

Anticipating Correlative Thinking:
A Comparative Analysis of the *Laozi* and *Phaedrus*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

Decades of efforts by Sinologists like Marcel Granet, A.C. Graham, and Roger Ames, have been put into explicating the notion of “correlative thinking” in the *Laozi* and other early Chinese texts. There is, however, no consensus among scholars of the field about exactly what they mean by the term “correlative thinking.” Some scholars consider this early stream of Chinese thought to be “pre-logical,” “irrational,” or “intuitive-associative,” which if not self-refuting, is at least misleading. This essay, acknowledging binary oppositions as the key to the gateway of correlative thinking, begins with analyzing the operation of those opposite terms in the *Laozi*, in which they always appear in concept-clusters valorizing the one commonly recognized as the lower-status. In this regard, the *Laozi* is interpreted providing a technique for tracing the fluidity of correlative language, especially the correlative thinking of binary oppositions. Moreover, aiming at recovering the cultural value of correlative thinking, this essay attempts to illustrate how this distinguished language model could be used to revise more familiar methods of post-Derridean hermeneutics.

To do so, it turns to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, expecting that the model of correlative language could provide an alternative foothold for deconstructive interpretation, which distinguishes itself from a Derridean exegesis. The main approach is to demonstrate the tension between logic and non-rational elements in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Though the methodology of dialectic is highly valued, philosophical argumentation also relies heavily on the correlativity of terms in the text. Further argumentation proceeds with characterizing the rhetoric habits in the *Laozi*, as a contrast to those dialectical principles described in the *Phaedrus*. The purpose is to explore the possibility, necessity and benefit to build up a correlative perspective.

Instead of being a “prelogical” stage of thinking, the correlative thinking operates in its own effective way of argumentation, which is wholly capable of defending itself. There are reasons to believe that such a reevaluation would, on the one hand, provide the gateway for entering into a dramatically different cultural context developed in China, while, on the other, echo with the poststructuralist critiques of the ultimacy of fact and the foundation of rationality in language.

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Introduction

In the *Laozi*, the practices of “knowing” and “speaking” are so paradoxically interrelated that the knowledge of this five-thousand-character work always arouses our fundamental concerns over language. There is an unspeakable *dao*, pouring out numerous reverse sayings that in no way could make the text more logically understandable. However, the theoretical core seems to thread scattered pieces of wisdom, emphasizing one specific form of behavior—the performance of *dao*. And the experience of reading the *Laozi* is more like a self-reflection in its confrontation of all sorts of unfamiliar expressions that continuously challenge our traditional recognitions and practices, so that individuals are spontaneously guided toward altered perspectives.

However, the “argumentation” in the *Laozi* is far from being logically persuasive. Is the saying “one who knows does not speak”¹ (*zhi zhe bu yan* 知者不言) spoken knowledge in itself? (*Laozi* 56, Lau 63). If it is, then no one should have heard or read this secret knowledge in any situation. The only reasonable explanation is that the proposition is a false one. Yet, how could one expect something false to be persuasive, beneficial, or even wise? A Laoist’s answer would naturally be a “yes,” since “Straightforward words seem paradoxical” (*Zhang yan ruo fan* 正言若反) (*Laozi* 78, Lau 85). Similar forms of verses and paradoxical expressions fill the *Laozi*’s text as if the function of language to convey meanings is suspected, and hence challenged. It is difficult to tell whether the *Laozi* is going to illustrate or conceal its intentions. This awareness of the limitation of language, however, betrays a rhetorical manipulation of literary art. It is best shown in the delicate operation of opposite terms, which always appear in concept-clusters valorizing the one commonly recognized as the lower-status. The emphasis on “valuing the lower” and “abiding by the soft,” according to D.C. Lau in his essay *The Treatment of Opposites*

in *Lao Tzu* 老子, is “the best authenticated theory attributed to *Laozi*” (349). They illustrate the fluidity of the text, which, in the *dao*’s language, is unstable and self-reversing. Names, specifically binary oppositions, are bonded to our value judgments—expressing desires or aversions. There are no constant names, only the highly conventional ones. It is also unexpectedly simple to subvert socially favorable judgments, which usually match with so-called good names and vice versa. *Laozi*’s narrations focus greatly on language as an explanatory link between names and other philosophical or practical theories. Its strategy interestingly corresponds with what is called the “linguistic turn” in Western philosophy, that our long-established social, cultural, or philosophical concepts are, to some extent, constructed on assumptions of language. And these shared concerns and suspicions toward the functions of language led the *Laozi* to voice itself in the lengthy discussion of language that has occupied the theoretical center of the twentieth century.

From analytical philosophy to phenomenology, from structuralism to post-structuralism, the critical insights into language have eventually escalated to a war, assaulting the ultimacy of fact. Today, postmodern critics, despite the diverse theoretical emphases exercised by them, share the same responsibility of challenging the foundation of rationality in language; what was previously perceived as the universal truth or an authentic textual understanding has been deconstructed, “condescending” to Roland Barthes’ onion of infinite surfaces with nothing inside. This language revolution sweeps nearly all social aspects and leads to an interlexical age as Jacques Derrida claimed in *Of Grammatology* in the 1960s, “There is no outside-text” (158).

Despite their differences and the lack of contextual relations that used to be the only legitimate foundation for comparative studies, the *Laozi* and post-modern critics seem to share a theoretical concern, which encourages the potential for harvesting mutual enlightenment—the

critique of ultimacy with respect to language. However, proliferation of recent studies in the field cannot conceal the problematic approaches involved. In *The Tao and The Logos*, Longxi Zhang criticizes journal articles that follow the rubric of East-West comparative literature, which either “juxtapose texts from different cultural traditions without justifying the choice of those texts for comparison” or “mechanically apply terms, concepts, and approaches of Western criticism to non-Western works” (Preface xi). The case of comparison of Laoism to post-structuralism is, unfortunately, no exception. To follow the post-modernist trend, the ineffability of *dao* is argued to share significant similarities with Derrida’s *différance* so that the initial textual instability and negative dialectic in the *Laozi* demonstrate the Derridean sense of deconstruction, that further contributes to post-structural efforts of challenging logocentrism and metaphysical language. At first glance, a comparative study like this seems fruitful and potential; however, its literary and philosophical implications remain empty. In general, a very fixed textual structure is the precondition of generating self-deconstruction as the corresponding counter-power. It is through the overturning of well-established conventional language discourses that postmodern theories contribute to the breakdown of dominant power in diverse social aspects. In other words, deconstruction operates inside a defined textual structure. However, if *dao* is so “*différance*-like” that the text of the *Laozi* inherently refuses the arrested meanings or the “transcendental gods;” then where is the textual ground for launching the power of deconstruction? Certainly, even Derrida cannot deconstruct his *différance*. Jonathan Culler’s explanation of the issue states that “The value and force of a text may depend, to a considerable extent, on the way it deconstructs the philosophy that subtends it” (98). Then what is the significance of dragging the *Laozi* into the field of post-structuralism? In saying so, this present essay does not intend to deny the text’s textual fluidity, its counter discourses, or any other feature valued by postmodern critics. In fact,

in the *Laozi*, these heterogeneous characteristics are presented so prominently that one begins to wonder if they would operate in a different deconstructive model of a language, which distinguishes it from “well-established” post-structuralist criticism.

Though still reacting to the relationship between Laoism and post-structuralism, this essay intends to step beyond the cliché of similarity-difference comparison, which either simplifies the *Laozi* as a mere textual resource and reconfirms what postmodern theories have demonstrated for decades or foreignizes the *Laozi* to such an extent that it hinders mutual communication. This essay will instead, through tracing the consistent line of ancient Chinese literature, interpret the *Laozi* providing an effective framework for tracing the fluidity of correlative language. Sharply distinguished from Saussure’s model of signified and signifier in which meanings come from differences, in correlative language, both associations and differences are emphasized, so that the context of signification extends through interrelated series of agents to all related phenomena. Such an in-depth exploration may, on one hand outline a path by which the correlative method of the *Laozi* could be used to contribute to post-structuralist criticisms, while on the other hand contribute to explicate the notion of “correlative thinking” to which no consensus among scholars have been reached, despite decades of efforts by Sinologists like Marcel Granet, A.C. Graham, and Roger Ames. Moreover, there is also the tendency to interpret this early stream of Chinese thought as “pre-logical,” “irrational,” or “intuitive-associative,” which, if not self-refuting, is at least misleading. Though spontaneity is highly valued, correlative thinking is not a random or casual process. There are distinctive methods, which prepare one to perform correlative operations. These methods, according to David Hall and Ames, cannot be detailed in the manner we often purport to detail logical procedures (*Anticipating China* 232). It is not difficult to presume that some of these methods could be

illustrated within correlative language and a new approach is, therefore, necessary to classify certain features of correlative thinking in the *Laozi*. A different model of correlative language could be adopted beyond the Chinese text to revise and renovate more familiar methods of post-Derridean hermeneutics.

To further reflect on correlative thinking in the *Laozi*, it is necessary to briefly review Sinologists' efforts at illustrating this form of culturally disparate language. Historically speaking, the first encounter of the West with correlative thinking in China, without exception, led to intercultural conflicts. Gernet's studies based on seventeenth century documents described the dilemmas faced by Jesuit missionaries in order to make their doctrines accessible to the Chinese people: "[The] Chinese appeared to lack logic." Perhaps one of the most developmental contributions of Gernet is his attribution of "logic lacking" to an alternative thinking pattern from an unfamiliar culture: "What seems to them [missionaries] to be Chinese inaptitude was, in fact, a sign not only of different intellectual traditions but also of different mental categories and modes of thought" (3). He further expressed concern over the necessity to resort to what he identified as Chinese internal perspectives, probing into cultural bases and how this different mode of thought is literarily expressed in language.

Among the works addressing the issue, A.C. Graham's *Disputers of the Tao* distinguishes itself by articulating the possibilities of an alternative way of thinking. He does not fall into the cliché of separating it as "Chinese" against "Western" rationality. The contrast is "transcultural," "What Granet saw as the difference between Chinese and Western thoughts may nowadays be seen as a transcultural difference between proto-science and modern science. Correlative cosmos-building is most conveniently approached as merely an exotic example of the correlative thinking used by everyone, which underlies the operations of language itself" and "is not

distinctively Chinese” (320). There are two controversial implications in Graham’s arguments. First, what we perceive as “uniqueness” in typical correlative thinking models like *yin–yang* has little to do with being Chinese. Second, the inevitable concession of correlative functions in the text involves process of social development, something like a set of transformations that every cultural would go through due to the growth of reason and intelligence. Graham’s treatment bears the potential danger of rationalizing the correlative procedure and therefore, fails to elaborate its function on cultural and philosophical sensibility in ancient China.

Borrowing from Alfred Whitehead’s Process Philosophy, Ames and Hall later developed this thinking mode into a model of correlative language. How images are associated with each other is based less upon claimed common essence, objective observations, or fixed linear reasoning, but greatly upon carefully selected images eliciting similar feelings and behaviors in human beings, so that there are mutual influences between the practices of correlative language and accumulated individual experience. They believe that the language of correlativity is the language of process, [namely] “the only language, which gets us close to the immediate sense that ‘all things flow.’ Metaphorical and imagistic language is grounded in correlativity. The language of correlativity is the result, the sign, and the reward of feeling the flux of passing circumstance” (*Anticipating China* 138).

With respect to the relationship between correlative and causal language, they claim that they are “two contingent strategies [that] human beings employ to accommodate themselves to their surroundings.” This transition from correlative to causal language in Western history does not indicate the transition of the movement from mysticism to intellectual culture or the “norm for the civilizing of human experience” (Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China* Preface xviii). Even today, within the dominance of the causal thinking mode, correlative language still functions

recessively. However, in their respectable efforts to characterize correlative language, Ames and Hall have to elaborate on the contrast between what they coined as the *first* and *second problematic thinking*. The distinction further inevitably deepens the unnecessary oppositions between the two. In their argumentation, the correlative or analogical language that belongs to the *first problematic thinking* is non-cosmogonical, with a preference for motions and processes, depending on correlative procedures complying with aesthetic principles. Meanwhile, in the causal language that belongs to the *second problematic thinking*, the world is understood as a single-ordered cosmos that favors the general order, the priority of permanence, explicitness of reasons, and the principle of logic.

So far, virtually no effort has been put in literary hermeneutics to illustrate how correlative language operates as deconstructive power within the texts. This paper attempts to illustrate the characteristics of correlative language in the pre-Qin Daoist traditions and how it could serve as a culturally distinguished language model that is different from the post-structural “game of words.” To do so, the first chapter of this paper will characterize oppositions and chains of binaries in the *Laozi* in which those dualistic terms operate as what this essay perceives as “correlative pairs.” In this regard, the usage of correlative pairs in the following passages specifically refers to the language dichotomies in the *Laozi*, operating within the structure of correlative thinking. As a contrast, chapter Two will turn to Plato’s *Phaedrus* in which more than 30 pairs of binary oppositions are directly referred to or subtly implied. It is expected that the model of correlative pairs demonstrated in chapter One would provide an alternative foothold for deconstructive interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, which distinguishes itself from a Derridean exegesis. Chapter Three will return to the *Laozi*, exploring its “rhetoric habits” and hence the possibilities that Laoistic claims may constitute a text-functioning correlative theory renovating

post-structuralist literary hermeneutics.

Chapter One: Binary Oppositions in *Laozi* and their Theoretical Implications

There is no doubt to anyone who reads the *Laozi* that binary oppositions play a prominent part in its expressions. There is hardly a page on which one cannot find some dualistic terms with a preference for the “weak” one. In this regard, the *Laozi* is renowned for its use of “reversing and returning words” (*fanyan* 反/返言) in binaries, which are termed “correlative pairs” in this paper. The purpose of chapter One is to study, in detail, certain features of correlative pairs, which distinguish themselves from binary oppositions of either Western traditions or other pre-Qin schools.

First is the strong conventionalism in the *Laozi*'s text. After Saussure's distinction of the signified and the signifier, the arbitrariness of signs, as well as the fact that language is conventional, laid the foundation for the “linguistic turn” of Western philosophy. However, according to Chad Hansen, the conventional characteristic of ancient Chinese language is much stronger, as “[N]aming is just making the distinctions, and the distinction themselves are merely conventional—socially agreed-on ways of dividing up the world” (62). Whether Hansen's presupposition is suitable for all readings of the Chinese classics still requires verification, but this strong conventionalism is so obvious in the *Laozi* that Daoists are renowned for their relativism and skepticism. Still, this conventional language adopted in the *Laozi*'s text is crucial to understand the series of indications of correlative pairs:

1) In each correlative pair, the relevant distinction between the two terms is language-based, instead of reality-based. In other words, there is no ontological, essential, or real distinction. Those are only marked by names, as one could see in chapter 32 of the *Laozi*.

Only when it is cut, are there names.

As soon as there are names

One ought to know that it is time to stop (*Laozi* 32, Lau 37).

始制有名，名亦既有，夫亦將知止，知止可以不殆。

Distinctions are made to manage society effectively. And distinctions in themselves are functional. It is dangerous to turn names into things as it will petrify and constrain an individual's experience of the world, as well as institutionalize value judgments carried by the names, since terms of the language are non-spontaneously graded into positive or negative and desired or abhorred categories.

2) In correlative pairs, distinctions between terms always embody value judgments, individual attitude, purpose, and desire. Therefore, there is no wholly objective distinction. As Graham has mentioned, "Since the distinguishing of oppositions is guided by desire and aversion, which enchain the pairs with good and evil, someone thinking correlatively is satisfied not only of what to expect but of what to approve and disapprove; values appear self-evident..." (322). In this sense, these already formed discriminations are habitual language patterns of how people perceive, experience, evaluate, and expect the world to be. They are marked and used by and for ourselves. As a result, they are highly subjective in serving specific perspectives or desires, which according to the *Laozi*, harm our natural states. The bond between terms and subjectivity is most obvious in chapter 37:

After they are transformed, should desire raise its head,

I shall press it down with the weight of the nameless uncarved

block.

The nameless uncarved block

Is but freedom from desire (*Laozi* 37, Lau 42).

化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸。無名之樸，夫亦將不欲。

From the point of view of the *Laozi*, language dichotomies are conventionally discriminatory. Though the divided terms are already marked in language, there are no essentially fixed or naturally appropriate distinctions. Therefore, in each correlative pair of two presented terms, a reversed structure that subverts standard evaluation is wholly possible, even beneficial. Of the many examples in the *Laozi*, the typical one that best suggests the overturning of social value could be seen in chapter 31. The unbalanced status of right and left is a very obvious social convention, and nothing could better display desires and forced judgments than warfare:

On occasions of rejoicing precedence is given to the left; on occasions of mourning precedence is given to the right. A lieutenant's place is on the left; the general's place is on the right. This means that it is mourning rites that are observed. When great numbers of people are killed, one should weep over them with sorrow. When victorious in war, one should observe the rites of mourning (*Laozi* 31, Lau 36).

