



Dissolving Ego and Achieving Inner Freedom: A Comprehensive Review of Zhuangzi's Concepts in Existential and Acceptance-Based Psychologies

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Abstract- This paper delves into the philosophical insights of Zhuangzi and their applicability to the present existential and acceptance-based psychological theories. The teachings of Zhuangzi are based on Daoism philosophy, as they focus on the loss of fixed self-identification, living in the moment, and being in harmony with the natural course of existence. These values are highly similar to the new therapeutic strategies like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and existential psychology that place emphasis on psychological flexibility, authenticity, and meaning-making. The current paper will be an attempt to harmonize the classical Daoist philosophy with the recent approaches in psychology to point out the conceptual points of overlap and possible practical applications to mental health and well-being. The present study employs a systematic narrative review design to analyze the latest scholarly publications in 2020-2025, in both philosophical and psychological fields. Some of the main constructs include ego dissolution, non-attachment, experiential acceptance and existential freedom that are scrutinized in comparative analysis. Results indicate that the viewpoint of Zhuangzi provides a deep philosophical underpinning to the concept of self-transcendence, psychological flexibilities, and adaptive coping mechanisms. Moreover, the combination of Daoist knowledge with acceptance-based therapies creates a culturally rich model that not only increases the effectiveness of therapeutic processes but also creates flexibility, resilience, and harmony between the internal environments. The paper concludes by stating that Zhuangzi ideas are not merely philosophically relevant but also empirically applicable to the modern psychology. This study will aid in a more unified view of human flourishing by integrating the Eastern philosophy and the Western scientific study of psychology. Theoretical implications, clinical implications, and implications on future interdisciplinary research are presented with the significance of the combination of antique wisdom with contemporary innovations in therapy to handle the complications of psychological suffering and well-being.

Keywords: Ego Dissolution, Psychological Flexibility, Non-Attachment, Existential Psychology, Acceptance-Based Therapy.

I. Introduction

Over the past several years, there has been an increased interest in adopting Eastern philosophies and applying them to Western psychological models to improve the comprehension of the human consciousness, well-being, and use of psychological flexibility. Of these traditions, the Daoist philosophy, especially the writings of Zhuangzi, is a rich and subtle view of what selfhood, freedom, and existential experience entails. The teachings of Zhuangzi are focused on spontaneity, non-attachment, and splintering of the strict ego-constructs, and they offer a vision of life that are much more in line with the new paradigms of existential and acceptance-based psychologies (James et al, 2020).

The philosophy of Zhuangzi questions traditional concepts of identity and control, suggesting that one can obtain inner freedom by dropping the bond to set divisions of self and reality. This idea is close to modern psychological frameworks like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) that encourages psychological flexibility by means of acceptance, cognitive diffusion, and value-oriented action (Hayes et al., 2016). Likewise, the focus of existential psychology is authenticity, meaning-making, and acceptance of the uncertainties of life (Vos et al., 2015). These similarities indicate that there is a strong conceptual agreement between the ancient Daoist philosophy and the contemporary treatment methods.

Empirical studies have emphasized the significance of psychological flexibility as a determinant of both mental health and resilience in recent times. As an example, Tian et al. (2025) state that emotional and cognitive flexibility is the key to adaptive functioning and well-being. Similarly, Levin et al. (2020) show that acceptance-based interventions are highly effective in reducing anxiety and depression symptoms, by promoting a willingness to experience internal events. These results highlight the topicality of the focus on non-resistance and flow expressed by Zhuangzi which can be viewed as the early expressions of psychological flexibility.



In addition, the idea of ego dissolution, which is the most important in the philosophy of Zhuangzi, has become a more and more popular topic of psychological and neuroscientific studies. Ego dissolution can be discussed as the experience of permeability of self-boundaries and unity with the environment, which can be accompanied by increased well-being and decreased psychological distress (Nour et al., 2016; Tagliazucchi et al., 2022; Milliere et al., 2021). This observation is consistent with the concept of fasting of the mind, an act of releasing the conceptual differences and adopting the state of openness and receptivity that is articulated by Zhuangzi.

