

Postgraduate/Distance Learning
Assignment coversheet & feedback form

**THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE
SUBMITTING (DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)**

For completion by the student:		
Student Name: Chun Han		
Module code: SICH7019 Module title: Readings from The Compilation of Books and Writings on the Important Governing Principles	Student ID number: 1804023	Educational support needs: No
Module tutor: Dr. Chen, Sufan Assignment due date: 10 Nov 2023 - 15:00		
If your module has multiple submissions please indicate which piece of work this is. 1 st ☐ ✓ 2 nd ☐ 3 rd ☐ 4 th ☐ 5 th ☐ 6 th ☐		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed Chun Han..... Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ✓ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		
Assignment Mark		
1 st Marker's Provisional mark		
2 nd Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark		
Agreed Internal Mark:		
External Examiner's mark (if relevant)		
Final Mark		
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.		
For completion by Marker 1:		

Comments:	
Marker's signature:	Date:
For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:	
Comments:	
Marker's Signature:	Date:
AGREED INTERNAL MARK (where necessary):	
Comment on process on arriving at agreed mark:	
External Examiner's comments (if relevant)	
External Examiner's Signature:	Date:

The Relevance of *Zhuangzi's* "Life is finite, while *Zhi* is infinite"

Word Count: 2391

1. Introduction

Zhuang Zi lived in an era of a hundred schools of thought, an era in which "The system of the Dao 道 was about to be torn in fragments by the world." (*Zhuang Zi - The Chapter of the World*) He not only absorbed the ideas of various scholars, but also, more importantly, felt the contradictions in the ideas of different scholars and the incompatibility of different schools of thought. Behind the chaos of thought is the chaos of spirit. He saw the reality of the pluralistic human debate and the stubbornness of man and the barrier between. How to face this dilemma is the starting point of *Zhuangzi's* thought. For the individual, it is the conflict between knowledge and life; for human society, it is the resulting conflict of pluralistic values. How to break through the distress brought about by individualism and resolve the confusion of life in order to restore the true relationship between pluralistic existence is the central question.¹

The conflict between knowledge and life lies first of all in the fact that human beings, with their rational capacity, cannot grasp infinite knowledge and absolute truth in their limited life. *Zhuangzi - Nourishing the Lord of Life* 養生主 says, "Our life is finite, while *Zhi* is infinite. It is dangerous to pursue infinite *Zhi* with a limited life! It would be very dangerous to pursue *Zhi* when one already knows this truth" All we have at our disposal is a wide variety of conceptual systems, fragmentary and even conflicting knowledge. Then, if we use such prejudices to guide our own existence and the development of society, we will end up doing nothing more than

¹ Luo Suming 羅蘇溟, *Analysing the Practical Meaning of Zhuang Zi's Ideas of "Dao", "Knowledge is infinite" and "Get rid of selfishness"* (Journal of Shanghai Normal University, 1994), p.44.

going our own way, bewildered by the clash of ideas and spirituality, so that we will always end up in a situation where the strongest wins. All of this is hurting ourselves and all of us deeply. So the real problem is not intellectual but practical. The question is how we can get rid of the sense of division brought about by knowledge and desire and return to the unity of harmony, that is, "Heaven and earth are born together with me, and all things are one with me", as stated in *Zhuangzi's The Adjustment of Controversies* 齊物論.

Understanding the background of *Zhuangzi's* thought and the origin of the theme of this presentation, we will now look at the meaning of the key word *Zhi*.

2. What is *Zhi*

Guo Xiang's 郭象 commentary in the *Nourishing the Lord of Life* defines "*Zhi* is infinite" as *Zhi* means a tool for realising desires such as "fame" and "victory".² *Zhi* has no boundaries, nor does "aspiration". Other commentators have interpreted *Zhi* in a way similar to the concept of "knowledge", for example, Chen Jingyuan 陳景元 argues: "The one who has a broad understanding of the world knows without boundaries."³ According to Lu Shuzhi 陸樹芝, "Don't bother with a lot of knowledge."⁴

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the commentators' interpretation of the concept of *Zhi* in the *Nourishing the Lord of Life* can be divided into two categories: one category believes that *Zhi* refers to objective knowledge about objective things, which is value-neutral; the other category believes that *Zhi* represents knowledge based on right and wrong.

² Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), p.123.

³ Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀, *Nan Hua Zhen Jing Yi Hai Zuan Wei* 南華真經義海纂微 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), p.113.

⁴ Lu Shuzhi 陸樹芝, *Zhuang Zi Xue* 莊子雪 (Shanghai: East China Normal University, 2011), p.35.

On the other hand, the concept of *Zhi* represents desires based on judgements of right and wrong, good and evil, and the means to realise those desires. To summarise, one category refers to objective knowledge and the other to subjective desires. The meaning of *Zhi* in *Nourishing the Lord of Life* should be consistent with the meaning of *Zhi* discussed in its previous article, *The Adjustment of Controversies* 齊物論 and its later article, *The World on Earth* 人間世.

In *Zhuangzi*, *Zhi* can be divided into two categories, i.e., knowledge of "Dao" and "Things" and their results. Knowledge of the appearance or falsehood of things and its results is a kind of "small *Zhi*" or "clever knowledge", because what it obtains is a kind of false knowledge (it thinks it knows the truth of the matter, but in reality it does not), or an external knowledge of things. The knowledge of the truth of things is also the knowledge of Dao, which is a kind of "great knowledge", because what it obtains is a kind of "true knowledge" (the knowledge of the nature of things), or a kind of inner knowledge about things.

