

A Proposed Paper to the CBI, SBL. Submitted to Prof. Daniel Patte (Vanderbilt University, daniel.patte@Vanderbilt.Edu) and Prof. Yung Suk Kim (youaregood@yahoo.com)

Pauline Theological “Counseling” of Love in the Language of the *Zhuangzi*:
A Reading of Love in 1 Corinthians in a Chinese Philosophical Context

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Abstract:

The paper will read the theology of love in 1 Corinthians as Paul’s way of “counseling” the problematic church at Corinth. The present author reads Paul’s theology in the philosophical language of love in the *Zhuangzi*, and demonstrates that (1) despite cultural/linguistic differences between Paul and *Zhuangzi*, the *Zhuangzi* illuminates 1 Corinthians for Chinese readers who are familiar with the language of classical Daoism; (2) the ways the *Zhuangzi* can explain to the Chinese readers regarding Pauline theology of love as they align with the *Dao*/Creator, love in the way of *wuwei* (effortlessly), relate to other as *wangji* (self-forgetting; letting go), in sincerity/*cheng*, authentically/*chenren*; (3) Paul’s rhetorical theology as a way of counseling the church to love one another and to love God is similar to the *Zhuangzi*’s admonitions on living with Dao, others, and oneself.

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(first complete draft, Aug 19, 2009)

Introduction

Paul’s series of rhetorical interactions with the Corinthian Christians (as evident in the rhetorical analysis of 1 and 2 Corinthians)¹ can be read as the apostle’s conducting “counseling sessions” with the divisive, narcissistic, arrogant, and problematic house-churches in Corinth. No Pauline scholar has attempted to read Paul this way,² perhaps for fear of anachronism. Yet, scholars studying the Chinese Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi (c. 369–c. 286 BCE), have no such reservation;³ needless to say Western philosophers and writers have embarked on cross-cultural readings of the Daoist texts with much courage and curiosity.⁴ My intention here is not to make any historical claim about the encounter

¹ See Yeo Khiok-khng, *Rhetorical Interactions in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), *passim*. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 26, 37, 41-47.

² Except Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), which deals more with Paul’s pastoral care, rather than psychological counseling or therapy. On demystifying therapy, see Ernesto Spinelli, *Demystifying Therapy* (London: Constable, 1994), 19-46.

³ See Erik Craig, “Tao Psychotherapy: Introducing A New Approach to Humanistic Practice,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 35 (2, 2007): 109-133; C. H. Huh, “Introduction to Taopsychotherapy,” in *Tao Psychotherapy and Western Psychotherapy: Congress Proceedings* (Seoul: Korean Academy of Psychotherapists, 2004), 6-18; C. G. Jung, “Psychology and Religion: West and East,” in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 11*, R. F. C. Hull, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); D. Rhee, “The Tao and Western Psychotherapy,” in *Psychotherapy East and West: Integration of Psychotherapies* (Seoul: Korean Academy of Psychotherapists, 1995), 162-168; P. Skogemann, “Chuang Tzu and the Butterfly Dream,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 31 (1986): 75-90;

⁴ Besides voluminous translations of the Daoist texts by Westerners, see Jesse Charles, “Chuang Tsu and the Problem of Personal Identity: A Study of Identity and Interrelatedness” (PhD dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1988), *idem*, “Comparative Philosophy: Its Aims and Methods,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30 (2, 2003): 259-270; Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1991); Reinhard May, *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources: East*

between Zhuangzi and Paul (c. 2 BCE- c. 64 CE). Rather, my attempt is to read 1 Corinthians through the eyes of *Zhuangzi*, noting the kind of intertextual relationship that can exist between the two documents for a reader of two classics.

Philosophical/Theological Counseling of Love in the *Zhuangzi* Language

Here, I interpret the theology of love in 1 Corinthians as Paul's way of "counseling" the problematic church at Corinth. I begin by reading Paul's theology through the philosophical language of love in the *Zhuangzi*. I then demonstrate that despite cultural/linguistic differences between Paul and Zhuangzi, the *Zhuangzi* elucidates 1 Corinthians for Chinese readers who are familiar with the language of classical Daoism. For readers unfamiliar with a Daoist worldview, this article expands a cross-cultural reading of 1 Corinthians.