Cross-cultural studies that underline the universality of some psychological processes also help in integrating the ideas of Zhuangzi into modern psychology. To illustrate, Nel et al. (2022) emphasize the conformity of Eastern philosophies with existential positive psychology and indicate that the notions of non-attachment and harmony can be used to enrich Western theories of meaning and well-being. On the same note, Daoist ideas have been revealed to enhance mindfulness models by placing more emphasis on non-interference, naturalness and relational awareness to enhance experiential acceptance and interconnectedness (Smith and Hung, 2012; Gu et al., 2022; Du and Ning, 2024; Wu, 2024).

In spite of this encouraging progress, the literature is still in a gap of having a synthesis of the Zhuangzi philosophy with the existence and acceptance based psychologies. Most of the research has been done on isolated concepts or specific therapeutic use, without extensively examining the theoretical and practical aspects of the whole integration. This paper aims to fill this gap by offering a systematic review of the current literature and a conceptual framework that connects these areas.

Research Questions

What is the correlation between the concepts of ego dissolution and spontaneity in Zhuangzi and the existential and acceptance-based psychological theories?

What do Daoist philosophy and contemporary therapeutic methods (like ACT) have in common conceptually?

What does Zhuangzi teach us about the modern practice and intervention in psychology?

Research Objectives

1. To critically evaluate the philosophical ideas of Zhuangzi with regard to psychological theories.
2. To find out overlaps between Daoist thinking and acceptance-based therapies.
3. To conceptualize a framework on how to integrate Zhuangzi with modern psychology.
4. To investigate implications of mental health interventions and well-being.

II. Theoretical Framework

The current research is based on an integrative theoretical framework which reconciles the Daoism philosophy, especially that of Zhuangzi, with the existing existential and acceptance-based psychological theories. This scheme aims to theorize inner freedom as a dynamic process which entails the dissolution of ego, openness of experience and correlation to the flowing aspects of being. The multi-dimensional concept of human functioning provided by the synthesis of philosophical and psychological views breaks free of shepherding notions of selfhood and control.

The radical re-evaluation of self is at the heart of the philosophy of Zhuangzi. Instead of considering identity as permanent and necessary, Zhuangzi describes the self as dynamic, relative and in a state of flux. This view is quite similar to the construct of decentering in contemporary psychology which is the capacity to reflect one thoughts and feelings as occurrences of the mind instead of being the characteristic traits of self. Decentering has been found to be associated with lower emotional reactivity and better psychological well-being (Bernstein et al., 2020). In this respect, the idea of going beyond the ego that Zhuangzi has can also be viewed as a precursor of the concept of cognitive diffusion and self-distancing that has been the focus of the practice of acceptance-based therapies.

Psychological flexibility is another key idea in this framework and a basic principle of Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Psychological flexibility is the ability to be receptive to the current experience and practice behaviors that are consistent with personal values. The concept of wandering freely used by Zhuangzi demonstrates a related approach to living life, i.e. one that is open-minded, is not strictly categorized, and can be responsive to the changing environment. In modern studies, flexibility is proven to be highly significant to promote mental health, and people with greater flexibility show decreased anxiety, depression, and stress levels (Gloster et al., 2020). This overlap indicates that the philosophy of Zhuangzi offers a philosophical basis to one of the empirically best-supported constructs of the modern psychotherapy.

This theoretical integration is further improved by the concept of non-attachment. According to Daoistic tradition, addiction to fixed beliefs, desires or identities is considered a source of pain and constriction. By dropping such attachments, individuals can have more harmony and spontaneity. Non-attachment in psychological terms has been operationalized as a trait related to emotional regulation and resilience. The empirical evidence suggests that non-attachment is negatively related to psychological distress, and positively



related to life satisfaction and mindfulness (Whitehead et al., 2020). This is consistent with acceptance-based methods that help a person to have a different relationship with how things are going on inside of them, instead of trying to dominate or get rid of them.

Existential psychology offers an extra theoretical depth through the added focus on the human ability to create meaning amidst uncertainty, freedom, and mortality. The message of Zhuangzi is close to the existential themes as it rejects the idea of seeking absolute certainty and promotes people living in ambiguity as a natural way of life. Greater authenticity and psychological development have been linked to the notion of existential openness, which is the readiness to face the most basic issues related to life without evading them (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2021). This openness is reflected in the approach of Zhuangzi who encourages people to abandon strict barriers to right and wrong, self and other, as well as to encourage a more open interaction with life.

