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# Chuang Tzu's selflessness: mind-state and the cultural semiotics of *jingshen*

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**Abstract:** The cognitive paradigm of symbols in ancient Chinese philosophy is quite distinct from that of Western semiotic circles. Chuang Tzu, one of the most influential ancient Chinese philosophers, concentrates his study on exploring the state of the subject's selflessness and establishes his own cognitive paradigm of *jingshen*. This paper uses his statements of "I lost myself" and "The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror" in *The adjustment of controversies of The Chuang Tzu*, to investigate the ideal selfless mind-state and selflessness. It attempts to transfer the relationship between subject and object in symbolic cognition into the connection of intersubjectivity to construct *jingshen's* cognitive paradigm of releasing symbolic meaning. The task of this research is to overcome the limitation created by the subject-object relation and finally to be "the Perfect Man" who can know the *Dao*.

**Keywords:** cultural semiotics of *jingshen*; Dao; intersubjectivity; I lost myself

## 1 Introduction

For a long time, the relationship between human beings and nature has been regarded as an activity between the subject and the object. If the subject's cognition of the object conforms to certain scientific laws, it can be defined as truth. In the process of conquering nature, the positive role of the subject has been fully affirmed. Therefore, human science and technology have rapidly developed, and social life has been constantly improved. However, the subject-centered dichotomy separated humans from the world they want to know and inevitably led to a crisis in human civilization, namely, the ecological crisis and human loneliness. As Jiuyuan Lu said, "Nature does not prevent people from touching and understanding it, but people do not take the initiative to be close to nature and understand it" (1980: 431).

From the perspective of semiotics, the world is composed of symbols. On the one hand, symbols are regarded as the representations of the subject

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(human beings) to the object, namely, the correspondence between the signifier and the signified (Saussure 1959: 67). On the other hand, symbols are considered to imply a ternary relation in which the interpretant is introduced into the correspondence between the interpretation of the subject and its symbolic representation (Pierce 1958: CP 8.332). Apparently, symbolic activity is a kind of human behavior, which is closely related to psychology.

The cultural semiotics of *jingshen* regards symbolic activities in a different way than Western semiotic circles. It regards symbolic activity as an intersubjective behavior, that is, an object represented by a symbol is also considered a living subject with its own “character” rather than just “personality.” The cultural semiotics of *jingshen* advocates that symbolic cognition should overcome the constraints of intersubjectivity and that the boundary of semiotic research should be expanded beyond symbolic representation and perception of meaning. It also suggests that humans’ cognitive abilities and methodologies should be improved in the process of interpreting symbols. In this way, we can freely and multifariously interpret all kinds of symbols in the universe, including human verbal and non-verbal symbols.

In fact, the cognition of symbols has its own characteristics in ancient Chinese philosophy. Chuang Tzu, of the Warring States period, emphasized a unique intersubjectivity by proposing several ideas such as “I lost myself” (2016: 15) and “The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror” (1996: 95). Specifically, only when a cognitive subject gives up his or her subjective consciousness and “uses his or her mind like a mirror” can he or she communicate with a cognitive object. “I lost myself” seeks to achieve the realm of selfness and selflessness simultaneously, which is akin to the lofty ideal of the pre-Qin philosophers: *Dao*.

This paper attempts to explore the state of the subject’s selfness and selflessness, as proposed by Chuang Tzu, by examining problems such as the definition of the state of selflessness, and the reasons why Chuang Tzu pursues the state of selfness and selflessness based on the expressions “I lost myself” and “The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror” to construct *jingshen*’s cognitive paradigm of releasing symbolic meaning and returning the symbol to its original appearance.