吉事尚左，凶事尚右。偏將軍居左，上將軍居右，言以喪禮處之。殺人之衆，以悲哀泣之，戰勝以喪禮處之。

If the status of these two terms could be overturned and their conventional distinctions are linguistically worthless, one may conclude that in some sense, the two terms are of the same kind. They are not so much opposite as associated. When analyzing language dichotomies, Hansen, in *Language and Logic in Ancient China*, indicates that “Any time a name is used to mark a distinction there must be an opposite name to apply to the complement ... for any one distinction, there are two names” and “we could draw the distinction almost anywhere” (69).

Again, granted that the distinctions have already been made, in any correlative pair, two terms are associated together through the same conventional distinction. Even if one term appears solely in the text, univocity is impossible. It, at least, signifies both itself and its counterpart.

This leads to the second point, which is also how the *Laozi* establishes its fame. That is the negative knowledge “valuing the lower” or “abiding by the soft” which D.C. Lau attributes as “the best authenticated theory” in the *Laozi* (*Treatment of Opposites* 349). Since in correlative pairs, distinctions are man-made and self-valued on purpose, the positions of these two terms always appear unbalanced with one in higher status and the other in lower one. However, how the *Laozi* defines high-low statuses in its text still requires classifications. To coherently illustrate the movement between the two terms, D.C. Lau uses only typical opposite terms with “long” as the higher and “short” as the lower. A category such as this is convenient and clear, since it comfortably follows our conventional expectations. Meanwhile, it embodies the potential danger of fixing the two terms as well as their statuses and movement and associations. D.C. Lau’s model, since he rejects the transformation between the two terms, generates one difficulty. Vague as the *Laozi* is, there are unusually direct statements that the lower will overcome the higher. For example, chapter 78 states that “[t]hat the weak overcomes the strong, And the submissive overcomes the hard” (弱之勝強, 柔之勝剛) (*Laozi* 78, Lau 85). If one follows Lau’s model of fixed high-low statuses, then by abiding by the soft, one actually becomes hard in victory, which makes the saying meaningless. To solve the dilemma, D.C. Lau turns to “Straightforward words seem paradoxical” (*zheng yan ruo fan* 正言若反) (*Laozi* 78, Lau 85) and makes a distinction between “the weak and the soft” and “what seems to be weak and soft”: “or, as some philosophers would say, the victory of the soft over the hard is *true* victory, and it seems to be like defeat. Furthermore, the Soft which can achieve victory over the Hard is truly hard and is to

be distinguished from the soft in the ordinary sense” (*Treatment of Opposites* 356). Lau’s interpretation is established on the assumption that there is a true victory that keeps its position still and permanent. Despite possible critiques, he persuasively suggests that the term that appears in the text signifies both itself and its absent opposite, as “what seems to be soft” also refers to as the unseen “hard.” The essay, hence, argues that in each correlative pair, the term that is present in the text is of higher-status, while its corresponding opposite (that is absent) is of lower-status. “The soft” can, hence, perform the role of either the higher or the lower status.

For example, the single term “soft” refers to the correlative pair “soft-hard,” even though the term “hard” is literally absent. In this certain circumstance, “soft” is presented as the higher-status, while “hard” in its lower-status hides behind “soft”. On the contrary, the single term “hard,” when presenting in the text, refers to the same correlative pair “hard-soft”. It, however, performs as the higher-status with an absent lower-status “soft” hiding behind.

So, in each correlative pair, there is no true inequality between the two terms. Both are able to present the higher-status in different situations. In this sense, the issue of high-low statuses also becomes language-based, instead of being something essential. Besides, whenever one term presents itself as the name of higher-status, there should be an absent, nameless counterpart in lower-status acting as a compliment to maintain the basic structure of correlative pair. In this regard, there is a series of possible implications.

1) The presence (*you* 有) and absence (*wu* 無) always go together as the fundamental correlative pair that functions with the others. It guarantees the basic structure of two terms with each in their corresponding high-low statuses. Meanwhile, the unfixed statuses of presence-absence dismiss all possibilities of formulating the two terms in one correlative pair. The function of presence and absence is vaguely told in the opening chapter:

The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.
Hence, always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets;
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.
These two are the same
But diverge in name as they issue forth.
Being the same, they are called mysteries,
Mystery upon mystery —
The gateway of the manifold secrets (*Laozi* 1, Lau 5).

「無」，名天地之始；「有」，名萬物之母。

故常「無」欲以觀其妙；常「有」欲以觀其徼。

此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，衆妙之門。

Being both “nameable” and “nameless”, *dao* as “the way” abstracts the process of becoming. It has respectively characterized the statuses of “presence” and “absence” as being fluid and processional. Hence, there is always something present that is “becoming absent,” and something absent that is “becoming present”.

2) Based on point one (that there is always an absent low-status as the complement), it is possible to draw the conclusion that for each term, there is no completely signified meaning. As Graham suggests in *Disputers of the Tao*, “The trouble with words is not that they do not fit at all but that they always fit imperfectly.” And *dao*, literally as a signifier, by being signified to nothing, self-deconstructs itself to a nameless name. Moreover, Graham continues his argumentation that “[T]hey can help us towards the way, but only if each formulation in its inadequacy is balanced by the opposite which diverges in the other direction” (219). This leads to the third implication.

2) Being absent, the lower-status characteristically goes in accordance with *dao*. Chapter 41 provides numerous images to show how *dao* hides in their features when they come to their lower-status. The chapter concludes that:

The way conceals itself in being nameless.

It is the way alone that excels in bestowing and in accomplishing (*Laozi* 41, Lau 48).

「道」隱無名；

夫唯「道」，善貸且成。

Though the lower-status is absent, its function is necessary since it supplements the higher-status to move toward accomplishment. Strictly speaking, every term would act in lower-status in certain situation, so that *dao* carries all things in their absence. In turn, every correlative pair reflects *dao* and is guided toward *dao*, while still retaining its own specialization. Since terms only temporally gather in *dao* when they are in the lower statuses, they are perceived as “events” rather than “things.” Ames also indicates that, for Daoists, “particular ‘things’ are in fact processual events, and are thus intrinsically related to the other ‘things’ that provide them context” (*Daodejing* 46). In this regard, *dao* is not a metaphysical unification of beings, but a metaphorical “great whole” that carries and reflects any “events” in their absence, a passive integrity whose virtues are explored through interrelated metaphors. Ames describes this integrity as “consummatory relatedness” (46). Evidence is best shown in chapter 34:

The way is broad, reaching left as well as right.

The myriad creatures depend on it for life, yet it claims no authority.

It accomplishes its task, yet lays claim to no merit.

It clothes and feeds the myriad creatures yet lays no claim to be their master.

Forever free of desire, it can be called small; yet, as it lays no claim to being master when the myriad creatures turn to it, it can be called great (*Laozi* 34, Lau 39).

大道汜兮，其可左右。萬物恃之以生而不辭，功成而不有。衣養萬物而不爲主，可名於小；萬物歸焉而不爲主，可名爲大。

One may see that, both the two opposites, left and right or small and great, could be reached by *dao*, so that terms in their temporary lower statuses are free of desire for they are nameless in their absences. They also offset their presented counterparts toward completion. No term could achieve accomplishment by itself and hence, none is able to claim dominance over the ongoing process.

Let us return to Lau's dilemma, "does not the weak, in overcoming the strong, become itself strong? If it does become strong, then, as the strong, if not as the victorious, it will necessarily change to its opposite" (*Treatment of Opposites* 355). There are two problems concerning the question itself. First, it is implied that the distinction between weak and strong is reality-based and not language-based, and second, the weak or the strong can be isolated from each other, so when the weak defeats the strong, it is as if the "weakness" is essentially dismissed. Therefore, it is ungrounded to presume that "the weak necessarily changes to the strong" since they are only two terms marking the same distinction, rather than two different transformable ends. While in a correlative pair, "the weak" refers to the "weak-strong" pair, embodying "the strong" in its lower-status. Then "the weak", instead of signifying "true strength," implies the movement toward its absent opposite, "the strong," since "Turning back is how the way moves" (反者道之動) (*Laozi* 40, Lau 47). In this sense, the significance of

“abiding by the weak” is the non-coercive experience of the “weak-becoming-strong,” the movement toward its opposite will be manifested in time. In this sense, the relationship between the two opposite terms is more like an indivisible unity, forming a coincidence with *dao*. Despite the conventional separation between the two, there are reasons to believe that they form an unbreakable continuum.

Until now, the above paragraphs have mainly focused on the structure of two terms within one correlative pair. Generally speaking, distinctions between the two terms are conventionally language-based, and largely bonded with emotional valuations. Not only are those evaluative distinctions inconstant, the two terms within are also subjective and inaccurate. The high-low statuses of the terms are always temporary, with one presenting and the other hiding as the complement. The deconstructive power of the *Laozi* is derived from the insight into the absent “other” and the corresponding rearrangement of terms into alternative chains of binaries, which prove vulnerable to established language patterns. It is of crucial importance to examine in the *Laozi*, how the submerged meanings of absent terms are brought to the textual surface and how conventions of terms with their evaluative judgments are correlatively subverted.

When overseas Sinologists first began their studies of the *Laozi*, its deconstructive potential was more or less associated with Chinese mysticism. One typical example was Joseph Needham’s description of Daoism in *Science and Civilization in China*, that “one would not wish to deny that ancient Taoist thought had strong elements of mysticism” (Vol.2 35). Benjamin I. Schwartz followed the idea, whose further research began “precisely with its mystical dimension” (192). His argumentation started from consensus in the field of comparative religion,

claiming that features of mystical orientations “are present in and even central to the visions of the *Lao-tzu*” (193). For Schwartz, there are two prominent features in the *Laozi* that support his classification. The first one is the *Laozi*’s “constant paradoxical efforts to speak about the unspeakable” and to “convey the indescribable in words;” the second is the “the mysterious region where the world of nonbeing comes to relate to the world of the determinate, the individuated and the related, or perhaps literally in Chinese, in the world of the ‘there is’ (*yu*)” (198–199). Despite his conclusion, Schwartz’s insights from a mystical perspective serve the purpose of exploring the associations between correlative pairs. *Dao*, whether being ontologically real or not, cannot, in principle, be differentiated, “since it is, by definition, beyond all differentiation” (194). As what has been argued above, *dao* is the unification of every term in its absence, so that the attempts to refer to it rely heavily on the use of metaphors associated with “all aspect of their [ancient Chinese] cultural heritage and historical situation” (194). In the following parts, this essay will discuss how correlative pairs are regularly organized into chains of binaries, why the rearrangement of the scheme is possible, and how the *Laozi* loosens the grip of existent categories toward more fluid and spontaneous differentiations and assimilations. The following paragraphs attempt to prove that since the distinctions of terms within correlative pairs are conventionally value-based, they further follow formulated patterns, which on the contrary, regulate practical life and impede the individual’s immediate perception of realities. From the *Laozi*’s perspective, reevaluation of the scheme to return to spontaneity is necessary to the fullest appreciation of flowing phenomena and specificities that continuously constitute one’s field of experience. It is through blending metaphors and correlative switches into alternative chains of binaries that the conventional language patterns are deconstructed into their own counter-discourse. The result is the revitalization of an ever-flowing experience of a myriad of things,

which “reflects events as they are in our dynamic relationship to them” (Hall, *Thinking from Han* 51).

First and foremost, when discussing chains of binaries in the *Laozi*, it is necessary to be aware of the typical binaries operating within correlative thinking—the *yin–yang* scheme. Historically speaking, from the fourth century B.C., there was an increasing influence of the *yin–yang* model of thinking, which basically served to frame things and therefore, established effective correlations between the natural and the social phenomena. Since then, it has survived, developed, and thrived, leaving profound influences on following development of “Chinese Philosophy.” It was later listed by Sima Tan in his *Lun Liujia Yaoyi* 論六家要旨 (*Essential Tenets of the Six Lineages*) as one of the six schools under the rubric of the “School of *Yin* and *Yang*” (陰陽家 *yin yang jia*) (Smith 129). Though it is treated as an independent school of thought, it would be ill-considered to ignore the complex ways of interaction between the *yin–yang* school and other dominant tendencies of the period. The fact of its relatively late emergence as a comprehensive outlook in the available text is “no proof that it may not, indeed, represent a truly archaic level of the culture” (Schwartz 351). Despite the lengthy discussions on the relation of *yin–yang* thinking to the Daoism, especially the Huang Lao Daoism, the following analysis will proceed with the acknowledgement that during the compilation of the *Laozi*, *yin* and *yang* as concepts of underlying all cosmic phenomena have already presented. Instead of treating it as a recorded pre-Qin school on the historical basis, the essay will consider the *yin–yang* scheme broadly as a primordial “structure of thought,” which has not only shaped Chinese correlative thinking but also had fruitful interplay with other pre-Qin thought. A treatment like this is not groundless. In principle, it more or less shares some similarities with Levi-strauss’ “the savage mind” as the pervasive thinking mode which has dominated every early society. This

tendency is more obvious in Granet's works which treat *yin-yang* thinking as typical expression of the Chinese mind. Despite Graham's negative attitude of treating *yin-yang* thinking as "intellectual deterioration," he, indeed, has conducted an in-depth analysis and concludes his *Disputers of the Tao* with the statement that until the middle period of the Han dynasty, "the excesses of correlative system-building have temporarily penetrated to the heart of philosophy" and finally underlain the main lines of Chinese thought (382). Recent researches also challenge the orthodox acknowledgments established by Sima Tan. Based on the *Mawangdui* silk manuscripts, Robin Yates reflects on the scope of *yin-yang* thinking and questions whether or not there is an established school called *yin-yang*. It is even possible that this name of the school first served a bibliographical purpose in the Han dynasty. In this regard, compared to tracing the historical relationship of *yin-yang* and Daoism, it is of more importance for this essay to see a few similarities and differences between *yin-yang* thought and binary oppositions. The purpose of the essay is to see what influence *yin-yang* thought has on correlative pairs in the *Laozi*.

Though structurally, terms in both the *yin-yang* scheme and the correlative pairs are lined up into contrasting parallels, there are noticeable differences between the two. Binary oppositions in the *Laozi* are conventionally language-based dichotomies embodied with value judgments. The most typical chains of binary oppositions are in chapter 2 with clear intentions showing that distinctions between the two terms are linguistically worthless:

The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful,
yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the
good as the good, yet this is only the bad.

Thus, Something and Nothing produce each other;

The difficult and the easy complement each other;

The long and the short offset each other;

The high and the low incline towards each other;

Note and sound harmonize with each other;

Before and after they follow each other (Laozi 2, Lau 6).

天下皆知美之爲美，斯惡已；皆知善之爲善，斯不善已。

有無相生，難易相成，長短相形，高下相盈，音聲相和，前後相隨，恒也。

It is of significance to notice that opposite terms in this parallelism of prose are more like abstract, objective connotations in efforts to generalize essential properties common to all category members. These language discriminations, according to the *Laozi*, arouse falseness, violence, dangers, and desires. Besides, it is ungrounded to presume that all dyads in ancient China follow the dialectically complementary relationship as the *yin–yang* scheme. The belief simplifies many delicate binary relationships such as opposites, alternations, or nondynamic complementarities.

The *yin–yang* scheme is, however, quite different. It involves paired images with sharp contrasts and blurred connections. “The scheme can work only if two complementary conditions hold” (Graham, 335). Despite many debates in the field, there is, at least, the consensus that the scheme of *yin* and *yang* is how the ancient Chinese understood the world. It is established on the assumption that the myriad of things, beings or phenomena, can be categorized. The process to understand *yin–yang* scheme is not an acquisition of knowledges of a specific thing or an operation of logic to give a definition. It is more like an awareness of “what goes on” based on previous experience. In structure, the category does more than divide a group of names into two columns. It refers to a classification of direct experience since *yin* and *yang* are believed to be non-exclusive inner characters of things associated with real environments. Usually the scheme

involves images and metaphors rather than concepts that lined up along this single chain. It is common to see in ancient China that the *yin-yang* scheme structures practical issues, such as agriculture or course of time. The model simply follows a list of parallel phrases as “A is *yang*, B is *yin*”: Heaven is *yang*, earth is *yin*; summer is *yang*, winter is *yin*; fire is *yang*, water is *yin*; bird is *yang*, fish is *yin*. However, seldom does one see “The long is *yang*, the short is *yin*.”

However, it would be misleading to suggest that there is an absolute distinction between binary oppositions and the *yin-yang* scheme, as it is both futile and baseless to differentiate between literal and metaphorical meanings into two mutually exclusive systems. Whether the *yin-yang* scheme could be treated as an abstract dyadic principle in general is still unsettled. Even though a large number of images are involved, it is irresponsible to deny the possibilities that “terms which may have originally referred to light and dark or heat and cold may become general abstract terms referring to all dualities” (Schwartz 355). Nevertheless, clear evidence has been shown in the *Laozi* that there is the mixed use of contrasting paired images and abstract terms. The question is, how could this mixed usage contribute to the deconstruction of chains of binaries in the *Laozi*.