Love in 1 Corinthians as Paul's Theological Response

The radical problems found in the churches at Corinth reflect an increase in the type of Christian "love-patriarchalism" (Gerd Theissen)⁵ that Paul hopes will shift toward internal wholeness and external transformation.⁶ In his rhetorical strategy, Paul employs

Asian Influences on His Work (London: Routledge, 1996); Graham Parkes, ed., *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987); Lee H. Yearley, "Daoist Presentation and Persuasion: Wandering among Zhuangzi's Kinds of Language," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (3, 2005): 503-535 on Dante's *Commedia* in light of Zhuangzi's language. On Chinese resources, see 王夫之, 《老子衍; 莊子通; 莊子解》(北京: 中華書局, 2009); 林希逸, 周啟成校注, 《莊子肅齋口義校注》(北京: 中華書局, 1997); 呂惠卿, 湯君集校, 《莊子義集校》(北京: 中華書局, 2009); 王叔岷, 《莊子校註》上下冊(北京: 中華書局, 2007); 王先謙, 《莊子集解》八卷(北京: 中華書局, 1987); 郭慶藩, 《莊子集釋》三卷(北京: 中華書局, 2007); 陳鼓應注譯, 《莊子今注今譯》上下冊(北京: 商務印書館, 2007); 劉文典, 《莊子補正》(合肥: 安徽大學出版社, 1999); 方勇、陸永品, 《莊子詮評》上下冊(成都: 巴蜀出版社, 2007); 方勇, 《莊子學史》三冊(北京: 人民出版社, 2008); 楊柳橋, 《莊子譯注》(上海: 上海古籍出版社, 2006)。

⁵ Gerd Theissen, "Social Stratification in the Corinthian Community," in John H. Scütz, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity. Essays on Corinth by Gerd Theissen* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 122: "this love-patriarchalism takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, and obligation imposed upon those who are socially stronger. From the weaker are required subordination, fidelity, and esteem."

⁶ Contra David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*.

the cruciform love (*agape*) to rebuild the body of Christ at Corinth. Paul's "theological counseling"⁷ of the Corinthian Christians, encourages them to love one another and to love God for the purpose of transforming the distorted body of the Greco-Roman world.⁸ Both *Zhuangzi* and 1 Corinthians emphasize love as selflessness or self-offering generosity. Throughout the epistle, Paul prescribes love as the remedy to three serious problems:

(1) Responding to the problem of dullness of worldly wisdom, Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9 quotes the Ascension of Isaiah or paraphrases Isaiah 64:3 in order to prove that God through his Spirit has revealed the crucified Messiah to those who love God.

(2) Responding to the problem of a "personality cult" in the church, Paul uplifts the apostle's "love in a spirit of gentleness" (4:21) with the believers so that they may become the beloved (4:14, 17, cf. 15:58).

(3) Responding to the problem of the self-claimed "strong" and "knowledgeable" ones who are coercing the "weak conscience" brothers to eat food offered to idols, Paul admonishes that "knowledge puffs up, but *love* builds up." (8:1)

It is telling that the conclusion of 1 Corinthians (16:1-24) ends with love: "Let all that you do be done in *love*. . . . Let anyone be accursed who has no *love* for the Lord. . . . My *love* be with all of you in Christ Jesus" (16:14, 22, 24). This ending serves as the reminder that *love* is what they need most. No wonder that of all the Pauline epistles, 1 Corinthians is the only letter that has an encomium on *love* (13:1-14:1; *agape*, or earlier Greek word *eros*).⁹ Paul's purpose is to explain *love* as the most excellent way of life for

Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 197: "Paul's focus is certainly upon life and relationships in the church . . . Paul shows little if any concern about transforming the world." (p. 197)

⁷ Or "philosophical counseling/psychotherapy/praxis" as Gerd Achenbach called it. On the background of the movement of "philosophical counseling", see Ran Lahav, "A Conceptual Framework for Philosophical Counseling: Worldview Interpretation," in Ran Lahav and Maria da venza Tillmanns ed., *Essays on Philosophical Counseling* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 1-24.

⁸ See Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Yale University Press, 1999); Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

⁹ See James Moffatt, *Love in New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929); Victor P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972); PHEME PERKINS, *Love Commands in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 11982); Viktor Warnach, *Agape. Die Liebe als Grundmotiv der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1951); Ceslaus Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament: Analyse des Textes* (Études Bibliques 3 vols.; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1958-59). E.T.: *Agape in the New Testament* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book, 1963-66), 3 vols; Paul Brett, *Love Your Neighbor: The Bible as Christian Ethics Today* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992); Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love, I: Plato to Luther* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1-158; James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Holy Eros: Recovering the Passion of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009).