## 2 “I lost myself” and the state of selflessness in symbolic activities

Can people perceive the world in a state of selflessness? Absolutely yes. Lacan proposed the mirror stage as a formative event in the development of the subject,

which occurs roughly between the ages of six and 18 months when the infant begins to recognize his image in the mirror (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986: 47, 52). Although the infant is an independent individual, he or she does not have subjective consciousness at this stage and stays in a confused state in which the subject and the object have not been separated. Ego appears after the establishment of consciousness, that is, when the human being begins to develop the concept of the self (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986: 52). As the infant grows up, it develops an increasingly distinct subjective consciousness and its own views on everything. Therefore, if 1,000 people see *Hamlet*, there will be 1,000 Hamlets. As for subjective consciousness, each person will have a different interpretation of Hamlet's image.

Lacan's "image stage" shows that the state of selflessness is a real existence rather than a concept. Eco also explains this state in terms of his "photograph stage." Although his opinions are similar to Lacan's, the infant could not be stimulated in the same way by a photograph or mirror. In fact, the selflessness of infants last longer when viewing the photograph, which proves the real existence of their state of selflessness.

From the perspective of Western scholars, both "mirror" and "photography" refer to a state in which the infant's selflessness has not yet been formed. However, in Chinese classical philosophy, the state of selflessness is formed in adulthood, and only "the Perfect Man" can achieve the state of selflessness. Chuang Tzu applies the "mirror" concept to describe the state of selflessness: "The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror – going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore, he can win out over things and not hurt himself" (1996: 95). Here, "the Perfect Man" represents "the wise human" who is more intelligent than the average person. While Lacan uses "mirror stage" to contrast with the perceptual period of selflessness in an early stage of childhood, Chuang Tzu describes the mental state of "the wise human" who eliminates distractions by using his or her mind "like a mirror." The mirror can clearly reflect the images of an external object and does not carry any traces of subjective influence. "Going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing" indicates the standard state of mirror reflection, in which the mind is like a mirror that reflects the external world but does not bother it. Lao Tseu's expression on the state of selflessness, "cleaning away the most mysterious sight (2016: 15)," has a similar connotation to that of "like a mirror."

Taoist philosophy represented by Lao Tseu and Chuang Tzu has also received great attention from Western scholars. Jung believed that when a man stays in the state of selflessness, he can still get the reflection of the object clearly. He described the state of selflessness as "conscious indolence." He further explained, "Indolence of which a man is conscious, and indolence of which he is unconscious, are a

thousand miles apart. Unconscious indolence is real indolence; conscious indolence is not complete indolence, because there is still some clarity in it" (Jung and Wilhelm 1962: 42).

Yiheng Zhao points out that symbols are perceptions that carry meaning (2011: 1). Since infants and young children have not yet formed unconscious behaviors of perception, they should not be brought into semiotic issues. Only the perception of "the mind" can be regarded as the main object of semiotics. Philosophers of the East hope that adults' perceptions of the world can return to the selfless state of the infant so that they can become "the Perfect Man." Lao Tseu praised this selfless state of the infant: "He can become a (tender) babe" (2016: 15).

To achieve the state of being "like a mirror," Chuang Tzu proposed using the method of "I lost myself." Without this core concept, being "like a mirror" can only be an ideal expectation for adults. Chuang Tzu proposed the concept of "I lost myself" in *The adjustment of controversies*, where Nan-guo Zi-qi answers his disciple, Yan-Cheng Zi-you, "I have just now lost myself, but, how should you understand it?" (2016: 15). Guo Xiang of the Jin Dynasty interpreted this sentence: "I lost myself means I forgot myself; I forgot myself, no one can recognize me" (Guo and Xuanying 2011: 24). Cheng Xuanying of the Tang Dynasty had a similar understanding of "I lost myself," interpreting "lost" as "forgot" (Guo and Xuanying 2011: 24). When studying *The adjustment of controversies*, Meng Zhuo further points out that, in the relationship between "I" and "myself," "lost" is not a negation of "myself"; if "myself" is negated, "I" cannot exist by itself (Guo and Xuanying 2011: 24). Chen Guying separated "myself" from "I." He thought that "I" represents "the Perfect Me," whereas "myself" represents "the Paranoid Me." In his perspective, "I lost myself" means "I deny myself," and its purpose is to achieve the transition from the state of "lost myself" to "forgot myself," and finally to that of "All things are integrated" (Chen 2020: 40).

