Title	Revisiting Donald Schön's notion of reflective practice: A Daoist interpretation
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DRAFT

Abstract

This article revisits Donald Schön's notion of reflective practice by interpreting it from a Daoist perspective. In the first part of the essay, I summarise Schön's critique of technical rationality and his concept of reflection-in-action. I argue that two main weaknesses of Schön's approach to reflective practice are the presupposition of self-protected individualism, and an insufficient attention to ethical concerns. Next I expound on a Daoist formulation of reflective practice by drawing on the philosophical thought of Zhuangzi. Three salient characteristics are highlighted. First, Zhuangzi's thought is aligned with Schön's rejection of a technical approach and concomitant support of reflection-in-action. But unlike Schön's individualistic tendency, a *dao*-centric orientation is called for where the practitioner is cognisant of and synchronises oneself with the innate nature of all things. Thirdly, Zhuangzi foregrounds ethics by stressing the primacy of other-regarding considerations and harmonious responses for reflection-in-action. A Daoist understanding of reflective practice offers a non-Western philosophical basis to Schön's ideas and adds to the existing theories on reflection.

Keywords: Daoism, reflective practice, Schön, Way, Zhuangzi

Introduction

Originating from Plato and conceptualised by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, John Dewey and Schön, reflective practice is firmly entrenched in the academic discourses and educational circles. But a number of researchers have observed that the notion of reflective practice (including reflection itself) remains ambiguous, contested and under-theorised (Bengtsson, 1995; Clarà, 2015; Feucht, Brownlee, & Schraw, 2017; Fook, White, & Gardner, 2006). It is worthy of note that the extant literature on reflective practice is dominated by and evolves from Anglo-American ideas, experiences, practices and worldviews (Ixer, 1999). Consequently, non-western histories, cultures and intellectual traditions on issues related to reflection are relatively under-presented. Analysing the contemporary understandings of reflective practice from a philosophical angle, this paper discusses Donald Schön's notion of reflective practice from a Daoist perspective. Schön's concept of reflective practice is the focus of this paper as he is arguably the most famous proponent of reflective practice, with his book *The Reflective Practitioner* lauded as the "most quoted book on professional expertise in recent years" (Kinsella, 2007a, p. 103, also see , Beauchamp, 2015; Eraut, 1995; Gilroy, 1993; Kinsella, 2007b). Despite its popularity, his work has been criticised by scholars for, among other shortcomings, lacking a cogent theoretical basis (Fook, White, & Gardner, 2006; Smyth, 1988; Thompson & Pascal, 2012; Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). It is therefore appropriate to critique and expand on Schön's works from diverse intellectual and cultural traditions.

I have chosen to discuss Schön's ideas from a Daoist perspective as this wisdom tradition has much to say about reflection and its relation to practitioners, as we shall see later. Daoism, together with Confucianism, originates from China and has shaped the psyche and

worldviews of the Chinese for millennia. Although Daoism as a school of the Dao only entered the Chinese vocabulary around the second century B.C.E, its philosophical thought was already known to the populace as "the teaching of Laozi and Zhuangzi" (de Bary & Bloom, 1999; for more information on Chinese philosophy in general and Daoism in particular, see Chan, 1963). There is, to date, no academic discussion published in English on a Daoist worldview of reflective practice. Among the Daoist thinkers, Zhuangzi's ideas are particularly pertinent; his thought as recorded in the *Zhuangzi* revolves around the knowledge, assumptions, ruminations and experiences of practitioners (for the philosophical ideas of the other eminent Daoist philosopher Laozi, see de Bary & Bloom, 1999; Tan, 2019, 2020a). Philosophers are in agreement that the *Zhuangzi* is not solely written by Zhuangzi but also by other unknown writers over a long period (Chong 2011; Graham 1986). Following Chui (2018), I shall use the name "Zhuangzi" throughout this essay to denote all the writers of the text rather than the historical figure of Zhuangzi. This paper proceeds as follows. In the first part of the essay, I summarise and critique Schön's views on reflection-in-action. In the second part of this paper, I delineate a Daoist formulation of reflective practice and compare it with Schön's.