the Christians to live out their faith according to the paradigm of Christ. In other words, Paul is eulogizing Christ-like *love*. One can easily substitute the word “love” with the word “Christ” in 1 Corinthians 13.¹⁰

The Pauline christologies in 1 Corinthians supplement and clarify his theology of love. In 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (introduction), christology of the Cross (crucifixion) and the Body (corporeal unity) stand out as Paul’s thesis. Though the word “love” is absent, it is obvious that Christ’s self-offering on the Cross is because of love, because of his authentic nature. The work of Christ on the Cross as love makes it possible for: (1) the reunion of all believers with the Lord (1:9) in the community of the Triune God; (2) the restoration of all believers as one body (1:2);¹¹ (2) the sanctification of all believers so that they are free eschatologically from the power of sin (1:8).

Zhuangzi’s Prescription and Paul’s Theological Counseling

Paul’s Christological responses to the various problems found in the Corinthian church can be interpreted through Zhuangzi’s understanding of love as he responded to vicissitudes of human life and the chaotic world of the Warring States (480-221 BCE). A few points on love in the Zhuangzi are helpful lenses for the reading of 1 Corinthians.

First, love is selflessness, viz. *wangji* (self-forgetting or letting go and let it happen; *Zhuangzi*, chap. 2: *wu sang wo* [“I have lost my self”]). *Zhuangzi* says that “the perfect person (*zhiren*) has no self (*wuji*), transcendent person (*shenren*) has no accomplishment (*wugong*), the holy person (*shengren*) has no name (*wuming*).” (chap. 1, cf. 6: *chiren* has no self, *zhenren* has, *shenren*)

Second, to love is not for the purpose of profit, power, or any self-advantages. Instead, love means befriending all, including other creatures in the universe such as frogs, birds, fish, and even the robber Chih who sucks on human livers (see *Zhuangzi*, chap. 29). Ideally, a leader befriends his followers; Zhuangzi advocates that a ruler’s love of the people—a sage-ruler’s love—never comes to an end (chap. 15). However, elsewhere he warns that the moment rulers want to love the people, they will harm them. Unfortunately, this intentional love is bound to become manipulative, and gradually turn to biased and self-servicing love.

Third, to love is not to follow the “cultured” or “civilized” ways of life, but to

¹⁰ “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have *love/Christ*, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have *love/Christ*, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have *love/Christ*, I gain nothing. *Love/Christ* is patient; *love/Christ* is kind; *love/Christ* is not envious or boastful or arrogant. *Love/Christ* never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. And now faith, hope, and *love/Christ* abide, these three; and the greatest of these is *love/Christ*. Pursue *love/Christ* and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.” (13:1-14:1; NRSV)

¹¹ “The church of God in Corinth” constitutes “those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy”, and all Christians universally are described as joined in one body. See 1 Cor 1:2. See Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 103, 179.

freely wander despite the tyranny of traditional mores and prevailing ideology. To love is to be creative and spontaneous, maximizing self and social freedoms. Thus, “to forget one’s physical form” (*wang ji xing*) and “to forget one’s heart” (*wang xin*) is different from maintaining one’s “constant heart” (*zhang xin*), this last being “the ability always to attune harmoniously to changing circumstances.”¹²

Fourth, love changes all. In *Zhuangzi*’s language, love transforms (*hua*) all, because we are intricately connected with the manifold, organic, and changing cosmos.¹³ Paul’s understanding of body as an organic whole can be explained more powerfully by *Zhuangzi*’s understanding of *Dao* as the natural, spontaneous, effortless, emerging, cyclical process of all things (*wanwu*). Fleming writes, “The *Dao* also denotes the unity and intimate interconnectedness of all things.”¹⁴

Because all things are organically related, the way of life is unity and this process is called *hua*. *Zhuangzi* writes, “All the ten-thousand things and I are one.” (Chap. 1) And, “If you were to climb up on the Way (*Dao*) and its Virtue (*De*) and go drifting and wandering (you), neither praised nor damned, now a dragon, now a snake, shifting (*hua*) with the times, never willing to hold on to one course only. Now up, now down, taking harmony for your measure, drifting and wandering (you) with the ancestor of the ten thousand things, treating things as things, but not letting them treat you as a thing—then how could you get into any trouble.” (Chap. 20; Watson, 209)

Interconnectedness with God/Dao, Others, and Oneself

Paul’s rhetorical theology as a way of counseling the church to love one another and to love God is similar to the *Zhuangzi*’s admonitions on living with *Dao*, others, and oneself. That is, Pauline theology of love advocates one to align with the *Dao*/Creator, to love in the way of *wuwei* (effortlessly), to relate to others as *wangji* (self-forgetting, letting go, letting it happen rather than making it happen). All this one performs in sincerity/*cheng*, and authentically/*chenren*.