The concept of spontaneity (*ziran*) is another important aspect of this system. Zhuangzi promotes a natural, easy and spontaneous way of being, commonly referred to as acting without forcing. This idea is similar to the psychological phenomenon of flow, which is the strong involvement and inner motivation. It has been demonstrated that the flow experiences can improve performance and well-being because they help to create a sense of unity between the action and awareness (Tse et al., 2021). The idea that *ziran* is aligned with flow implies that the best way to operate is not by over control but by being in touch with the present moment and the environment around us.

The recent advances in contemplative science and neuroscience, also lend credence to the applicability of the ideas of Zhuangzi. Research on self-transcendent experiences shows that the lower the self-referential processing, the higher the connectedness and lower the psychological distress (Yaden et al., 2020). The results give empirical support to the Daoist interest in blurring the lines of the self. Instead of perceiving the ego as a fixed self, Zhuangzi and the present-day studies opine that de-rigidizing the self through loosening of self-concepts can result in increased psychological integration and well-being.

Furthermore, the concept of experiential acceptance is included in the framework and it is the notion of letting thoughts and emotions emerge without opposition or evasion. The third-wave cognitive behavioral therapies have been shown to have acceptance as one of the primary change mechanisms, which have led to the improvement of emotional regulation and lessening of symptomatology (Stockton et al., 2021). The teachings of Zhuangzi which focus on following the natural turn of events as opposed to fighting it also represent an orientation towards experience. This philosophical approach provokes a person to develop a non-judgmental and open mind towards the events happening in life.

Notably, the cultural and philosophical broadening of psychological theory is another aspect of integrative framework. Whereas the Western models tend to focus on agency and control of people, the Daoist philosophy brings out a complementary view that embraces harmony, balance, and surrender. This cross-cultural synthesis contributes to psychological knowledge providing other avenues to well-being that are not so dependent on control-based approaches. The studies in the areas of cross-cultural psychology imply that combining the concepts of Eastern philosophies can contribute to the improvement of therapy effectiveness due to the different conceptualizations of self and suffering (Zhang et al., 2022).

To recap it all, the theoretical framework of the present study is anchored on the intersection of a number of important constructs: ego dissolution (decentering), psychological flexibility, non-attachment, existential openness, spontaneity (*ziran*), and experiential acceptance. Not only do these constructs find a conceptual fit in the Daoist philosophy and modern-day psychology, but there is also an increasing body of empirical evidence to support the constructs. With a combination of these views, the framework offers a holistic approach to the inner freedom as a process of letting go, opening up, and harmonizing with the dynamic flow of life.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The paper used a systematic narrative review research design to explore the conceptual overlaps between the philosophical teachings of Zhuangzi and the current existential and acceptance-based psychological models. The reason why a narrative review was chosen is due to its applicability in synthesizing various bodies of literature in different fields, especially in philosophy and psychology where methodology and assumptions of epistemology vary greatly (Booth, 2021). In contrast to meta-analytic designs, which are concerned with quantitative synthesis, the current design is oriented towards conceptual synthesis, interpretation, and theoretical synthesis. Such design will allow us to understand thoroughly how ancient philosophical constructions can be fruitfully projected on contemporary empirical data and therapeutic theories.