On the other hand, Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 understands the emergence of *Zhi* as the result of the action of the separate mind of human beings, and if this is the case, ignorance is the knowledge of non-separation. This is because separate knowledge is far from the original unity of man and the world, that is, far from the Dao. Therefore, only "ignorance" cannot be separated from its virtue. This explanation is similar to Guo Xiang's explanation that knowledge is the product of being far away from Dao. Therefore, "ignorance" is the process of returning to Dao.

3. How to achieve *Zhi*

From the perspective of objective knowledge, learning is the norm of human life, but also the

objective needs of the development and progress of social civilisation. The development of society is ever-changing, if you neglect to learn, facing a lot of new things, new problems will be lost and confused, do not know what to do, will lag behind the times. The aging of knowledge and the rigidity of thought will directly lead to narrowing of horizons and degradation of ability, which is not conducive to the development of individuals and society. To achieve *Zhi*, we need to have the right approach and mentality, and correspondingly, we also need to avoid mistakes.

3.1. Avoid blindly pursuing *Zhi*

In the era of information explosion, in the face of the huge amount of knowledge and information, if you do not have a clear purpose of learning, grasp the core, you will be lost in the sea of information, the pressure and anxiety of receiving an infinite amount of information will also affect the physical and mental state.

Interpretation of the text: "Scholars learn what they can not learn, that is, people want to learn what they can not know, where all can, so it is able to be able to. If you are able to learn what you can, then you are not learning what you cannot learn." Cheng Xuanying's *Shu*, the reason why people are not free is because they do not follow nature and follow the reason of their hearts, so-called "Heaven's punishment, how can be solved" (*The Seal of Virtue Complete* 德充符), all their lives are trapped in the contradictions and entanglements, blindness and confusion in the cannot be extricated.

3.2. Know to stop

When human beings think that they know about everything, they tend to be arrogant. However, if one recognises the limits of knowledge, one will be modest and cautious. This is what is

meant by the saying, "Know what you do not know, and then know it". The knowledge that comes from knowing the boundary of what one does not know points to both the dimension of "knowledge" and "ignorance," both to the empirical realm of objects and the metaphysical realm of Dao, in which the subject can know both the object and himself, the boundaries of the object and the infinity of the Dao. It can be said that this kind of *Zhi* is the prerequisite preparation for obtaining the true knowledge of the Dao.⁵

In the dialogue between Nie Que and Wang Ni in *The Adjustment of Controversies* 齊物論, there are four questions and four answers, and after each answer, Nie Que has some "loss", his "human" mechanism slowly diminishes, and the mechanism of "nature" emerges. It can be said that the dialogue process of "four questions and four ignorances" is a process of transcendence from "knowledge" to "Dao".

In the first question, "Do you know that all things are the same?" The focus of attention at this point is on "the same thing". This is a shift from the "other" to the "this", and all things are constructed by man through cognition, which also reflects the intentionality of *Zhi*. Based on this, it is difficult to obtain a uniform standard of judgement in the empirical field as everyone's cognition is different, and the answer to this question is also conceivable. Just as Cheng Xuanying said, "It is said that the feelings of things are perverted, and the views are different, and all of them think they are right and others are wrong, and they quite know whether they are." Wang Ni replied, "I do not know!" Wang Ni is not unaware of it, but denies the "small knowledge" in the human mechanism. It is precisely because of Nie Que's excessive knowledge that he gets lost in external objects and loses his heart, making it difficult for him

⁵ Li Shuang, *On Zhuangzi's Thought of Ignorance* (Master's thesis, East China Normal University, 2016), p.43.

to attain the Dao. Wang Ni's response of ignorance is a kind of inspiration to Nie Que, hoping that he can realise the limitations of man's small knowledge and improve himself.

In the second question, "Do you know what you do not know?" The content of the question is no longer "know", but "do not know". The realm of engagement is elevated, asking about the subject's "ignorance". Lao Zi said, "The one who knows others is intelligent, the one who knows himself is wise." The one who is able to know himself is one level higher than the one who chases external objects without knowing the return. This kind of reflection of the subject on himself is a kind of "know to stop".

Thus, Wang Ni replies again, "I do not know." If one knows what one does not know, one still knows, stay at the level of things, not rising to grasp the Dao. On the other hand, the foothold of Nie Que's question remains in the centre of the individual, and thus he only sees himself but not everyone. Wang Ni's reply, "I do not know," implies that he does not know his own "knowing" or "not knowing," thus the opposition between knowing and not knowing is deconstructed, and Nie Que has a better understanding of "not knowing".

In the third question, Nie Que asks, "So nothing can be known?" Wang Ni replies for the third time, "I do not know." From "knowing" to "not knowing", this time the question leads to ignorance. I do not know me and I do not know things; only when things and I are forgotten inside and outside can we really get out of the conscious state of knowing. The reason why people do not know is that they are different from each other and do not communicate with each other. If we look at it from the Daoist point of view, so that all things are not subject to human cognitive intervention and return to the nature of things, then all things will be in a world of self-explanation.

In the realm of clarity, one's awareness and existence are integrated into all things in the world. Inspired, Nie Que asked the fourth question, "If you do not understand the benefits and the harms; do not the most virtuous individuals also know the benefits and the harms?" Though Nie Que and Wang Ni are both virtuous, they have not yet become true Daoist masters. The *Zhi* represented by Nie Que is about to break through the limitations of small knowledge and enter the Great Dao through the layers of questions. In Zhuang Zi's view, the knowledge of the ultimate things constructed by sensibility and knowledge is at a lower level, while the knowledge of not knowing through the subject's inner reflection and cultivation is the true knowledge of the Dao.

