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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis has made most Filipinos reconsider, rethink, and reprioritize various aspects of their lives. While they are well-known for their resiliency, they are not immune to experiencing fear, anxiety, uncertainties, and other disruptions, as these are inevitable experiences during crises, particularly pandemics. While the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a public health crisis, there is a fear that it also provoked an existential one. This paper explores the philosophical insights of Daoism and its practicality and relevance to navigating such crises. In what ways can Daoist insights guide us regarding the right way(s) to manage ourselves during the crisis? How can these insights help us reframe our perspective of life during a pandemic? The paper employs reflective analysis to examine the crisis brought on by the pandemic and argues that Daoist insights can offer a practical approach to managing oneself and coping with the pandemic. This paper will highlight two Daoist principles: the principle of wu-wei and the principle of yin-yang. These principles are vital in approaching life with flexibility and balance. Ultimately, this paper shows that adopting Daoist insights will improve our understanding of the crisis brought on by the pandemic and how this could serve as a practical approach to managing our lives effortlessly during this trying time.

Keywords: *crisis, Daoism, pandemic, wei-wu-wei, yin-yang,*

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) brought a myriad of disruptions and challenges worldwide, wherein millions of individuals were infected, and thousands lost their lives. In the Philippines, it was January 30, 2020, when the Department of Health announced the first case of the novel coronavirus in the country involving a Chinese national, then on March 7, 2020, the first local transmission was confirmed.[1] As of January 8, 2024, the country recorded a total of 4,140,383 COVID-19, wherein 6,138 are active cases and 66,864 related deaths

1 World Health Organization, "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the Philippines."

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due to the dreadful disease.[2] Nevertheless, hope was rekindled as the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines provided a crucial step to curb the spread of the virus. Moreover, while the pandemic triggered a public health crisis, there is a fear that it also provoked an existential one, prompting many Filipinos to rethink, reconsider, and reprioritize various aspects of their lives. While Filipinos are well known for their resilience, none of them are invulnerable to the fear, stress, anxiety, depression, uncertainties, and other unfortunate and inevitable disturbances brought on by the current crisis. Based on the survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed that 86 percent of adult Filipinos were stressed over COVID-19, where 58 percent of the respondents said that they had "great stress," 27 percent said that they had "much stress," and 14 percent felt "a little stress" or no stress at all.[3] These numbers are mainly caused by the pandemic's myriad disruptions to their "normal" life. Consequently, the survey conducted by the SWS indicated that the COVID-19 crisis posed a great challenge, particularly to the mental health of the majority of Filipinos, and the fear is that these challenges related to the pandemic may still last even to the post-pandemic. Efforts were directed towards an alternative way(s) to cope with the crisis. Ways include but are not limited to professional help for those with mental health issues, and information drives through various mediums such as webinars, social media posts, etc. However, what is primarily intriguing is most of the coping strategies being suggested are mainly and dominantly from Western perspectives. Seldom notices, if not disregarded, the Eastern perspectives on the ways to cope during crises. In this paper, I will show that the Eastern perspective of Daoist philosophy should also be recognized and credited for its practicality, just as we credit the Western perspectives on coping strategies. Therefore, I want to emphasize that Daoist insights can help us navigate our lives during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic world as well.

Nevertheless, examining Daoism will not be easy as it is also known for being paradoxical, making it challenging to interpret. Moreover, there are already studies on Daoism, and each explores various themes and applications. Castillo (2016) examined and used the Daoist water metaphor and the principle of wu-wei as a "pedagogic inspiration" on how teachers and students approach learning. Castillo concludes that the educational approach inspired by Daoism would be a liquid pedagogy and wu-wei as a normative value and model for living.[4] On the other hand, Yang (2018) re-interpreted individualized teaching in light of Daoist philosophy. Yang introduced Daoist principles and practices to understand individualized teaching and learning better and, consequently,

2 Department of Health - Republic of the Philippines, "COVID-19 Case Tracker."

3 Lalu, "86% of adult Filipinos stressed over COVID-19 – SWS."

4 Castillo, "Taoism and Education: Water and Wu-Wei as pedagogic inspirations," 13.

suggested Daoist transformative paradigms for future pedagogies that hopefully would prompt further arguments and discussion regarding the future of education in an age of disruption.[5]