From the above quotation on chained opposite terms in chapter 2 of the *Laozi*, it is not difficult to presume that, within correlative thinking, the structure of chains of binaries follows the structure of the *yin-yang* scheme as parallel phrases. However, the terms are lined up along a single chain, not according to their *yin-yang* characters but to their binding value judgments, with one line of terms as the desired chain and the other line as the aversive chain. Even when the two chains are mutually dependent, the desired chain is believed to be superior to the aversive chain. Evidently, instead of reflecting the spontaneous experience of the flowing phenomena, these parallel phrases become rigid formulations made habitual by names associated

with what is expected to be the standard of good and bad. One fatal consequence is the separation of things and phenomena from the present situation into isolated objects to meet newly invented desires and aspirations. The *Laozi*, in chapter 77, defines it as “the way of man” (*ren zhi dao* 人之道), as people tend to polarize their desires while eliminating what they deem as unwanted.

It is the way of heaven to take from what has in excess in order to make good what is deficient.

The way of man is otherwise. It takes from those who are in want in order to offer this to those who already have more than enough (*Laozi* 77, Lau 84).

天之道，損有餘而補不足。

人之道，則不然，損不足以奉有餘。

The differentiation between desires and aversions makes it self-evident what would be approved and appreciated. Our experiences of things, which are fluent and complex, are hence patterned in line with social value judgments. Specific patterns are familiarized into something “no more than the recurrence of habitual expectation” (Graham 321). However, it is not difficult to imagine that there are recurrent defeats of our expectations in reality. Graham believes that the tension between expectations and facts grows as the transition from correlative thinking to logical thinking initiates the need for critical examinations of the scheme in the search for precise, invariable, causal connections. The process consolidates peoples’ inclination toward analytical thinking, which provides guaranteed results in a seemingly “fully comprehensible” world. However, throughout the *Laozi*, there is a persistent suspicion of intellectualism (*zhi* 知), which restricts individuals to the “right” side of conventional distinctions. The acquisition of knowledge in specific areas of experience provides a fictional sense of mastering. Chains of

dualistic categories are hence constructed in the value of objectivity. These established principles and dogmas are further strengthened as socio-culturally motivated preferences, leading to the development of exclusionary prejudices that are unreliable in guiding an individual's behavior. For Laoists, it is necessary to remove such restraints and reestablish insights into the “wholeness,” as “everything in due course gives rise to its opposite and can be instructive in guiding the human experience” (Ames and Hall, *Daodejing* 227). An example of these efforts in chapter 22 of the *Laozi* is as follows:

Bowed down then preserved;

Bent then straight;

Hollow then full;

Worn then new;

A little then benefited;

A lot then perplexed. (*Laozi* 22, Lau 27)

曲則全，枉則直，窪則盈，敝則新，少則得，多則惑。

It is universally acknowledged that in the *Laozi*, what is conventionally accepted as favorable is overturned by the preference of the opposites in the chains of binaries. Except for shocking the readers in the opening chapter by saying that there is something (or rather nothingness) that presents and absents itself, and the two fundamental opposites are only one thing with two names, these socio-culturally unhabitual expressions are further accentuated in the following texts, arguing that the negative, undesired terms are the one of vitality and fecundity. As in this short piece of parallel verse, the socially unfavorable chain is tied to its linguistic opposite. The two ends in a correlative pair, where both are presented together, leave a strong feeling of continuity between them. Or one may say, it is possible to isolate one term

temporarily as an event in its presence. However, it is necessary to perceive the event within the process of the correlative continuum to resist potential discriminations.

What is more noteworthy in this chapter is the relationship between each line and the chains of binaries as language structure. There are no lengthy argumentations or delicate dialectics that are “notoriously” typical in the postmodern critiques. The *Laozi*’s interest in laying out parallels is far from an exploration of syllogism or establishment of any logical form. Usually, the analytical language in logical order intends to indicate a kind of unity in pattern and is “disclosed by pattern regularity indifferent to the actual content of the particulars constituting the order” (Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China* 134). Each line in analytical narrations is developed structurally with temporal linearity, from the causes to effects. Also, a logically acceptable argumentation intends to complete or close the narration, leaving no room for defect for further supplement. However, a piece of correlative narration characterizes the way of “argumentation” distinctly. Hall describes it as a process shaped by aesthetic order. This paper intends to further characterize it in the context of the *Laozi*, especially from the part-whole relationship. In the *Laozi*, as known to many people, “therefore” or “this is why” is so arbitrarily distributed that it is no more than a language signal indicating a change of tone/context. It is difficult to imagine that a small piece of verse as above attempts to make an argumentation, as all the short lines are “starkly” juxtaposed. One challenge for Laoists is to adopt a form of language capable of dealing with the spontaneous experience of the whole, as the *Laozi* holds that the rigid distinctions of names formulate the flowing experience. In this regard, this parallel structure in correlative language does not intend to end the argumentation as a unity. That is to say, each parallel line, as a part, reflects or contains the meaning of the chains of binaries in an adumbrated way. It is possible to continue supplementing new lines without damaging the “totality” of the

whole. When talking about a part-whole relationship, Hall and Ames define this model as a hologrammatic one where “a particular is a focus that is both defined by and defines a context field” (*Thinking through Confucius* 238). In the *Laozi*, the notion of “*dao*”—practically the life knack to abide by the soft—is characterized as a distinctive context defined by the lines of “events” in their relations. Also, each small verse provides a differential focus on the notion. There is no overarching, complete, or unified whole, but there is correlativity. In analytical language, when each cause serves as one step toward a signified authenticity, instances are considered as something inferior—they only explain instead of defining things. Therefore, they generalize or exclude nothing. While in correlative language, each event is understood as irreplaceable and specific. They do not signify meaning; they are thoughts themselves. All the six verses in chapter 22 of the *Laozi* (bowed down then preserved, bent then straight, hollow then full, worn then full...) implicitly constitute a context in which all existence moves in a continuum. It is important to “abide by the soft,” as the socially unwanted other would manifest itself in the polarization of the desired. And interestingly, if we put *Laozi*'s argumentation in a cause-effect formation, this chapter may illogically appear as follows:

Why “Bowed down then preserved?”

Because “Bent then straight.”

Why “Bent then straight”?

Because “Hollow the full.”

Why “Hollow the full?”

Because “Worn the new.”

There is no conclusion, and the argumentation is always incomplete, unfixed, and extendable. This “brutal” way of arguing in the *Laozi* may appear to be confusing and irritating due to the

lack of logical connections. Graham states that this parallel of correlative lines “starkly juxtaposes instead of filling in gaps” (218). This draws one’s attention to the “gaps” or, literally, the lack of logical inference. In other words, the form of chains of binaries almost always suggest a logical deficiency; therefore, more than one juxtaposition is supplemented based on the connections. The supplementary pairs are usually correlative in demonstrating a symbiotic context. As one may say, this analogical operation serves as the dominant way of argumentation in the *Laozi*. Graham gives a vivid description of this reading experience, stating that “the aphorisms of *Lao-tzu* hit the reader as successive blows from opposite sides which seem somehow to be driving the mind in one direction, leaving it to him to choose whether he needs more prosaic words to explain to himself where he is going” (220). However, the result is significant. Reflecting the way of *dao*, diverse correlative pairs are juxtaposed to deconstruct the established language pattern imposed by value judgments, desires, and stereotyped expectations. Current thoughts are freed to welcome more fluid differentiations and assimilations. Individuals react not to an institutionalized evaluation of “good” or “bad” but stay low to let solutions and benefits spontaneously present themselves when the situations come.

It has been argued that in analogical argumentation, correlative switches are organized into chains of binaries based on their intrinsic echo with the whole, which is constituted on the correlativity between each connection. In the *Laozi*, there is another important form of supplement that contributes to the overturning of the conventional language pattern. The following passage intends to show how a metaphor acts as a meaningful implication and that the discrimination between the two terms is only language-based, and there is not a clear-cut distinction between them in the complex and flowing phenomena in reality.

In fact, in correlative thinking, the notion that meanings are generated through image

clusters that hold metaphors to be constitutive of discourse has frequently been discussed by Sinologists devoted to ancient Chinese thought. However, one question still requires further analysis. Is a metaphor a name from the Laoist perspective? A possible interpretation shows in the opening chapter.

The way that can be spoken of

Is not the constant way;

The name that can be named

Is not the constant name.

The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;

The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.

Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets;

But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.

(*Laozi 1, Lau 5*)

道可道，非常「道」；名可名，非常「名」。

「無」，名天地之始；「有」，名萬物之母。

故常「無」，欲以觀其妙；常「有」，欲以觀其微。

It is generally believed that the opening chapter serves as a guide to understanding the text as well as their interpretations. A series of fundamental correlative pairs are juxtaposed as parallels, with opposite two terms alternately appearing in higher-status, indicating that there is never a constant *dao* with a constant name.

These two are the same

But diverge in name as they issue forth.

Being the same they are called mysteries,

Mystery upon mystery—

The gateway of the manifold secrets. (*Laozi* 1, Lau 5)

此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，衆妙之門。

After disposing the binaries as confusingly as possible, this concise stanza finally arrives at a metaphor—the “gateway”—that seems to be a unification of “these two” (*ci liangzhe* 此兩者). Though one can never tell which binary “these two” signifies, seeing it as a language dichotomy in general does not impede its understanding, as before being named, the two terms are the same. This binary could refer to “the named and the nameless,” as “the nameless” itself is, literally, a name that divides the whole. The paradox is partly solved by adopting “the gateway,” which is metaphorically functional. The gateway as a live image does not transcend “the two” or suggest any perspective of absolute externality. Instead, it tries to connect them. This recalls the scheme of *yin* and *yang*—the two sides that swing back and forth in the ongoing progress. By doing so, the metaphor, in the Laoist sense, is the nameless name in one of the *wu*-forms. Or as Ames points out, when talking about the *wuming* 無名, it actually suggests “a kind of naming that does not assign fixed reference to things” (*Daodejing* 104). Metaphors are necessarily multivalent and, as a result, promise the possibility of a correlative operation.

In the lined juxtaposition of images, a meaningful pattern emerges through the interplay among them. On the one hand, numerous carefully selected images are disposed, whose characteristics are only vaguely similar, to produce a certain context to enhance their interrelations. Meaningfulness is largely generated through the echo between the individual image and the context as a whole. On the other hand, metaphors, being multivalent, always suggest a conscious or unconscious awareness of “the other” and the reflective interplay those metaphors share. The world is hence articulated as dynamic, as nothing is defined. Even though

distinctions are temporarily made, they are usually unfixed, allowing for rearrangements. There is no correct or incorrect manner of pairing things, and further reorganizations are always possible. In either case, metaphors, when they appear in chains of binaries, contribute to the deconstruction of linguistic distinction or isolated concepts.

The following passage will trace an important image—“the babe”—to see how this metaphor functions in the productive interplay with other images in the *Laozi*. The first time one encounters this image is in chapter 10, with the infant as a metaphor of being supple and soft, as follows:

In concentrating your breath, can you become as supple as a babe? (*Laozi* 10, Lau 14)

專氣致柔，能如嬰兒乎？

The line, being isolated, is barely special. However, when examining the whole chapter, one finds that the meanings of “babe” become metaphorically rich in the interplay with other verses. Being parallel with other *wu*-forms—無離 *wuli*, 無疵 *wuci*, 無為 *wuwei*, 無知 *wuzhi*—it suggests that “babe” may carry one or more of those features and is favored as a powerful metaphor, reflecting *dao* in some adumbrated sense. In this chapter, another image that reacts with “the babe” is the “female.” These two images are vaguely categorized as being similar. In fact, their relationship is further explained in chapter 28 of the *Laozi*, as follows:

Know the male

But keep to the role of the female

And be a ravine to the empire.

If you are a ravine to the empire,

Then the constant virtue will not desert you

And you will again return to being a babe. (*Laozi* 28, Lau 33)

知其雄，守其雌，爲天下谿。爲天下谿，常德不離，復歸於嬰兒。

The short piece of the verse above is almost completely organized with metaphors and metaphorical pairs. It is impossible to make sense of it through mere reasoning. One “solution” is to explore how multiple metaphors are productively associated with each other and how they generate an empathic context to go in accordance with *dao*. One could say that there is no decontextualized, absolutely externalized interpretation among metaphors. Therefore, the context is always subjective, based on the human experience of both natural and cultural environments. As it has been argued in this paper, one persistent theme in the *Laozi* is the continuity between the polarized dichotomies, which is representatively applied here to the male and female. As Ames and Hall mentioned, this gender distinction “represents a whole range of other dichotomies that in their breadth demarcate the rich scope of possible behaviors available to the human being” (*Daodejing* 250). Therefore, to “return to being a babe” metaphorically refers to the continuity of two polarities, as an “infant” is typically androgynous. In another word, the image of “infant” fully possesses dualistic human traits, such as hard and soft or strong and weak. In this regard, the “infant” becomes one of the most powerful and productive images that is parallel with the other metaphors of *dao*, typically the “ravine,” “water,” and “mother.” It is usually acknowledged that those metaphors are associated with feminine traits, such as receptivity and softness. They also invoke a feeling of inexhaustible fecundity. For example, in the *Laozi*, “mother” refers to “impregnated women—a union of the masculine and the feminine” (Hall and Ames, *Thinking from Han* 94). Therefore, the “babe” in the text is highly valued as an undifferentiated life force, the representation of reproduction. The image is further explained in

chapter 55 of the *Laozi* as follows:

One who possesses virtue in abundance is comparable to a newborn babe.

Poisonous insects will not sting it;

Ferocious animals will not pounce on it;

Predatory birds will not swoop down on it.

Its bones are weak and its sinews supple, yet its hold is firm.

It does not know of the union of male and female yet its male member will stir:

This is because its virility is at its height.

It howls all day yet does not become hoarse:

This is because its harmony is at its height. (*Laozi* 55, Lau 62)

含「德」之厚，比於赤子。毒蟲不螫，猛獸不據，攫鳥不搏。骨弱筋柔而握固。未知牝牡之合而媵作，精之至也。終日號而不嘎，和之至也。

It can be seen in the above verse that the full life force of the “newborn babe” prevents it from any potential danger. This vitality, at height, derives from the union of male and female and the return to an undifferentiated unity of dualities. What is more, “a babe does not know the union of male and female.” Therefore, this “return” to unity should be something unknown, metaphorically referring to “unprincipled knowing” (*wuzhi* 無知), a state of mind free from the interference of language and knowledge. The use of the metaphor of the babe here calls attention to the chapters above, specifically its parallel with *wu*-forms, which resonate distinctly with one major theme of the *Laozi*—the manifestation of *dao* and many of its implications.

In this sense, one can hardly say that metaphors employ the dual model of the signifier and signified that has dominated the post-modern theoretical traditions since Saussure. Metaphors themselves are largely the evidence of correlative operation when appearing in the

text. It affirms the worth of complexity and appreciates a harmonious accommodation in the world. The efforts to make distinctions through language may be textually or socially functional. However, it is the reduction of this complexity and an escape from the reality. In the case of gender distinctions, an independent person would act either strongly or softly under different circumstances. No presupposed principles, imposed value judgments, or socio-culturally constructed concepts regulate how one behaves and experiences this world. In comparison with a constant name or univocal implication, about which the *Laozi* holds great suspicion, meanings are generated through the correlativity of metaphors in the co-constructive context. Therefore, in the *Laozi*, metaphors that evoke memories of lived experiences are believed to be more authentic than any other language form. The relationship between images, reality, and authenticity is implicitly told in chapter 21 of the *Laozi*, as follows:

As a thing the way is

Shadowy, indistinct.

Indistinct and shadowy,

Yet within it is an image;

Shadowy, indistinct.

Yet within it is a substance.

Dim and dark,

Yet within it is an essence.

This essence is quite genuine

And within it is something that can be tested. (*Laozi* 21, Lau 26)

「道」之爲物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈

兮冥兮，其中有精；其精甚真，其中有信。

In this chapter, “image” (*xiang* 象) followed by “substance” (*wu* 物) and “essence” (*jing* 精) intends to describe a processual experience that one gradually experiences closer to reality. One noticeable binary is how authenticity resides within the shadow and darkness. Therefore, it is futile for language to make distinctions between them. The understanding of a thing is presented as being integral to its image. One interesting result in the *Laozi* is the mixed use of abstract terms and metaphors in the chains of binaries. On the one hand, the correlative switches, consistently challenges our established language distinctions based on value judgments, taking the mind in an undecided direction. On the other hand, those carefully selected metaphors achieve a source of contextual coherence whose meanings should be understood on multiple levels without a definite answer. And the further interpretation of the text would generate an expanding web of correlativity that benefits oneself in the complexity of the world.