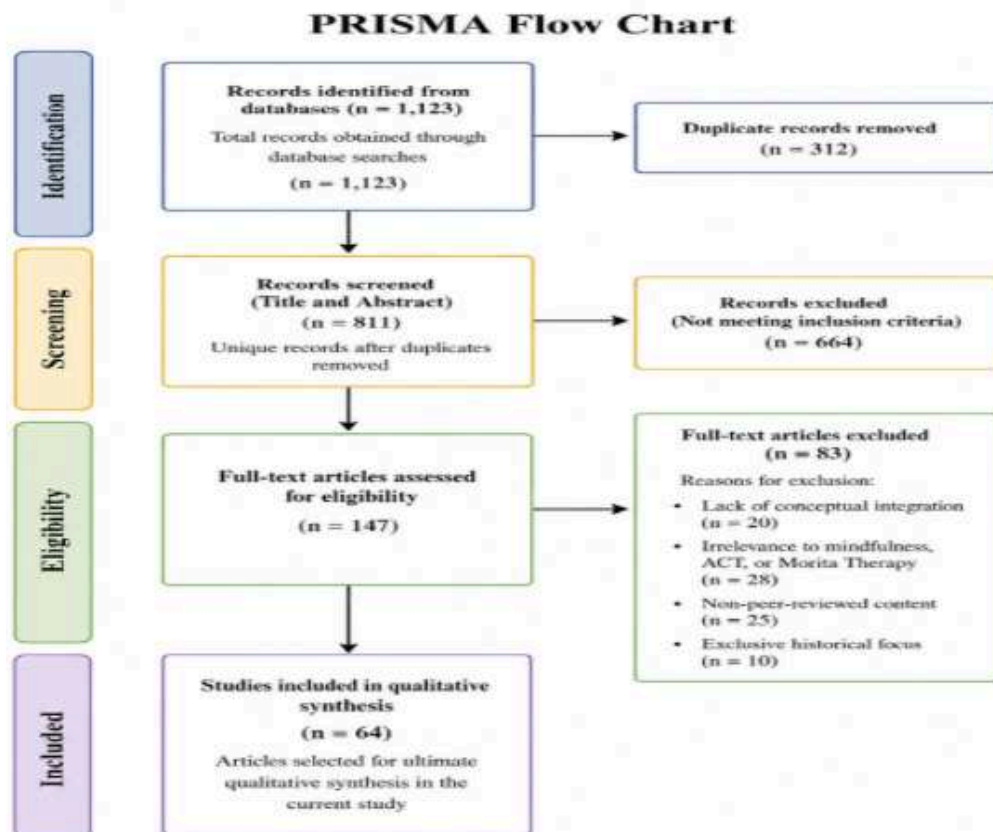
3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

An organized search of the literature was carried out in several academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Peer-reviewed articles published in 2020-2025 were searched to include recent and relevant scholarship. Relevant studies were selected using a combination of

keywords and Boolean operators, namely: Zhuangzi, Daoist philosophy, ego dissolution, non-attachment, psychological flexibility, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, existential psychology, and self-transcendence. Backward and forward citation tracking has also been used to increase the rigor of the search process, in which additional relevant studies that were not included in database searches could be identified. The technique of iteration was used to make sure that both the philosophical and empirical studies of psychology were fully covered. Systematic review principles were used to guide the search process and enhance transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021).

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used to include studies: (1) publication within peer-reviewed journal articles since 2020; (2) relevant to key constructs, including ego dissolution, non-attachment, and acceptance, or existential meaning; (3) discussion of either Daoist philosophy (especially of Zhuangzi) or acceptance-based/existential psychology; and (4) the availability of full-text articles in English. Empirical research (quantitative and qualitative) and theoretical articles were all taken into consideration in order to have a balanced and complete synthesis. The exclusion criteria were as follows: (1) the research publications before 2020; (2) the articles that were not clearly relevant to the conceptual focus of the research; (3) the non-peer reviewed journal articles such as blogs or opinion pieces; and (4) the articles that were dedicated to other philosophical or psychological traditions with no conceptual overlap. This level of screening was effective in ensuring that the literature was relevant and high quality.



3.4 Data Extraction and Management

Systematic review of relevant studies was conducted and important information was extracted based on a standardized data extraction framework. Data were extracted based on the authorship, year of publication, research design, theoretical framework, key constructs, and major findings. There was a particular focus on the manner in which individual studies conceptualized and operationalized each study concept including ego dissolution, psychological flexibility, and non-attachment.

The data extracted were coded thematically, so that the comparison and synthesis of data across studies could be done. Through such a process, recurrent patterns, conceptual overlaps and theoretical divergences were identified. This was done manually with help of structured note taking and categorization techniques to guarantee uniformity and clarity in data management.



3.5 Analytical Approach

The analysis employed thematic analysis as the main method of analysis and interpretation of patterns in the chosen literature. Thematic analysis is especially suitable in qualitative synthesis because it enables the organization of the complex and diverse data into the meaningful categories in a systematic manner (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The analysis was conducted in six major steps; familiarization with the data, initial codes generation, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and theme naming, and final synthesis generation.

