the road and no carpenter would look at it twice" (35).

Another feature of anthropocentric domination is humans' deafness to the voices of nonhuman species. At the initial stage, things defy rigid boundaries and are in the fluid process of cross-species becoming, as exemplified by the fish-bird transformation. The next phase inherits the potential of transformation. Human beings in primitive societies are open to spectacular wonders of nature: the magnificent bird roused itself into the sky of "ninety thousand li," and launched its imposing journey from the Northern Lake to the Southern Lake. After the establishment of anthropocentric superiority at the third stage, mankind blocks the potential of cross-species becoming, refutes species equality, and inserts myriad things into hierarchical systems to serve human needs. The more humans practice anthropocentrism, the more arrogant men feel about their centrality on the earth. It is this entrenched hallucination of mastery that makes humans unwilling to recognize the sovereignty of other species. "And blindness and deafness are not confined to the body alone—the understanding has them too" (Zhuang 1968: 33). Human beings are too myopic to pay attention to the existence of non-human species unless they are "useful" for human purposes. Moreover, they are deliberately deaf to the voices of nonhuman counterparts that would consternate their snug psychology. Chieh Yu, a Taoist sage who is in unison with the



myriad things, becomes a mouth-speaker of nature and his “wild, flippant” words are confusing to our comprehension:

“I was listening to Chieh Yu’s talk—big and nothing to back it up, going on and on without turning around. I was completely dumbfounded at his words—no more end than the Milky Way, wild and wide of the mark, never coming near human affairs” (33).

The “insane” discourse of Chieh Yu, goes beyond anthropocentric monopoly and examines the world from non-human species, which confuses and even horrifies mankind. To mollify their terrified psychology and to restore their sense of illusionary mastery, human beings decide to become deaf to the voices of nonhuman species and blind to their existence.

### 3. Posthumanism and the Definition of Cross-Species Becoming

Zhuang Zi urges us to descend from anthropocentrism and build an egalitarian relationship with the numerous things in nature. Because anthropocentrism is pernicious to human relationship with other species, we should return to the second stage of development in which men and their counterpart species have a harmonious coexistence. Zhuang Zi’s philosophy contains the seeds of posthumanism. Posthumanism came into existence at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It repositions mankind as a part rather than the center of nature. Cary Wolfe locates posthumanism during the periods both “before” and “after” humanism. “*Before* in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being not just in its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture)” (Wolfe 2010: xv). The “before” version of posthumanism significantly resembles Zhuang Zi’s second stage of cosmic development: it is chronologically irretrievable, but it functions as a blueprint for humankind to live up to. “But it comes *after* in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore” (xv). The “after” version of posthumanism finds an intellectual reverberation in Zhuang Zi’s philosophy of restoring “the equality of things.”

To achieve egalitarian existence, Zhuang Zi proposes human confrontation with anthropocentric insufficiency. The story of raising a bird exposes a deficiency of human criteria. The Marquis of Lu loves an exotic bird so he employs luxurious treatments to greet the aviary creature. The marquis “welcomed the seabird” in his ancestral temple, performed the most popular music (“The Ninefold Splendors”), and “offered it beef, mutton, and pork as sacrificial victuals” (Zhuang 1994: 171). The bird demonstrated no interest and starved to death after a couple of days. The marquis’ mistake is nourishing the bird in a human way rather than adopting “the nourishment suitable for a bird” (171). The tragic end of the bird exposes the deficiency of a human approach and compels us to acknowledge differences across species. When the music of “The Ninefold Splendors” is played in nature, different species have drastically different responses: “Birds fly away upon hearing it, beasts run away upon hearing it, and fish dive into the depths upon hearing it, but when the masses of men hear it, they circle around and look” (171). Classics such as “The Ninefold

Splendors” symbolize the anthropocentric standard and its universal implementation leads to terrifying responses from nonhuman species. This obliges us to go beyond the monopoly of human standards and accept the validity of plural species standards. The flying birds, running beasts and diving fish come from the sky, land, and water, and together they represent a vast spectrum of nonhuman agents: “They are decidedly different from each other, so their likes and dislikes are different.” Zhuang Zi even reverses the situation to deepen our contemplation. If we adopt an animal standard to measure human beings, we would come to realize the absurdity of the universal application of the human yardstick: “Fish dwell in the water and live; if men were to dwell in the water they would die” (Zhuang 1994: 172).