In this way, the acquisition of true knowledge must be connected with a real person, "there is a real person and then there is true knowledge". In the ancient times, a true man did not regret what he missed and was not arrogant when he got what he wanted. If so, the heights do not tremulous, into the water is not moistened, into the fire is not hot. This is only possible for those who are wise enough to reach the realm of the Dao.

With his knowledge, he gains his mind, and with his mind, he gains his constant mind. The end of knowing is the self-consciousness of the mind, and from the clarity of the mind, we get the constant mind. Zhuang Zi strips away the layers of knowledge from the mind, so that the frozen and rigid heart under the bondage of concepts can slowly relax and be tranquilised.

4. Conclusion

Zhuang Zi saw the contradiction between the various limited theories and the infinite nature of the universe arising from the limited cognition of human beings, and came to the conclusion

that "it is dangerous". What Zhuang Zi was exploring was not empirical knowledge, but the wisdom of survival, which implies the ultimate concern of human beings.

Therefore, when Zhuang Zi said, "There is a limit to our life, but to knowledge there is no limit. With what is limited to pursue after what is unlimited is a perilous thing; and when, knowing this, we still seek the increase of our knowledge, the peril cannot be averted." At that time, Zhuang Zi's focus was on how human beings can keep their nature, how to maintain the natural state of life without being damaged by external objects. Human life is limited by its natural form, but knowledge is limited by external objects, and there is no end to it. Those who are fond of fame and victory are often lost in external objects, and their minds are trapped in a state of fatigue without knowing how to return. Since knowledge has a negative meaning for human nature, why not return to ignorance? This is not a worthless state of ignorance, but a transcendent state in which human beings coexist with all things in harmony, in which human life is one with the Dao, and in which nature is born in a state of inaction. This makes *Zhuangzi's Zhi* contain a very high level of wisdom, which has a very important impact on the development of human thinking and cognitive ability, and has a positive research significance.

Bibliography

Books:

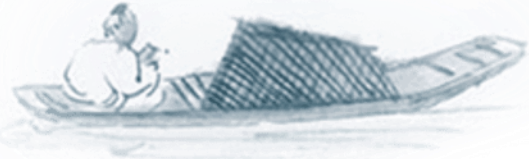
- Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀, *Nan Hua Zhen Jing Yi Hai Zuan Wei* 南華真經義海纂微 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018)
- Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016)
- James Legge, *Zhuangzi*, in *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2016)
- Lu Shuzhi 陸樹芝, *Zhuang Zi Xue* 莊子雪 (Shanghai: East China Normal University, 2011)

Journal articles

- Luo Suming 羅蘇溟, *Analysing the Practical Meaning of Zhuang Zi's Ideas of "Dao", "Knowledge is infinite" and "Get rid of selfishness"*, Journal of Shanghai Normal University: Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition, 1994.4 (1994)

Theses

- Li Shuang, *On Zhuangzi's Thought of Ignorance* (Master's thesis, East China Normal University, 2016)



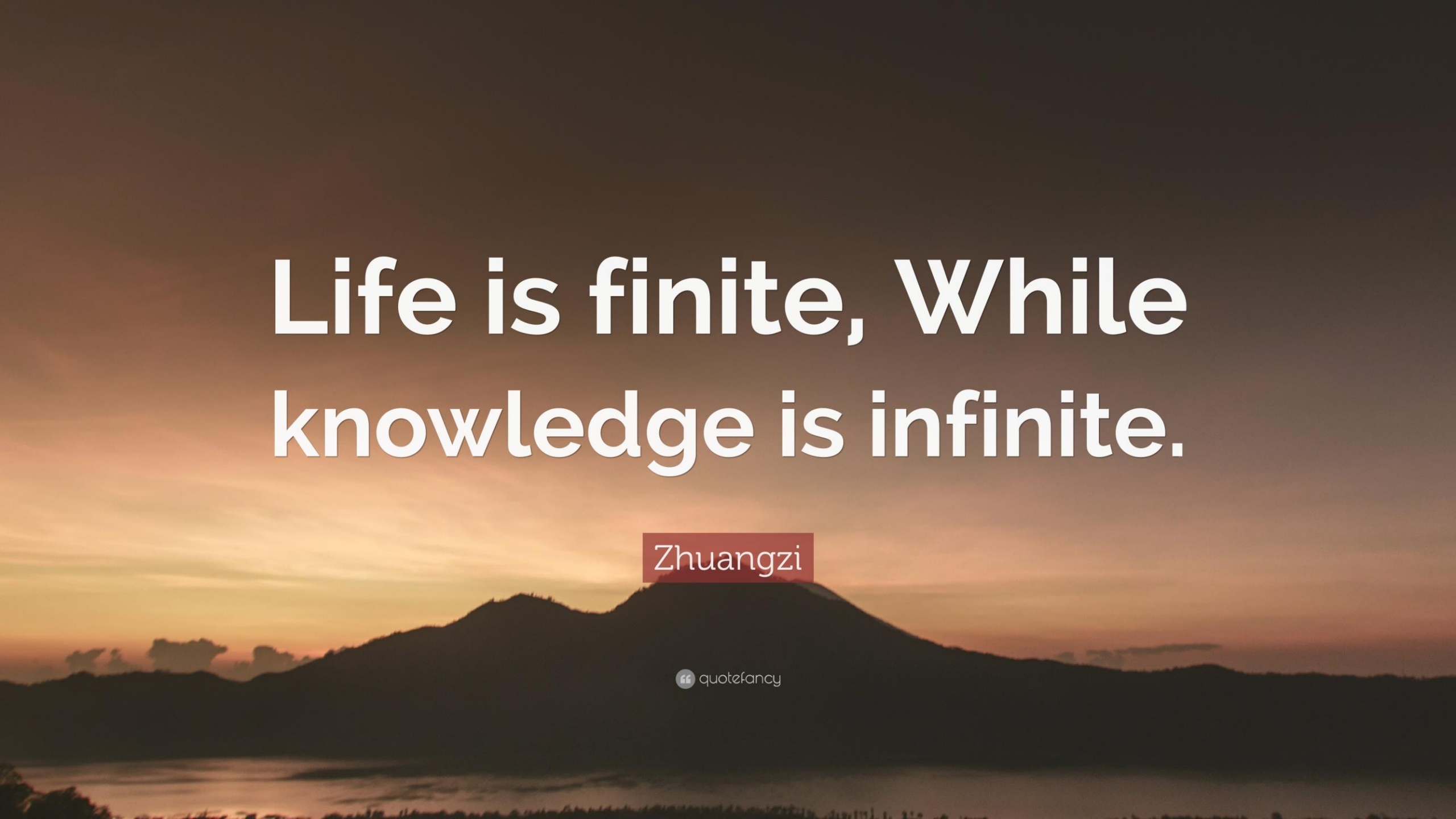
The Relevance of *Zhuangzi's* "Life is finite, while *Zhi* is infinite"