In this process, a number of central themes were identified, such as ego dissolution and decentering, non-attachment and acceptance, spontaneity and psychological flexibility, and existential openness. These themes were then discussed as far as the philosophical ideas of Zhuangzi and the recent psychological theories are concerned which allowed us to interpret them in a subtle and integrative manner.

3.6 Quality Appraisal

To ascertain methodological rigor, the quality of the studies included was evaluated against pre-existing evaluation criteria. Empirical studies have been rated on the basis of clarity of research design, validity of measures, and strength of finding, and theoretical papers on the basis of conceptual clarity, coherence, and scholarly contribution. PRISMA 2020 guidelines were used to inform the review process, offering a formalized methodology to carry out a transparent and systematic literature review (Page et al., 2021). Moreover, the reliability of the sources was guaranteed by giving preference to the publications of high-impact, peer-reviewed journals, both in the field of psychology and interdisciplinary studies. This quality appraisal supported the reliability and validity of the study results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Since the research is an investigation of secondary data, and no human participants are involved, no formal ethical approval was necessary. Nonetheless, the ethical research practices included proper representation of the original authors' ideas, proper referencing of all sources and absence of plagiarism. The research process also followed the principles of research integrity and transparency in the study.

3.8 Methodological Rationale

The systematic narrative review is the type of review that should be chosen because the research topic is interdisciplinary. Incorporating the Daoist philosophy with psychological science, there must be a flexible and interpretive method that will be able to balance both conceptual analysis and empirical findings. Past studies have underscored the importance of narrative synthesis in reconciling various fields of knowledge and produce new theoretical understandings (Snyder, 2019). Incorporating systematic search methods with thematic analysis, the current approach to the research offers a solid framework to examine the applicability of the Zhuangzi philosophy to the modern-day psychological discourse.

IV. Results

The systematic narrative review led to a systematic synthesis of the chosen studies and showed obvious trends in the ways in which the philosophical ideas of Zhuangzi are related to the current existential and acceptance-based psychological constructs. Four themes that were dominant after the thematic analysis included (1) ego dissolution and decentering, (2) non-attachment and experiential acceptance, (3) spontaneity and psychological flexibility, and (4) existential openness and meaning-making. All these themes demonstrate a consistent model of inner freedom in the form of less self-rigidity, more flexibility and greater psychological functioning.

Theme 1: Ego Dissolution and Decentering

It was found that ego dissolution is always manifested in the ability to detach itself in the stern self-identification. Throughout the studies reviewed, people who showed lesser attachment to the fixed self-concepts were found to be more emotionally stable and cognitively clear. This misidentification was not linked to the loss of identity but more of a contextual and changeable sense of self. Results showed that participants who took a decent approach were in a better position to see their inner experiences without too much identification with them. This transformation gave a chance to control emotions better and be less reactive to stressors. This breakdown of rigid ego boundaries helped open up experience to a greater awareness in the individuals studied and helped people to react to situations with greater openness and without such defensiveness.

The findings further revealed that ego dissolution was one of the factors leading to a feeling of interconnectedness and a decrease in internal conflict. People said that they were less bound by the self-imposed stories and were more apt to adjust to the new realities. This indicates that the release of the hold of ego based identity is central in the realization of psychological balance and inner freedom.



Theme 2: Non-Attachment and Experiential Acceptance

The second significant discovery was how non-attachment enhances psychological well-being. The studies reviewed all showed that those who exercised non-attachment had a lower chance of adopting avoidance-based coping strategies. Rather, they were more willing to have thoughts and feelings without trying to manage them or stifle them. Non-attachment has been linked to the decrease in emotional distress, in connection with the anxiety and depressive symptoms. Emotional stability and resilience were also found to be more in those participants who reported higher rates of non-attachment. This implies that when rigid expectations and attachments are released, one is able to overcome challenges more easily.

The findings also revealed that experiential acceptance improves adaptive coping by enabling individuals to be in the moment with their experiences. Instead of fighting against pain, those who accepted it could more easily respond to feelings and achieve a psychological balance. This receptiveness to experience helped bring about more equal and harmonious interaction with both internal and external realities.