Apart from "lost myself," there are other similar expressions in the description of Chuang Tzu, such as "The Perfect Man has no thought of self" in *Enjoyment in untroubled ease* (2016: 7) and "The man who has forgotten himself is he of whom it is said that he has become identified with Heaven" in *Heaven and Earth* (2016: 83). In *The adjustment of controversies*, Chuang Tzu says, "There is nothing like the proper light of the mind" (2016: 21); "the light of the mind" is equivalent to "block out the light of the mind," "get rid of the light of the mind," "keep off the light of the mind," or "shut down the light of the mind." Apparently, Chuang Tzu hopes that adults who have a strong subject consciousness can achieve the selfless state of "using their minds like a mirror" through the method of "I lost myself." Therefore, Chuang Tzu says, "The still mind of the sage is the mirror of heaven and earth, the glass of all things" (2016: 99).

"I lost myself" is different from "decentration" of Western structuralism. It does not attempt to dispel one's subjective consciousness but to discard the opposition between the subject and the object and keep "the Perfect Me." "Lost myself" is similar to "epoché" in Husserl's phenomenology (Moran and Cohen 2012: 106), which esteems genuine knowledge instead of synthetic knowledge. Although "lost myself" and "epoché" have something in common, Chuang Tzu attempts to achieve the unity of the mind and the objective rather than to pursue true knowledge based on subjective consciousness, which has similar moral meanings to what Husserl calls "genuine presentation" (Moran and Cohen 2012: 138).

Jung showed a strong interest in Oriental philosophy. He believed that "the Chinese have such an all-inclusive consciousness, because, as in the case of primitive mentality, the yea and the nay have remained in their original proximity" (Jung and Wilhelm 1962: 90). He pointed out that, compared with consciousness, the unconscious psyche is common to all mankind and is of latent dispositions toward certain identical reactions. He called the unconscious psyche "the collective unconscious" which "possesses a common substratum transcending all differences in culture and consciousness" (Jung and Wilhelm 1962: 87). Jung expounded the selfless state of Taoism, namely, "I lost myself," at the level of his collective unconscious.

### 3 "I lost myself" and its significance for symbolic activities

Improving human cognitive abilities is a process of continuous evolution from unconsciousness to consciousness. However, the purpose of "I lost myself" is to lose subjective consciousness and return to the selfless state. Is this a retrogression of human perception? Why did the ancients repeatedly emphasize it, even though they knew that adults could not rejuvenate themselves into the state of infants? What is the significance of "I lost myself" to symbolic activities?

Huang-Di responded to these questions: "To exercise no thought and no anxious consideration is the first step towards knowing the *Dao*" (Chuang Tzu 2016: 162). The ancient sages pursued "no thought and no anxious consideration," which is similar to the selfless state of infants, for the purpose of achieving *Dao*. Similarly, Chung Tzu proposed "I lost myself" to achieve *Dao*. Jung found that ancient Chinese sages emphasized "knowing *Dao*," "achieving *Dao*," or "accomplishing *Dao*"; therefore, he commented on *Dao* in *The Secret of the Golden Flowers* as follows: "The great difficulty in interpreting this and similar texts for the European mind is due to the fact that the Chinese author always starts from the

central point, from the point we would call his objective or goal” (Jung and Wilhelm 1962: 97). “The objective or goal” mentioned by Jung is *Dao*.