Module Code: SIC7019

Module Tutor: Dr. Chen, Sufan

Student Name: Chun Han (1804023)

Date: 9th November 2023



Life is finite, While
knowledge is infinite.

Zhuangzi

The background of the slide is a traditional Chinese ink wash painting of misty mountains. The painting features dark, craggy peaks rising from a sea of white mist. The style is minimalist and atmospheric, with soft brushstrokes creating a sense of depth and tranquility. The mist is rendered in varying shades of white and light grey, while the mountains are in darker ink tones.

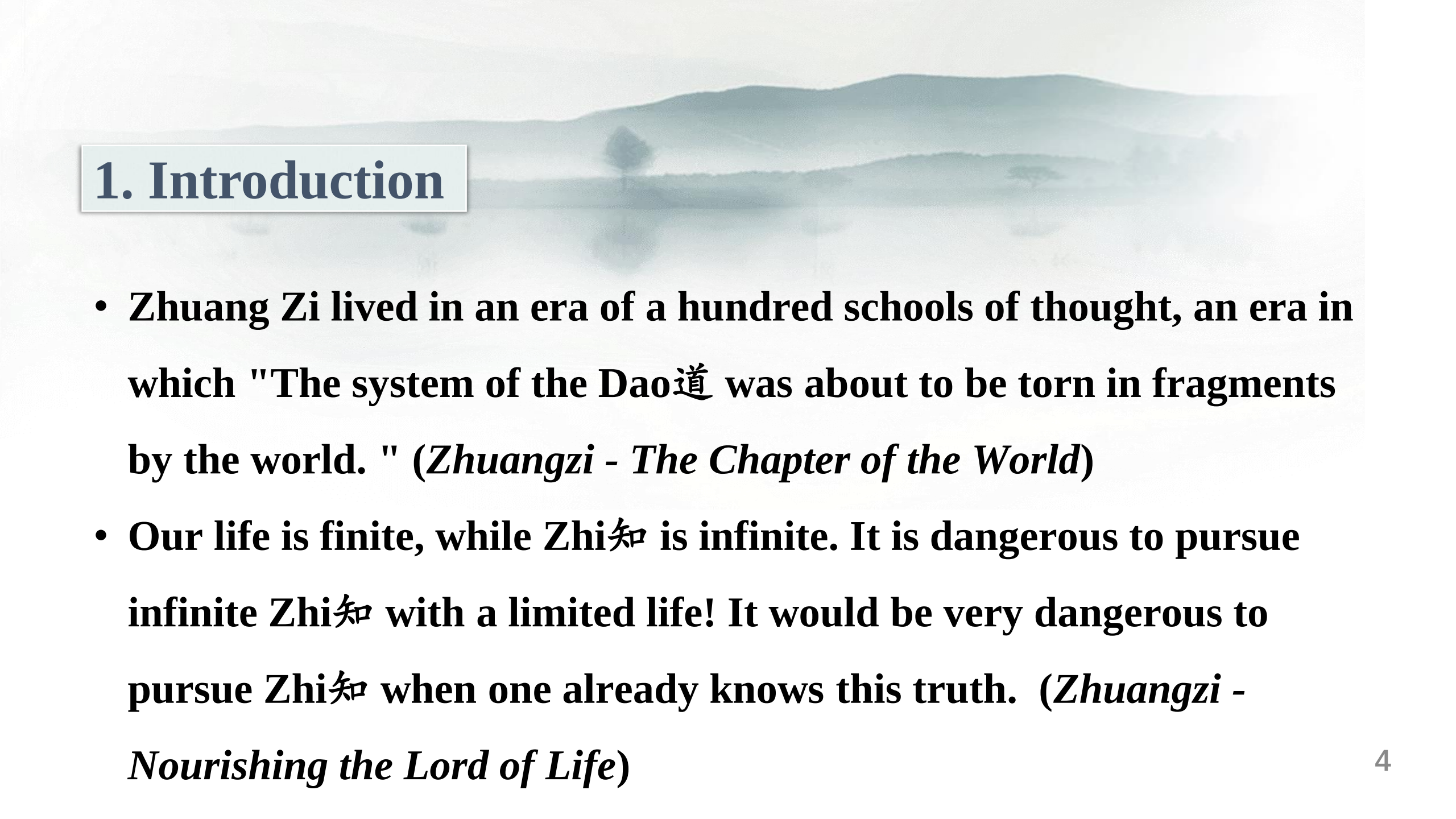
CONTENTS

1. Introduction

2. What is *Zhi*

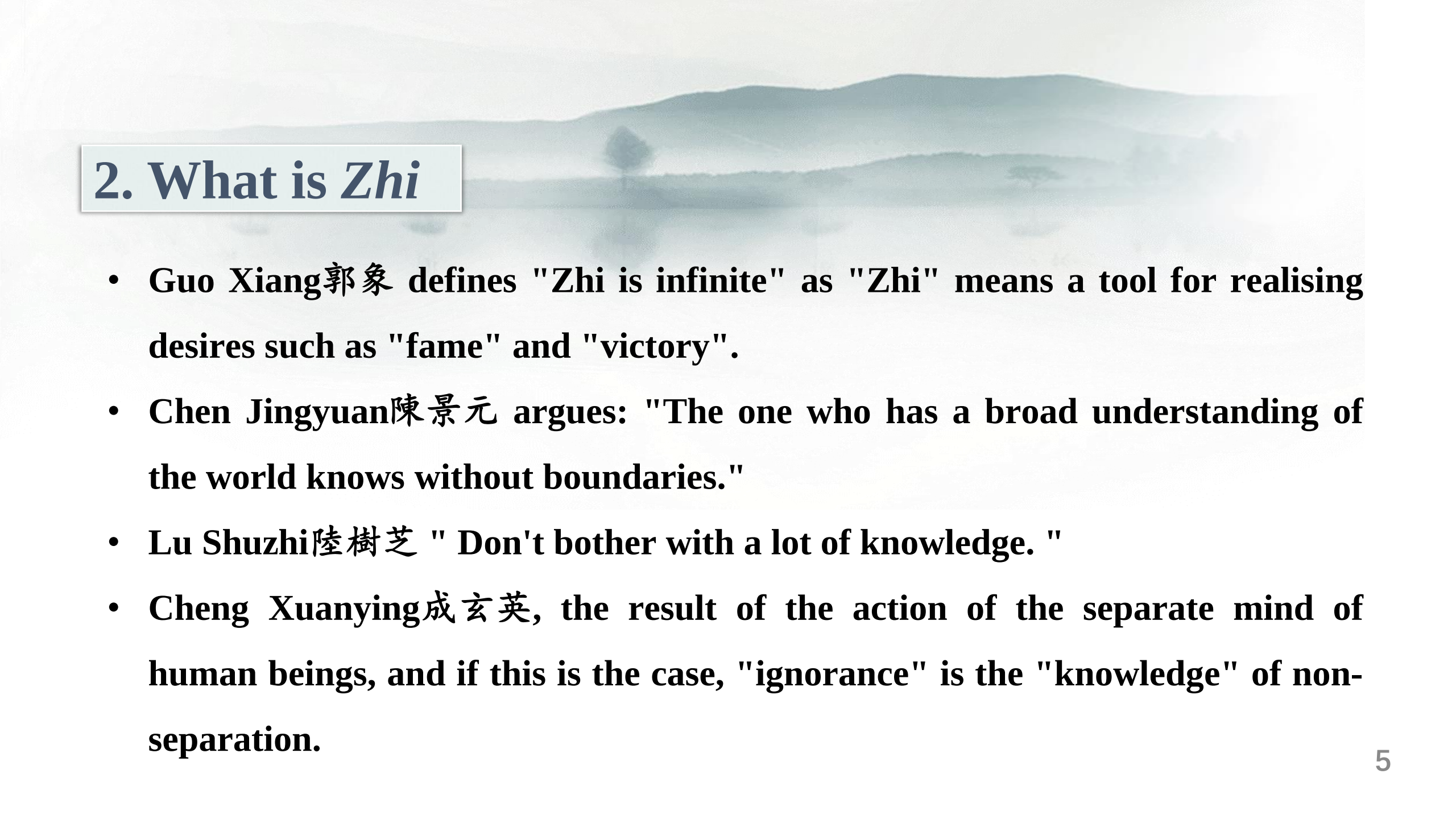