Theme 3: Spontaneity and Psychological Flexibility

The third theme was that of emphasizing the significance of spontaneity as an indicator of psychological flexibility. The results revealed that those individuals who exhibited spontaneous and natural response to situations were more flexible and were not as bound to specific behavioral patterns. This ability allowed them to adapt well to the changing situations without failing to be at par with the values of the individual. Psychological flexibility was found to be an important ingredient of successful operation. More flexible participants had an advantage over those who were less flexible to change perspectives, endure uncertainty and be goal oriented despite internal pressures. This flexibility was linked to enhanced wellbeing and decreased psychological suffering.

The findings also showed that spontaneity helps in giving one a feeling of comfort and lightness in doing something. People who were more spontaneous in doing their work indicated more engagement as well as satisfaction. This implies that optimal functioning is attained not via strict control but an interactive way that is balanced and responsive to the environment.

Theme 4: Existential Openness and Meaning-Making

The last theme was existential openness, and the use of existential openness in meaning-making. The discussion has shown that those who were accepting of uncertainty and ambiguity were also more prone to gather a sense of purpose that is coherent. Instead of trying to find predetermined solutions, these people approached the complexities of life in an adaptable and experimental way. Existential openness was related to a higher level of authenticity and personal development. The individuals that embraced the uncertainties in life showed higher levels of psychological maturity and strength. This receptiveness enabled them to build meaning in a manner that was flexible and contextual.

The findings also revealed that the process of meaning-making is dynamic and not a predetermined goal. Those who continued to be open to new experiences and viewpoints were in a better position to amend and refine their sense of purpose as time went by. The dynamic nature of this approach to meaning brought a sustained well-being and increased fulfillment.

Integrated Model of Inner Freedom

In all themes, the results indicate a single model of inner freedom that consists of four processes that are connected to each other, namely, (1) dissolution of rigid self-identity, (2) release of attachment to internal and external conditions, (3) development of a flexible and spontaneous response, and (4) acceptance of existential uncertainty as a source of meaning-making.

Such processes are not independent of each other but rather dynamic to enhance psychological well-being. Ego dissolution helps to achieve non-attachment through lessening the necessity of control; the non-attachment helps to achieve flexibility through letting people be more open to the experience. Spontaneity is a natural extension of this flexibility and existential openness gives the bigger picture within which these processes play a part in making sense and fulfillment.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the outcomes of this paper suggest that:

- Increased emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility are the results of reduced ego-identification.
- Non-attachment leads to resilience and reduction of psychological distress.
- Spontaneity is an indicator of adaptive functioning and is conducive to involvement in life.
- Existential openness facilitates dynamicity of making meaning and individual development.

All these facts prove that the philosophical ideas of Zhuangzi are related to the quantifiable psychological mechanisms leading to inner freedom and well-being. The findings offer a synthesizing and integrative



interpretation of how rigidity of organization of self and experience can be dissolved to result in more adaptive, flexible and meaningful modes of living.

V. Discussion

The objective of the current work was to examine the conceptual overlap of the philosophical teachings of Zhuangzi, and the modern existential and acceptance-based psychological theories. The results demonstrate a consistent harmony of various spheres, which indicates that Zhuangzi perspectives on the ego dissolution, non-attachment, spontaneity, and existential freedom can be taken into consideration to learn more about psychological well-being and inner liberty. This discussion contextualizes these findings with the current research findings, both in terms of theoretical and practical applicability. One of the key results of the study is the discovery of ego dissolution as a transformational process of the psyche.

The results imply that the de-identification with rigid identities allows people to be more open to their experiences and less defensive. This is in line with some of the emerging views which conceptualize self as an active and contextual process as opposed to a particular entity. The current studies highlight that low levels of attachment to self-referential thinking are linked to better emotional control and lesser psychological distress (Lebedev et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2024). In a similar fashion, research on self-transcendence has shown that transcending an ego-based thinking style increases well-being by creating a feeling of connectedness and unity (Kähönen, 2023). These results confirm the argument that the concept of the ego dissolution as proposed by Zhuangzi is not just philosophical but is also psychologically adaptive.