Paul wants to bring the Corinthian Christians to a higher spiritual awareness via the “crucified Christ” (1:23, 2:2)—a “politic of metaphor.”¹⁵ Robert E. Allinson describes this phenomenon similarly for *Zhuangzi* as the “myth of deconstruction and reconstruction” for the sake of self-transformation.¹⁶ For example, in the first chapter of

¹² Fleming, “Philosophical Counseling and Chuang Tzu’s Philosophy of Love,” 384.

¹³ *Hua, pien, fan, huan* are different words used in the *Zhuangzi* to speak of transformation according to the Way and how we are interconnected to the manifold and changing cosmos. See Skogemann, “Chuang Tzu and the Butterfly Dream,” 81-90; idem, “Forvandlingerne (*hua*) hos Chuangtse” (unpublished thesis. University of Copenhagen, 1983).

¹⁴ Fleming, “Philosophical Counseling and Chuang Tzu’s Philosophy of Love,” 381.

¹⁵ See Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth*.

¹⁶ Robert E. Allinson (愛蓮心), “On Chuang Tzu as a Deconstructionist with a Difference,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30.3-4 (2003): 488-490. See also his *Chuang-Tzu for Spiritual Transformation: An Analysis of the Inner Chapters* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989).

Zhuangzi, there is “the myth of a fish that is deconstructed as a fish and reconstructed as a bird.”¹⁷ Paul preached only “crucified Christ” to the Corinthian Christians, so that they would deconstruct the civilizational ideals of power (Romans), religion (Jews), and wisdom/philosophy (Greeks). Through such self-deconstruction, they could then reconstruct wholistic life found only in the “weakness” of God, “miracle-less” faith, and “foolish” understanding (1 Corinthians 1-2).¹⁸ The deconstruction of body and self is for the higher purpose of attaining union with the *Dao*/Reality so that one identifies with the crucifixion of Christ, and also comes into union with his resurrection: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” (1:30) Chapter three of *Zhuangzi* tells of the similar process of a crippled commander. This leader acknowledges that “When Heaven gave me life, it saw to it that I would be one-footed. . . . I know this was the work of Heaven and not of human beings. The swamp pheasant has to walk ten paces for one peck and a hundred paces for one drink, but it doesn’t want to be kept in a cage. Though you treat it like a king, its spirit won’t be content.”¹⁹

The key to attaining *Dao* or entering into Heaven is through self-forgetfulness. The attempt to make things happen only manipulates and distorts the true daoist nature of things: “Forget things, forget Heaven, and be called a forgetter of self. The person who has forgotten self may be said to have entered Heaven.” (*Zhuangzi*, chap. 2) The word “forget” (*wang*, 忘) in the Chinese pictogram is made up of “losing” and “heart.”²⁰ Our extrapolation reveals a self-centered, narcissistic self as the core problem in the Corinthian churches; Paul admonishes them to be forgetters of the self by recalling Christ’s selfless love. *Zhuangzi* advocates that “The Perfect Person [*chiren*] has no self.” (chap. 1) It follows then that the Perfect Community has no self, or in the sense by Paul’s account that selflessness means union in Christ’s selflessness.

Likewise, Paul reproves the Corinthian Christians regarding their eating of food offered to the idols. While on one hand one should not allow her freedom to make fellow

¹⁷ Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968; see English full text available online: <http://www.terebess.hu/english/chuangtzu.html>). Allinson, “On Chuang Tzu as a Deconstructionist with a Difference,” 488 writes: “The deeper, analogical truth that is prefigured here is a one-way transformation, from bound vision to unbound vision. It is not an endless, cyclical transformation of fish into birds and birds back into fish. It is a movement from lower to higher, from that which is bound to that which is free.”

¹⁸ “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” (1 Cor. 1:17) “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor 1:23-24) “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” (1 Cor 2:2)

¹⁹ Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 52.

²⁰ See also Anthony S. Cua, “Forgetting Morality: Reflections on a Theme in Chuang Tzu,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 4 (1977): 305–328.

believers (especially the “weak” conscience brothers) stumble (8:9). On other hand, her freedom to eat food should not be limited/subjected by “raising question on the ground of conscience” (10: 25-29) but rather be conditioned by thankfulness to the Lord that all are created for his glory (10:26, 30, 31). Thus, Paul comes up with “situational ethic”: “Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall” (8:13); “If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” (10:30-31) Paul uplifts a Christian ethic of greater freedom benefiting and building up all people (10:23).