This essay examines “cross-species becoming” from three interconnected aspects: its definition, conditions and manifestations. Zhuang Zi’s concept of “cross-species becoming” possesses three distinctive features: equal, transversal and heteromorphic. The initial appearance of the idea occurs at the end of the second chapter, titled “Equality of Things.”<sup>v</sup> Zhuang Zi dreamt he became a butterfly. Upon his awakening, Zhuang Zi was confused about his identity: was he “Zhuang Zi who had dreamt he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zi?” Unlike a traditional interpretation of human dreams, Zhuang Zi attaches equal importance to the second part: is he “a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zi?” Therefore, in the world of Zhuang Zi, the butterfly has achieved agency and even possessed the unconsciousness of dreaming, which is regarded as an exclusive human privilege. The parallel structure of the two questions, in reverberation with the chapter title, rhetorically underwrites the metaphysical frame of species equality. Zhuang Zi then moves on to his definition of “cross-species becoming”: “Between Zhuang Zi and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called cross-species becoming” (Zhuang 1968: 49). Apart from species equality, the second feature is the transversal subject.<sup>vi</sup> Things have developed their boundaries; however, the demarcations are not completely sealed. Things still retain the potential of overcoming borderlines and transforming into other species. “Cross-species becoming” superimposes the first cosmic stage on the second one and accentuates the connecting fluidity of the myriad things. At the first stage, things have no boundaries and are in the constant process of becoming; this potential flow of becoming is then passed on to the second phase where things have categorical ambits yet enjoy equal status.

The third trait of “cross-species becoming” is heteromorphic orientation. The majority of the renowned translators of *The Zhuang Zi*, including A.C. Graham, Burton Watson, Victor H. Mair, and Paul Kjellberg, render “物化” as “transformation.” In this article, however, the translation of the term as “cross-species becoming” has two salient advantages. One merit is its indication of a continuous and unperceivable process of becoming. According to *Longman Dictionary*, “to transform” is “to change completely in form, appearance, or nature” (1988: 1511). Transformation gives the impression that the mutation is sudden, radical, and complete, disconnecting itself from the previous existence. This idea contradicts the Taoist doctrine that everything is in a gradual and dynamic process of changing, and nothing stays static. Becoming accommodates both the unperceivable process of changing and the accumulated result of transformation. This leads to the second advantage: cross-species metamorphosis. Transformation primarily refers to external

alterations of the same species. For example, butterflies undergo a series of transformations: from eggs and caterpillars, through chrysalis, and finally to butterflies. Despite the variations of outward forms, the creature beneath the appearances remains within the same species. This differs from the story of Zhuang Zi, who undergoes a cross-species becoming from mankind into a butterfly, which belongs to the *class Insecta of kingdom Animalia*.

#### 4. Conditions of “Cross-Species Becoming”

To initiate “cross-species becoming” requires some basic conditions. Mankind uses human organs to perceive the world and experience reality in a unique way, formulating an anthropocentric understanding of nature. Unfortunately, mankind regards that knowledge as the universal yardstick to gauge all species, including both human and non-human counterparts and forgets the anthropocentric prejudice. Zhuang Zi anatomizes the interactive relationship between human organs and knowledge:

“The hundred joints, the nine openings, the six organs, all come together and exist here as my body. But which part should I feel closest to?”

Do we have preference over certain corporeal organs? Or are they simply the servants of our body?

“If they are all servants, then how can they keep order among themselves? Or do they take turns being lord and servant? It would seem as though there must be some True Lord among them” (Zhuang 1968: 49).