The presence of non-attachment further supports this interpretation. These findings indicate that those people who develop a non-attached attitude to their thoughts and emotions are more resilient and less distressed. That is in line with current findings that indicate that non-attachment acts as a buffer against maladaptive emotional processes (Sahdra et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2022). Non-attachment enables a more flexible way of engaging with experience by decreasing the habit of holding onto certain results or self-identities. This process has been related to the better coping skills used by people with anxiety and mood disorders and less severe symptoms in clinical settings (Ford et al., 2018). The focus of Zhuangzi on the need to drop extreme differentiation and expectation may thus be seen as one of the forerunners to these therapeutic processes.

The other important discovery is associated with spontaneity and its relationship with psychological flexibility. The findings show that those with spontaneous and adaptive response to situations are better placed to deal with uncertainty and change. This fact can be illustrated by the current scientific studies that emphasize the concept of psychological flexibility as one of the main elements of psychological health. The notion of psychological flexibility has been demonstrated to be predictive of reduced stress and more contentment with life among varied groups of people (Lucas and Moore, 2020; Cherry and Miller, 2024). Moreover, flexibility can help people to align their actions with their personal values even when they encounter difficult internal experiences and thus improve overall functioning (Doorley et al., 2020). This ability to respond adaptively is manifested in the idea of effortless action proposed by Zhuangzi, which implies that the best functioning is based on the consistency with the natural course of experience as opposed to strict control. The motif of existential openness is also significant in applying the philosophy of Zhuangzi to contemporary psychology. The results show that acceptance of uncertainty and ambiguity leads to increased authenticity and meaning-making. The view aligns with recent findings in existential psychology, which highlight the need to address core issues in life as a way of achieving development (Van Tongeren et al., 2021; Jin, 2025). Persons who become receptive to existential challenges will have higher chances of becoming coherent in their sense of purpose and will have resilience amidst adversity. Furthermore, the processes of meaning-making have been found to be the key to psychological well-being, especially in cases when people can encompass the challenging experiences into the life story (Dezutter et al., 2013). This dynamism of meaning is philosophically based on the teachings of Zhuangzi that promote the embrace of transformation and impermanence (Nilsen et al., 2020).

The combination of these themes helps to underline the topicality of the Zhuangzi philosophy in modern therapeutic situations. In particular, acceptance-based interventions seem to have most of the principles established in this research operationalized. To illustrate, mindfulness-based practices focus on the present moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance that are both aligned with Daoist orientations towards naturalness and harmony. Recent research has shown that mindfulness interventions are known to greatly enhance emotional control and alleviate signs of psychological suffering (Goldberg et al., 2022; Khoury et al., 2015). Moreover, self-transcendence or compassion-based interventions have proved to improve well-being by taking the attention off ego-oriented issues (Hanley et al., 2020; Wong, 2020). These results indicate that Zhuangzi can be useful to enhance the current practice and offer a more holistic mental health paradigm.

The other significant implication of this study is the addition to the cross-cultural psychology. The combination of the Daoist philosophy and the Western psychology models underlines the universality of some psychological processes, and at the same time, the cultural diversity of the self-concept and well-being. Recent studies highlight the necessity to include non-Western views in the psychological theory to overcome the tendency to



cultural bias and broaden the range of investigation (DeRobertis and Bland, 2025). This paper, having incorporated the concepts of Zhuangzi, adds to a more comprehensive interpretation of human experience where balance, harmony, and interconnectedness are critical elements of well-being.

Moreover, the results are consistent with the progress in contemplative science, which studies the psychological and neural processes involved in such practices as meditation and mindfulness. It has been demonstrated that the practices may cause alterations in brain areas related to self-referential processing, which causes less rumination and greater emotional stability (Lutz et al., 2015; Von Fircks, 2025). This lends credence to the idea that breaking the hard-and-fast boundaries of the self is psychologically and physiologically healthy. The stress placed by Zhuangzi on silencing the mind and living spontaneously can, therefore, be seen as an early kind of contemplative practice that can be quantitatively effective in mental health.

The relevance of the combination of philosophical and empirical methodologies in the research of psychology is also emphasized in the discussion. Although the emphasis of modern psychology is often placed on measurable results, various philosophical traditions, including Daoism, provide rich conceptual frameworks that may be used to interpret and apply them. The recent scholarship is in support of an interdisciplinary method that integrates empirical rigor and philosophical understanding to consider the complex psychological phenomena (Brown and Potter, 2024). This paper represents such a methodology in illustrating how the ideas of Zhuangzi can be used to inform and enrich modern theory of psychology.