3. How to achieve *Zhi*

4. Conclusion



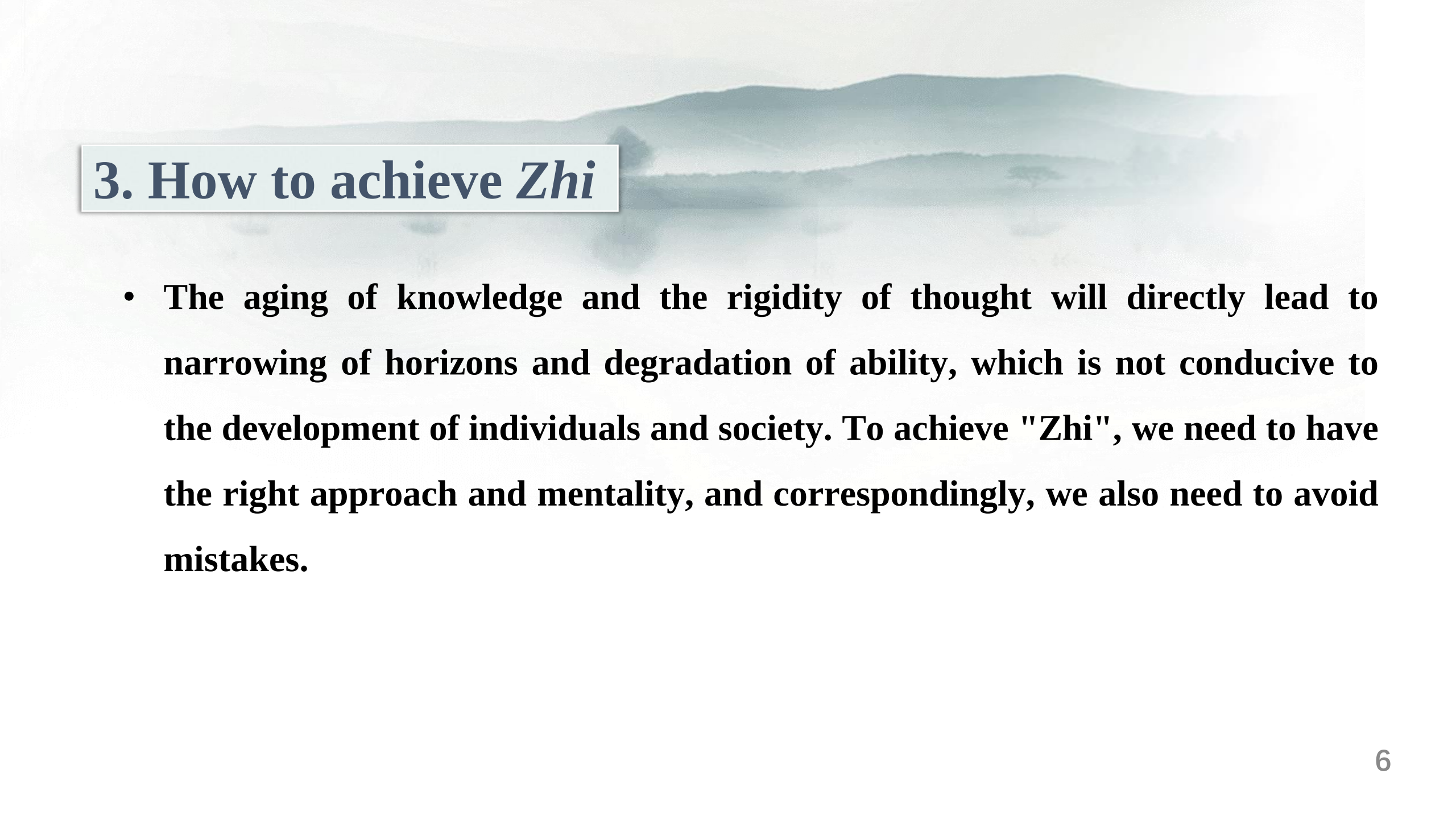
1. Introduction

- Zhuang Zi lived in an era of a hundred schools of thought, an era in which "The system of the Dao道 was about to be torn in fragments by the world. " (*Zhuangzi - The Chapter of the World*)
- Our life is finite, while Zhi知 is infinite. It is dangerous to pursue infinite Zhi知 with a limited life! It would be very dangerous to pursue Zhi知 when one already knows this truth. (*Zhuangzi - Nourishing the Lord of Life*)

A misty landscape with mountains and a body of water. The mountains are in the background, and the water is in the foreground. The scene is hazy and atmospheric.