On the other hand, Zhu (2013) examined the concept of wu-wei and then claimed that it had undergone significant changes from Laozi to Zhuangzi. Zhu also added that while Laozi's concept of wu-wei is a utilitarian principle, the wu-wei of Zhuanzi represents an aesthetic worldview.[6] Furthermore, Cao (2018) clarified that practitioners can understand and explain the origin and nature of life through the Yin-Yang theory of traditional Chinese medicine. Cao also clarifies that the Yin-Yang theory is monistic rather than dualistic; hence, its significance emphasizes that the Yin and the Yang are a complementary interaction of unified opposites.[7] Khosla (2008), on the other hand, claims crises have crucial implications for our well-being and quality of life. Koshla emphasized that during a crisis, addressing problems by thinking positively, reassessing situations, and finding a silver lining amidst the crisis. Thus, timely coping is essential before it escalates too far late.[8] Moreover, Rudnick (2020) reflected on the social, psychological, and philosophical (ethical and epistemological) concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Rudnick concluded that there is still a need for more reflections on and research on social and psychological challenges and underlying philosophical issues related to the current pandemic.[9]

Nonetheless, this paper differs from other studies as it focuses on analyzing Daoist insights and arguing for their practicality and relevance in navigating crises. This study will argue that Daoist insights, particularly the principles of wu-wei and yin-yang, offer a practical approach to self-management and coping during a crisis. Commonly translated as "action-through-inaction," wu-wei does not imply passivity or fatalism; instead, it restricts our actions to what is necessary and natural. On the other hand, yin-yang reveals the interplay between opposites. From a Daoist standpoint, there is a symbiotic relationship between two opposing experiences: fear and courage, freedom and restriction, crisis and peace. Therefore, we must restore and maintain the balance between these contrasting experiences, which the pandemic has further shaken.

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5 Yang, "Taoist Wisdom on Individualized Teaching and Learning—Reinterpretation Through the Perspective of Tao Te Ching," 1.

6 Zhu, "Wu-Wei: Lao-zi, Zhuang-zi and the Aesthetic Judgment."

7 Cao, "Is theory of Yin-Yang of Traditional Chinese Medicine Either Monism or Dualism?"

8 Khosla, "Need for Coping with Life Crises: Implications for the Quality of Life."

9 Rudnick, "Social, Psychological, and Philosophical Reflections on Pandemics and Beyond."

Managing life during and after the current crisis is undoubtedly challenging; however, it is not impossible, especially if we can find effective ways to navigate it. This paper aims to open a window of opportunity for all of us to the practical value of Daoist insights in improving our understanding of the crisis caused by the pandemic and how they can serve as a practical approach to managing our lives effortlessly. The paper is structured as follows: First, I will discuss the relevant and practical insights of Daoist philosophy, drawing insights from the Dao De Jing and the Zhuangzi focusing on the two fundamental principles: wu-wei and yin-yang. Subsequently, I will discuss how these two principles can serve as a practical approach to address the challenges brought by the pandemic.

Daoist Insights: Wu-Wei and Yin-Yang

Daoism is one of China's renowned religious and philosophical schools of thought. It is widely regarded as founded by Laozi (also known as Lao-tzu), an ancient sage who was considered the author of the Dao De Jing (also known as Tao Te Ching). Although there are discussions about whether Laozi is the sole author of the Dao De Jing or whether he even existed, this classic Chinese text is recognized as one of the foundational texts of Daoist philosophy. Written in a poetic style and known for its paradoxical nature, the Dao De Jing illustrates the "way" of nature and offers practical wisdom for individuals.[10] On the other hand, another key figure who has profoundly influenced Daoist philosophy is Zhuangzi (also known as Chuang-tzu). His compilation of works, along with others found in the Zhuangzi, is also regarded as one of the foundational texts of Daoism. It comprises three sections, namely, the Inner Chapters, the Outer Chapters, and the Miscellaneous Chapters, where the Inner Chapters, which consist of the first seven chapters, are considered by many to be the work of Zhuangzi himself.[11] The Zhuangzi builds on the philosophical framework established in the Dao De Jing and further develops it through narratives, such as parables and allegories, to emphasize the principles and tenets of Daoism. Although Laozi and Zhuangzi share significant similarities in their understanding of Dao (also known as Tao), there are notable nuances. Nonetheless, the nuances will not be discussed in depth here, as the primary aim is to examine and draw on Daoist insights, arguing that they can provide a practical approach to navigating the pandemic. Generally, Daoism emphasizes that people should live in harmony with nature, by the flow of nature, by the law of nature, and in harmony with the Dao. But what is the "Dao"? The Dao is the most profound and vital concept in Daoism.