Schön on Reflective Practice

As Schön's theories on reflective practice are well-documented, I shall only briefly sketch the salient aspects of his ideas in this section. Schön (1987) defines reflective practice as a "dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skilful" (p. 31). His conception of reflective practice is situated against a backdrop of his dissatisfaction with technical rationality which comprises "instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique" (Schön, 1983, p. 21). Technical rationality resides in 'high-hard ground' and is disconnected from the 'swampy lowland' experienced by practitioners in real life. As explained by Schön (1983):

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern (p. 42).

Technical rationality is inadequate for practitioners such as architects and teachers to perform competently in real life. These professionals often encounter divergent and problematic situations that are not predictable and easily solved using prescriptive and formulaic solutions. Beyond established theories and technical approaches, practitioners need what Schön calls 'an epistemology of practice' to make sense of disruptive and troubling situations. This epistemology is manifested in "the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (Schön, 1983, p. 49). Reflection is essential for the practitioner to not only think back on what they have done – reflection-on-action – but also to think while doing the action. Schön (1987) calls the latter *reflection-in-action*:

> [W]e may reflect in the midst of action without interrupting it. In an *action-present*—a period of time, variable with the context, during which we can still make a difference to the situation at hand—our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it. I shall say, in cases like this, that we reflect-*in*-action (p. 26, italics in the original).

Reflection-in-action complements but is more powerful than reflection-on-action as it enables the practitioner to act during the action-present to make a difference to the outcome. These actions draw upon the past experiences of the practitioner, enabling one to connect the unfamiliar with the familiar. Unlike technical rationality that sets apart the means from the ends, research from practice, and knowing from doing, reflection-in-action integrates these categories (Schön, 1983). In contrast to the data-based, technique-driven and deliberate approach in technical rationality, reflection-in-action is marked by intuitive, spontaneous and artistic performance that testifies to a competent practitioner (Schön, 1984). Going beyond a one-way and simplistic approach to practice, reflection-in-action involves an interactive process where the situation "talks back" to the practitioner, allowing one to reframe and gain new and further insights on the situation (Schön, 1983, p. 131). The relation between the practitioner and a situation is a "transactional" one where a person shapes a situation "in conversation with it, so that his own models and appreciations are also shaped by the situation" (Schön, 1983, p. 150). Throughout the process, the practitioner engages in a "reflective conversation" with a situation; functioning as "an agent/experient", such person "shapes it and makes himself a part of it" (Schön, 1983, p. 163).

Reflection-in-action complements *knowing-in-action* which is the knowing that is demonstrated in the doing of everyday routines of action. This form of knowing "is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action" (Schön 1983, p. 49). As knowing-in-action takes place under unproblematic circumstances, it is of limited use to a practitioner whose action is interrupted by surprise. In such a scenario, the practitioner may be trapped in one's accustomed, parochial and inflexible thinking and doing, resulting in boredom, burn-out or imperilled relationship with one's client (Schön, 1983). The way out for the practitioner is to reflect-in-action: bringing to the fore and interrogate one's tacit understandings in knowing-in-action so as to make new sense of the uncertain situation (Schön, 1983).

Schön's critique of technical rationality and exposition of reflection-in-action find resonance with many researchers and practitioners. His writings form the basis of the existing approaches in reflection (Clarà, 2015). Kinsella (2007) adds that "there is no denying the enormous influence that Schön's work has had in the professions" (p. 103). At the same time, researchers have raised some objections to Schön's ideas. Two major weaknesses are noted here: a self-protective individualistic orientation, and a de-emphasis on ethical concerns. First, Schön's conception of reflective practice is prone to what Convery (1998) calls 'self-protective individualism':

> In the examples which Schön provides he emphasises the importance of individuals reframing problems in 'one-to-one' situations. These illustrations may ignore the *self-conscious, often defensive dimension* of 'reflecting-in-action', for example, the teacher's concern with managing complex situations in front of multiple audiences. Thus a teacher (such as myself) may unconsciously select a particular strategy because it enables me, the teacher, to retain control of a situation (Convery, 1998, p. 202, italics added).