Different human organs perceive the world in different ways. Ears can discern acoustic sounds of nature, noses can detect olfactory dimensions of the world, and mouths can distinguish delicate tastes. These organs, as well as their unique perceptions of the world, are supposed to be on an equal footing; however, human preference and cultural values have ranked them into an arbitrary hierarchy, at the top of which is “some True Lord.” Zhuang Zi’s insightful hypothesis of organs’ “taking a turn into the lord and servant” depicts the interpellation process of social subjects. An infant feels closest to his mouth and regards it as the “True Lord” because the oral organ enables him to suck nutrition and build the first social network with his mother. As the infant grows up, ears gradually occupy the position of the Lord since linguistic syllables become omnipresent in his social life. When the child becomes an adult, the eyes become the dominant organ for human beings to perceive and comprehend the world.

Ocularcentric perception then begins to stabilize its position as the “True Lord” among corporeal organs as the individual gradually builds up an anthropocentric knowledge of the world. Confucius concretizes this ocular-centric view:

“The Master said, ‘see what a man does.’ / ‘Observe his motives.’ / ‘Examine in what things he rests.’ / ‘How can a man conceal his character?’ / ‘How can a man conceal his character?’” (Confucius 2009, 10.1-5).

To know a person, Confucius recommends three interconnected ways of seeing. To see one's behaviors and actions is the preliminary way of obtaining basic information. Then, "to observe" integrates seeing with thinking and goes beyond external behavior to discover the underlying motives. However, because motives often vary in different circumstances, Confucius advises us to penetrate into the root of the matter: "to examine in what things he rests." Seeing, along with observing and examining, implies a visionary penetration from the surface into the depth and consequently establishes our knowledge of the observed object. And the purpose of human observation is to establish control over the world. "How can a man conceal his character?" The repetitions of the final sentence in the text convey an unmistakable message: a rigid implementation of the recommended observatory procedure is bound to produce the expected result of mastery.

Zhuang Zi's rigorous analysis reveals the arbitrary nature of human perception, and his series of questions place a critical distance from our inveterate anthropocentric thoughts. To transcend anthropocentrism, Zhuang Zi recommends the practice of forgetting as an effective remedy, which also constitutes the conditions of cross-species becoming. This is exemplified by Yen Hui, who makes progress in his practice of forgetting. First, he has "forgotten benevolence and righteousness," then "rites and music." Finally, he arrived at the last phase: "I can sit and forget" (Zhuang 1968: 90). Yen Hui continues to elaborate on this epiphany:

"I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thorough-fare. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything" (90).

Forgetting the knowledge of the external world enables Yen Hui to get closer to the myriad things in nature. Knowledge, to some degree, is a stereotype of the world. What unconsciously occurs in the process of observation is that we endeavor to identify typical features of the observed thing, then classify the object into a certain category and insert it into the hierarchy of human knowledge. Knowledge tends to act as pre-existing structures to discipline things into manoeuvrable systems. If we unlearn knowledge and deculturize ourselves from our entrenched perspectives, we could look at things from fresh perspectives. It is for this reason that Yen Hui recommends us to "drive out perception and intellect" and "do away with understanding" (90).

If forgetting knowledge facilitates our descent from anthropocentrism, then forgetting our bodily form assists our transcendence over the monolithic perspective of the human species. Human organs have a unique way of perceiving the world and human bodies have special cognitive methods of organizing these inputs. After suspending his intellectual understanding, Yen Hui arrives at a more advanced phase: "I slough off up my limbs and trunk" and "depart from my form" (Zhuang 1994: 64). The realization of deficient human perception and desire to move beyond species confinement paves the path to initiate "cross-species becoming." The Taoist concept of "sloughing off" corporeal parts has inspired the modern concept of "the Body without Organs:" "A great Japanese compilation of Chinese Taoist treatises was made in A.D. 982-984. We see in it the formation of a circuit of intensities between female and male energy." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari acknowledge their intellectual indebtedness to the Taoist principle of "Yin-Yang";

however, we find more philosophical affinity between “the Body without Organs” (BwO) and Zhuang Zi’s “discarding bodily parts.” “The BwO: it is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 157). The purpose is to produce “a disorganized body” and liberate “molecular multiplicities” (151). Therefore, the BwO defies “the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism,” sabotages “significances and subjectifications as a whole,” and mobilizes “a movement of generalized deterritorialization” (157). The “Body without Organs” has explicitly spelt out the conditions of Zhuang Zi’s “cross-species becoming”: we should abandon the hierarchical organization of human organs and entitle “the hundred joints, the nine openings, and the six organs” with equal opportunities to “take turns being lord and servant” (Zhuang 1968: 38).