10 Yang, "Taoist Wisdom on Individualized Teaching and Learning—Reinterpretation Through the Perspective of Tao Te Ching," 2.

11 Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 172-174.

Let us consider what Laozi said: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao; The Name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things"[12]

Translated as a "way" or "path," Dao connotes a metaphysical reality. In the passage above, Laozi states that the written word Dao, or that we know of, is not the real Dao. The Dao is believed to be an unknowable, incomprehensible reality that serves as a force that connects everything that exists and serves as the supreme source and guiding source of all. However, while we cannot totally or directly comprehend the Dao, we can understand it by observing its manifestations in our everyday lives and in nature.[13] According to Laozi, the Dao is embodied in the entire universe. Thus, we can consider it the way of nature or the universe and the source that produces and nourishes everything. Thus, for Daoists, individuals should endeavor to become a person of Dao or a sage—someone who deeply understands the fundamental laws of nature and lives in harmony with it.

On the other hand, Zhuangzi also speaks of Dao, "the way," which encompasses the world is and how people should live in it.[14] While Laozi's account of the Dao was more structured, Zhuangzi's account of the Dao was not quite systematic. In his works, Zhuangzi used humor, stories, dialogues, and parables, which were mostly paradoxical, to illustrate the Dao and highlight ideas about spontaneity, relativism, and effortless action. Accordingly, a set of practices that includes meditative stillness can help individuals achieve unity with the Dao and become "perfected people" (zhenren).[15] For Zhuangzi, this state is achieved by disengaging or emptying oneself of conventional values and demarcations created by society rather than withdrawing from life.[16]

As we can see, both Laozi and Zhuangzi emphasize that individuals should live in harmony with the Dao. To live in harmony with the Dao, there are principles that we must understand and live by. As mentioned earlier, I will highlight two: (1) the principle of wu-wei and (2) the principle of yin-yang.

The Principle of Wu-wei

Wu-wei, translated as "action-thru-inaction," is one of the most profound paradoxes in Chinese philosophy. It is central to Daoist thought, as implied in

12 Laozi and Mitchell, "Tao Te Ching: A New English Version," chap. 1.

13 Stenudd, "Tao Te Ching: The Taoism of Lao Tzu Explained."

14 Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 206.

15 Daoism (Daoist Philosophy),"Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy."

16 Ibid.

several passages in the Daodejing and richly illustrated in the Zhuangzi. However, it is important to note that wu-wei does not imply that there is no activity at all. It implies that activity should be performed naturally, without unnecessary, excessive, or extreme efforts. Let's consider some passages from the Daodejing: "The Master arrives without leaving, sees the light without looking, achieves without doing a thing."[17] "Act without doing; work without effort... The Master never reaches for the great; thus she achieves greatness."[18]

For some, these passages may appear paradoxical and contradictory as they raise the question of how an individual can achieve something without exerting effort. However, the passages suggest that wu-wei does not mean inaction. Instead, it suggests that individuals should act without any forceful interventions and allow things to flow naturally, actions that align with the Dao.

Moreover, the Zhuangzi further emphasizes the importance of wu-wei through the parable of the butcher:

> What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop, and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are.[19]

The parable above illustrates the butcher's transition from performing his craft effortfully to effortlessly. At first, the butcher struggles to master his craft as he perceives only the "whole ox" and relies on conventional techniques to cut it. However, after several years, the butcher no longer perceives the "whole ox" and begins doing his craft beyond skill and not relying on conscious thought. This suggests that the butcher's movements became fluid and harmonious with the ox's natural structure. This implies that true mastery transcends technical or conventional skills and is attained by aligning oneself with what is natural.