Even today, there is a legitimate concern among Sinologists that the universalization of parochial assumptions would undermine the value of distinctiveness of the Chinese classics. There are also attempts to recover a China-centered internal perspective, which respects culturally specific expressions and vocabulary in its own context. One method is to turn away from those uncritical assumptions about a universalized humanity or shared mode of thinking, which are acknowledged to transcend cultural or linguistic differences. Then, one may ask, whether it is possible that the Chinese classics could indicate an alternative mode of thinking. If so, what is the significance of it? This paper serves as a response to these questions. Focusing on the correlative language operation in the *Laozi*, specifically the binary oppositions and chains of binaries, it attempts to argue that in a correlative pair, distinction between the two terms is largely a result of socio-cultural value judgments and individual desires. The deconstructive power of the *Laozi* derives from the insight that well-established language institutions could be

reversed, and their distinctions could be blurred through the supplement of reversals and metaphors in the chains of binaries. Ambiguity, incoherence, and even absence is brought out to the text, involving meaningful associations among images and constituents between terms. Sharing a modern parallel with Derrida's efforts to deconstruct binary oppositions, this correlative language serves as an alternative way of deconstruction, however, having little to do with the "signified" and "signifier" or the logocentric orientation. Also, the *Laozi* never tries to abolish the higher-status as revenge against the traditional effort to abolish the lower. Within the correlative language, it is more likely that through the appropriate arrangement of terms, sequences, and image clusters, individuals could be guided back to behave in appreciation of the complexity of the living world.

The sage does not hoard.

Having bestowed all he has on others, he has yet more;

Having given all he has to others, he is richer still.

The way of heaven benefits and does not harm; the way of the sage is bountiful and does not contend. (Laozi 81, Lau 88)

聖人不積，既以爲人己愈有，既以與人己愈多。

天之道，利而不害；聖人之道，爲而不爭。

The language dichotomy is marked; however, the sage does not act to it. The knowledge of analysis will inevitably lead to polarization and the reinforcement of one term at the expense of the other. The sage is the one who adopts himself in continuity with "the Way of heaven" (*tianzhidao* 天之道) to behave and survive. Therefore, the sage is gladly accepted by the Way, just as he is gladly accepted by the loss.

Chapter Two: A Correlative Reading of the *Phaedrus*

In recent decades, discussions of “correlative thinking” have given rise to a series of interpretative reflections and controversies in the field of Sinology and comparative studies. The correlative conception of nature and reality, using complex analogical correlations, proves itself to be essentially pre-logical. This conclusion unsurprisingly is in accordance with the anthropological theories and sociological principles in pursuit of a unified category to characterize all cultural forms. One typical example could be seen in *Primitive Classification* (1963) by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, where correlative thinking is described as “a highly typical case in which collective thought has worked in a reflective and learned way on themes that are clearly primitive.” In their opinion, correlative thinking essentially equals to *Zuñi* of Australian aborigines (73). Their sociological approach had a profound influence on the studies that followed, among which the best-known one is Marcel Granet’s *La pensée chinoise* (1934). His work made research on early Chinese correlative thinking an important part in the anthropological study of cosmology. This led to Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *The Savage Mind* (1962), whose primary concern was to find the common properties to all thought, i.e., the demand for order. His understanding of the Chinese correlative thinking should be understood as a highly formalistic system in which rules of correlativity is fundamental to human thought. As the foundational figure in the structuralist school of thought, Lévi-Strauss’ insights into correlativity regarding language are inspiring and profoundly influential. Yet, his attempts to rationalize correlative thinking through the metaphor/metonym distinction in pursuit of clarity and rigor formalized this “language of experience” and might be less applicable to China. Moreover, this portrayal of early Chinese thought as “untamed” is based on the Eurocentric ideal of social evolution. It seems that the final destiny of correlative thinking, together with its “mystical”

implications, is to be wiped off in the progress of rational awareness. Those reflections generate one interesting question that has been largely ignored. If one could break through the siege launched by rationalism, what is the relationship between correlative thinking and causal thinking within the text?

In seeking a different path from the anthropological approach to outline the operation of correlative thinking, the first chapter of this paper provides a detailed reading of the correlative operation in the *Laozi* focusing on binary oppositions. It also illustrates how the parallel structure suggests a lack of consequentialist logic and why metaphors play as distractions in the chains of binaries. With the model of correlative language at hand, chapter two will go through Plato's *Phaedrus* to trace the "gaps" of logical inference in the text. With a comparative approach, one concern of this inspection is to trace the operation of thoughts in texts. Words should not be considered as only vessels of ideas. The relation between texts and thoughts is never simple but always intense. It is expected that an analysis of this tension will lead to certain aspects of the *Phaedrus* that one might otherwise overlook. As Stephen Owen once mentioned in *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (1992), "we can discover the tradition's unquestioned assumptions, the range of variation within those assumption, and the tradition's most powerful desires and fears" (4).

Reasons to Choose the *Phaedrus*

There are certain reasons behind choosing Plato's *Phaedrus* as an example. To begin with, mature thinkers in ancient Greece, such as Plato, have indicated a strong desire to develop a unified and permanent system with philosophical analysis. This allows them "to provide contexts in which explanatory principles might be consistently invoked" (Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China* 116). One consequence is the separation of philosophy as an independent discipline

holding the highest position. A philosophical life involves the pursuit of truth, the recollection of the true knowledge of the subject matter, and the understanding of the soul. And Plato's *Phaedrus*, among all his dialogues, is the one which provides the most intensive reflection on the subject of rhetoric. Through discussing relations between rhetoric and philosophy, it provides a concrete entry into the roots of philosophical approach in the aspect of language. Moreover, Plato is never parsimonious while giving binary oppositions. More than 20 pairs of binary oppositions have been directly referred to in the *Phaedrus*, not to mention those which are only subtly implied. With a contrast to the *Laozi*, this chapter intends to explore how certain distinctions are made and how terms operate in binary oppositions and chains of binaries.

An interpretation based upon the model of correlative language would allow for a sharp contrast with either the traditional Western hermeneutical approach or the Derridean sense of deconstruction in his *Plato's Pharmacy*. In general, the philosophical tradition of understanding Plato is based on the assumption that those Platonic tenets as authentic understanding could be reconstructed from the texts. There are, however, some fundamental issues involved. Little evidence entitles us to conclude that Socrates propounded Plato's own ideas. Also, concerning particular concepts such as *psyche*, there are obvious discrepancies between different dialogues. What has been held true in some dialogues might have been criticized by protagonists in others. These inconsistencies at least damage Platonists' efforts to construct a unified and permanent philosophical system pursuing a stable acknowledgment of truth and an effective methodology to approach it. Ever since the last century, there is the tendency to question Plato as a dogmatist, as well as the validity of the dogmatic interpretation of his dialogues. Hans-Georg Gadamer's reappraisal is the most influential of these efforts. Though whether Gadamer's engagement with many of Plato's significant dialogues has been deprived of philosophical doctrines is a question

requiring further debate, there is no doubt that his hermeneutic approach paves the way to enter the dialectic structure and dialogic movement in those texts. A more radical interpretation that follows the German hermeneutical approach is the poststructuralist movement, which is devoted to the deconstruction of doctrines. Derrida is, no doubt, one of the primary representatives of this movement. Yet, his insightful exegesis is never short of dissenting voices. There are critiques that his thorough efforts to underscore the deconstructive power within the texts sacrifice any possibility of acknowledging the legitimacy of the doctrinal elements.

In this regard, it is expected that the model of correlative language would provide a different foothold for fresh interpretation of the *Phaedrus*. It intends to highlight a deconstructive reading, by providing an alternative perspective, which distinguishes itself from a Derridean exegesis. In general, deconstruction is more like an antithetical reflection on logocentrism, which still works in the structure of rational thinking. But the approach to trace the operation of correlative thinking in Plato's *Phaedrus* is inherently comparative. The construction of a correlative narration in the *Laozi* could initiate reflections on the deeply entrenched and otherwise unquestioned agendas of the Western traditions. Owen describes these efforts as seeing clearly "what an interpretive tradition tries to conceal: these are not aspects of the text to which no attention is given, but dangerous possibilities that interpretation tries to deny or hide and which, in their suppression, become all the more powerful" (*Readings Chinese Thought* 4). For example, what we find in the *Phaedrus* as the definition of "soul" or "love" might explicate the anxiety to limit and control thought since a definition only tells us what an idea ought to be. It is essential never to take the relationship between thoughts and the text simply at face value. Another important concern is to present the intense relationship between correlative and rational thinking from the perspective of language. Kenneth Dorter once mentioned, in *Three*

Disappearing Ladders in Plato, an interesting paper which began with a quotation from the *Laozi*—“[b]oth doctrinal and aporetic elements are present in Plato, and the tension between them is one of the factors that makes Plato’s thought provocative and challenging to so many different traditions” (280). Therefore, this present chapter intends to explore these “tensions” in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, especially those between philosophy and rhetoric and logic and correlative language. It is, hence, argued that the text of the *Phaedrus* illustrates both a strong desire to suppress non-rational elements in dialectical argumentation and the dependence of those elements to undertake such argumentation. This conflict in the *Phaedrus* is most obviously presented in the binaries between rhetoric and philosophy, on which the chapter tries to reflect.

This chapter will first demonstrate Plato’s approaches to “improve” the rhetoric to the dialectical analysis, which he wishes to advocate for philosophical pursuit. It is achieved through distinguishing between good and bad rhetoric with the truth as a value judgment. Good rhetoric is further regulated to be a voice for philosophy. Three formulations are involved in undertaking true rhetoric, including knowledge of the subject matter, soul, and structural organization. It will show that even Plato or Socrates could not abide by these three doctrines as it is impossible to undertake pure logical analysis. Non-rational elements always operate recessively in the text, acting as resistance against reasoning. The binary between good and bad rhetoric will be analyzed in an endeavor to deconstruct this stratification in terms of several characteristics of correlative pairs summarized in chapter one. The second part of this chapter intends to unearth the non-rational elements in the *Phaedrus*: the metaphorical expressions of the truth and Plato’s construction of a thematic chain of binaries operating in the hierarchical system, which, however, depends largely on correlations between terms. The purpose is to show how those elements, on

the one hand, are inevitable and valid in a philosophical argumentation, while on the other, bring ambiguity and figurativeness into philosophy that the philosophical tradition tries to deny.

Rhetoric as Art and Craft

The first part of this chapter intends to reflect on the question from the perspective of the rhetoric on which the *Phaedrus* contains explicit discussions.

It is usually acknowledged that the *Phaedrus* begins with its first half about love and *erōs*, followed by the next half about rhetoric. A close reading, however, reveals that its structure is more than a simple juxtaposition of themes as long as one notices that the three sample speeches are expressed and arranged so as to show the rhetoric method in several different aspects. The first two speeches are rhetorical set-pieces. Though preserving the same argument with Lysias's, the one made by Socrates is developed in a more skilled and dialectically organized style. There is a clear distinction between the “form” and the “content” of a discourse as one can both appreciate and construct a speech in good style despite what the thing truly is (235a). These two speeches, as Socrates himself mentioned later, contain an example of the way in which “someone who knows the truth can toy with his audience and mislead them” little by little through similarities—a rhetoric such as this “is likely to be ridiculous thing – not an art at all” (262d). It seems that Socrates is not pleased with the practice of the rhetoric, which resonates with his attitude in the *Gorgias*, namely, “Rhetoric is the art of persuading an ignorant multitude about the justice or injustice of a matter, without imparting any real instruction” (Hunt 26). This early work reveals Socrates's attempt to make rhetoric redundant and unworthy for philosophy and, if possible, erase it from the list of arts. However, when reading the *Phaedrus*, one gets the feeling that “rhetoric comes to have an inevitable and necessary place alongside (or perhaps even closer)

the highest of Platonic arts, viz. philosophy” and that “philosophy without rhetoric’s voice leaves the truth mute” (Ramsey 248).

Studies of Plato’s change of attitude toward rhetoric interestingly suggest the interpreters’ own opinions on rhetoric and philosophy. The dogmatic philosophical understanding is that the *Phaedrus* is more a dialogue of love than of rhetoric. The association between rhetoric and philosophy expressed in the *Phaedrus* is only momentary. It only “adds a jarring note” to Plato’s authoritative and most internally consistent theory of rhetoric, that this artless trick must never arise in the State (Levi 205). And it is the doctrines of the *Gorgias* that ground a more “Socratic” position. Yet, twentieth-century continental philosophy would support a more initiated relation in the continual tension between the rhetoric and philosophy. This tension, as Derrida explicated in one of his interviews, “comes from the fact that rhetoric as a separate discipline, as a technique or as an autonomous field, may become a sort of empty instrument whose usefulness or effectiveness would be independent of logic, or even reference or truth – an instrument in the hands of the sophists in the sense that Plato wanted to define them” (Olson 16). Therefore, the focus shifts to one question: How could rhetoric be a philosophically significant art, i.e., the Platonic theory of a *true rhetoric*?

This essay, while adopting the model of correlative language, expects to explore this “true rhetoric” in the *Phaedrus* to understand the rhetoric without the presupposition of truth, philosophy, or an authentic Platonic theory. Different from both the dogmatic or contemporary interpretation, it prefers to not define rhetoric only in its relationship with philosophy as if rhetoric could only be lower in status, either as a technique of deceptive nature or as something functional to “voice” the truth and philosophy. In this part, it will, instead, probe into the binary between good and bad rhetoric in which the concept of true rhetoric is distinguished. In chapter

One, we have discussed several characteristics of the correlative pairs in the *Laozi*. Within this form of language dichotomy, the relevant distinction is made for a certain purpose. There is an embodiment of value judgment, grading the two terms into desired or abhorred categories. One result is the institutionalization of value judgment carried by the names. In the *Phaedrus*, one might find that such a distinction between a good and bad rhetoric has been made since Plato was haunted by the dangers of a rhetoric being both misleading and influential. Therefore, he felt it was necessary to deal with its “unwanted” effects and to “improve” the rhetoric to an approximation of dialectical process and logical operation. Truth, instead of being a permanent pursuit of philosophy, is more like a value judgment, which intends to make it self-evident of what should be approved. Moreover, since rhetorical art is a way of leading the soul using speech, true rhetoric becomes a language technique, directing people to what is judged as wanted. The following paragraphs attempt to explicate this distinction and further deconstruct it by demonstrating that true rhetoric is not essentially different from a “bad one.” Furthermore, as it has been proved in the *Laozi* that the two terms in one correlative pair form an unbreakable continuum, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato indeed indicates a kind of movement between opposite terms through the language operation of accumulated similarities.

In the *Phaedrus*, rhetoric is divided into two aspects. Negatively, it is demonstrated to be an irrational technique, eluding the audience away from the pursuit of truth, while positively, rhetoric is presented as a responsible and effective kind of art, philosophy’s necessary Other. It is in Socrates’s view on rhetoric that Plato used the very techniques he tries to construct to make his dialogue responsible and effective. Generally, a bad rhetoric is deemed as deviating from the truth. It operates through similarities and relations between things since the unintelligent are unable to perceive the differences between them. This use of similarities is usually downgraded

for being ambiguous and deceptive, thus blocking one's path to philosophy. The true rhetoric enjoys the status of a kind of philosophically significant art. It could be seen as a synonym for the dialectical processes, regulated by strictly set principles. Plato had been trying to deprive the negative aspects of rhetoric so that its positive side could be strengthened, leading to a purified language technique.

One should notice that neither Socrates nor Plato had made such a distinction directly. It is more like an involuntary choice or a constantly presented tension in the *Phaedrus*. This textual tension becomes most prominent when Socrates tried to classify good and bad speech. Socrates's first speech serves as a companion piece to that of Lysias's, arguing that it is more beneficial to give one's favors to the non-lover instead of the lover. These two rhetoric compositions, according to Socrates in the later dialogue, are foolish, horrible, and close to being impious. His second speech, standing on the opposite of the previous two, works for purification. At the end of this part, when talking about whether a speech is well written and delivered or not, Socrates asks, "Won't someone who is to speak well and nobly have to have in mind the truth about the subject he is going to discuss?" (259b). Phaedrus's response is rather interesting, claiming that "[n]or again what is really good or noble, but only what will seem so. For that is what persuasion proceeds from, not truth" (259b-e). Their disagreement shows us the relationship between truth and rhetoric, which must not be dismissed by Socrates, who believes that the knowledge of truth is essential for a piece of speech to be both well-formed and good. Then, one may ask whether a persuasive speech need necessarily be true and whether a well-formed good speech will also be persuasive. It seems that different acknowledgments on truth would lead to different rhetorical ends. In either case, Socrates would not allow Phaedrus to believe that a piece of good and persuasive speech is only to elicit some kind of desired reaction among the audience, considering

that he was persuading Phaedrus to accept a lover and to live a philosophical life. Socrates then questions those Sophists whose rhetorical theory reduces art to a craft; the latter one is neither good nor persuasive. To do so, he personifies the “art of speaking”. This “rhetorical figure” defends itself by saying “even someone who knows the truth couldn’t produce conviction on the basis of a systematic art without me [art of speaking]” (260d). That is to say, the knowledge of the truth alone would not allow one to access the art of rhetoric. This is the kind of claim that Socrates would criticize without hesitation: Rhetoric without truth is not an art but an artless practice. It is impossible to separate truth from rhetoric since the Socratic sense of art depends necessarily on truth. “As the Spartan said, there is no genuine art of speaking without a grasp of truth, and there never will be” (260d–e). There are, as a result, rhetoric as a form of art and rhetoric as an artless practice. The acknowledgment of truth serves as the judgment for this distinction. It is through its opposition to “bad rhetoric” that the rhetoric, as an art, finds its status to be equal with dialectic. The “true rhetoric” would hence be able to play a significant role in philosophical discussions. As a result, Socrates further formulates a similarity between the true rhetorician and the philosopher:

If any one of you has composed these things with a knowledge of the truth, if you can defend your writing when you are challenged ...then you must be called by a name derived not from these writings but rather from those things that you [Phaedrus] are seriously pursuing ... To call him wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom’s lover – a philosopher – or something similar would fit him better and be more seemly. (278c–d)

At the end of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates finally arrives at the conclusion that through acquiring knowledge of the truth and proper skills to argue and defend one’s speech, a

rhetorician is qualified as a philosopher. Thus, Plato completes his shift of attitude from the *Gorgias* to the *Phaedrus*.