Pauline and Zhuangzi’s Rhetoric of Ineffability

In 1 Corinthians 1-2, Paul’s powerful use of “pneumatic rhetoric” juxtaposed by his harsh critique of humanistic rhetoric appears incongruent. However, this discrepancy actually makes sense in light of what twenty-six chapter of *Zhuangzi* has said about word and meaning:

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a person who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?

Allinson rightly explains that the *Zhuangzi* (thus also Paul) has ultimately deconstructed deconstruction:

What is forgotten is the descriptive function of the words. . . . The metaphors, analogies, and poetic discourse of the *Zhuangzi* . . . are crucial to the very project of understanding. For understanding is only possible through the deconstruction of the literal that enables the higher cognitive function, which in turn allows one to “forget” language, that is forget its literal, descriptive use.

. . . *This* is deconstructionism with a *difference*. . . . It is a deconstruction that never took place at all in the first place because there never was any subject matter to be deconstructed in the first place. . . and no one to perform the deconstruction. ²¹

Thus, “when the shoe fits, the foot is forgotten. When the belt fits, the belly is forgotten. When the heart fits, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are forgotten.”²² Likewise, the dialogue between *Zhuangzi* and his best friend *Huizi* (*Yan Hui*) reveals the limitation of categorical and analytical thinking, and the truth that “*Dao* (Way) gives shape and form to human beings, . . . Instead of struggling to improve life, one simply abides in occurrence appearing of itself—the Way it is.” (*Zhuangzi*, Chap. 5) Chapter twenty-seven of the *Zhuangzi* speaks of three kinds of rhetoric that are power, persuasive, thus in Paul’s rhetorical interactions

²¹ Allinson, “On Chuang Tzu as a Deconstructionist with a Difference,” 495. See also his Robert E. Allinson, *A Metaphysics for the Future* (Burlington, VT: Aldershot, 2001) and *Space, Time and the Ethical Foundations* (Burlington, VT: Aldershot, 2002).

²² Kuang-ming Wu, *Chuang Tzu: World Philosopher at Play* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 136.

with the Corinthian Christians that can be seen as equally therapeutic:

lodging place language (yuyan), . . . This language . . . is to challenge or (at least) to relativize the position treated. The second, *repeated words (chongyan)* or (under another reading) *weighted words (zhongyan)*, involves words or language that gain a special authority because of the person who says them. . . . The third, *goblet or spillover words or language (zhiyan)*, receives its names because it resembles a vessel that tips when full and rights itself when empty or even just less than full. It involves language that moves from perspective to perspective or usage to usage in an everchanging fashion that utilizes but transcends ordinary kinds of linguistic representation.²³

Examples of the *yuyan* occur in 1 Corinthians: when Paul exhorts the knowledgeable (strong) Christians to empathize with the weak-conscience ones (8:1-13), and when he urges wealthy, powerful hosts to wait and honor those believers who are in socially lower class when it comes to partaking the Lord's supper at the homes of the hosts (11:17-34). Examples of the *chongyan/zhongyan* in Corinthians unfold as Paul emphatically proclaims the crucified Christ (1:23, 2:2), affirms the body of Christ (10:16, 12:27), assures that Christ is risen (15:12-14), and eulogizes self-offering love (13:1-13). Examples of *zhiyan* in 1 Corinthians are: "I do not know whether I baptized anyone else" (1:16), "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18), "the world did not know God through wisdom" (1:21), "God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe" (1:21), "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1:25), "God may be all in all" (15:28). Paul's correspondence reflects the dictum that "for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I only know in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (13:12) by the great, ineffable Dao. Thus, healthy Corinthian believers ought to boast only in the Lord, rather than in themselves (1:29, 31, 3:21, 13:3, 15:31); focus on the self leads to the division of the body of Christ (1:11-13; 12-14, 11:18). If Zhuangzi and Paul are skeptics, they are not of the sense or ethical sort, but mainly of the epistemological and language variety.²⁴

Wuji, Wuwei; Self(lessness) and (In)finity

There are too many strong-headed Christians at Corinth. Self-involvement gets in

²³ Yearley, "Daoist Presentation and Persuasion," 509.