Though having subtle differences, Laozi and Zhuangzi conceptualize wu-wei as an action defined by effortlessness, spontaneity, and harmony with the Dao instead of viewing it as a passive activity. For Laozi, wu-wei entails relinquishment or letting go of excessive effort and forceful control. An individual achieves ultimate mastery not through force but through a deep alignment with the way things are. That has significant implications both for governance and

17 Laozi and Mitchell, "Tao te ching: A New English Version," chap. 47.

18 Ibid., chap. 63

19 Watson, The Complete Works of Zhuangzi, 83.

individual conduct, suggesting that rulers or individuals should allow things to take their natural course. Conversely, Zhuangzi extends wu-wei by emphasizing detachment and spontaneity, thus transcending conventional values and norms and embracing the Dao. That being said, Zhuanzi suggests that life must be approached carefree, where individuals must follow their natural inclinations and free themselves from social conventions and rigid thinking.

Nonetheless, wu-wei may resemble the well-known Filipino saying *"bahala na"* (translated as "come what may"); however, we should not misconstrue it as carrying the same meaning since both concepts differ. As already discussed, the principle of wu-wei is not characterized by passivity or fatalism, nor does it imply surrender. It refers to natural actions limited to what is both necessary and natural, thus encapsulating the idea of "action through inaction" or "never overdoing." It represents a mode of action that strives to adapt rather than oppose the flow of any given situation.[20] To illustrate this further, consider the following examples: As the Earth revolves around the sun, it does so without exerting effort; when we plant a seed, it grows into a tree even without growing; as we breathe, we do so without conscious effort. At first, the examples might seem paradoxical. How can the Earth revolve around the sun without revolving? How can a seed grow into a tree without growing into one? How can we breathe without any effort at all? The answer is not that when the Earth revolves around the sun, it is not revolving; rather, it implies that the "action" of revolving is not carried out forcefully. It occurs naturally and effortlessly since it is the Earth's natural function to revolve around the sun. The same applies to the seed, which effortlessly grows into a tree. It is the natural function of a seed to grow into a tree, and this "growing" happens naturally. When it comes to breathing, we no longer consciously think about it or attempt to do so (except in specific medical situations or responses to strenuous activity).

Consequently, we can now infer that wu-wei does not mean inactivity; instead, our activities must be done effortlessly and, thus, restricted in two planes: (1) the necessary and (2) the natural. Our activities must be aligned with what is necessary, meaning the attainment of a specific purpose and never-doing or never-forcing, doing what is natural and necessary.

What happens if we do not limit our activities to what is necessary and natural? Let us consider these examples. If we can only lift 50 kilograms, then we should not exceed that limit. If we can jog for only a maximum of 10 kilometers, then we should not go beyond that distance. We might push ourselves out of sheer will; however, we must remember that activities are good only when enough, and when they are excessive, they can be harmful. Failing to do what is

20 Eifring, "Spontaneous Thought and Early Chinese Ideas of Non-action and Emotion."

natural and necessary may result in harm. There is a saying, "*Overdoing is worse than not doing at all*." It is better to leave the cup half full than to fill it entirely, and it is wiser to drink liquor within our limits rather than indulge excessively. We know that too much alcohol leads to undesirable effects, just as drinking an overflowing cup is rarely enjoyable. Another example is when we hurry to complete a task, like unlocking a door with a key. We often find that rushing to jiggle the key results in more trouble, wasting time, or worse, breaking the key or damaging the lock. In contrast, if we take a calm approach to unlocking the door, we can achieve our goal efficiently. The same applies in a basketball game. If we force ourselves to play in a manner that disregards and is not aligned with the fundamental principles of the game, we end up playing disorderly and ineffectively, consequently failing to achieve the desired outcome. As Laozi cautions, "Rushing into action leads to failure…Forcing a project to completion can ruin what is almost ready."[21] The Dao emphasizes flowing with the natural course of things. When we align ourselves with this, we act with rather than with force, consequently achieving better results. Living our lives where our actions are excessive and unnecessary can complicate life and lead to undesirable consequences. In sports and life, success emerges not from excessive effort but from adapting to the natural flow of situations and circumstances. Thus, Daoism teaches us to be like water. Let us consider this passage from chapter 78 of the Daodejing: "Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water. Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible, nothing can surpass it. The soft overcomes the hard; the gentle overcomes the rigid. Everyone knows this is true, but few can put it into practice"[22].