It is possible to perceive good and bad rhetoric as sharing certain characteristics with the correlative pairs introduced in chapter one of this paper. In the *Laozi*, the distinction is only conventionally made with an embodiment of one's desire institutionalized as a value judgment. From the perspective of correlative thinking, the opposition between good and bad rhetoric makes no exception. Good rhetoric is more like one's expectation of what true rhetoric ought to be. And truth as a value judgment is made transcendental as a prior condition. Technically, rhetoric, as both an art or a craft, is the skill of persuasion/deception. They both manipulate the similarity between things. And one would notice that there is a continuum between good and bad rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*.

It is then reasonable to ask, is persuasion a form of deception? Ironically, even acknowledging the claim that rhetoric presupposes the truth, this does not necessarily mean to speak the truth at all times. In *Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic*, James Murry describes it as rhetorical deception, a technique without ethical implications (282). Interestingly, in *Plato's Conception of Persuasion*, G.R. Morrow notes that "the Greeks, from Homer onward, seem to have had an ambivalent attitude toward the devices of persuasion" (235). He hence argues that the skill of persuasion, namely rhetoric, is perceived as both admirable and potentially dangerous. Precisely because of this dualistic characteristic, rhetoric becomes a source of moral concern for Plato. As H.F. North's studies in *Plato's criticism of Sophistic Rhetoric*, words such as "incantations," "charms," "wizardry," and "bewitchment" are frequently used when Plato discusses rhetoric in his dialogues. Unexpectedly, she further notes that Socrates himself is often

described in the same terms. One might conclude that rhetoric, whether as an art or a craft, functions through both persuasion and deception.

Before going to the second point, it is important to push the topic a little bit further to confirm the scope of the rhetoric. In terms of Phaedrus's traditional understanding toward rhetoric, which takes place mainly in the law courts and the Assembly, Socrates extends it to "all practice of speaking on opposite sides" (261e). Therefore, one would say, a rhetoric deals with disputations resting on binary oppositions. Those include the just and the unjust, the good and its opposite, very importantly when Socrates arrives at Zeno's thought, the similar and dissimilar, one and many, those at rest and those in motion, and all opposite concepts of considerable abstractness. As David White indicated in his *Rhetoric and Reality in Plato's "Phaedrus"*, "in the transition from law courts and political meetings to Zeno, the Eleatic Palamedes, a purely metaphysical conflict arises between notions of extreme generality" (199). The extension from specific forms of discourses, such as law courts, to certain fundamental binary oppositions of philosophical concerns shifts our attention to dualism in general and the relationships between every two terms. What concerns Plato is just the ubiquity and forceful power of rhetoric. In this regard, Socrates's citation of Zeno is, of course, not a random one. The scope of rhetoric is extended to the language issue in general, specifically to an understanding of experience that comes through the process of making binary distinctions. This leads to the second point.

Both good and bad rhetoric involves the manipulation of similarities between things, including the two terms in binary oppositions. Or one would say, there is a continuum between the two opposite terms, including good and bad rhetoric as well. It is known that Zeno, the "Eleatic Palamedes," is presented in Plato's other dialogues as a practitioner of the specific brand of argument known as "antilogic," or the art of contradiction—something of a sophist. Through a

delicate arrangement of general terms, the audience is shown opposing propositions of the same thing. Yet, in the following arguments, Socrates himself indeed acknowledges a continuum between the two terms, at least on the aspect of language. Such a speech advances on the construction of potential similarities, that is, ambiguity between things: “At any rate, you are more likely to escape detection, as you shift from one thing to its opposite, if you proceed in small steps rather than in large ones” (262a). Does Socrates actually suggest that there is a certain kind of movement between the two opposites that is driven by language through detecting and managing the similarities involved? He actually suggests more than that. Compared with word images “iron” or “silver,” when we utter abstract ideas such as “just” or “good,” we are quite likely to differ with one another and even with ourselves; we wander in different directions and are more easily deceived (263a-b). Therefore, within binary oppositions, there is more than a continuum. The two terms even resemble each other. It is ungrounded to conclude that “just” and “unjust” would form a correlative pair like that in the *Laozi*. Still, at least those similar terms do appear as obstacles, impeding the path of philosophical inquiry. There are reasons to believe that rhetoric, as craft, almost always involves this manipulation of accumulated resemblance, which belongs to the language techniques of anti-logic. It requires no knowledge of the truth, and its persuasiveness (or deception) rises from operations of similarities and likeness (272d–e). This, however, does not necessarily mean that Plato would deprive the “manipulation of similarities” from the rhetoric as art in his philosophical arguments. “It is, so to speak, a leading away from one’s opinion, not necessarily a leading away from the truth (though it may well be)” (Murry 282). Basically, the functions of acquiring an adequate knowledge of similarities and dissimilarities as well as the experience with collection and division rest on two aspects. They prevent the orator from self-deception and from being deceived by others when accomplishing

the deception of one's audience (262b–c). And the most successful persuasion/deception is carried out by those who perceive precisely the respects in which things are similar and dissimilar to one another and those who can link together several such similarities (262a).

In terms of good and bad rhetoric, one may speculate that there is a continuum between the two. Notice that Socrates's first speech and his later palinode are opposite. The first one favors the non-lover. It is the left-hand part of the body with madness as a kind of human illness. The palinode favors the lover. It is the right-hand part of the body with madness as the cause of our greatest good (2265e–266a). Many contradictory readings are given to explain Plato's compositional purpose concerning the relations between the two speeches. One possible interpretation suggests that the pairing of themes surprisingly indicates a consecutive structure for the two speeches also acting as example materials for Plato's rhetorical theory. This chapter follows the idea of interpreting the two speeches as organizing in continuous unity to examine the transition from censure to praise: "Let's take up this point about it right away: How was the speech able to proceed from censure to praise?" (265c). The answer may rest on the collection and division of madness. One may notice that the first speech ends with a classification of love as madness when there is the "right-minded reason in place of the madness of love" (241a). His palinode begins with an introduction of the four forms of madness, which illustrates that his first speech only told half of the story:

Then, just as each single body has parts that naturally come in pairs of the same name (one of them being called the right-hand and the other the left-hand one), so the speeches, having considered unsoundness of mind to be by nature one single kind within us proceeded to cut it up – the first speech cut its left-hand part, and continued to cut until it discovered among these parts a sort of love that can be called "left-handed," which it

correctly denounced; the second speech, in turn, led us to the right-hand part of madness; discovered a love that shares its name with the other but is actually divine; set it out before us, and praised it as the cause of our greatest goods. (266b)

Through displaying consistency of his two speeches as opposite, Socrates demonstrates how one could practice a kind of “rhetoric deception” and how rhetoric could function from both positive and negative aspects under one name. This is the *techne* fundamental to Zeno’s thought. “If therefore Socrates can illustrate how the transition between opposites was structured in his own speeches, he will have gained insight into the ways Zeno executed the same transition concerning matters of utmost generality” (White 211).

The Three Principles— “The Way of Man”

Until now, we attempted to demonstrate that Plato’s attitude toward rhetoric is rather paradoxical. Whether being an art or a craft, it uses the same techniques to persuade and deceive souls. Their difference is only judged by the truth, which embodies the desire to direct the audience to what is considered as morally right and philosophically beneficial. True rhetoric is only defined by opposing it to a sophist’s view and the so-called bad rhetoric. For Plato, it was important to give it a normative account, i.e., to prescribe what true rhetoric ought to be. Socrates gives three requirements or preconditions that need to be met to practice true rhetoric. This is the polarization of the positive aspect of rhetoric through the dialectical process. Traditionally, dialectic is perceived as the methodological aspect to achieve the superiority of philosophy. The absolute knowledge of subject matter and the soul, the acquisition of definition through division, and the logical construct of different parts into the whole are highly valued in the philosophical argumentation, setting a paradigm for scientific and technical procedures. It is no exaggeration to say that the starting point of the Western academic tradition is the dialectic of the *Phaedrus*. Yet,

from the perspective of correlative thinking, those principles of true rhetoric might play a different role. It is a regulative way to pattern our experience of things with value judgment—the truth. In the *Laozi*, this might be defined as “the way of man” (*ren zhi dao* 人之道), i.e., to maximize what one expects as the standard of good, restricting individuals to the “right” side of conventional distinctions. Because of this, true rhetoric becomes a means of categorizing the experience or, according to George Kalamaras, who tries to examine the place of silence in the *Phaedrus* through a comparative approach between the East and West, “locating experience in these ‘divisions’ can serve as a heuristic, enabling easy organization of, and access to, the truth ... The acquisition of knowledge is accomplished only through the process of making distinctions, of apprehending experience categorically” (69). There is a persistent suspicion of *zhi* 知 in the *Laozi* that knowledge only provides a fictional sense of mastering, control, and objectivity. It is this desire to search for a precise, invariable, causal connection that correlative thinking, as well as the figurative language, is refused in the philosophical argumentation. In the *Phaedrus*, the analytical thinking, or the dialectical process to undertake true rhetoric, is believed to provide guaranteed results in a seemingly comprehensible world. We will list these three principles first.

Knowledge of the subject matter.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato is constantly concerned with those abstract terms, especially in binary oppositions, which are multivocal and linguistically transformable. Those characteristics make it convenient for a sophist to “wrongly” conflate binaries, which should be two separate and distinct things and, thus, to hinder his audience from what is morally favorable. It is necessary to define the topic at the beginning of the speech so that the whole discourse is brought into agreement behind this distinction, just like Socrates’s response to Phaedrus:

If you wish to reach a good decision on any topic, my boy, there is only one way to begin: You must know what the decision is about, or else you are bound to miss your target altogether. Ordinary people cannot see that they do not know the true nature of a particular subject, so they proceed as if they did; and because they do not work out an agreement at the start of the inquiry, they wind up as you would expect – in conflict with themselves and each other. (237c)

The first approach to reach a *good* decision is to define the specific object under discussion. This definition will direct the content of that discussion. On the one hand, if the definition has not been made by an exhaustive and dialectical method, some ambiguity will remain, and the audience risks being misled. On the other hand, only a speaker who has precise knowledge of the subject matter of his speech will best be able to persuade or deceive the audience and, in turn, avoid self-deception. The method to define the object is what Socrates introduced as collection and division, which has relied heavily on defining or examining diverse subject matters in Socrates's two speeches.

The knowledge of the soul.

There is already an exhaustive description of the psychology behind the speeches, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. In short, it claims that true rhetoric should be *ad hominem*, i.e., “speech that is offered and adapted for the particular needs and conditions of a particular soul” (Werner 30). There is reason to believe that psychology mainly involves the efficacy of persuasion/deception.

A structural organization, which is also known as the organic unity of a speech.

Basically, a good speech should begin with a definition followed by every part organized in logical relationships. Discussions in the field mainly focus on the analogy which compares the structure of a speech to a living creature (264c–d). This also brings our attention back to Socrates’s palinode describing the incarnation of the souls that “a soul that never saw the truth cannot take a human shape, since a human being must understand speech in terms of general forms, proceeding to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity” (249c). It is acknowledged that the organization of different parts relies on logical relations.

Then, one may ask, is it possible to fulfill these three requirements in practice? Could true rhetoric be attained in one’s speech? Traditionally, Socrates’s palinode is argued as an exemplar of true rhetoric. The claim is attractive and beneficial as it further solves the dilemma that the dialogue is loosely structured. This paper holds the idea that even the so-called highest form of human discourse could not fulfill those preconditions. The text of the *Phaedrus*, though as an exemplary practice of rhetoric of consummate skill, cannot fully comply with the three principles of true rhetoric that Plato set for himself. Therefore, it is impossible to bring “true rhetoric” to fruition. Actually, several scholars have also given a negative answer. For example, the acquisition of precise knowledge of the subject matter is argued by J.C. Koritansky as “nothing less than the comprehensive wisdom for which the philosopher searches unendingly” (47). Moreover, when talking about whether a theoretical construct of a true art could fit the claim of rhetoric, Oscar Brownstein does mention that it is impossible to meet the requirement that the speaker should have absolute knowledge of his subject matter, such as justice or good. This is a requirement for absolute knowledge of everything. He further shows that the knowledge of the soul involves the problem of gathering and speaking to a large group of souls whose possibility Plato had never mentioned (397). In this regard, Daniel Werner, taking a step further,

claims that, if knowledge of the complete truth of one's subject matter constitutes the first precondition of true rhetoric, "no potential orator can offer a fully 'artful' or 'scientific' (τέχνη) speech on such subjects" as we conspicuously lack complete knowledge of the Forms and the souls (35).

Yet, despite their claims, they still believe, to some degree, that dialectic as logical thinking is the best approximation of a true rhetoric. Though it is impossible to reach pure rationality, logical thinking is highly valued while analogies, metaphors, the manipulation of similarities, and the Platonic myth are deemed as deviations from the realization of true rhetoric and, hence, of the philosophy itself. Those interpretations are still deep-rooted in the logical arguments of the Western traditions. Whether they can be achieved or not, such principles are exclusively considered as qualified of guiding philosophical thinking and argumentations or of providing a criterion for their evaluation. What true rhetoric aims at is always an abstract, unambiguous, and universal expression as well as an ideal *techne* to follow despite the possibility of not realizing it. The unfulfillment of this ideal is either because the philosopher does it deliberately as a *techne* of the rhetoric of winning a soul or because he only stays in a provisional stage of expression due to "incarnation." He does this only due to the lack of choice instead of a willing acknowledgment that figurative language, typically correlative language with metaphors and analogies involved, is of the same value with rational mode of expressions in philosophical pursuit. This paper proposes that those principles direct philosophy to the deprivation of non-rational mental faculty, which will meet its own logical endpoint with their emphasis on logical examination as well as the setting of truth as value judgment. Two aspects are worth highlighting.

The three principles, formulated either by Plato or those interpreters who perceive them as ideal for philosophical argumentation, only impart the feeling that their validity is totally objective, free from value judgments of individual subjectivity. Therefore, the philosophical tendency to rely on logical thinking is not incidental. As Frogel Shai mentioned in his *The Rhetoric of Philosophy*, “the philosopher who desires to clear his thoughts, ensure they are not grounded in personal and arbitrary preferences, regards logical elaboration as a means of texting them that is independent of common opinions” (87). Such desire is most obviously presented in Plato’s aspiration for definition, which joins in the larger picture of the Western tradition. It is no exaggeration to say that the quest for definition is one of the most enduring projects of the Western philosophical thought. Conceptual precision becomes a goal to avoid both vagueness and subjectivity. This, according to Owen, is “the hope to stabilize meanings and thereby control words” (*Chinese Literary Thought* 5). Owen further describes it as a “pleasant illusion” that a precise technical vocabulary exists (5–6). In the *Phaedrus*, the three principles turn out to be more than a control of words and also of the text and its audience. A good rhetorician is not only required to have true knowledge of the different types of souls but also the skill to re-organize parts of his speech into a unit accordingly. This affects how the relationship between an orator and a speech will be understood. One immense consequence is that, if we take a speech to be a philosophical piece, a text made for true rhetoric, it should be deprived of its maker’s will. It is more like a full control of the words, the souls, and the text in the name of truth. It is through this deprivation of individual will that the three formulations are designed to qualify themselves as a unified criterion of human thought. They tend to suppress and rule out any non-rational elements that might impair their own authority.