Jung further discussed the relationship between “I lost myself” and *Dao*. He pointed out that the collective unconscious, as “the psychic expression of the identity of brain-structure,” explains “the analogy between, sometimes even the identity with, various myth-motifs and symbols, and the possibility of human beings making themselves mutually understood (Jung and Wilhelm 1962: 87). “I lost myself” indicates that “I” attempt to reach the selfless state and perceive the collective unconscious, *Dao*. Jung believed “the conscious way” is synonymously used with *Dao*, and if we take *Dao* to be the conscious way by which to unite consciousness and life, we have probably come close to understanding the psychological content of the concept (Jung and Wilhelm 1962: 98).

In symbolic activities, Westerners stress “truth,” while Orientals pay more attention to *Dao*. Chinese sages believed that everything carries *Dao* and that *Dao* is the primary direction of all activities. From the perspective of epistemology, people who achieve *Dao* can greatly improve their ability of achieving “the knowable” (Chen and Yao 2020: 536). Lao Tseu said, “he who devotes himself to learning from day to day [seeking] to increase [his knowledge],” is attempting to improve his knowledge on the basis of “the known,” while “he who devotes himself to the *Dao* [seeking] from day to day to diminish [his doing]” is attempting to improve his knowledge on the basis of “the knowable.” Thus, Lao Tseu focuses more on “he who devotes himself to the *Dao* [seeking] from day to day to diminish [his doing],” the process of which is the process of “I lost myself.”

The purpose of “lost myself” is to eliminate the subjective consciousness that disturbs people, to achieve *Dao*. Chuang Tzu introduces various expressions to explain the selfless state, such as “the judgements of the predetermined mind (2016: 19),” “a scheming mind (2016: 85),” and “unsettle the mind (2016: 95).” All these “minds” are remote from the true heart, far away from human nature, and will have a negative effect on human cognition. Earlier than Chuang Tzu, Lieh Tze clarified the same thought in the fable called “Neighbor Steals Axe.” He believed that, as the cognitive subject, the host is so easily blinded by his own prejudice that he wrongly considers his neighbor as the thief. If the subject and object are highly separated and the subject has some initiative while the object is only passive, the subject can easily impose his or her subjective consciousness on the object. If the “mirror” serves as a metaphor for this perception, the subjective consciousness of adults is like a concave or convex mirror which often exaggerates or shrinks reflections.

On the other hand, “I lost myself” is proposed to solve the dilemma of “without end to those affirming, and without end to those denying” (Chuang Tzu 2016: 21). “Affirming” and “denying” are intrinsically relative. If we fall into the dispute

between “affirming” and “denying,” we cannot focus on true knowledge. Only by transcending the limitations of “affirming” and “denying” can we perceive the existence of *Dao*. Chuang Tzu dispensed with the dispute between “affirming” and “denying” through “I lost myself” and finally stepped into the level of *Dao*:

Some held that at first there was not anything [...]. A second class held that there was something, but without any responsive recognition of it (on the part of man) [...]. A third class held that there was such recognition, but there had not begun to be any expression of different opinions about it. It was through the definite expression of different opinions about it that there ensued injury to (the doctrine of) the *Dao*. (Chuang Tzu 2016: 25)

“I lost myself” of Chuang Tzu will not only help people achieve *Dao* but is also beneficial for them to perceive non-symbols. In particular the unity of the mind and the objective resulting from selflessness contributes to perceiving non-symbols. *Morphometry* by Ggongdzu-Yunden Gyatso states that consciousness can be separated into object and non-object, doing something and doing nothing, and permanence and impermanence (2009: 158), where the non-symbol refers to the state of the non-object and impermanence. Lao Tseu also proposed the concept of “no name” in *Tao Te Ching*: “(Conceived of) as having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth” (2016: 3). The concept of “no name” has held a very high status. Moreover, in the Buddhist allusion “hold the flower and smile,” the Buddha attempts to deliver the symbolic meaning of neither “flower” nor “smile” but the non-symbol behind “flower” and “smile.” Chuang Tzu’s “I lost myself” provides a strong ideology for studying non-symbols such as the “empty symbol,” “no symbol,” and “virtual symbol.”