Water is the most underrated element, often characterized and linked to softness. However, as soft as it is, its fluidity allows it to adapt to any situation. It is the most agile substance in the world. It can overcome any obstacle with the least resistance. If something blocks or hinders its movement, it never forces its way; instead, it remains steady, still, and patient because, eventually, it will find a way through or around whatever obstructs its path. This metaphor best illustrates wu-wei since it symbolizes the concepts of adaptability, fluidity, flexibility, and change. Hence, the wisest way to act is through natural action, as expressed in the movement of flowing water, embracing and adapting to the demands of the terrain or situations.[23] We should be like water, effortlessly adjusting to any given circumstance. Our actions should not be forced; instead, they must align effortlessly with the natural flow of the world. Therefore, the best way to act is not to act forcefully; the best way to live is not to live with effort.

21 Laozi and Mitchell, "Tao Te Ching: A New English Version," chap. 64.

22 Laozi and Mitchell, "Tao Te Ching: A New English Version," chap. 78.

23 Castillo, "Taoism and Education: Water and Wu-Wei as Pedagogic Inspirations."

The Principle of Yin-yang

In life, we often come across opposites, such as left and right, up and down, day and night, and so on. We tend to believe that there are always two sides to everything, that there are opposites, and we see them as if there is conflict. However, this belief has crucial implications on how we perceive the realities of life. This belief pushes us to make a judgment, opinion, and conception of a particular thing, event, or person based on comparisons. This dualistic way of thinking treats opposites as fundamentally opposed to one another. However, this oversimplifies and misses the deeper connections between opposites, consequently limiting or preventing our understanding of their symbiotic relationship. For example, we may judge a drawing as beautiful primarily because we know its opposite, which is ugly. Likewise, we judge a drawing as ugly because we know its opposite, which is beautiful. Moreover, we can think and feel that particular event or situation as peaceful because we know what and how it feels to be in a chaotic or stressful situation. Hence, two sides are believed to be in conflict, incompatible, and distinct. Consequently, the comparison between two extremes forces us to choose one over the other or, worse, reject one extreme. However, this is in contrast with the Daoist views. Let us first consider this passage from chapter 42 of the Daodejing:

> The Tao gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two. Two gives births to Three. Three gives birth to all things. All things have their backs to the female and stand facing the male. When the male and female combine, all things achieve harmony. Ordinary men hate solitude. But the Master makes use of it, embracing his aloneness, realizing he is one with the whole universe[24]

The Daoist yin-yang principle explains life's essential unity through the interaction of opposites. As mentioned, there are two sides to everything. However, from the Daoist standpoint, these opposites are not in conflict but are interdependent and complementary. The yin-yang principle teaches us that a dynamic interplay of opposites exists in all aspects of reality. Unlike the West, which often views opposites as exclusive and in conflict, Daoism sees the opposite as complementary, wherein it defines and sustains each other. This is articulated in the Dao De Jing: "Under heaven, all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness. All can know good as good only because there is evil"[25]

Accordingly, we can only know that there is "right" only because we know that there is "left," and vice versa; there is "day" only because there is

24 Laozi and Mitchell, "Tao te ching: A new English version," chap. 42.

25 Ibid. chap. 2.

"night," and vice versa; there is beauty because there is ugly and vice versa; there is peace because there is chaos, and vice versa. Simply put, there is an interplay between opposites, and this relationship is symbiotic. The yin-yang principle suggests that we should embrace change and understand that there are no permanent states, only cycle processes. One extreme creates the opposite extreme and vice versa; one extreme gives birth to the opposite extreme and vice versa. Opposites are complementary, and their elements will mutually transform into each other in a balancing process.[26] Moreover, Daoism teaches us not to prefer or choose one side against the other but to reflect and observe how one grows from the other. Consequently, nature shifts continuously to a state of steadiness and order. Life is a system in which a constant transition occurs, one thing flowing into another and becoming another.