The risk of self-protective individualism is further illuminated by Schön's (1983) depiction of a reflective practitioner as an "agent/experient" (p. 103). An agent/experient accordingly takes the initiative and remains firmly in control of the situation, leading inadvertently to actions that may become self-conscious and defensive. By playing up the centrality of the practitioner reframing the problem, making sense of the situation and resolving the problem, Schön has also placed undue emphasis on cognitivism. Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) maintain that Schön's "clings to the notion that actors come to know the world primarily through thinking about it,

converting experiences into mental maps of an outside world" (p. 1343). Despite Schön's repudiation of technical rationality, Bleakley (1999) contends that his theory still treats reflection primarily as a technique.

Related to this first critique is Schön's limited consideration of ethical concerns. Convery (1998) claims that Schön's reflection-in-action does not encourage the practitioner to question one's ends or values: "Reflective practice concentrated on my teaching practice and ignored the emancipatory potential which I could have stimulated for my learners beyond my immediate teaching environment" (p. 199). Benade (2012, p. 341) calls attention to the moral justification of reflective practice where practitioners ask questions concerning a right or just situation and outcome. A case in point is Schön's (1983) views on a transactional relation between the practitioner and one's situation:

> [T]he practitioner's moves also produce unintended changes which give the situations new meanings. The situation talks back, the practitioner listens, and as he appreciates what he hears, he reframes the situation once again (pp. 131-132).

What is underscored here is an instrumentalist approach to resolving the uncertain and problematic situation by deriving new meanings and reframing the situation. There is little mention of the ethical considerations and implications of the meanings and outcomes of reframing the situations. In Schön's defence, his focus is more epistemological rather than moral; he clarifies in the introduction to his book that his exploration is professional knowledge and an epistemology of practice (Schön, 1983, 1988). But the neglect of the moral dimension of reflective practice has unfortunately vitiated Schön's (1988) argument for reflection-in-action for teachers. He explains that reflective teaching involves "giving the kids reason" by "listening to kids and responding to them, inventing and testing responses likely to help them get over their particular difficulties in understanding something, helping them build on what they already know, helping them discover what they already know but cannot say, helping them coordinate their own spontaneous knowing-in-action with the privileged knowledge of school" (p.19). But what is and should be the moral end of reflective teaching? Given that teaching is often a moral endeavour – education is about *educare* ("moulding") and *educere* ("drawing out") – what ethical principles (should) guide the teacher in reflecting-in-action? In the section, I shall offer a Daoist response to these questions by examining the philosophy of Zhuangzi.

A Daoist Interpretation of reflective Practice

A Daoist formulation of reflective practice, according to Zhuangzi, comprises three salient characteristics. First, Zhuangzi's thought is in concert with Schön's criticisms of the limitations of technical rationality for practitioners. The text *Zhuangzi* is replete with stories of the folly of practitioners who rely solely on technical rationality to resolve everyday challenges. An example is the story of a man's treatment of horses (Chapter 9):

> Chomping the grass and drinking the waters, prancing and jumping over the terrain – this is the true inborn nature of horses. Then along comes Bo Le, saying, "I am good at managing horses!" He proceeds to brand them, shave them, clip them, bridle them, fetter them with crupper and martingale, pen them in stable and stall – until about a quarter of the horses have dropped dead. Then he starves them, parches them, trots them, gallops them, lines them up neck to neck or nose to tail, tormented by bit and rein in front and by whip and spur behind. By then over half of the horses have dropped dead (all quotations of the Zhuangzi are translated by Ziporyn, 2009).

Positioning himself as an expert on rearing horses, Bo Le depends on technical skills such as shaving and bridling the horses. But his strategies obviously did not work as a quarter of the horses died. Instead of pausing to make new sense of this uncertain situation and allowing it to talk back, Bo Le persists in leaning on routinsed and conventional tactics to discipline the horses such as trotting and whipping them. These tactics, far from improving the situation, expectedly led to more deaths. By disregarding the prior experiences and needs of the horses and forcing them to conform to his own will, Bo Le fails to resolve the perplexing and problematic situation. His underlying mistake is an unreflective and unquestioning faith in technical rationality: tried-and-tested skills that are fallaciously assumed to be fool-proof. His boasting that he is good at managing horses shows up his misplaced confidence in the "high, hard ground" of technical solutions (Schön, 1983). It may be argued that Bo Le has manifested some degree of reflection-on-action: he modified his strategies after realising that they did not work and that a quarter of the horses had died. But what he lacks is reflection-in-action that takes into account the "swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution" (Schön, 1983, p. 42).

