



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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English Oral Presentation

Good morning, everyone. What I'm going to talk about today is The Interpretation and Translation Comparison of The Chapter 03. I will try to analyse the meaning of the article using two different translations and Master Hanshan's annotations, and the some sections of this chapter will have a separate special in-depth interpretation and discussion.

First of all, I would like to introduce Master Hanshan. Master Hanshan was from the Ming Dynasty. He was very knowledgeable and was familiar with the Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. Here we quote one of his annotations, "老子道德經憨山注", which is also the most authoritative annotated bibliography in China.

This is the original text of Tao Te Ching:

不尚賢，使民不爭；不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；不見可欲，使民心不亂。是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨。常使民無知無欲。使夫知者不敢為也。為無為，則無不治。¹

Firstly, because the translation content of the first two sentences is not much different, we only make a simple comparison and

¹ 釋德清 [Shi Deqing], ed. 道德經解 [The Explanation of Daodejing] (Shanghai: East China Normal University chubanshe, 2009), p37.

explanation here. James Legge said: *“Not to value and employ men of superior ability is the way to keep the people from rivalry among themselves; not to prize articles which are difficult to procure is the way to keep them from becoming thieves;”*² Xu Yuanchong believes: *“Honor no man so that none would contend for honor. Value no rare goods so that none would steal or rob.”*

³The two translations share the same concept, and they both believe that the metaphor of this sentence means that too many things that are not worth pursuing should not be set up externally for people to devote their energy to, which is the way to avoid people fighting.

And then, The two translators have slightly different translations of the sentence that was written down. Look at the translation. James Legge said: *“not to show them what is likely to excite their desires is the way to keep their minds from disorder.”*⁴ Xu Yuanchong thinks: *“Display nothing desirable lest people be tempted and disturbed.”*⁵ Mr. Xu believes that the phrase “不現可欲” should be understood as not showing anything that can be obtained. This is to translate this sentence from the perspective of realism, but James's thinking is more idealistic, he believes that this sentence the focus of the words should be not to show things that can arouse the desires of others. This thought and understanding seems to be more thorough and profound. If we want to determine that the translation of the sentence is more reasonable, we still need to judge by the association of the previous text. In the previous narrative, whether it is not to honor the sages or not to pursue treasures, it is to prevent people from

² James Legge: *Tao Te Ching Or the Tao and its Characteristics* (The Floating Press, 2008), p.12.

³ 許淵衝 [Xu Yuanchong], ed. 英漢對照老子道德經 [Chinese-English Edition The Old Master Modernized Laws Divine and Human] (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), p.6.

⁴ James Legge: *Tao Te Ching Or the Tao and its Characteristics*, p.12.

⁵ 許淵衝 [Xu Yuanchong], ed. 英漢對照老子道德經 [Chinese-English Edition The Old Master Modernized Laws Divine and Human], p.6.

fighting. These practices are all about guiding people from the heart or spirit to change their values or thoughts, in other words not to subconsciously add too many preconceived misconceptions that can potentially cause a burden. For example, there is a distinction between high and low, and there are treasures that can be obtained. These first values are what lead people to think in a chain reaction that leads to fights. According to this, James' translation seems to be more reasonable and profound.

Besides, following the next sentence, “是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨”⁶. The translation by James is: “*Therefore the sage, in the exercise of his government, empties their minds, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, and strengthens their bones.*”⁷ Xu Yuanchong thinks: “*Therefore the sage rules by purifying people’s soul, filling their bellies, weakening their wills and strengthening their bones.*”⁸ The translation of this sentence is not very different between the two. only the meaning of "心" is different. Because this involves some philosophical areas, it is very difficult for me to understand the discussion in more depth; therefore, I only state the opinions of different people and personal simple views, and do not do in-depth debates. Firstly, James record 心 as “mind”, but Xu Yuanchong consider 心 as “soul”. Here, we introduce the point of view of Master Hanshan. He believe 心 was “妄想思慮之心”⁹, which means “wandering thoughts and not right thinking” First of all, according to the content of the previous article, what Laozi expressed is that he hopes to reduce people's pursuit of unrealistic or excessive desires through external means. This is to affect people's return to a simple state without too many distracting

⁶ 釋德清 [Shi Deqing], ed. 道德經解 [The Explanation of Daodejing], p37.