Truth becomes a value judgment of not only good and bad rhetoric but also of binary oppositions in general. It has been agreed that truth gives a normative account of rhetoric which, according to Plato, happens to all practices of speaking on opposite sides. If truth prescribes what rhetoric ought to be and a good speech preconditions the knowledge of the truth, true rhetoric then becomes an “art of controlling” of both the language and audience, making it self-evident for them to make the “right” choice in binary oppositions. Chapter One of this paper discussed that correlative pair always embodied value judgments to serve a specific purpose or desire so that what to expect and approve became self-evident. In this regard, two aspects are worth noticing. First, this truth as value judgment carries with it the moral overtones for it is expected to solve the ethical dilemma brought out by rhetoric deception. Regarding social stability, it functions in both a positive and negative aspect: “Positively, it promises, down the road, a standard of common assent that can ground common values and practices. Negatively, it suggests the necessity of a certain tolerant circumspection in the treatment of those who do not share our present truths” (Hall and Ames, *Thinking from Han* 107). Second, it implies a significant stratification between truth and rhetoric. Truth should be ontologically higher than the rhetoric to be out of reach of its danger. It functions as transcendental authorities to which great importance has been given by Western philosophers tacitly and explicitly. A good rhetoric is, therefore, the rhetoric arguing that “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” Hence, the pursuit of truth becomes a universal assumption in justifying all cultural forms. Hall and Ames perceive this concern for truth as a worry about saying something that is, that it is. Such a worry requires, in the background, some theory of truth (106). The transcendency and universality of the truth, however, hold one dilemma for Plato. No philosopher, not even himself, could speak of truth no matter how good the speech is. By apparently adopting a different methodology, Werner, in his

Rhetoric and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus, draws a similar conclusion that “true rhetoric” is akin to a regulative ideal, something that can never be fully instantiated in practice (22). And true knowledge rests beyond language in the domain that can only be labelled as figurative. Therefore, non-rational elements inevitably imply something, if there is this something, beyond language. What is typical in the *Phaedrus* is the use of analogs, metaphor, and myth.

Metaphors and Chain of Binaries in the *Phaedrus*

The rest of this chapter will go back to Socrates's second speech and his palinode in an endeavor to show that he employs all the necessary ways of argumentation. Those include logical analyses for the revealing of contradictions and correlative thinking, specifically metaphors, analogies, and chains of binaries. Philosophical arguments appeal to both forms of thinking and are intended to convince (persuade or deceive). Accordingly, the question is not how rhetoric could be restricted to qualify itself in the philosophical argument. It is instead, as Shai argued “conviction *per se* is not a reprehensible objective; on the contrary, it is the denial of conviction as an argument's objective that may lead to extremely problematic results from a philosophical point of view – to fraud and self-deception” (41).

Traditionally, a classicist assumes that metaphorical discourse is only a linguistic ornament. If possible, metaphors and analogies should be reduced to a literal statement. Instead of revealing the truth, they are perceived as capable of hiding it. Yet, in the *Laozi*, a metaphor is believed to be more authentic than any other language form for it always arouses lived experiences of the world. The implication of a metaphor is vague and should be understood on multiple levels without a definite answer. This allows for a correlative operation, which generates an expanding web of correlativity. Therefore, a text might be loose in structure but still be contextually coherent, much like the situation we have in the *Phaedrus*. Nearly every scholar

wonders how the *Phaedrus* hangs together. There are too many subjects in the dialogue whose themes are drawn to and from different directions. Several seemingly uncooperative elements are organized into one line of argument in some adumbrated sense. What is even “worse” for some critics is that the *Phaedrus*, when compared with Plato’s other dialogues about particular concepts, presents obvious discrepancies which might invalidate implications of his own philosophical practice. The paradox of writing, which is claimed as an unfaithful medium to discuss philosophy in the written text of the *Phaedrus*, has been discussed throughout. Another discrepancy that is worth noticing is Plato’s literary emphasis on the organic unity for each discourse even though the narration of *Phaedrus* flows among diverse subject matters and is conspicuously loose in structure. Yet, there are always attempts to prove that the *Phaedrus* is not only highly focused on one specific theme but also more logically coherent than how it appears at first glance. For example, in *The Habitation of Words*, William Gass states that the *Phaedrus* is “fundamentally concerned with the local habitation of the name ... it goes about its business by providing us with a classification, by means of model and example, of the various residence of word, at all times seeking the best address” (85). The same goes for Ronna Burger who even claims, in her *A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing*, that “[t]he clues to the theme that determines the underlying unity of the *Phaedrus* lie in the *muthoi* that simultaneously connect and separate the diverse parts of the conversation, marking the divisions between the speeches on *erōs*, the discussion on rhetoric and dialectics, and the analysis of writing” (4). Their efforts to re-organize those “diverse parts” in the dialogue show a strong intention to safeguard the intellectual vitality of the *Phaedrus* and the Platonic dialogue as the prototype of philosophical argumentation and dialectic.

Yet, from a correlative perspective, a lack of logical connection demonstrated in the *Phaedrus* should not be considered as an impairment for philosophical argumentation. The situation is similar to that in the *Laozi*, whose textual coherence depends on the equivocalness of metaphors and analogical relevance. We shall reflect on some productive metaphors of the truth in the dialogue. They may not appear as powerful as those images of *dao* in the *Laozi*. But to some degree, the theoretical enterprise of the *Phaedrus* is constructed on and could be traced with those metaphorical terms. The indeterminate dimension of a metaphor allows for correlative operation, which in the *Phaedrus* is typically presented as chains of binaries. Research in the field has mainly focused on individual binaries and the relations between the two terms, either from a canonical or deconstructive perspective. Until now, no effort has been put on the parallel organization of multiple binary oppositions in the text. In chapter One, we analyzed that the structure of chains of binaries do not follow a cause-effect formation. One pair of binary progresses to another through correlativity. Or in other words, the two pairs share analogical characteristics in some adumbrated sense. The following paragraphs argue that metaphors and correlativity grant the *Phaedrus* more coherence and textual openness.

The following argument will begin with the metaphorical expression of truth, which, without doubt, goes against Socrates's claim to begin the speech with a precise definition. There is a great discrepancy between the theoretical attitude toward metaphor and how metaphor is practically adopted in the Greek philosophical traditions. Practically, metaphors are used almost everywhere in diverse forms. As Lloyd mentioned, Aristotle criticized his predecessors' use of metaphorical language in providing definitions (21). Theoretically, every metaphorical language is obscure and should be deprived of philosophical argumentation. In *Comparative Essays in Early Greek and Chinese Rational Thinking*, Jean-Paul Reding notices that this condemnation of

metaphorical language should not be explained solely by the desire to obtain pure and abstract knowledge. Its invalidity in philosophical argumentation could also be attributed to the fact that “there is no way to ascertain whether everybody attaches the same meaning to a proposed metaphor” (131). One important implication is that conventional metaphors could be adopted without potential danger since their meaning is signified through hermeneutical consensus. This reminds us of the mirror Rorty refers to as an optical metaphor, which has dominated the whole history of Western metaphysics. However, metaphorical expressions in ancient Greece are not only available in large quantity but also highly creative and individualistic. Plato’s *Phaedrus* is no exception. One would rather say that, in the dialogue, truth is mainly expressed through different metaphorical usages since a proper definition for it is lacking. This use of metaphor is ironically dualistic as, on the one hand, it functions through the figurative expressions, showing that truth should stay beyond the bodily sensorium and language using, while on the other, the understanding of images relies largely upon individual experience. Meanwhile, there are reasons to believe that it is impossible to reach a consensus on the meaning of truth. If there is truth, it is always equivocal.

At the beginning of Socrates’s palinode, when talking about manic, truth is carried in the image of the prophet: “We will not mention the Sybil or the others who foretell many things by means of god-inspired prophetic trances and give sound guidance to many people” (244b). In general, the prophet is one whose word is true. A prophet becomes so by being possessed by god or, in Plato’s word, mania. It is a direct revelation of divinity. Since love is manic, it is naturally associated with the truth. When talking about something unknown, there is efficacy in the prophet, which corresponds with reality and the nature of things. This leads to another tier of binary opposition between reality and language, or to use the words of Hall and Ames, “there is a

way things are, and a way things are presented. The conformity of the two is truth” (*Thinking from Han*, 109). The issue of truth, hence, develops to, on the one hand, the theory of saving and revealing the unchanged essence in the flowing experience of all phenomena and, on the other, the authority of reason that leads to the conviction that our bodily experience is always misleading. Reflections on truth further strengthen the distinction between reality and appearance, and therefore, make such stratification the perpetuation. One would, therefore, find that a chain of binaries has been institutionalized where the “upper” line follows the reality while the “lower” line follows the appearance. This is the case between good and bad rhetoric, the art and craft, the god and human, the knowledge and opinion, etc. And there is more. The *Phaedrus* is concerned with a diversity of topics including also love, *erōs*, afterlife, soul, writing, etc. Scholars, in recent years, tend to believe that those elements form an organic whole. This is partly true since the three speeches play a special role in the whole dialogue, especially considering how those speeches provides materials for the methodology introduced in the second half. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the dialogue is logically coherent because even Socrates’s palinode could not comply with the rules established by himself. Moreover, the dialogue does not proceed “to bring many perceptions together into a reasoned unity” as was Socrates’s expectation (249c) as non-rational elements fill in the gaps of logic lacking typical analogs.

The most thematic analogues in the exegetical center of the *Phaedrus* are love and rhetoric, with each taking turns to be the primary subject of the dialogue. As Michael A. Griffith mentioned in his *Left-Hand Horse, Winged Souls*, “Plato consistently links the trappings of rhetoric with the suspicious pleasures of sex as twin enemies of (and temptations from) wisdom” (32). Sex is like figurative language—full of emotive and explanatory power. It is seductive, tempting both the rhetorician and philosopher. Poetry or bad rhetoric is the surrender to its lust.

In the image of the chariot as a metaphor of the soul, this tier is the black horse on the left, which is not only ugly in appearance but also a “companion to wild boasts and indecency” (253e). Whereas, the *erōs*, in its intense experience, is portrayed as the pursuit of knowledge, triggered and driven by the sight of beauty, i.e., the sight of real beauty and the parallel sight of the beauty of the beloved (251a–251b). Its purest form is identified as philosophy with a chaste and orderly life. Also, in the image of the chariot, this tier is the white horse on the right, “a lover of honor with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory” (253e).

A long chain of binaries, centered around the analog of love and rhetoric, is established through the whole dialogue. In fact, in the *Phaedrus*, one would be surprised by how many dialectical opposites Plato connects and brings together. There is the line of appearance in the lower-status, contrasting with the line of reality in the higher-status: appearance/reality, human/god, earthly language/divine language, incarnation/dearnation, body/soul, bad rhetoric/good rhetoric, craft/art, rhetoric/dialectics, poetry/philosophy, first speech/third speech, sophist/philosopher, opinion/knowledge, writing/speech, forgetfulness/remembrance, metaphorical language/logical language, seducer/true lover, sex/*erōs*, physical lover/mental lover, desire/self-control, dark horse/white horse, left/right, etc. A diversity of elements is juxtaposed against their opposites to institutionalize their distinctions in this construction of a chain of binaries to illustrate a process of polarization. The line of higher-status constantly indicates a process of elevation with the destination to the truth: a higher conception of love, a kind of more philosophical life, a more reasoned argumentation, and an artful skill of rhetoric. For Plato, it was wise to prevent the higher line from the “infection” of the lower line:

By their nature wings have the power to lift up heavy things and raise them aloft where the gods all dwell, and so, more than anything that pertains to the body, they are akin to

the divine, which has beauty, wisdom, goodness, and everything of that sort. These nourish the soul's wings, which grow best in their presence; but foulness and ugliness make the wings shrink and disappear. (246e)

“Everything of that sort” is a very vague expression. Plato seems to suggest that it is self-evident to distinguish what sort of words should be akin to the divine. However, he, on the contrary, makes quite an effort to explicate a divine love, which, after all, cannot break away from its mortal form without ceasing to be itself. Love is a realm halfway between desire and wisdom and sense and intelligence. And the reason is not only limited in the domain of sensory desire but also in the domain of knowledge, since it is our direct experience of flowing phenomena that generates rational thinking and yet continually struggles against it. Therefore, in the *Phaedrus*, a chain of binaries is constructed to formulate the complexity of our experience. Distinctions are made habitual by terms associated with what one expects as the standard of good and bad. The good/desired chain is the wings, bringing souls to the vault of heaven, while the bad/detested chain is the heaviness of the body, dragging oneself down to the state of corruption. As it has been argued in the *Laozi*, this layout of parallels does not follow any rational form. Instead of logical formation, those similar terms in one line proceed through their correlation with the whole chain in an adumbrated sense. Each pair of binary oppositions constitutes an intrinsic echo with the whole thematic chain of binaries, and the efficacy of each pair is continually reinforced through correlativity instead of logic. The chain is always incomplete and extendable, suggesting a logical deficiency and instability of the structure.

Consequently, one inconsistent fact in the *Phaedrus* is that it is impossible for a definition to constitute a precise or autonomous container of meaning despite Socrates's efforts on the issue. For example, the meaning of love is constantly re-defined as part of a mutually

defining system in the thematic chain of binaries. The situation is much like Owen's interpretation of literary terms in the text, that "each term has a degree of latitude for variation and the possibility of idiosyncratic redefinition" (*Chinese Literary Thought* 5).

Another important metaphorical expression of truth could be understood in the final myth of Theuth and Thamous. It has been discussed that truth is carried in the prophet whose word possesses an efficacy, which Socrates hints at concerning the presence of the traditional mythology scattered in the *Phaedrus*. They are also the product of Platonic "fiction." Interestingly enough, the latter category is the most renowned one and has greatly enriched Plato's philosophical language. Those include the great myth of the winged chariot, the beautiful journey of the soul, and the final myth of Theuth and Thamous. The credibility of these myths, according to Socrates, relies on exceptional divine inspiration, despite their nature as a literary creation like poetry: "The place beyond heaven – none of our earthly poets has ever sung or ever will sing its praises enough! Still, this is the way it is – risky as it may be, you see, I must attempt to speak the truth, especially since the truth is my subject." (247c–d)

Socrates then provided a vivid description of the vault of heaven, a place "without color and without shape and without solidity, a being that really is what it is, the subject of all true knowledge" (247d). Such a vision is achieved through philosophical meditation, the process of recollection of the journey of the soul by refusing sensory experience.

The myth of Theuth and Thamous is, however, quite different. Instead of being a recollection of the things divine, Socrates himself acknowledged that it was more like literary fiction. Shortly after Socrates completed his tale, Phaedrus replied with gentle mockery at Socrates's great imagination: "Socrates. You're very good at making up stories from Egypt or wherever else you want!" (275b). Phaedrus's suspicions are understandable considering that

myths are only adopted divinely throughout the dialogue. Socrates's reply is interestingly worth noticing:

Everyone who lived at that time, not being as wise as you young ones are today, found it rewarding enough in their simplicity to listen to an oak or even a stone, so long as it was telling the truth, while it seems to make a difference to you, Phaedrus, who is speaking and where he comes from. Why, though, don't you just consider whether what he says is right or wrong? (275d)

Both the two citations involve the issue of truthfulness in two opposite manners. Phaedrus is fully aware that the myth of Theuth and Thamous is a literary fiction without credible origin, namely the traditional mythology or consecrated prophecies. Socrates argues that so long as the truth is told, its origins should make no difference. This is quite an impious comment that sharply contrasts with Socrates's previous attitude in the *Phaedrus*. Words from an oak might be the truth, provided that it speaks truthfully. Then, one might ask accordingly, could a piece of divine speech (or even a prophet) states falsehoods? How can one make sense of reality, given that a made-up story tells the truth? Could it be possible that reality and appearance are simply two facets of one matter as the origins of truth should not make a difference and, therefore, truth can dwell anywhere?

This chapter would prefer to keep the answers as ambiguous as they are. It is, to some degree, quite a reasonable irony to know the fact that the metaphorical expressions can also embrace the truth and stay relevant to the philosophical argument. One might say that what makes the *Phaedrus* so attractive is just this kind of tension between the desire for precise definition and logical principle on the one hand, and the inevitable yet skilled manipulation of non-rational elements on the other.

Taking the correlative pairs in the *Laozi* as a contrast, we have been trying to get at an alternative reading to Plato's *Phaedrus*. One purpose is to reflect on the traditional methodology of philosophical argumentation. It attempts to deconstruct Plato's notion of "true rhetoric" and hence philosophy, arguing that philosophical discussion, as expressed in Socrates's speeches, is one that embraces all forms of approaches, whether they belong to rational or analogical language. This is achieved through illustrating a tension between logic and non-rational elements in the text, so that the precision, objective, pure logic, universal principles, or a unified understanding of the truth are only illusions—the dead-end for philosophy itself. The use of reason, as it has been argued, poses the danger of manipulation, which will always generate suspicions whenever non-rational elements of philosophical discussions are proposed. Typically, correlative thinking and metaphorical expressions are not only evitable but also of the same value with logical analysis. This chapter could also be considered as a proposal for a pluralistic argumentative method to a philosophical pursuit.

