

Coexistence and Writing in the *Zhuangzi*: The Case of Goblet Words

The term *zhiyan* (goblet words, spillover language) appears only twice in the entire *Zhuangzi*. Yet, despite this poor number, it is arguably one of the volume's crucial notions. As such, *zhiyan* has attracted increasing attention in the field, leading to a number of recent studies that either take *zhiyan* as their exclusive focus or discuss *zhiyan* in combination with two other types of discourse (Wang 2004; Yearley 2005; Fried 2007; Chiu 2015).

In spite of important differences, recent studies on *zhiyan* tend to converge on three points. First, the notion of *zhiyan* refers to a philosophical style exhibited in the *Zhuangzi*. This style includes the use of paradox, denegation, and dilemmatic questions, as well as, on a larger scale, the mixture of genres and seemingly unconnected passages. Second, *zhiyan* are characterized by instability or indeterminacy. And third, *zhiyan* create an openness that changes the reader's understanding of the world. These three points in turn define what *zhiyan* are, how they work, and what function they perform.

I broadly agree with these points in so far as they concern the philosophical style of the *Zhuangzi*. My position differs from the recent scholarship, however, in that I do not consider *zhiyan* a matter of stylistic form. Taking the three points articulated above in reverse order, I will provide an alternative account of *zhiyan*. I will argue that *zhiyan* serve to complete one's natural life span by avoiding untimely death, that instances of *zhiyan* defuse conflict by virtue of being definite, and that *zhiyan* are simple utterances that adapt to the position of the other in social interaction. In effect, I hold that *zhiyan* operate on the basic level of human coexistence. Against this background, the *Zhuangzi*, rather than consisting of *zhiyan*, can be understood as guiding its readers towards *zhiyan*. It is only on the level of persuasive writing—writing about *zhiyan*—that discussions on the philosophical style of the *Zhuangzi* become relevant.