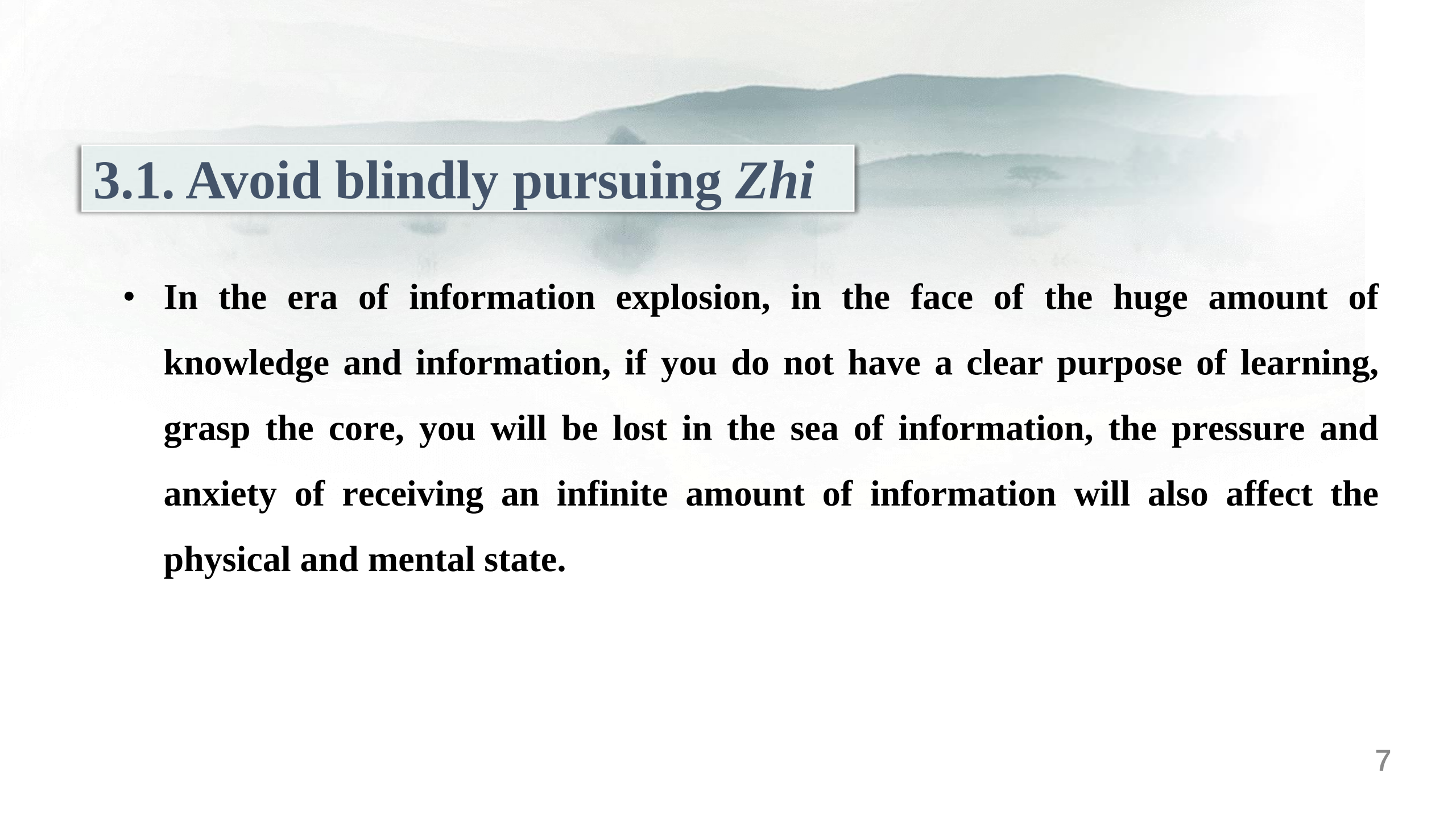
2. What is *Zhi*

- Guo Xiang郭象 defines "Zhi is infinite" as "Zhi" means a tool for realising desires such as "fame" and "victory".
- Chen Jingyuan陳景元 argues: "The one who has a broad understanding of the world knows without boundaries."
- Lu Shuzhi陸樹芝 " Don't bother with a lot of knowledge. "
- Cheng Xuanying成玄英, the result of the action of the separate mind of human beings, and if this is the case, "ignorance" is the "knowledge" of non-separation.