### 5. Manifestations of “Cross-Species Becoming”

The story of Sir South Wall not only concertizes the conditions of cross-species becoming, but also manifests the possible forms of transformation: “Tzu-Ch’i of South Wall, sat leaning on his armrest, staring up at the sky and breathing, vacant and far away, as though he’d lost companion” (Zhuang 1968: 36). The Taoist master forgets his earthly existence, cuts himself off from worldly companion, and becomes a vacant vessel to embrace things in nature. His disciple makes a penetrating observation of the transformation:

“Can you really make the body like a withered tree and the mind like dead ashes? The man leaning on the armrest now is not he one who leaned on it before” (36).

The image of “dead ashes” visualizes his abandonment of intellectual acumen while the “withered tree” portrays his obliteration of bodily perception; together they constitute the conditions of cross-species becoming. “I have lost myself,” Sir South Wall informs his disciple. Quan Wang contends that the “myself” (me) consists of the “Social I” and the “Corporeal I” and the loss of self suggests the removal of obstacles to the equality of things (Wang 2017: 257).

Sir South Wall becomes his breathing and mingles itself with the wandering wind. “The Great Clod belches out breath and its name is wind” (Zhuang 1968: 36). Wind equalizes things in nature. Wind has no discrimination against anything, and all species in nature, ranging from plants to animals, have an equal opportunity to interact with air. The elaborate depiction of the blowing wind at the beginning of chapter two highlights the title of “Equality of Things.” When the wind blows, “ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly. Can’t you hear them, long drawn out?” Besides, wind, without its own concrete form, metamorphosizes itself with interactive objects: “There are huge trees a hundred spans around with hollows and openings like noses, like mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups, like mortars, like rifts, like ruts.” The wind blows over huge trees with different shapes of cavities and produces various sounds: “They roar like waves, whistle like arrows, screech, gasp, cry, wail, moan, and howl” (36). Metaphorically, wind exemplifies an inchoate self. Taoist sages often claim that an infant is an idealized self because it has not formulated a corporeal boundary and is in the fluid process of cross-species becoming. This Taoist speculation has solid support from modern science. Within the first six months, an infant has no concept of self, and it

identifies itself with any adjacent thing that offers pleasure stimuli. The infant might identify itself with a warm blanket, a milk bottle, or even a toy. The law of this primordial world of fantasy is "universal equivalence," and things become "a series of equivalences" (Lacan 1988: 86). Gradually, the infant prioritizes the mother's breast as its primary identity due to frequent maternal feedings. The progression from "heteromorphic identification" to "homeomorphic identification" suggests the child's growth into the "Mirror Stage" (Lacan 2001: 4).

Philosophically, wind represents Zhuang Zi's metaphysical exploration into the root of things. For Zhuang Zi, all things originate from air:

"Man's life is a coming-together of breath. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death" (Zhuang 1968: 235).

In addition to man, all species in nature are fundamentally constituted by air: "The ten thousand things are really one." The "one" in the quote refers to the same constituting material of the world: air. Air follows various categorical principles and is consequently condensed into the myriad things in nature, such as men, animals, and plants. Despite categorical distinctions, the primordial connection among species remains latent. This potential of cross-species becoming has its manifestations; for example, human commiseration with a dog's suffering or human perception of a flower's bliss evinces this primordial connection.