Zhuangzi also advocates a form of reflection that parallels Schön's notion of reflection-in-action. Recall that reflection-in-action arises when the practitioner encounters a challenging situation that goes beyond knowing-in-action. Chapter 19 of *Zhuangzi* records an expert cicadas catcher who succeeds in trapping cicadas with a glue-tipped stick as if plucking them up with his hand. When asked how he did it, he replied (Chapter 19):

> I have a course. For five or six months, I practised piling one pellet on top of another. […] Although heaven and earth are vast and the ten thousand things numerous, I am aware of nothing but cicada wings. Motionless, neither turning nor leaning, I would not trade away a single cicada wing for all of creation. How could I fail to catch them, no matter what I do?

Here the catcher shares how he manages to increase his catch of cicadas over a period of five or six months. His reflection-in-action is seen in his maintaining total concentration while gathering the cicadas, constantly adjusting his body and modifying his actions. The catcher exemplifies Schön's (1987) description of a practitioner who reflects-in-action by perceiving "as unique, paying attention to phenomena and surfacing his intuitive understanding of them, his experimenting is at once exploratory, move testing, and hypothesis testing" (p. 72). Reflection-in-action, from a Daoist perspective, reflects skilful spontaneity – "action that arises naturally from a state of total and penetrating attention to the situation at hand" (Barrett, 2011, p. 686).

But unlike Schön who adopts a individualistic approach to reflective practice, Zhuangzi privileges a *dao*-centric orientation. Such an approach enables the practitioner to be cognisant of and synchronises oneself with the *dao* (Way) or the innate disposition of all things. To understand a *dao*-centric orientation to reflective practice, we need to understand the notion of *dao* that prevailed during his time. Zhuangzi lived during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.E.) where many philosophical schools such as Confucianism and Mohism thrived and competed for pre-eminence. Each school conceptualised and championed its own *dao* or guiding discourse for its followers and society. As explained by Ziporyn (2009), *dao* "originally meant a set of practices designed to guide one's behaviour in some specific way so as to promote the attainment of a predetermined value or objective: social harmony, personal contentment, material benefit" (p. xiii).

Dao, according to Zhuangzi, is one that opposes artificial and human-centred rules, regulations, norms and practices which characterise many of the philosophical schools at that

time. Zhuangzi urges a (re)turn to nature where human beings act spontaneously in accordance with the innate disposition of all things. *Dao* signifies "the nondeliberate and indiscernible process that is claimed to be the real source of value and being, on the model of the unhewn raw material from which a particularly culturally valued object is carved" (Ziporyn, 2009, p. 214). Zhuangzi in Chapter 7 exhorts all to "follow the rightness of the way each thing already is without allowing yourself the least bias" (7.4). Doing so "allows all creatures to delight in themselves" (7.5). We can further learn about the concept of *dao* by returning to the passage that documents the tragic ending of horses (chapter 9). We see from the account two contrasting guiding discourses: the natural way of horses which is "simply the way Heaven has cast them forth" (chapter 9), and the individualistic way imposed on the horses by Bo Le. What Bo Le fails to recognise is the pre-existing and innate nature of the horses – one that is free of contrivance and artificiality. His proclamation that he is "good at managing horses" reveals his human-centric and egoistic worldview that sees human beings as superior to and lording over the horses. Rather than viewing horses as merely animals to be managed, Zhuangzi throws his weight behind a different paradigm – one that acknowledges, respects and preserves the inborn nature in all things.