Chapter Three: Leading to A Correlative Perspective

“Real philosophy” is largely an Anglo-European enterprise. In the past, the sinological inquiry of Chinese philosophy always indicated an awareness of cultural hegemony, the legacy of European colonialism, and Christian missionary sensibilities. In the early twentieth century, Chinese philosophy confronted the dilemma of academic legitimacy, which led to the selective reformation of our thoughts and traditions to meet the standards of Western academia. What had been perceived as superstition or “pre-logical” argumentation has been denied, adapted to a theoretical system constructed on the logic of intellectual history. There are a series of hallmark events in the development of this Chinese philosophy. In 1885, the Japanese scholar Nishi Amane translated “Philosophy” to “哲學” (Ch. *zhexue*, Jap. *tetsugaku*), which was then introduced to China. In 1914, “The Gateway to Chinese Philosophy” (*zhongguo zhexuemen* 中國哲學門) was set up in Peking University. It was soon changed to the Department of Philosophy, representing the formal establishment of Philosophy as an independent discipline in China in 1919. The same year, Hu Shih published the *History of Chinese Philosophy*, which was renowned as the cornerstone in the field. In 1934, Feng Youlan’s *A History of Chinese Philosophy* finally accomplished the systematization of this discipline. That is to say, the so-called “Chinese Philosophy” and its history and journey spans one hundred years. Just as other disciplines in modern China, such as sociology or psychology, Chinese philosophy is a modern enterprise. It is a result of philosophizing the Chinese canons with Western conceptions and categorizations. And this “Chinese philosophy,” like the pervasive fortune cookie, is constructed through “traditions” only resulting from the encounter of China with the West. It is not until the beginning of the Twenty-First century that the issue of “legitimacy of Chinese philosophy” finally broke into the academic reflection in a large scale. We began to ask, can the traditional

Western philosophy, originating from ancient Greece, be the universal criteria of human culture and knowledge as a whole?

Such a movement was launched on a presupposed distinction between “Chinese philosophy” and “philosophy in China.” And one may conclude that the mainstream philosophy in China continues to be Anglo-European philosophy. The significance of this distinction rests on constructing an alternative platform on which “Chinese philosophy” could be properly acknowledged and explained, without the unannounced Western self-understanding of being “logical-rational-enlightened” (Ames, *Getting Rid of God* 26). In contemporary China, a critique of traditional Western ontology has been adopted increasingly to open a space for further development and reflection on Chinese Classics such as the *Laozi* or *Book of Changes*. If, finally, the context for intercultural conversation is made possible, it is reasonable to presume the existence of another culture, which as Derrida put, provides “the testimony of a powerful movement of civilization developing outside of all logocentrism,” so that there is no need for the language of that culture to overcome the logocentrism grounded in the ontological binary of “presence” and “absence” (*Of Grammatology* 90). Reflections on the Chinese classics from a correlative perspective echoes today’s revolution of criticizing ontology and rationality, especially from the perspective of language theorization. It is reasonable to believe that such a revaluation would constitute a possible assault upon the dominance of rational thinking and intellectual faith in progress. This is hardly a controversial claim considering the consistent efforts devoted by poststructuralists who have inherited insights and determination from Friedrich Nietzsche in his critique on the Enlightenment which argues that the “evolution” from obscurantism to rationalism or from proto-scientific to causal thinking marks the process of civilization in all cultural forms. Michel Foucault’s “death of man” is one important aspect of the

attack, arguing that the development of these “scientific” doctrines has been largely accidental and arbitrary; therefore, the notion of “man” is a kind of institutionally elaborated fiction. Derrida chooses another path, focusing on the deconstruction of the metaphysics of phonetic writing, that is, the Western alphabet as transcription of a living voice. According to him, it is “nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world, controlling in one and the same order” (*Of Grammatology* 3). The correlative thought of early China, being classified into the primitive mode of thinking, is largely a victim of this kind of ethnocentrism.

The present paper holds the belief that recovering the cultural value of correlative language could contribute to a breakthrough from the siege of this ethnocentrism. It begins with one question, what can we expect from the Chinese language? A question such as this is inherently cross-cultural, whose answers involve a careful reflection of comparative methodologies. It requires an effort to overcome oversimplification, incautious assimilations, and excessively stark contrasts that block the way to interaction and mutual understanding between the Chinese and Western traditions. Instead of an anthropological approach, which presupposes a unified expression to present the human culture, the first two chapters of this paper was devoted to recover the correlative thinking in the *Laozi* and reassess it in a comparative context—a correlative reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Through illustrating the tension between logic and non-rational elements in the text, it arrived at the dilemma of the “true rhetoric,” claiming that philosophical argumentation embraces all forms of approaches, whether they belong to rational or analogical language.

The last chapter, continuing in a comparative context, will turn to examine correlative thinking in general. Still taking the *Laozi* as an example, it will probe into the possibilities of

undertaking a correlative reading. This chapter will begin with a comparative analysis of the cosmogonic tradition between Platonism and Laoism. It is believed that our perception of the cosmos either shapes or is being shaped by the way a culture comes to conceive of things and their order. Based on this, the following parts will explore the “rhetorical habits” in the *Laozi* from a correlative perspective. In Anglo-European traditions, rhetoric as *techne*, though highly suspected, is adopted as a control of words, texts, and audience, while correlative thinking, as a prominent ingredient in Chinese philosophy, respects different “rhetorical habits”. The following argument will proceed in three aspects in contrast with the three criteria that Socrates proposed for an ideal logical analysis. These three aspects include the image of *dao*, the purpose of arguments, and an evolving coherence of the text. The final part will prove that the rational perspective will leave us no choice but to find the correlative thinking to be a “prelogical” stage of thinking, which should be surpassed. Hence, it argues for the necessity and benefit to build up a correlative perspective. Our analysis of the *Phaedrus* has demonstrated that a correlative reading allows us to acknowledge the tension and interdependence of the two modes of thinking. Moreover, as a form of discourse, correlative thinking operates in its own effective way of argumentation, which is wholly capable in defending itself.

Demiurge and dao

Issues with definitions and images begin with one question: What makes a thing what it is? Or in other words, what stabilizes the names and categories of things? As a response, Owen in *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* argues that “in the created world the power to define and give meaning lies in the act of creation ... But in the uncreated world, an entity is defined by its differentiation from a series of correlatives and counterparts; likewise, a

totality is the combination of two essential parts” (84–85). This chapter will follow Owen’s proposal and shift a little back to the story of origin.

Plato’s creation story is best presented in the *Timaeus*, that demiurge created an organized, intelligent world which also displayed beauty, proportion, and order in its soul. This demiurge is described as a craftsman and his handiwork, the ordered universe (*kosmos*), is the product of rational agency, the representation of the unchanging and eternal model. The significance of a created universe rests on the acknowledgment that “now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created” (28a). A culture grounded in the faith of cosmogony presumes that a created cosmos could be known and understood through intelligence and rationality. Therefore, for Plato, the order of the universe is very important that it should be guaranteed by the state laws. In Plato’s *Laws X*, those who claim that the world is “devoid of order” commit the crime of impiety, which deserves confinement or even death without burial (908e–909b). It should be undoubted that the world is created by God’s desire that all good things should be good. The process of creation is also described as bringing order upon the disorder: “Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other” (*Timaeus* 30a). Reasons control such a process through words: “it [this ordered world] is the offspring of a union of Necessity and intellect. Intellect prevailed over Necessity by persuading it to direct most of the things that come to be toward what is best, and the result of this subjugation of Necessity to wise persuasion was the initial formation of this universe” (48a). The *Genesis* myth demonstrates the same situation—that light is created and distinguished from the darkness by an order or a command. There are three important implications in those creation stories.

1) The procedures to define things and to stabilize names are modeled with this process of world creation or vice versa. In any case, it is the rational agency of words through persuasion that reduces the threat of chaotic disorder. To construe or uncover order is to make distinction out of “good” will. An ordered world is then created, named, differentiated, and finally categorized. Similarly, at the very beginning of the speech, a precise definition of the subject matter is required, so that the propositional forms could be regulated as unambiguous and univocal meaning and the whole discourse would, hence, be logical and well-organized. Consequently, the analytical language must be superior to metaphorical language. And one may say, Socrates’s interest for definition opens the tradition of causal thinking.

2) The procedure to give a speech and to persuade its audience is also modeled with this process of world creation or vice versa. It has been argued that a philosopher is required to “create” his speech into a reasoned unity in goodwill. He claims the qualification of control over his language—a “created” text. Such a text then becomes the object of its creator’s will. It is through pursuing the goodness and leading the soul to the right side that one sees the truth. Therefore, a philosopher is a craftsman of his speech. He brings order to his words whose efficacy rests on persuading the intellect.

3) Through bringing order to disorder, a series of dualistic entities are created, bearing “reality” with them. As the demiurge created the order, he made them quite independently. They are antagonistic bipolar opposites. Their relationship generally expresses dominance, superiority, or normative desirability of the “good” entity “prevailing over” the other, such as chaos/order, rational/non-rational, good/evil, and just/unjust. It is through making distinctions that the fundamental meaning and order of

the world are determined. Therefore, a philosopher could finally reach the form of the good, since the “idea of the good” is the cause of the creation of the world and things.

One would, therefore, find out that, in Platonic traditions, there are important analogical relations between creating the world, defining a word, and giving a speech. Consequently, the world, a definition or a piece of text, becomes, or attempts to become, an objective entity. The purpose of argumentation is to exclude “the other” from the goodness so that, at the end of the arguments, truth or the form of the good is discoverable.

In contrast, suppose the world began differently. Then how could an “uncreated” world reflect the correlative understanding of things? In general, forms of narrative as cosmogonic myths in classical China are not central to the Chinese literary civilization as they are from the West. Similarly, there is no intention to define terms, to make distinctions, and to search for truth or the idea of the good. One may say, concerning the understanding of the origin as well as the world, there is a dramatic contrast between Laoist cosmology and that of ancient Greece:

The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three;
three begets the myriad creatures.

The myriad creatures carry on their backs the yin and
embrace in their arms the yang and are the blending of the
generative forces of the two. (*Laozi* 42, *Lau* 49)

「道」生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以爲和。

The world is constituted by ten thousand things whose origins simply happened. A world is “self-so-ing” (*ziran* 自然), something that spontaneously arose without any transcendent will or imposing principles. The things, therefore, require no external order to account for it. By

attributing the ancestral worship to a religious base with divine afflatus, Schwartz demonstrated with credibility that the dominant metaphor embodied in the Chinese accounts of the origins of mankind or of the cosmos was that of procreation or “giving birth” (*sheng* 生) rather than that of fashioning or creating (26). This is rather convincing considering that an impregnated mother is an important image of *dao*. In this regard, this chapter could be literally translated as “*dao* give birth to one; one to two, two to three.” *Dao* is not a superior objectivity but the process of the world, which is experienced through ten thousand things. It participates in the world’s “self-so-ing,” a fetal beginning associated with genealogical implications. Therefore, *dao* embodies both continuity and proliferation and ten thousand things are spontaneously dividing themselves. Correlations are formed as self-transformed correlatives and counterparts, such as *yin* and *yang* and female and male. There are also two important implications.

1) Linguistic distinctions are deconstructive. They are only products of a manipulative intention. As demonstrated earlier, there is a continuity between the two terms in a correlative pair. The relations in between might be complementary or antithetical, but each term cannot be independent and univocal. Taking one step further, the prevalence of correlative terms is unquestioned within the Chinese traditions, whether they are things or concepts. In the physical world, as Owen indicated, “a totality is the combination of two essential parts” (85). Thus, we have “*cao-mu*” 草木 meaning “vegetative life”; “brothers” disposing itself into “elder” and “younger,” (*xiong-di* 兄弟); “animals” represented in “birds-and-beasts” (*niao-shou* 鳥獸), which corresponds with “flyers-and-runners” (*fei-zou* 飛走). The conceptual world is no exception, with two opposite terms forming a totality. There are *yin/yang* 阴阳, heaven/human (*tian-ren* 天人), knowing/doing (*zhi-*

xing 知行), fullness/empties (*shi-xu* 實虛), body/heart-mind (*shen-xin* 身心), even as the *Laozi* would argue, something/nothing (*you-wu* 有無), high/low (*gao-xia* 高下), long/short (*chang-duan* 長短), and so on. Though being differentiated, terms are comprehended in their combinations of counterparts. Those terms constitute a vocabulary, ensuring correlations among them and a vision of things.

2) Things are understood in their correlation with other things. It may be more appropriate to perceive them as both a process and an event, or as Owen has claimed, “no entity in the uncreated world has existence or identity apart from certain essential relations to other things. Those relations are the primary means by which a thing can be known, defined, or spoken of” (*Poetry and Poetics* 85). In this regard, to “know” a thing is to experience its appropriate place and correlations, more like a kind of resonance. Therefore, there is no objective perspective. Things can be viewed in several different ways since their proliferation is constitutive and continuous with each other. Ames described it in three aspects: “In their flux and flow they are ‘passing (*shi* 逝)’, in their proliferation into distinct and unique particulars they are ‘distancing (*yuan* 遠)’, and in their radical contextuality and continuity with other things they are ‘returning (*fan* 反)’” (*Dao De Jing* 281). In fact, to experience things in their correlations means that time becomes a fundamental aspect of them. Time and things are mutually dependent, and things are understood as events.

We will discuss how this correlative understanding of things could lead to different “rhetorical habits” in the text and arguments, especially in the Daoist traditions.

“Rhetorical Habits” in the *Laozi*

First and foremost, notice that the word “rhetoric” here is adopted only to be used in contrast with the *Phaedrus*’s rhetorical theory. Traditionally, the development of rhetorical theory is perceived as a decidedly European enterprise. Non-Western rhetoric is limitedly referred to, if not wholly ignored. Whether ancient Greece and Rome were the sole sites for rhetoric in antiquity is beyond the scope of this paper. By traditional Platonic standard, rhetoric in a Laoist sense is a vastly different enterprise. One would find no explicit definition or any rhetorical methodology. Moreover, persuasion, in general, is not an end for rhetoric, since a correlative view of the text and its readers is fundamentally different. Therefore, in this chapter, the expression “rhetoric habits” is used in a sense more closely related to a form of argumentation adopted by the Laoists. The purpose is two-fold. On the one hand, it bears the potential to challenge the questionable Eurocentric assumptions about culture and communication, while, on the other, it attempts to demonstrate a possible relation between the form of narrative and a correlative understanding of a pattern of nature. It is possible to explain correlative language as an independent rhetorical habit, demystifying those exotic natures perceived as prevailing in the Laoist traditions. We will proceed from three aspects in comparison with Plato’s dialectical approaches as discussed in chapter Two.

1. Images of Dao

If logical thought is manifested in rationality, correlative thinking is mainly characterized by the perception of the image. Concerning the role of the image, or the metaphor to some extent, scholars hold contradicting ideas on whether metaphorical expressions in the Chinese classics are

culturally distinct. For example, Vincent Shen, taking the religious-studies perspective, highlights the Chinese “Idea-Image” in contrast with the “pure ideas” in the West (11–13). Reding builds his argument upon the cognitive linguistic literature, which meant that metaphoric thinking is the agency of the general human cognition. He specifies his argument on light and mirror from the perspective of comparative metaphorology, claiming that there were many shared metaphors in both the two traditions, which, however, should not obscure their differences on the expressions of uniformity in the use of metaphors (130). A more “radical” position is held by Edward Slingerland, who believes that the dichotomy between the literal, logical West and the metaphorical, concrete China is but a false one, growing out of “a fundamentally mistaken conception of the nature of human cognition” (6). Constructing his arguments on the cognitive sciences, Slingerland insists that we should move beyond this dichotomy and view “*all* human language and cognition as, to a greater or lesser degree, imagistic” (7). Research of those scholars are significant in illustrating the metaphorical expressions between the two cultures, whether such expressions are fundamentally different or not. Yet, there are reasons to believe that their disagreements are a consequence of different starting points in perspectives. Even if, according to Slingerland, “[t]he very real and important difference between China and the West with regard to the official philosophical *attitude* toward metaphor” (6), this paper believes that such a difference in attitude is culturally based and warrants sufficient attention. If the understanding of a thing rests on the ability to perceive its correlations and counterparts, the image becomes a reliable expression to evoke holistic intuition while experiencing the characters of things. The prominence of the image in early Chinese thought has shaped its rhetoric habits and portrayed itself as a distinct mode of cultural discourse. Meanwhile, compared with a study of human cognition, a correlative reading would be more

relevant to dodge a prior assertion of “transcendental pretense” and to understand *dao* of the Laoist traditions in a less paradoxical dimension.

Concerning *dao* in the *Laozi*, why do deductions from logical structures provide only conflicting ontological assumptions? One may attribute the issue to a lack of well-established ontological grammar in pre-Qin philosophy. Or to give a more affirmative answer, *dao* should be understood in a correlative language with inferences from patterns of images as well as their correlations. If *dao* is such language failing, it does not mean that *dao* is a conceptual abstraction which can only be approached by a negative dialectic just like Derrida’s *différance*. Instead, it is a focus of experiential and emotional intuition evoked by its images in correlations. Previous research tended to interpret diverse metaphors of *dao* in separation. For example, the image of water is believed to be characterizing many features of *dao*. But how could water be associated with the image of the mother (*mu* 母) and valley (*gu* 谷)? What is the correlation between those images, and how do they provide us a focus to understand *dao*? Reflections on those questions will demonstrate that *dao* is the focusing of metaphorical expressions on spontaneously correlated aspects. One would also find that there is no simple one-to-one relationship between the idea and image. The images of *dao* are a continuously expanding web of significance.

We will attempt to exhaust the metaphorical implications of certain images in the *Laozi* to see the correlations between them. Take chapter 6 as an example.

The spirit of the valley never dies.

This is called the mysterious female

The gateway of the mysterious female

Is called the root of heaven and earth

Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there,

Yet use will never drain it.