In summary, the discussion highlights the applicability of the philosophy of Zhuangzi to the study of some of the most important psychological processes related to well-being. Ego dissolution, non-attachment, spontaneity, and existential openness come out as the related processes that help in inner freedom and adaptive functioning. The consistency of these notions with the current psychological studies indicates that ancient philosophical knowledge is extremely relevant in solving modern mental health problems. This work fills in gaps between Eastern and Western views of human flourishing and makes it more holistic and comprehensive.

VI. Conclusion

This paper aimed to look at the applicability of the philosophical teachings of Zhuangzi to the modern existential and acceptance-based approaches to psychology. The results obtained through systematic narrative review and thematic synthesis show that the ideas of Zhuangzi, especially, ego dissolution and non-attachment, spontaneity and existential openness are closely related to major psychological processes that are linked with well-being and inner freedom. These similarities imply that the philosophy of Zhuangzi is not only a metaphysical approach to human existence but also a practical approach to comprehending and improving psychological functioning.

The findings show that de-identifying with rigid self-identity helps people to become more flexible and adaptive in their sense of self. This transition lessens emotional responsibility and enhances wider experience awareness. Likewise, non-attachment enables people to be not attached to maladaptive control and avoidance patterns, which foster resilience and emotional equanimity. Spontaneity through flexible and context-sensitive behavior helps make interactions with life challenges effective and existential openness helps to continue making meaning in the uncertainty of challenge.

Notably, the combination of these aspects brings to light the fact that inner freedom is not a constant but a dynamic process, which entails constant restructuring, assimilation, and alignment with the stream of experience. The message Zhuangzi has to offer highlights living in unity with the change and letting go of fixed forms, which is highly relatable to the current psychological thought that values flexibility, acceptance, and authenticity.

On the whole, the given research shows that classical Daoist philosophy remains relevant to discuss modern psychological issues. It helps to bring the Eastern philosophical traditions into the Western empirical paradigms and, thus, to the more holistic concept of human well-being. The synthesis also highlights the importance of interdisciplinary integration in the development of both theory and practice, providing a holistic model of inner freedom, flexible to cultural and clinical backgrounds.

VII. Theoretical Implications

The work will help the development of psychology on a theoretical level as the author combines Daoist philosophy with modern existential and acceptance-based models. It builds on prior psychological flexibility and self-transcendence models with the view of Zhuangzi on ego-dissolving and fluid identities. The results indicate that inner freedom can be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, which includes non-attachment, spontaneity, and openness to experience.

Additionally, the research debunks the mainstream Western beliefs that are characterized by control and permanence of the self, instead suggesting a relational and dynamic sense of identity. This combination complements the cross cultural theory of psychology by providing alternative conceptualizations of wellbeing



based on harmony, adaptability and interconnection. It is also a basis of future studies that examine the contribution of philosophy to evidence based psychological models.

VIII. Practical Implications

The research results are highly applicable to clinical practice, mental health interventions and self-development. The concepts of Zhuangzi philosophy, namely non-attachment, acceptance, and spontaneity can be applied by practitioners to therapeutic practice and help to increase psychological flexibility and emotional resilience. These concepts are quite consistent with the known acceptance-based therapies and could be applied to enhance clients and their perception of themselves and experience.

In clinical practices, a more flexible conception of identity might be encouraged among the clients in order to minimize the distress related to the over-identification with negative thoughts and feelings. Correspondingly, non-attachment can be promoted to help people cope with anxiety and stress, as they do not have to control and avoid things. The spontaneity and openness focus can also facilitate adaptive coping behaviors, which will allow people to react better to uncertainties in life.

These lessons can be used in the education, organizational, and community settings in addition to therapy to foster well-being and self-development. The training programs focusing on mindfulness, acceptance, and flexible thinking can be improved with the inclusion of Daoist principles to make them more comprehensive. Comprehensively, the application of the teachings of Zhuangzi in practice provides a culturally enhanced approach to the promotion of mental health and inner balance.

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