It follows that a reflective practitioner who follows *dao* does not seek to control a situation through self-protective, self-conscious and defensive reflecting-in-action. Instead, such a person is conscious of and acts in accordance with the innate disposition of all things. More needs to be said about how harmony can be achieved if one has to weigh the innate disposition of one thing against another, and I shall return to this topic in a later segment. Describing Zhuangzi's notion of the self as "authentic person", Wang (2013) avers that Zhuangzi advocates the dissolution of one's ego in order to become united with *dao* (p. 71). Rather than self-protective individualism, a *dao* practitioner extends one's frame of reference to all things by being sensitive to their natural disposition. Not discarding one's thinking functions, such a person goes beyond cognitivism to integrate the spiritual dimensions in all things through reflection-in-action. Transcending the employment of conceptual thinking to achieve one's goals, Zhuangzi supports the attuning of oneself to the processes inherent in nature (Singh, 2014). Specifically, Zhuangzi refers to an approach known as "matching the Heavenly to the Heavenly". This approach is demonstrated by Qing the Woodworker who shared how he succeeds in producing exquisite bells (chapter 19):

> My skill is concentrated and the outside world slides away. Then I enter into the mountain forests, *viewing the inborn Heavenly nature of the trees.* My body arrives at a certain spot, and already I see the completed bell stand there; only then do I apply my hand to it. Otherwise I leave the tree alone. So I am just *matching the Heavenly to the Heavenly*. This may be the reason the result suggests the work of spirits!" (italics added)

'Heavenly' in Daoism referring to "the spontaneous and agentless creativity that brings forth all beings, whatever happens without a specific identifiable agent that makes it happen and without a preexisting purpose or will or observable method" (Ziporyn, 2009, p. 217). Lu (2018) renders the same expression as "matching of nature with nature", signifying that a reflective practitioner is one who displays a skill that "elevates the human artifice to a divine art" and "attends closely to the innate nature of things" (p. 1230). Qing the Woodworker epitomises a Daoist reflective practitioner who, unlike Bo Le, is responsive to the "inborn Heavenly nature of the trees". This awareness guides him to carve the bell stand that harmonises both the *dao* of the tree and the *dao* of an artisan. It follows that matching the Heavenly to the Heavenly is not a human-centric, one-way and impositional approach. It is not about 'managing' or exploiting the tree or horses but about synchronising oneself with others spontaneously. Another passage about another artisan who similarly attains the perfect synchrony elaborates

that the artisan's fingers "transformed along with the thing he was making" so that "the encounter with each thing fits comfortably" (Chapter 19). Such an awareness of fit is obtained only after a period of reflection, what Qing the Woodworker describes as the quieting of one's mind, casting aside of distractions and total concentrating on the task at hand.

In addition, Zhuangzi foregrounds the ethical dimensions of reflective practice by stressing the primacy of other-regarding considerations and harmonious responses. Recall that the second critique of Schön's theory is an inadequate attention to ethical considerations such as exploring, questioning and revising one's ends and values. By ignoring the moral purposes and consequences of reflection, a practitioner may be proficient in reflection-in-action but acting in ways that are morally questionable. To put it simply, a person may do the *wrong* thing despite doing it the *right* way through Schönian reflection-in-action. It is not enough to simply reframe one's situation through reflection-in-action, as recommended by Schön (1983). One also needs to reframe one's goals, methods, values and related ethical viewpoints. To challenge the ends of one's action is to go beyond self-regarding perspectives to other-regarding considerations, a stance brought home in a somewhat humorous story in Chapter 19. The Invocator of the Ancestors "stood over the pigpen and counselled the pigs, saying, 'Why should you object to dying? If I offered to feed you grain for three months, to keep vigil for ten days and fast for another three, then lay out the mats of white rushes and place your shoulders and rump upon the carved stand, surely you'd be willing to go along with it?' Zhuangzi describes this line of thought as seeing things purely from the Invocator's own point of view. To see things from the perspective of the pigs is "to eat bran and chaff and be left right there in the pen" (Chapter 19). Perspective taking, for Zhuangzi, is not amoral and relativist, but grounded in an ethical and genuine concern for the welfare of other things in the world, whether human or non-human. It shifts our focus from a merely instrumentalist approach to things to a position of empathy, thereby guiding humans to do what is right in the right way.