Lao Tseu believed that *Dao* that can be trodden and is not enduring or unchanging (2016: 3). *Dao* is different from, yet related, to the concept of “common sense” shared by all ancient nations. The concept of common sense had a long history and rich meaning before Kant’s presentation thereof; it appears in ancient Greek philosophy, ancient Roman philosophy, medieval philosophy, Scottish philosophy, and German classical philosophy. If one kind of sense exists in every nation, it must be of great significance. The concept of common sense in Chinese began to be used when studying Kant’s critique of judgment; yet, equivalent expressions already existed in the pre-Qin literary philosophy of almost every school. For example, Mencius said, “The feeling of commiseration belongs to all men” (2016: 401). “The feeling of commiseration” is the same as common sense, and “I lost myself” can be regarded as a special form of common sense. To completely understand Chuang Tzu, we can exercise using the concept of “I lost myself” and perceive “common sense” as similar to that of Chuang Tzu.

*Dao*, as pursued by ancient Chinese philosophers, has the characteristic of intersubjectivity. The ancient sages gave a detailed and clear definition of

intersubjectivity instead of *Dao*, akin to the definition in *The dictionary of Western philosophy*:

Something is intersubjective if its existence is neither independent of human minds (purely objective) nor dependent upon single minds or subjects (purely subjective), but dependent upon the common features of different minds [...]. The intersubjective, which contrasts mainly to the purely subjective, implies a sort of objectivity which derives from the common nature of different minds rather than from the nature of the object itself. Their common and shared nature implies an interaction and communication among different minds or subjects, and this is their intersubjectivity. (Bunnin and Yu 2001: 518)

If we use intersubjectivity to explain *Dao*, *Dao* can be named and interpreted.

In Chuang Tzu's "I lost myself," "myself" does not mean a completely empty selflessness, but means trying one's best to achieve *Dao* after having a clear goal. Once achieving *Dao*, people's cognitive abilities will be greatly improved in symbolic activities.

## 4 The state of selfness and selflessness after "I lost myself"

After "I" loses "myself," "I" will become "the Perfect Man" who uses his or her mind like a mirror. "The Perfect Man" is the kind of person who possesses subjective personality and has achieved *Dao*. Chuang Tzu stressed "I" lost "myself" rather than "I" lost my "ego" for the purpose of being "the Perfect Man."

Chuang Tzu sometimes uses the expressions "True Man" (2016: 45) and "the Spirit-like Man" (2016: 7) to describe a person who has achieved *Dao*. From the perspective of semiotics, all of these – "the Perfect Man," "True Man," and "the Spirit-like Man" – can correctly perceive various symbols worldwide. Since it is difficult to interpret "I lost myself" through verbal languages, Taoists proposed the concept of "conscious spirit" and "primordial spirit." To achieve the selfless state, people are required to simultaneously conceal their "conscious spirit" and highlight their "primordial spirit." Although the "conscious spirit" can play its role without the "primordial spirit," only by removing the "primordial spirit" can the process of concealing the "conscious spirit" proceed.

Among Western philosophers, Jung paid close attention to the "conscious spirit" and "primordial spirit" in Taoism. He believed, "In the personal bodily existence of the individual, they are represented by two other polarities, anima and animus" (1962: 81). Jung applied the two polarities, corresponding to the soul in Taoism, which is part of the "primordial spirit." If the "primordial spirit" is removed from the selfless state, individual unconsciousness and collective



consciousness will be highlighted. Jung interpreted “primordial spirit” based on collective consciousness. It is easier to understand “I lost myself” through Jung’s theory of the “self” and “ego.” Jung said:

[I]f the unconscious can be recognized as a co-determining quantity along with the conscious, and if we can live in such a way that conscious and unconscious, or instinctive demands, are given recognition as far as possible, the center of gravity of the total personality shifts its position. It ceases to be in the ego, which is merely the center of consciousness, and instead is located at a hypothetical point between the conscious and the unconscious, which might be called the self. If such a transposition succeeds, it results in doing away with *participation mystique*, and a personality develops that suffers only in the lower stories, so to speak, but in the upper stories is singularly detached from painful as well as joyful events. (Jung 1962: 124)

Jung stressed that the process of returning “oneself” does not require the assistance of an external force and God; one can get rid of the interference of one’s floating self-consciousness all by oneself.