A background image of a misty, mountainous landscape with layers of hills fading into the distance under a soft, overcast sky.

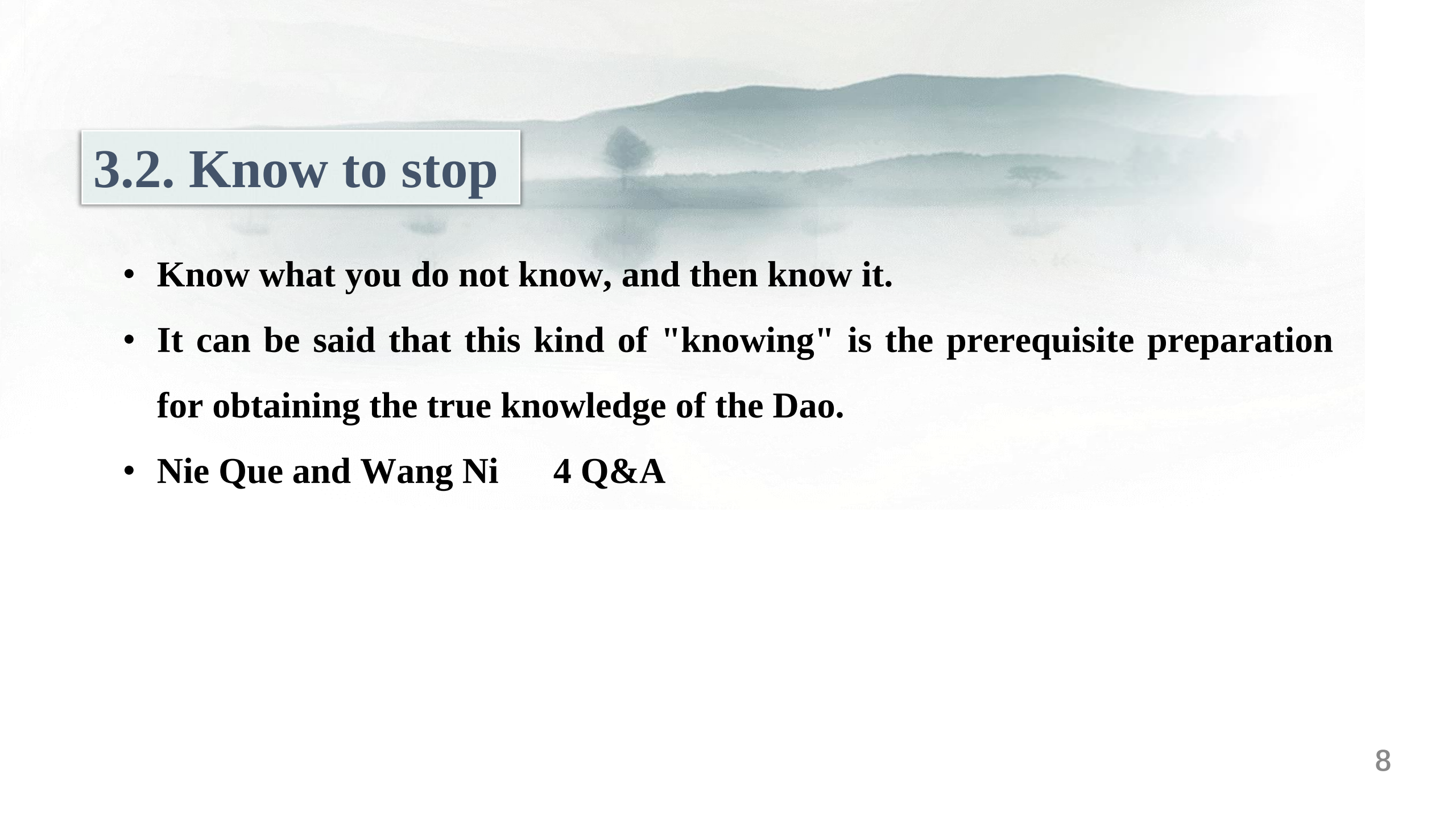
3. How to achieve *Zhi*

- The aging of knowledge and the rigidity of thought will directly lead to narrowing of horizons and degradation of ability, which is not conducive to the development of individuals and society. To achieve "Zhi", we need to have the right approach and mentality, and correspondingly, we also need to avoid mistakes.