²⁴ See a helpful definition of Ivanhoe on four related forms of skepticism: "*Sense skepticism* is . . . the belief that one cannot trust one's senses to provide reliable evidence of the way the world really is. Plato is a sense skeptic but not an epistemological skeptic. *Ethical skepticism* is the belief that there are no moral truths. . . . *Epistemological skeptics* do not deny that there are objective facts about the world, a way it really is, they only deny that we can have reliable knowledge of those facts. Finally, *language skepticism* is the belief that knowledge is somehow inadequate for expressing certain facts about reality, at least in propositional form." (Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Dao," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* [1991], 641.)

the way of communal unity. They assume they know fully, but Paul has a closer-to-Daoist understanding that *Dao*/Truth (the “All-in-all God”) cannot be conceptualized, and we know only partially like that of frog (limited in a well) and cicada (brief and temporary).²⁵ *Wu* (non-being) is the origin and primordial state of all beings. Chapter 23 of the *Zhunagzi* writes: “The Heavenly Gate is “non-being”, all things come from *wu*.” One’s self is in the constant process of interacting organically with others’ as they all in the forms of *chi* (“vital energy”) allow themselves to be part of, thus in-tune with, the *Dao*, which is the source of, of is, *wu*.²⁶ “Not only is each of us related to others in an infinitely complex, dialectical, and convoluted way, but we are also related to ourselves in a similarly complicated ways.”²⁷ Zhuangzi’s teaching of “forgetting” of the self and others and “perspectivalism require that we postulate an infinite (or at least indefinite) number of perspectives that are equally valid in regard to any particular situation; our freedom lies in our ability to shift perspectives.”²⁸

Craig writes,

Wu wei means, basically, not meddling or interfering with things, letting oneself and the world be. . . . *Wu wei* means to allow oneself to be in a relational flow with the *Dao*, with one’s own *Dao*, with the *Dao* of others, with the *Dao* of all that is.²⁹

Zhuangzi provides numerous paradigmatic people who are in sync with the *Dao*, and thus they live their best-self out effortlessly; for instance, the Cook Ding who carves up oxen with such dexterity and ease,³⁰ the Wheelwright Pian’s ineffable skill in shaping wheels is something not teachable,³¹ and the old man who swims at the Lu Liang waterfalls by going with the flow of the torrent and currents.³² What the Spirit does to members of the body of Christ is precisely this kind of difference in harmony, uniqueness in mutuality, interaction in synergy, so that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (12:4), “there are varieties of services, but the same Lord” (12:5), “there are varieties of activities, but the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (12:6), and “to each is

²⁵ See Laozi (*Daode Jing*), 1 (*Dao* is inexplicable), 15 (cannot be conceptually known), 35 (cannot be empirically known); *Zhuangzi*, Chap. 1; 1 Cor 13:12

²⁶ See Fleming, “Self and (In)finitude: Embodiment and the Other,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29 (2, 2002): 179: “... the *Dao* is ... equivalent to ‘non-being’, and *te* (‘virtue,’ or ‘potentiality’) is a manifestation of the *Dao* in particular persons and things, then ... one’s ‘potentiality’ is a manifestation of the ‘non-being’ of the *Dao*. ... *Dao*, *te*, and *wu* suggest that a particular person is endowed with a particular emptiness or non-being, with out which it would be a static plenum of being, with no elbow room.”

²⁷ Fleming, “Self and (In)finitude: Embodiment and the Other,” 180.

²⁸ Fleming, “Self and (In)finitude: Embodiment and the Other,” 180.

²⁹ Craig, “Tao Psychotherapy: Introducing A New Approach to Humanistic Practice,” 118.

³⁰ A. C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzu* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 63-64.

³¹ Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 152-153.

³² Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 136.

given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (12:7) “Members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, . . . whereas our more respectable members do not need [greater respect]. . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (12:22-26) And then Paul counsels them “still a more excellent way—love” (12:31-13:1).

Conclusion

Though of different eras and circumstances, both Zhuangzi and Paul seem to share similar views about the human psyche sick with self-inflation. Their prognosis is conflict/schism, and the prescription is self-lessness, viz. love. Despite cultural/linguistic differences between Paul and Zhuangzi, Chinese readers of the Bible understand better both Zhuangzi and Paul as they intertextually read the Pauline theology of love with *Zhuangzi's* deliberation on *wuwei* (effortlessly), *wangji* (self-forgetting; letting go), and *chenren*/authentically human. The *Zhuangzi's* admonitions on living with Dao, others, and oneself enriches the reading of Paul's rhetorical theology as a way of counseling the church to love one another and to love God.