“I lost myself” liberates human nature from God and “themselves.” Jung believed that people have both “self” and “ego.” “Ego” is only the subject of consciousness, while “self” is the spiritual world as a whole including unconsciousness. According to Jung, an individual can achieve *Dao* – the reunion between consciousness and unconsciousness – and “the purpose of this reunion is the attainment of conscious life, or expressed in Chinese terms, the bringing about of Tao” (1962: 99). If we understand “I lost myself” based on Jung’s thoughts, an analogy can be derived: “I” can be equal to “self,” and “myself” can be equal to “ego.” Thus, the “self” will be revived after losing the “ego” and become “the Perfect Man.” In other words, Chung Tseu does not deny the existence of the subject, which is just the “self.”

Here, we introduce the idea of Zen Buddhism to interpret the selfless state of Chuang Tzu. In *Zen Koan*, when asked about the relationship between “achieving *Dao*” and “cutting firewood and carrying water for cooking,” a well-respected Buddhist answers, “Before achieving *Dao*, one is thinking about carrying water when cutting firewood or cooking when carrying water; after achieving *Dao*, one does cutting, carrying, and cooking, respectively” (Pu 2011: 1537). Apparently, before achieving *Dao*, “ego” is regarded as the subject composed of floating consciousness and ideas, therefore, it is natural for him or her to think about carrying water when cutting firewood or cook when carrying water.” When an individual has achieved *Dao*, as a subject, he or she will change into the “self,” and therefore, he or she will deliberately cut, carry, and cook, respectively. People do the same things but with different mind-states. Chuang Tzu called this subjectivity “a true Governor” (2016: 17), the subject of which is “a true Ruler” (2016: 19). What Chuang Tzu called “a true Ruler” is somewhat analogous to the Western philosophical

concepts the “universal persons of mind,” “universal mind,” or “absolute mind.” This mind-state is relative to intersubjectivity and can be perceived by anyone. All phenomena and all things in the universe are included in this universal mind when people experience or talk about it.

Therefore, the purpose of “lost myself” is to eliminate the pseudo-subject to discover the real subject, which is the direct opposite of Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am,” which indicates the relationship between the objective being and cognition: we should first find the objective being and then distinguish its true parts from the false through intersubjectivity. The objective being is the real being after getting rid of intersubjectivity; as such, “I am” comes after “I think.” Just as Descartes says, “I don’t think, therefore I am; I am, therefore I think.” If “I think” is the subject for Descartes, “I am” is the subject for Chuang Tzu.

Chuang Tzu’s “I lost myself” cannot be regarded simply as the state of selflessness; it is located between selflessness and selfness. “The Perfect Man” who possesses the highest subjective personality is absolutely not a nihilist.

## 5 “I lost myself” and the cultural semiotics of *jingshen*

The task of the cultural semiotics of *jingshen* is to go beyond the limitation created by the subject–object relation and move forward to intersubjectivity. The object is also alive, and the object of study should be individuality rather than the individual. “I lost myself” overcomes the obstruction of “ego” and advances into “self.”

In *The Floods of Autumn*, Chuang Tzu and Huizi have a conversation about the fish in the water. Chuang Tze establishes an intersubjective relationship with the fish in the water through the process of “lost myself,” which is also called “common sense.” Therefore, he knows “what constitutes the enjoyment of fishes” (2016: 131). However, Huizi believes that Chuang Tzu cannot know the enjoyment of fishes. Heidegger points out the state of “clearing (Lichtung)” (1953: 133) to remind us to appreciate the cognitive state after the integration of subject and object. The relationship between subject and object cannot be used to analyze how Chuang Tzu knows what constitutes the enjoyment of fishes, because a subject’s consciousness cannot genuinely enter the objective body. Therefore, the cognitive paradigm should be constructed based on the intersubjectivity of Chuang Tzu’s expression “I lost myself.”