⁷ James Legge: *Tao Te Ching Or the Tao and its Characteristics*, p.12.

⁸ 許淵衝 [Xu Yuanchong], ed. 英漢對照老子道德經 [Chinese-English Edition The Old Master Modernized Laws Divine and Human], p.6.

⁹ 釋德清 [Shi Deqing], ed. 道德經解 [The Explanation of Daodejing], p37.

thoughts, which is like “樸”, uncarved. Therefore, in my opinion, the reasonable interpretation of “虛其心” should be reducing wandering thoughts and not right thinking that people should not be.

Ok, look at the next sentence and the translations:

He constantly (tries to) keep them without knowledge and without desire, and where there are those who have knowledge, to keep them from presuming to act (on it).¹⁰ —James Legge

He always keeps them knowledgeless and desireless so that the clever dare not interfere.¹¹ — Xu Yuanchong

They think “無知無慾” as no knowledge and no desire. This translation may cause some misunderstandings and ambiguities, making people think that this is a policy of ignorance. In fact, this is not the case. Master Hanshan has a more detailed analysis and interpretation of this sentence. He think it is “常使民不識不知，而全不知聲色貨利之可欲，而自然無欲矣”¹² which means making people unaware and unknow, making them completely unaware of the existence of the concept of good things, and people will naturally have no desires. There is a very unique cognitive concept about Master Hanshan's point of view. His explanation is to fundamentally cut off people's attachment to external things. Without goals, there will be no initial motivation, and without motivation, there will be no action. Thus, in my opinion, the interpretation of “無知” maybe not no knowledge and knowledgeless but unaware, which may be more reasonable. And then, as for the latter part of a sentence, James and Xu believe

¹⁰ James Legge: *Tao Te Ching Or the Tao and its Characteristics*, p.12.

¹¹ 許淵衝 [Xu Yuanchong], ed. 英漢對照老子道德經 [Chinese-English Edition The Old Master Modernized Laws Divine and Human], p.6.

¹² 釋德清 [Shi Deging], ed. 道德經解 [The Explanation of Daodejing], p38.

there are someone, like sage or leader, who can deter those who dare. Actually, in Master Hanshan's opinion, he thinks the “敢” should be translated “want to do” rather than “dare”. Hanshan believes if people do not have the desire and pursuit in this area, people will naturally not want to do it. In theory, this explanation is more reasonable

And then, following the last sentence translation:

*When there is this abstinence from action, good order is universal.*¹³— James Legge

*Where there is no interference, there is order.*¹⁴— Xu Yuanchong

There are some differences between the two translations. As for the meaning of “為無為”, James Legge's idea focuses on action, but Xu Yuanchong believe there are no interference. This sentence may be contradictory, whether there is action or no action. In my personal opinion, according to the explanation in the previous article, maybe this sentence is more suitable to be translated as "doing it but not doing it". A more detailed understanding could be "he did it, but people feel like he did nothing" First of all, because people's understanding of external things has changed, the original point of view has disappeared, and there is no non-pursuit or pursuit. When people take all this for granted, they naturally forget their previous actions to eliminate excess desires; therefore, this is what Laozi said, doing it as if not doing it.

That is all for my presentation today. Any feedback and suggestions will be appreciated. Thank you for your listening.

¹³ James Legge: *Tao Te Ching Or the Tao and its Characteristics* (The Floating Press,2008),p.12.

¹⁴ 許淵衝 [Xu Yuanchong], ed. 英漢對照老子道德經 [Chinese-English Edition The Old Master Modernized Laws Divine and Human], p.6.

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3. James Legge. *Tao Te Ching Or the Tao and its Characteristics* (The Floating Press, 2008)