From a Daoist standpoint, reflective practice requires the practitioner to think and act morally in accordance and concordance with the innate disposition of all things. Good intention alone is insufficient, as illustrated in another story – that of a bird and the ruler of Lu in Chapter 19. The ruler, upon discovering a bird, aimed to do good to it by feeding it with the finest meat and music. His efforts, however, only left the bird dazed, fearful and reluctant to eat and drink. Zhuangzi explains that what the ruler has done is "trying to nourish a bird with what would nourish oneself". To adopt an other-regarding perspective for the ruler is as follows: "To nourish a bird as the bird itself would want to be nourished, you should let it perch in the deep forests and glide through the rivers and lakes, allowing it to eat whatever wiggly things it can find – for this creature such a life is as comfortable as walking along on level ground". Here we find Zhuangzi linking the theory of the inborn nature of a thing to the ethical responsibility of humans. Humans should not violate the innate disposition of a thing by insisting on seeing things from one's own viewpoint and interests. Recognising and acting in tandem with the innate disposition of a thing is concomitantly affirming the innate disposition *of oneself.* A sage is one who "brought himself to completion by following along with things" (Chapter 25). This means that the completion of oneself and that of others go hand in hand. The reason why human beings fail to see this point, such as the ruler who insists on feeding the bird with the best human food and music, is that they are ignorant that different things have their own inborn nature. It is therefore not a question of weighing the innate disposition of one thing against another or, in the case of the ruler and the bird, whether the innate rights of a bird or the ruler should take precedence. Instead of "trying to nourish a bird with what would nourish oneself" (Chapter 19), the ruler should nourish the bird with what would nourish the bird, and nourish himself with what would nourish himself. Doing so will help all things to grow without controlling them (Chapter 19).

It needs to be acknowledged that Schön (1988) does not argue or suggest that reflective practitioners, especially teachers, should ignore the ethical dimensions of teaching or the needs of their students. In fact, he alludes to the teacher doing good to and meeting the needs of the students by "giving the kids reason" such as listening to them and helping them discover what they already know but cannot say. But the tenor of Schön's argument is still largely pragmatic in essence, with the teacher reflecting-in-action so as to complete one's tasks competently. The action involved in 'giving the kids reason' is one-way, with the teacher doing things to/for the students. To be sure, Schön stresses that the practitioner should recognise that "the situation, having a life of its own distinct from his intentions, may foil his projects and reveal new meanings" (Schön, 1983, p. 163). But the focus is on the *situation* and not the students. The students remain largely passive and secondary in the uncertain situation that is resolved by the teacher as an agent/experient. That is why Convery (1998) maintains that Schönian reflective practitioner may be a self-protected individual who "unconsciously select[s] a particular strategy because it enables me, the teacher, to retain control of a situation" (p. 202). Taking everything in account, there is little emphasis on the teacher being guided by one's moral calling and relating harmoniously with one's students so that all their heavenly (innate nature) will be matched.

Evincing a moral orientation, Zhuangzi speaks out against moral teachers who not only ignore the constant inborn nature of things but also invent norms and rituals that control and oppress the masses. These self-professed sages, according to Zhuangzi, have dismembered "our inborn nature and our uncontrived condition" which manifest "perfect Virtuosity" with their versions of Humanity and Responsibility (Chapter 9). Rather than doing good to society, the people end up taking sides, striving for personal gain and destroying *dao* (Chapter 9). What is recommended by Zhuangzi is relationship-building *dao* as exemplified by 'the man of the Renxiang clan' (Chapter 25):

> Now, the man of the Renxiang clan found the centre of the circle. He brought himself to completion by following along with things, staying right there with them no matter how they ended or began, no matter what their impulse or season. It is the one who *constantly changes together with all things* who is always one and unchanging – when has he ever had to abandon them for even a moment? (italics added).

It is significant that harmonious responses are not about passivity or an absence of reflection. On the contrary, these expressions necessitate constant changes together with all things as part of self-completion. The reference to "constant changes together with all things" in the above quotation is key to guiding a person to balance different and even competing needs and interests between things. The 17th century Chinese commentator Jiao Hong explicates the above passage by noting that "the sage externally goes by others, making use of all sorts of rights and wrongs to harmonise with them" without letting "the rights and wrongs that are the traces of his actions [to] obstruct his mind's freedom from rights and wrongs" (cited in Ziporyn, 2009, p. 149). In practical terms, a Daoist reflective practitioner takes in and evaluates other people's ideas using "all sorts of rights and wrongs", i.e., standards of good reasoning, norms and behaviours. But these standards are not rigid and static and are instead flexible, evolving and congruent with the innate disposition of all things. For example, in the account of the ruler and the bird, the reasoning of the ruler – that the best treatment of the bird is to feed it with the finest food and music – is fallacious despite his good intention as it violates the innate disposition of the bird. The ruler therefore needs to "follow along" with the bird (Chapter 25) by studying the bird's constitution, diet and habitat so as to provide the best care.