Apart from air, another form of cross-species becoming is animal-becoming. The King of Ch'u sent two officials to invite Zhuang Zi to administrate the country. A scared tortoise, after its death, has been "wrapped in cloth and boxed, and store[d] in the ancestral temple" (Zhuang 1968, 188). Zhuang Zi asked the visiting officials: "Now would this tortoise rather be dead and have its bones left behind and honored? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud?" The first tortoise has been assimilated into human culture and it has become a sacred symbol in an anthropocentric system, and the price is the death of animal agency: it becomes an empty vessel for human projections. On the contrary, the second tortoise in the mud refuses human assimilation and endeavors to maintain species autonomy in its familiar habitat. Therefore, Zhuang Zi informs the visitors: "Go away! I'll drag my tail in the mud!" Zhuang Zi's becoming animal is an effective approach to relinquishing anthropocentrism. Language is not neutral nor transparent but rather loaded with cultural connotations. The omnipresence of language in the human world has long-lasting and unperceivable influences on our thinking and formation of identity. For Zhuang Zi, these pernicious influences erode our original harmonious connection with the myriad things in nature and insulate us within anthropocentric arrogance. Thus, it is compulsory to escape from linguistic networks and depart from political society. How could it be possible for humans to escape ubiquitous linguistic signifiers which completely envelope our life? Animal-becoming is a possible method. Animals know nothing about human language and live in a world independent of linguistic penetration. Without cultural contamination, animals maintain their primordial connection with the myriad things in nature. Therefore animal-becoming can facilitate humans to descend from anthropocentrism and embrace a horizon-expanding world of multiple species. Taoist sages, who often equalize animals with the unfolding of the Way and urge us to learn from animals, understand this: "The true sage is a quail at rest, a little fledgling at its meal, a bird in

flight who leaves no trail behind. When the world has the Way, he joins the chorus with all other things" (Zhuang 1968: 130). Irving Goh reads animal-becoming as "a disavowal of politics" (Goh 2011: 117). "The animal is *the disappeared* in politics," and provides a valuable lesson for men "to escape the capture of life by politics, to reclaim life as it is without the demands and limits imposed by politics" (Goh 2011: 118). Goh offers an insightful analysis of the political dimensions of animal-becoming; however, he confines the wide spectrum of cross-species becoming only to animal becoming.

Cross-species becoming is not only a privilege for human beings: animals also have the capacity to metamorphose into other species. The transformation of the huge fish into a bird is featured at the beginning of *The Zhuang Zi*.

"In the Northern darkness there is a fish and his name is K'un. The K'un is so huge there is no knowing how many thousand li he measures. He changes and becomes a bird whose name is P'eng" (Zhuang 1968: 29).

Zhuang Zi deliberately locates the Northern darkness in "the bald and barren" territory and insulates this geography from mankind. As mentioned in the first part of the essay, the initial stage of creation is prior to the birth of humankind, when things have not formulated rigid boundaries and are in the fluid process of becoming. In other words, human absence means the withdrawal of anthropocentric interference so that things follow their own rhythms and unfold their natural bent. The advent of mankind gradually disrupts the natural balance and builds up human superiority.

In addition to humans and animals, other species in nature are in the fluid process of cross-species becoming. "The seeds of things have mysterious workings" (Zhuang 1968: 195). Things harmonize with adjacent space and change themselves into the surrounding environment. "In the water they become Break Vine, on the edges of the water they become Frog's Robe. If they sprout on the slopes they become Hill Slippers. If Hill Slippers get rich soil, they turn into Crow's Feet. The roots of Crow's Feet turn into maggots and their leaves turn into butterflies" (195). Identity is never an enclosed entity: it is porous of becoming. Then, the butterflies undergo a series of heteromorphic transformations: insects, birds, spray, vinegar, wine, plants, etc. Becoming is endless. Toward the end of this long paragraph, Zhuang Zi deliberately includes humans in the process of species transformation. "Green Peace plants produce leopards and leopards produce horses and horses produce men. Men in time return again to the mysterious workings. So all creatures come out of the mysterious workings and go back into them again" (196). The becoming of species in the passage might not be convincing in terms of modern science, yet it capitulates ancient Chinese nature lore and epitomizes Zhuang Zi's concept of "cross-species becoming."