(*Laozi* 6, Lau 10)

谷神不死，是謂玄牝。玄牝之門，是謂天地根。緜緜若存，用之不勤。

In this short sentence, three images capture the features of *dao*, namely, *gu* 谷, *pin* 牝 and *gen* 根.

- The image of the root (*gen* 根) is relatively direct. It is the part of a plant which absorbs water for growth and, therefore, understood as the beginning of something. It is also a metaphor for the origin of ancestral lineage in the Chinese families.

- The broad connotation of *gu* 谷 is, however, partially hidden in Lau's translation as "valley." It is appropriate to interpret *gu* 谷 as "valley," a low-lying path along which water travels. By being hollow, it becomes a conduit to guide water flowing down. Valley, in this sense, is the "way of water." Sarah Allan further indicates in *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* that "it (*dao*) is a general category in Chinese that encompasses waterways, roads, and various channels, all of those paths or 'ways' which one may go along, moving by water as well as on land." (67) Therefore, "a waterway may be joined by tributaries, it has a source and flows in one direction, moving ever downward until it eventually reaches the sea" (67). In this regard, *gu* 谷 together with other metaphors of watercourse such as *yuan* 淵, *chuan* 川, *xi* 谿 that are prevalent in the text of the *Laozi* are adopted and extended to the Laoist way of life and governing. Another important fact about *gu* 谷 in the Chinese classics is that it is interchangeable with *gu* 穀, an umbrella term for all food plants. *Gu* 穀 usually implies to live, produce, nourish, and benefit. The word is also mentioned in chapter 39 of the *Laozi*, referring

to the kings of pre-Qin humbly referring to themselves as *bugu* 不谷/穀 for highest respect. *Gu* 谷/穀 implies “goodness” (*shan* 善).

- The third image in chapter 6 of the *Laozi* is *pin* 牝. Literally, it means female horse, a typical image of being receptive, which can be traced all the way back to the opening judgment in the *Kun* Diagram (*kungua* 坤卦) in *The Book of Changes*.

THE RECEPTIVE brings about sublime success,

Furthering through the perseverance of a mare.

(*Book I, Kung*, Baynes 122)

元亨，利牝馬之貞。

Kun 坤 is the earth where plants grow. Its hexagram represents the dark, receptive primal power of *yin* 阴, with attributes of devotion, softness, and deference. Therefore, *pin* 牝 becomes a productive image of the female-maternal. Notice that meanings of “gateway” (*men* 门) include body orifice (*qiao* 窍). Hence, the “gateway of female” (*pinmen* 牝门) reminds us of the mysterious, moist, and accommodating interior of the vagina. The correlated images that are adopted as an appropriate analogy for such fertility also include “impregnated mother” (*mu* 母) and “female” (*ci* 慈). Notice that *pin* 牝 itself is also a metaphor of water in the *Laozi*, specifically the lower reaches of water’s downward flow:

A large state is the lower reaches of a river –

The place where all the streams of the world unite.

In the union of the world,

The female always gets the better of the male by stillness.

Being still, she takes the lower position.

(*Laozi* 61, Lau 68)

大邦者下流，天下之牝，天下之交也。牝常以静勝牡，以静爲下。

In short, the three images correlated with each other. The resonance between them strengthens our experiential intuition of *dao*. Here, in chapter 6, the resonance of the image finally arrives at the procreation of “giving birth” (*sheng* 生), the fertility that is dark, bottomless, and empty. *Gushen* 谷神 and *xuanpin* 玄牝 form a parallel couplet of intertextuality, representing a mysterious concavity either on the earth or the body. The reverberation between *gu* 谷 and *pin* 牝 is pervasive in the *Laozi*, including chapters 6, 28, 32, 39, and 61. She guides the life force to an “underneath.” Her softness and deference become the function of her capacity to reproduce and give birth. *Dao* is, therefore, the root (*gen* 根), the mother (*mu* 母) and the “gateway of female” (*pinmen* 牝门) of heaven and earth, the guiding way to maintain a productive relationship in the copulation of heaven and earth, male and female, and yang and yin. There is no definition or the operation of collection and division as in the Platonic traditions. Logic cannot tell us why emptiness gives birth to things or how a valley and a mare could be analogical to each other. In Chinese traditions, the image itself is a form of cognition. Connotations of images weave an expanded web of correlations whose focus depends on mutual resonance in the context. This reframing process of perception generates fresh interpretations, providing the possibility to break away from conventional recognition or behavior. If we go back to chapter 42, where “*dao* begets one” (道生一), the correlations of those images further reinforce our preconception about an initial beginning. And one, therefore, becomes more aware of the continuum of the reproductive and dynamic process of things and their transformation.

2. To Harmonize with Traditions

In the *Phaedrus*, the highest form of rhetoric is a kind of art whose efficacy rests upon an illustration of true knowledge. Rationality is identified and authorized with the discovery of goodness, truth, and logical finalities. The operation of rhetoric, whether in Socrates's sense or the Sophists', is to persuade. A created piece of speech should be able to impose a manipulation on its audience. It is then quite natural that Socrates would emphasize the knowledge of the soul. The famous analog in the *Phaedrus* is the soul of the charioteer. And the expression of the soul is pictured through the charioteer, who is the reason and self-regulation, attempting to bring the horses in line. The controlling metaphor is depicted as training a wild animal through orders. The heritage of such an explanation is one of conflict between the controller and the controlled and, therefore, between the soul and itself, reason and emotion, ordered and unordered. If these psychic conflicts are analogized to the rhetoric, especially to the topic of dialectical argument, they are expressed as a conflict of the right and wrong. A dialectical argumentation is a process to bring the audience into the right line. One may ask then, does this form of conflict also emerge in ancient China? How could the Laoists' understanding of the cosmos and things affect the purpose of arguments? What is the relation between a text and its audience?

The text of the *Laozi* is filled with images. Meaning is evoked through correlations instead of conceptualization. Images are "self-so-ing" at least on the aspect of language. They are presented as what they necessarily are, without differentiation, categorization, or interference. As for *dao*, since it includes all things, any use of words to express it would devalue its magnitude. Since one cannot see it, hear it, taste it, or feel it, the intention to name it shall be impossible. Much has been said about the Laoists' acknowledgment of the limitation of language. There was also the claim by Robert Oliver in his *The Rhetorical Implication of Taoism*, in 1961, that the

Laozi was above all a rhetorician whose attitude is anti-rhetorical (35). Ten years later, in his *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*, he demonstrated that the *Laozi* insisted on the futility of argument (236). Having argued for the equivocality of words and the continuum of the correlative pair in the *Laozi*, this paper finds that any one-sided claim might misleadingly simplify the *Laozi*.

In this respect, we will follow the explanation given by Hall and Ames that “in China, arguments are ultimately aimed at demonstrating conformity with the acknowledged excellences of traditions. Critical sorts of arguments aimed at demonstrating an opponent’s lack of such conformity” (*Anticipating China* 134). For the *Laozi*, it is wholly possible to claim that its arguments are, to some extent, “groundless.” No ontological foundation supports a dialectical analysis. The narrative is logically paradoxical. At the end of the argument, there is no objective knowledge or truth to be discovered. What acts as an alternative is a heart-mind resonance to the correlation of images, and, therefore, intuition and emotional reactions are necessary to respond to the text. Compared to judging a given proposition as true or false, it is of more importance for the Chinese to get close to the cultural model such as *shengren* 聖人 or *junzi* 君子 through self-cultivation. The argumentation of the *Laozi*, “unconventional” as it is, never intends to break away from the traditions in a truly radical manner. On the contrary, the *Laozi* only provides “the way” to harmonize with the traditions to optimize our experience with *dao*. It is expected that a Daoist sage is presented as a historical model, serving as a resource of productive proposals that benefits individual behavior, self-cultivation, and national governing. In chapter 54 of the *Laozi*, such personal cultivation is described as the root of man and the world. Its extensive influence nourished our ancestral lineage and broadened our understanding of the world.

What is firmly rooted cannot be pulled out;

What is tightly held in the arms will not slip loose;
Through this the offering of sacrifice by descendants

Will never come to an end.

Cultivate it in your person

And its virtue will be genuine;

Cultivate it in the family

And its virtue will be more than sufficient;

Cultivate it in the hamlet

And its virtue will endure;

Cultivate it in the state

And its virtue will abound;

Cultivate it in the empire

And its virtue will be pervasive.

Hence look at the person through the person; look at the family through the family; look at the hamlet through the hamlet; look at the state through the state; look at the empire through the empire.

How do I know that the empire is like that? By means of this. (*Laozi* 54, Lau 61)

善建者不拔，善抱者不脫，子孫以祭祀不輟。

修之於身，其德乃真；修之於家，其德乃餘；修之於鄉，其德乃長；修之於邦，其德乃豐；

修之於天下，其德乃普。

故以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以邦觀邦，以天下觀天下。吾何以知天下然哉？
以此。

In this regard, an argument in the *Laozi* would be more like an idea of suggestive value. As many Sinologists such as Donald Munro, Hansen, Hall, and Ames have argued that “in China an idea is a proposal for feeling and action. Thus, an idea is dispositional in the strict sense that it disposes individuals to implement it” (Hall and Ames, *Han Thinking* 138).

Adopting competence-based historical hermeneutics, Michael LaFargue’s research on the genre and coherence of the *Laozi* would support our explanation. An assumption he made to reconstruct the genre-related competence appropriate to the *Laozi* is that “if we think that a statement belongs to the genre ‘general theory,’ or ‘first principle,’ we understand it in a much different fashion than we would if we thought it belonged to the genre of poetry or proverb” (262). Notice that the word “poetry” is better understood as *shi* 詩 or songs such as those in the *Book of Songs* in the Chinese classics. This genre of poetry as a mode of intensified, rhythmic speech or song is widely acknowledged as fundamental to the Chinese classics. The approach to appreciating it might be inherently different from the philosophical meditation in the Platonic sense. It gives no objective knowledge but suggestions to benefiting one’s experience in a specific cultural context. LaFargue’s research further shows that two forms of discourse consist the text of the *Laozi*. First is the “polemic aphorisms” as compensatory wisdom, which is directed against some opposing human tendency that the Laoists mean to correct or compensate for, followed by the regimens for self-cultivation. Though having reservations about categorizing the *Laozi* into a specific genre, we believe that LaFargue’s insights opened an alternative space for us to reflect on the textual coherence of the *Laozi*.

3. Correlative Coherence of the Laozi

LaFargue proposed a different perspective to appreciate the coherence of the *Laozi*. For Plato, the ideal structure for a dialectical speech is to organize different parts into a reasoned unity logically. And the philosophy of the Anglo-European tradition is shaped by the cultural dominance of the *logos* style of argumentation. The analog between speech-composition and living creature is significant. It implies that each body part is at the command of one's mind to achieve a form of unity. A part is simply a piece of this greater whole and is structurally replaceable. Furthermore, different parts are arranged in a specific logical sequence, which means that the narrative of speech is linear and sequential. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates mocks Lysias's skill of composition by comparing his speech to the epigram inscribed on the tomb of Midas, the Phrygian, and said, "it makes no difference at all which of its verses comes first, and which last" (*Phaedrus* 264e). It should not be surprising that Western readers would find the *Laozi* as only disconnected, fragmentary, and distracted. However, what if the architecture of the text emerges from alternative directions? In this regard, a correlative perspective might turn out to be more appropriate.

Looking at chapter 6 of the *Laozi* as an example, it has been demonstrated how images correlated with each other. Images in the *Laozi*, like in many other Chinese classics, are better understood and appreciated paronomastically. Correlated images resonate with each other, which awakens in the reader an expanding web of semantic associations, repeatedly strengthening the focus and, thus, the inner coherence of the *Laozi*. Another feature that contributes to this correlative coherence is the form of parallel structures in the *Laozi*. What pervades the text of the *Laozi* is the varying degrees of partial parallelism, which could be seen as composing an

expanding form of correlative pairs, that is, corresponding words being arranged in a loose but correlative matching of “sense” (*yi* 意). In the *Laozi*, such “sense” is experienced as “reversing” (*fan* 反) and “returning” (*fan* 返) or, one would say, as deconstructive. A very typical example could be seen in chapter 45 of the *Laozi*.

Great perfection seems chipped,
Yet use will not wear it out;
Great fullness seems empty,
Yet use will not drain it;
Great straightness seems bent;
Great skill seems awkward;
Great eloquence seems tongue-tied. (*Laozi* 45, Lau 52)

大成若缺，其用不弊。

大盈若冲，其用不穷。

大直若屈，大巧若拙，大辩若讷。

This chapter is weaved with two basic formats:

- The formation of correlatives:

Positive: *cheng* 成/ *ying* 盈/ *zhi* 直/ *qiao* 巧/ *bian* 辩

Negative: *que* 缺/ *chong* 冲/ *qu* 屈/ *zhuo* 拙/ *ne* 讷

- The formation of counterparts:

Cheng 成/*que* 缺, *ying* 盈/*chong* 冲, *zhi* 直/*qu* 屈, *qiao* 巧/*zhuo* 拙, *bian* 辩/*ne* 讷

Parallel relations operate through the interplay of correlatives and counterparts of identity and difference. It allows for a continuum and complementary elements. What is fullness or emptiness or the skilled or the awkward? In this open system, there is no promise of certainty, only connections which need to be intuited.

In the *Laozi*, there is no definition, no objective knowledge, no persuasive communication, not even historical circumstances of any kind, nor universalistic doctrines that one should obey. It is through providing nothing definitive or universal that a noncoercive collaboration is achieved between the text and readers. To use LaFargue's words, "readers bring to their reading which implicitly shape the way they understand the words they read" (262). The text of the *Laozi* remained hermeneutically inexhaustible, continuously transcending the historicity of all its interpretations.

Anticipating Correlative Thinking

In conclusion, the final part of this paper will reflect on how the correlative version contributes something new to the literary theory, which proves itself to be a disparate critique from Derrida's deconstruction.

In general, deconstruction is an antithetical operation in terms of signs and logic. It is deeply rooted in the system of semiotics, that regulated connections of signs are established by the play of the words, marking their differences, undecidability and eternal interplay. This reminds us of the questions Derrida asks in *Plato's Pharmacy*: "And yet these links go on working by themselves. Despite him [Plato]? Thanks to him? In his text? Outside his text? But them where? Between his text and the linguistic system? For what reader? At what moment?"

(*Dissemination* 96). He further argues that it is impossible to answer such questions in principle and in general, because there is some malformation in the question itself. Therefore, deconstruction disrupts the faith in reason by revealing “the uncanny irrationality of texts and their ability to confute or subvert every system or position they are thought to manifest”. It is a counter-discourse aimed at “the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text” (Culler 220). In this regard, deconstruction could be considered a continued and reflective “refinement” of the same semiotic model of sign/meaning without entirely escaping.

While correlative thinking is effectively a “nonlogical” procedure employing analogical association, its operations are not based on dialectical principles of the organization, and hence, it is capable of providing an external version. Therefore, if practiced as a literary theory, its main approach rests on recovering correlativity, which exposes the tension and interaction between the two modes of thinking presented in the text. One finally reaches the admission that the pursuit of pure logic is largely an illusion even in philosophical argumentation. With regard to binary oppositions, it has argued in length that the *Laozi* never attempted to abolish the authority as revenge against the traditional effort to abolish the lower. Instead, it provides a possible perspective to harmonize the two terms whose relationship is perceived as a continuum. The higher-status is “downgraded” to an “event” or “moment”, which claims no dominance over the entire shift between the two terms. Finally, concerns regarding correlativity directs our attention to the structure of chain of binaries, which is largely neglected in the literary theory despite its extensive utilization. To some extent, it is not surprising that chain of binaries is ignored by postmodern critics whose theoretical foundation can be traced back to Saussure’s model of “Signified and Signifier”—that meaning arises through the differentiation of one sign from another. In contrast, in the layout of parallels, similar terms in one line proceed through their

correlation along the whole chain in an adumbrated sense. Complex semantic associations are allowed to project onto one another in such a way that presents indefinitely “vague” meaning.

In summary, the title of this paper has purposefully been kept ambiguous. The locution “anticipating correlative thinking” provides certain allied meanings without a definite significance. In the first sense, one can anticipate the understanding of correlative thinking by reconstituting the features of binary oppositions in the *Laozi*, especially in a manner that provides an alternative perspective for assaying the correlative operation in the text. From the second sense, aided by such perspective, one may be able to adumbrate a fresh account of the text, being relieved of the dominance of rational or “logocentric” language. Another concern implied in this paper is cultural. The rational perspective depreciates other forms of thinking in the implication that rationality is the one and only significant way for cultural development. The return to correlativity and process, the intuition of the “other”, as well as the plurality of visions are themselves the counterattacks to the notion of objectivity as the principal aim of thinking. The long-established Enlightenment rationality could be the only culture-specific character or ideologically grounded hegemony. Moreover, correlative thinking serves as the gateway for entering into a dramatically different cultural context developed in China.

Notes

1. The translations of the *Laozi* in this essay are from D.C. Lau 1963, unless otherwise noted.

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