

Book review: Meandering Sobriety

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“Meandering Sobriety” by Prof. Vuong Quan Hoang is a thought-provoking narrative that mirrors the process of deep contemplation. Through the author’s collective experiences, readers are invited to reflect on the world around them. The book is divided into three main chapters: “Science Sobriety”, “Business Intelligence”, and “Meandering Thought”.

In Chapter 1, “Science Sobriety”, the author shares 16 fascinating research findings he has encountered in recent years. These scientific insights, such as the alcoholic behavior of chimpanzees or the cannibalism of unproductive ants, are based on well-established journals and contribute to our scientific knowledge. What sets this chapter apart is the author’s interpretation of these findings and their implications for individuals and society. For instance, the author reflects on the morality of unproductive ants sacrificing themselves for the survival of the ant hive, contrasting it with the absence of similar biological-based morality in humans. These unconventional interpretations challenge readers to reconsider their understanding of science and what it means to be human.

Chapter 2, “Business Intelligence” delves into the author’s personal experiences accumulated over 30 years of research and consulting. The author explores various aspects of human behavior influenced by psychological characteristics, cultural values, and religious beliefs. Drawing from Vietnamese religious ceremonies, business cultures, and problem-solving processes at Vietnamese firms, the author demonstrates how social constructs profoundly shape the way people think and live. Vietnam’s dominant religions - Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism - are particularly influential in shaping the ideas and beliefs of its people (Vuong et al., 2018)

Throughout the book, the author highlights the irony inherent in human actions. People often act in ways that contradict their own interests or fail to acknowledge the consequences of their actions. This irony does not stem from ignorance but rather from a deliberate choice to prioritize immediate interests over long-term consequences. The author presents several anecdotes illustrating this irony, including individuals complaining about traffic congestion despite contributing to it, or supporting reforestation plans until faced with the associated costs. These observations invite readers to critically examine their own behaviors and decision-making processes.

Chapter 3 “Meandering Thought” consists of 17 notes derived from his observations, albeit small and trivial, but are delicate and even profound insights of the author regarding everyday objects and phenomena. It concludes without a definitive ending, capturing the essence of “Meandering Sobriety”. The author emphasizes that the process of thinking is ongoing, devoid of a predetermined destination. It entails considering the phenomena around us, questioning their causes, motives, mechanisms, values, and meanings. However, this open-ended structure can be both a strength and a weakness. While it allows readers ample room for interpretation, it also

leaves space for misinterpretation or the choice to not engage with the stories. Readers with a Western-oriented philosophical background might find it challenging to fully grasp the experiences of the author in Vietnamese business culture, as the format of short stories does not facilitate extensive elaboration on the core ideas and values of the three religions.

Overall, “Meandering Sobriety” captivates readers through its series of short stories, engaging them in profound reflections on science, human behavior, and the complexities of life.

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References

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