In the context of contemporary classroom teaching, this means that a Daoist teacher should tailor one's teaching to suit the individual traits, talents and interests of students rather

than imposing a 'one-size-fits-all' pedagogy. Such a teacher acts caringly and spontaneously, eschewing a fixation with test scores and seeking instead the inclusive growth and flourishing of the students (Tan, 2019, 2020a). In the event that a teacher finds that a lesson is not working, one needs to reflect on, among other factors, how much one knows of the profile, needs and potentials of one's students (Tan, 2006). Is the lesson planned and enacted in accordance with the students' capacities, interests and inclinations? For instance, lessons that are targeted at pushing students to improve their test scores through rote-learning or geared primarily towards meeting external accountability standards are at odds with the innate disposition of learners. A judicious balance of direct instruction and learner-centred activities, teaching methods, assessment modes, resources and environments that match the natural inclinations and strengths of the students are called for (Koh & Tan, 2016).

Conclusion

I have put forward a Daoist interpretation of Donald Schön's notion of reflective practice based on the philosophy of Zhuangzi. I argue that the two main weaknesses of Schön's approach to reflection are the risk of self-protected individualism and an insufficient attention to ethical concerns. Next I expound on a Daoist formulation of reflective practice based on the thought of Zhuangzi that comprises three salient characteristics. First, Zhuangzi's philosophy is consistent with Schön's rejection of a technical approach and propagation of reflection-in-action. But unlike Schön's individualistic tendency, a *dao*-centric approach is proposed where the practitioner is cognisant of and synchronises oneself with the innate nature of all things. In addition, Zhuangzi foregrounds ethics by stressing the primacy of other-regarding considerations and harmonious responses in reflective practice. It needs to be clarified that what is presented here is 'a' rather than 'the' Daoist interpretation, given the plurality and richness of Daoism. The Daoist conception of reflective practice elucidated in this article is by no means the only Daoist understanding on the topic. Nor am I asserting that the proposed notion of reflective practice as drawn from the *Zhuangzi* is superior to or the best one among other interpretations of reflective practice. My aim, rather, is to offer fresh perspectives and an alternative understanding of reflective practice that is drawn from a Chinese philosophy.

Although written many centuries ago, Zhuangzi's philosophy remains relevant to modern times, whether it is about humans' views of their professions, treatment of animals and place in the ecosystem. In the current geological epoch of *Anthropocene* that has marked by massive human activities and their repercussions on earth, it is critical for humans to rethink their relationship with their surroundings (Tan, 2020b). I have contended that a Daoist reflective practitioner is one who "becomes supremely attuned to the complexity of the world and can thus navigate various domains of relationality with extraordinary grace, ease, and efficacy" (Tao, 2011, p. 463). A Daoist understanding of reflective practice offers a non-Western philosophical basis to Schön's ideas and adds to the existing theories on reflection. My comparison of Schön and Zhuangzi illustrates a major difference between Anglo-American and Chinese worldviews and presuppositions on ego and consciousness. Zhao (2015) asserts that Western tradition "takes ego and consciousness as the sole origin and source of subjectivity, which in turn leads to a subject characterised by autonomy and egoism" whereas Chinese tradition underlines "a relational self and a non-being self, characterised by spirituality and ethics" (p. 77). I have shown in this essay that Schön's ideal of a reflective practitioner reflects the self-consciousness dominant in the Western traditions whereas Zhuangzi's ideas speak of the inter-subjective and moral experience that pivots on *dao*. A Daoist reflective practitioner, it follows, is one who performs moral actions spontaneously and joyfully by adopting the Heavenly view of the world (Huang, 2010). To conclude, a Daoist

construal of reflective practice expands the existing understandings of reflective practice beyond the influential Anglo-American traditions by drawing attention to other cultural traditions. It is hoped that this essay will expand and enhance the theory and practice of reflection among professionals through further discussions and debates across contexts and cultures.

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