## 6. Conclusion

Posthumanism endeavors to remove the centrality of human beings and facilitate an egalitarian relationship with other species. However, it fails to justify the parity of things. In this aspect,

Zhuang Zi's "cross-species becoming" becomes both a supplement to and an ontological foundation for posthumanism. Zhuang Zi examines species relationships from a monistic perspective and provides us with an edifying alternative. For Zhuang Zi, all things in nature, including humans, animals, and plants, originate from a monistic material: air. When air receives different principles, it will be condensed into myriads of things in accordance with the category of the object. "You have only to comprehend the one breath that is the world" (Zhuang 1968: 236). The condensation of air gradually stabilizes the boundaries of things and obscures the original connection among things. As humans integrate themselves into society and become fully-fledged members, they become obsessed with earthly pursuits of wealth and reputations. Zhuang Zi urges us to forget social contaminations to de-obscure our primordial cord with things in nature. Forgetting enables humans to descend from anthropocentrism and to re-establish egalitarian relationships with non-human species. Another related idea derived from the monistic view is the transversal self. For Zhuang Zi, the self is not an enclosed entity, but rather becomes "coextensive with," to borrow Roger Ames' term, with the myriad things in the environment (Ames 1984: 124). Transcendence over the egoist self enables one to redefine his sense of interconnection with nonhuman species in nature, which in turn enlarges his self and intensifies his existence. Zhuang Zi's philosophy of "cross-species becoming" complements posthumanism and together they comprehensively illuminate the intertwined relationships between human and non-human species.

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### **Notes**

<sup>i</sup> Many scholars have similar views, as can be seen in the titles of their articles. For example, Liu Xiaogan's "Non-action and the Environment Today" in *Daoism and Ecology*, eds., N.J. Girardot et al, (Cambridge: Harvard UP): 315—340, and Lisa Raphals' "Metic Intelligence or Responsible Non-Action?" in *Daoism and Ecology*. 305—31.

<sup>ii</sup> Critics have a controversy over the separation of humankind from things. Deep ecologists and ecofeminists, according to Joanne Birdwhistell, exemplify the polarization of the debate. The former accentuates "the interrelatedness of all things" and denies the separation of the human from the cosmos. In contrast, the latter emphasizes the distinction between humans "as biological organisms and as members of a social community" (Birdwhistell 2001: 39). This article introduces the concept of development to solve the dilemma: initially they are interrelated, then separated, but the separation of things could not conceal their underlying interconnection.



<sup>[iii]</sup> There is a linguistic difference in expressing the idea of “ninety thousand li.” In Chinese, “ten thousand” is regarded as an essential measuring unit, written as “wan (万).” Therefore, the original text in *The Zhuang Zi* is “nine wan,” with a salient accentuation on the numerical figure nine rather than ninety.

<sup>[iv]</sup> Animals in literature and philosophy often function as metaphoric substitutes for human subjects. “Metaphor provides a strong defence for poetics in the service of anthropocentrism, for communicating messages about our essential humanity” (McHugh 2009: 488-9).

<sup>[v]</sup> Scholars might dispute the translation of “物化” (*wuhua*) as “cross-species becoming.” Some critics tend to regard “equality of things” (齐物) and its closely related concept of “物化” (transformation of things) as the Daoist way to challenge the Confucian stratification of social classes and classification of human values. Other scholars often hold an allegorical or symbolic reading of *wuhua* in a very literalistic sense. I concede the validity of these readings because *The Zhuang Zi* does contain rich interpretative possibilities; however, this essay endeavors to reveal another much-neglected meaning of the term: *wuhua* constitutes the underlying cosmos of Zhuang Zi’s philosophy. Statistic appearances of *wuhua* in *The Zhuang Zi* further consolidate this translation. Out of 8 appearances, 5 occasions discuss heteromorphic transformations, and others depict the dynamic status of things.

<sup>[vi]</sup> Rosi Braidotti first proposes the term “the transversal subject” in her discussion of posthumanism. She defines the subject as “a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole, and to do so within an understandable language” (Braidotti 2013: 82). Braidotti is revolutionary in expanding the concept of the human subject to include the non-human species. This essay, however, reserves the term but accentuates the dynamic dimensions of cross-species becoming.

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