A Way Through Pandemic

Pandemics are not new, especially for those who have already experienced dreadful events. They can be compared to natural disasters or even to weather patterns. It may happen again, or we may simply accept living with it, much like the common flu. Therefore, managing it ultimately depends on our perspective of what it is, how it functions, and how we will (re)act in a given situation. From a Daoist perspective, the crisis should teach us to view life from a broader perspective. As Khosla already emphasized, we need to discover a positive outlook or a silver lining that will benefit us while coping with the crisis. Hence, instead of overly stressing about the virus, we should learn how to deal with it in the right way.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government and many individuals took excessive and unnecessary responses in their attempt to control the situation. These responses include, but are not limited to, imposition of rigid and prolonged lockdowns, implementation of strict health protocols, widespread panic buying and hoarding, and even excessive media consumption that, instead of improving their situation, these responses often resulted in increased anxiety and fear. I am not saying that we should be passive and accept the dreadful fate brought by the pandemic, but I believe we should address the current crisis in a way that is neither over-complacent nor overly cautious and over-protective. Instead of excessively and rigidly controlling every aspect of the crisis, we must adopt flexible responses and strategies. That is, our (re)actions must be forced; instead, do it in a manner without exerting too much effort. We should approach the COVID-19 crisis with adaptability. For example, most of us are well aware of the infectious nature of COVID-19. A typical way to avoid contracting the disease

26 Luo and Zheng, "Competing in Complex Cross-Cultural World," 389.

is by observing strict health protocols such as observance of social distancing or limiting physical contact, avoiding large crowds, wearing masks, observing proper health hygiene, undergoing quarantines, and the like. However, as Rudnick (2020) points out, these ways may reduce our sense of liberty and even produce distress related to the discrepancy between our social expectations and our right to freedom of movement and action. Rudnick also further added that this also leads to a loss of trust in people, even significantly close to them, in case they are either symptomatic or asymptomatic in trying to prevent being infected.[27] However, the pandemic did not cause distress and this loss of trust. Its main culprit was the improper way of dealing with the situation. As shown earlier, when our (re)actions are excessive and rigid, they lead to undesirable consequences and unintended harm. Panic-driven harms, like panic buying and hoarding, make resources inaccessible to those in need. Additionally, misinformation, stigmatization, discrimination against infected individuals, and disproportionate policies may have unintended consequences, such as overly strict and prolonged lockdowns that could result in social and economic hardships and educational setbacks. While caution is necessary, being overly cautious can inadvertently create more problems than the one at hand and may prove to be more harmful than doing nothing at all. However, if we limit our (re)actions to only necessary and natural, then there is a better chance that we can better manage our lives during the pandemic. A wu-wei approach would emphasize fluidity. For instance, it would help adjust restrictions and lockdowns based on real-time data and emerging trends, consequently supporting social and economic resilience through data-driven policies and responses while promoting mental health alongside physical health. Thus, wu-wei teaches us to be like water during this crisis—adaptable, flexible, and unforced.

Moreover, as we deal with the current pandemic, we tend to choose one experience over another, such as fear versus courage, crisis versus peace, restriction versus freedom, and safety versus danger. Again, it seems counterintuitive not to choose courage over fear, peace over crisis, freedom over restriction, and safety over danger. The point here is that choosing one side over the other during the pandemic is not the proper way to deal with it. As illustrated in the yin-yang principle, these opposite experiences are not actually in conflict but rather complementary and in harmony. We know what crisis is because we know what peace is, what fear is because we know what courage is, and what safe is because we know what unsafe is. What we can infer from this is that one creates the other. Hence, there is a symbiotic relationship and a mutual dependence between the two experiences. One extreme cannot

27 Rudnick, "Social, Psychological, and Philosophical Reflections on Pandemics and Beyond."

stand without the opposite extreme. These opposite extremes are dependent on one another. When we attempt to discern and perceive both as in conflict, thus choosing one side over the other, that is where we shake its balance. To further emphasize, let us consider this passage from chapter 36 of the Daodejing:

> If you want to shrink something, you must allow it to expand. If you want to get rid of something, you must first allow it to flourish. If you want to take something, you must allow it to be given. This is called the subtle perception of the way things are. The soft overcomes the hard. The slow overcomes the fast[28]

This Daoist insight suggests that a balanced and natural approach is essential during the pandemic or any crisis rather than an approach characterized by unnecessary force and rigid control. Pushing ourselves toward one extreme will eventually push us back to another extreme, which is the opposite. A crude example to illustrate this concept is that when we decide to climb up a tree and reach the top, we tend to go back down. By that example, we can relate that when we push ourselves to be peaceful, we tend to revert to a crisis. Life must be seen this way; it is made of two opposite extremes that are not in conflict but complementary and harmonious. The best way to do this is not to choose one experience over another. In a calm, still, and patient manner, we should observe how one experience unfolds and grows from the other. This does not mean disregarding the risk and danger but rather a more balanced and natural approach to dealing with the crisis.