The background of the slide is a soft-focus image of misty, rolling mountains in shades of blue and green. A semi-transparent light blue rectangular box is positioned in the upper left area, containing the section title.

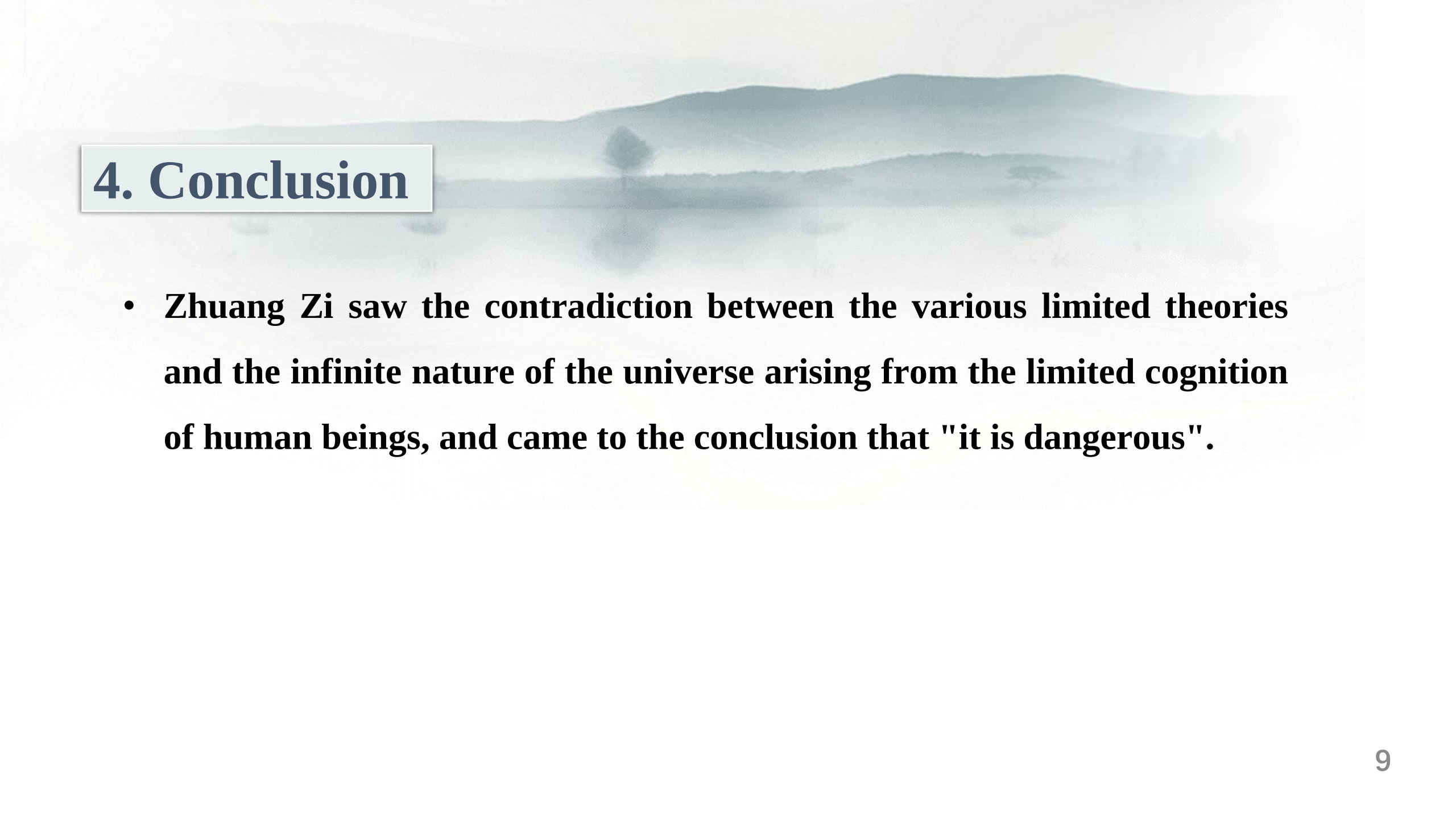
3.1. Avoid blindly pursuing *Zhi*

- **In the era of information explosion, in the face of the huge amount of knowledge and information, if you do not have a clear purpose of learning, grasp the core, you will be lost in the sea of information, the pressure and anxiety of receiving an infinite amount of information will also affect the physical and mental state.**

A background image of a misty, mountainous landscape with a body of water in the foreground and rolling hills in the distance.

3.2. Know to stop

- **Know what you do not know, and then know it.**
- **It can be said that this kind of "knowing" is the prerequisite preparation for obtaining the true knowledge of the Dao.**
- **Nie Que and Wang Ni 4 Q&A**

A misty landscape with mountains and a body of water. The mountains are in the background, and the water is in the foreground. The scene is hazy and atmospheric.

4. Conclusion

- **Zhuang Zi saw the contradiction between the various limited theories and the infinite nature of the universe arising from the limited cognition of human beings, and came to the conclusion that "it is dangerous".**



Bibliography

- **Books:**

Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀, *Nan Hua Zhen Jing Yi Hai Zuan Wei* 南華真經義海纂微 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018)

Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016)

James Legge, *Zhuangzi*, in *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2016)

Lu Shuzhi 陸樹芝, *Zhuang Zi Xue* 莊子雪 (Shanghai: East China Normal University, 2011)



**Thank you
for listening !**

