Chuang tsu: Confucius and the old swimmer

The Writings of Chuang Tzu: Book XIX, Part II, Section XII

Confucius was looking at the cataract near the gorge of Lü, which fell a height of 240 cubits, and the spray of which floated a distance of forty lî, (producing a turbulence) in which no tortoise, gavial, fish, or turtle could play.

Imagine AI generated

He saw, however, an old man swimming about in it, as if he had sustained some great calamity, and wished to end his life. Confucius made his disciples hasten along the stream to rescue the man; and by the time they had gone several hundred paces, he was walking along singing, with his hair dishevelled, and enjoying himself at the foot of the embankment.
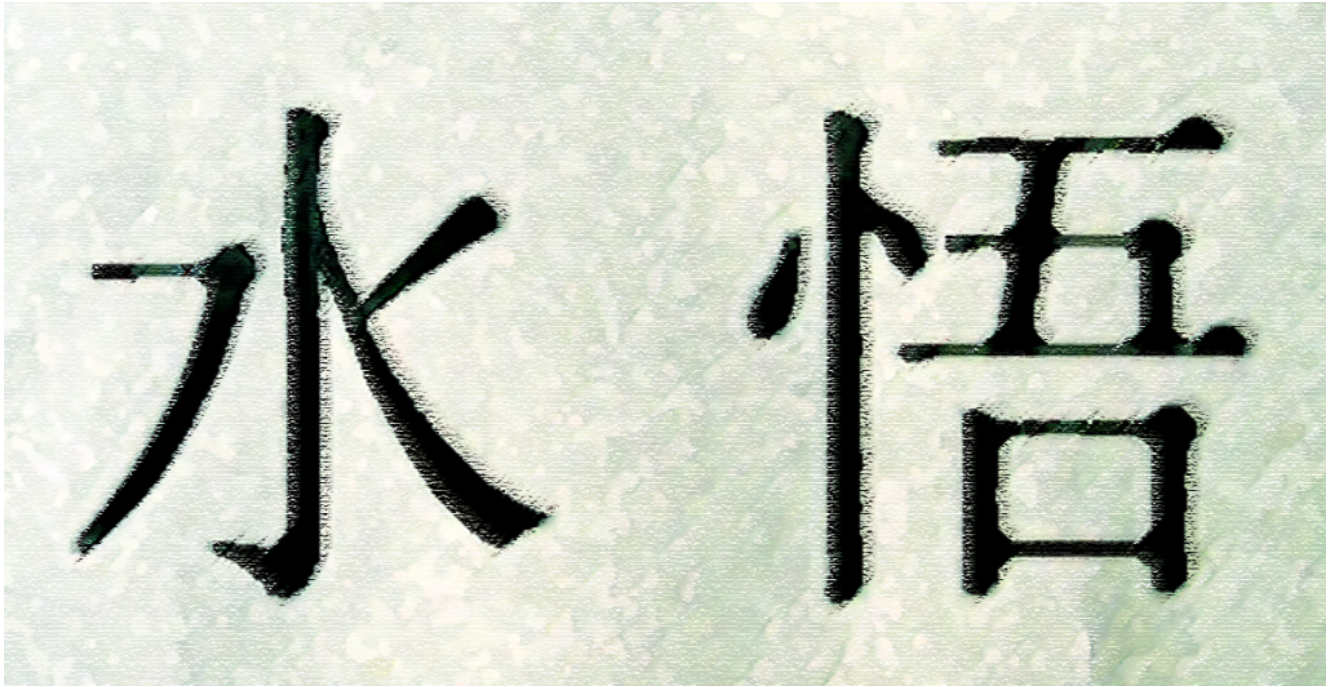
Confucius followed and asked him, saying, 'I thought you were a sprite; but, when I look closely at you, I see that you are a man. Let me ask if you have any particular way of treading the water.'

The man said, 'No, I have no particular way. I began (to learn the art) at the very earliest time; as I grew up, it became my nature to practise it; and my success in it is now as sure as fate. I enter and go down with the water in the very centre of its whirl, and come up again with it when it whirls the other way. I follow the way of the water, and do nothing contrary to it of myself;— this is how I tread it.'

Confucius said, 'What do you mean by saying that you began to learn the art at the very earliest time; that as you grew up, it became your nature to practise it, and that your success in it now is as sure as fate?'

The man replied, 'I was born among these hills and lived contented among them;— that was why I say that I have trod this water from my earliest time. I grew up by it, and have been happy treading it;— that is why I said that to tread it had become natural to me. I know not how I do it, and yet I do it;— that is why I say that my success is as sure as fate.'

The Writings of Chuang Tzu: Book XIX, Part II, Section XII

The word "Aquawareness" represented by the Chinese characters Shuǐ and Wù ("Water" and "Understand")