While the pandemic brought unfortunate disruptions and destruction in almost every aspect of life, we may also see it as a door for new opportunities and realizations. As Segura (2020) pointed out, "We are witnessing a natural cyclic manifestation of destruction to build a new world order, one with compassion and loving-kindness as an opportunity to enhance global development."[29] Although Segura speaks of the pandemic in a socio-political context, this is significantly related to the existential context of humanity. We are in a situation where a crisis has created two worlds: destruction and growth. Destruction in the sense that there were deaths and disturbances in life, and growth in the sense that we have rethought and reprioritized various aspects of our lives, including our relationship with one another and the world we live in. That being said, reframing our perspective in life can benefit us as it opens a new window of opportunity to view life as something relative and diverse, but complementary and unified. Paired with our resilience, this Daoist perspective on life and reality presents a game-changer for managing our lives during crises.

28 Laozi and Mitchell, "Tao Te Ching: A New English Version," chap. 36.

29 Chávez-Segura, "Beyond COVID-19: From Crisis to Compassion."

Nonetheless, Daoist insights offer practical and valuable approaches for sustainable recovery, coping, and long-term well-being as we are now in the post-pandemic period. They would also provide guidance on adapting to new social realities, such as the emergence of full or hybrid work arrangements and an increased reliance on technology. Instead of choosing one extreme over the other, for instance, fully returning to pre-pandemic practices or fully withdrawing from public spaces in favor of virtual interactions, we must find balance and live effortlessly and flexibly in a world where events or situations undergo an ongoing cycle. Daoism teaches us that we must be flexible and recognize when to yield and when to act. Furthermore, many individuals experienced stress, fear, and anxiety during the pandemic, and the post-pandemic period presents both challenges and opportunities for healing. Instead of viewing the crisis as solely negative, we should view it as something that may provide opportunities such as growth. As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted us to rethink and reprioritize various aspects of our lives. As we move forward to the post-pandemic, we can view the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the foundations of our resilience and rethink how to establish a stronger connection with life. Lastly, governments and other institutions should formulate and implement policies and responses that are flexible to changing circumstances instead of rigidly and aggressively attempting to restore what COVID-19 has disrupted. Policies and responses should foster gradual adaptation, support mental health, and advocate work-life balance in alignment with Daoist principles of wu-wei and yin-yang.

CONCLUSION

Crises, such as those caused by the pandemic, are inevitable realities of life with corresponding consequences, both/destructive and life-changing. In that regard, crises are essential as they open the door for further growth. Filipinos are well-known for being resilient. This resiliency is world-renowned, and history will attest to this fundamental character trait. In every crisis, we can proudly hold our ground because of our solid belief in "*lahat ng bagay kayang lampasan*" (English translation: everything is surmountable). However, the pandemic has tested this belief more than ever before. A survey showed that the majority of Filipinos experienced forms of stress during this crisis, and there is a fear that this stress would lead to unfortunate events and, worse, irreversible effects on one's mental well-being. While we Filipinos are ingenious in making ways(s) to cope and manage ourselves during this COVID-19 crisis, most of the ways (s) we use to cope and manage our lives during this crisis seem insufficient and deemed improper. We overly exert too much effort in battling the contagion, and we have shaken the balance between crisis and peace, freedom and restriction, courage and fear, and safe and unsafe by choosing

one side over the other. Consequently, instead of addressing the situation, we somehow made it worse.

Nevertheless, the Daoist perspectives allowed us to reflect on various aspects of our lives, particularly how to deal with such crises. The insights and proposed way(s) are quite relevant and practical. They teach us to accept the reality of crisis as one of the integral parts of life, deal with it effortlessly, and go with its flow. It suggests a perspective and a way to manage ourselves during a crisis, a way that does not require force but rather a harmonious alignment with the natural flow of events. Thus, the insights and principles of Daoism offer a compelling alternative to conventional approaches to managing the crisis by highlighting flexibility, balance, and spontaneity, which are traceable in the principles of wu-wei and yin-yang.

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