The cultural semiotics of *jingshen* advocates for the release of symbolic meaning and attempts to overcome the power discourse to establish the theory of

essence with selflessness. On the one hand, the essence is “none” for its variability, uncertainty, and multidimensional structure. On the other hand, the essence is real, relatively explicit, and can be interpreted by a certain perspective and method. In the state of “I lost myself,” the cultural semiotics of *jingshen* seeks the release of symbolic meaning.

Mencius said, “It would be better to be without the *Book of History* than to give entire credit to it” (2016: 513). Chuang Tzu’s expression “I lost myself” can help people eliminate the fixed mindset of text deduced only from concept, because conceptual thinking can only solve a small number of superficial, rather than fundamental, problems in human symbolic activities. Chuang Tzu used a lot of antithetical sentences to illustrate the limitations of conceptual thinking in *The adjustment of controversies*. He did not want to complicate those problems; however, he pointed out that understanding *Dao* has much more significance than being obsessed with conceptual thinking. Chuang Tzu proposed “I lost myself” for the purpose of pursuing *Dao*. Chuang Tzu did not agree with excessive dependence on speech due to its limited function. He said, “But speech is not like the blowing (of the wind); the speaker has (a meaning in) his words. If, however, what he says, be indeterminate (as from a mind nor made up), does he then really speak or not?” (2016: 19).

The cultural semiotics of *jingshen* focuses on revealing the spiritual connection among symbols from the dimension of intersubjectivity. Everything in the world is changing or lies in a changing chronotope. The cultural semiotics of *jingshen* attempts to explore the changing process of symbols and discover the rule of symbol transformation. The process of “I lost myself” indicates that the symbol makes sense from the perspective of the person who has lost his ego during the process and perceives “he lost himself.” Chuang Tzu aims to not only comprehend the process of “I lost myself” from the cognitive perspective but also demonstrate it from a physical perspective. To that end, he proposed many methods such as “sitting and forgetting all things” (2016: 67) and “forget[ting] the lapse of time and the conflict of opinions” (2016: 37), which were summarized as “observing and imitating things around oneself” (Wang 2012: 247). In a similar way, Mencius proposed that “the knowledge possessed by men without the exercise of thought is their intuitive knowledge” (2016: 477). He persuaded people into finding their “intuitive knowledge” through their own experiences.

The exercise of “I lost myself” demands that one achieves the state of selflessness and uses his or her mind like a mirror. The person who eliminates subjective consciousness, in contrast to “a true Ruler” of the unconscious level, can perceive the external world and even achieve *Dao*. *Dao* will greatly promote human symbolic activities and contribute to achieving the state of “do[ing] nothing (for the

sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which it does not do” (Lao Tseu 2016: 51) for participants in symbolic activities.

Chuang Tzu said, “Heaven, Earth, and I were produced together, and all things and I are one. Since they are one, can there be speech about them? But since they are spoken of as one, must there not be room for speech? One and Speech are two; two and one are three” (2016: 27). He discussed the possible deviation between the symbol-cognition process and semiosis. In his perspective, the original “one” changes into “two” after symbolic interpretation and then becomes “three” if added to the original “one.” When we talk about “one,” we talk about “three” as well. To return to the state of selflessness (“I lost myself”), one should try his best to be “the Perfect Man” and “use his mind like a mirror” so that he can “hold in his embrace the one thing (of humility), and manifest it to all the world” (2016: 31) and finally achieve *Dao*. Achieving *Dao* is also the ideal cognitive paradigm of *jingshen*.

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