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A Translation of Chapter 58 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing

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1. Original text and translation of chapter 58 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

1.1 Original text

其政悶悶，其民醇醇。其政察察，其民缺缺。禍兮福所倚，福兮禍所伏。孰知其極，其無正耶。正復為奇，善復為妖。人之迷，其日固久。是以聖人方而不割，廉而不劌，直而不肆，光而不耀。

1.2 Translation

If the politics is lenient and tolerant, the people will be loyal and honest. If the politics is strict and rigorous, the people will be crafty. Misfortune might be a blessing in disguise. On the contrary, misfortune might result from blessing. Who knows the end of it and is not there something unchangeable and constant. The normal things is considered to be strange and the kindness is regarded as the abnormal things. People's mind have been lost for a long time. Therefore, sages are righteous but do not harm others. They are very honest but not mean. They are right-minded, but not brazen. They are honourable, but have never shown off.

2. Original text and translation of Shi Deqing's 釋德清 annotation of chapter 58

2.1 Original text – Part A

此詳言上章有為之害，而示之以無為之方也。悶悶，無知貌。所謂民可使由之，不可使知之之意。由百姓皆注其耳目，若示有知，即上云法令滋彰，盜賊多有矣。故聖人潛行密用，令其悶悶然若無所知。則民情不鑿，奸偽自然不生。故其政悶悶，其民醇醇。若其政令察察然分星擘兩，則民多不自安，缺缺然憂有餘矣。故云其政察察，其民缺缺。缺缺，多憂不足之意。

2.2 Translation of Part A

This chapter speak of the harm of doing things with a strong sense of purpose and shows the way of that don't do things against the law of nature. Mengmeng 闷闷 means the look of ignorance. This is the meaning of so-called that ‘for the ordinary people, only can let them do things according to our wills , but cannot let them know why should them to do so.’ Since the ordinary people all focus on their seeing and listening, if the politics is shown, that is what mentioned above that the more complicated and repeated laws and decrees, the more thieves will be. Therefore, sages do things imperceptibly and make the politics unintelligently, like being ignorant. Feelings of the people are not clear, the fraudulent and fake would not be generated naturally. Therefore if politics is lenient, the people will be honest and loyal. If the politics is too clear and detailed, the people will feel uneasy and fear for that they will suffer and worry about themselves. Thus, it is said that the politics is too clear and detailed, the people will feel anxious. The word Queque 缺缺 means always worrying about not getting enough.

2.3 Original text – Part B

蓋禍福之機，端在人心之所萌。若其機善，則禍轉為福。若其機不善，則福轉而為禍。此禍福相倚伏也。由人機心不息，則禍福旋轉如循環之無端，人孰能知其止極耶。故孔子曰，知機其神乎，謂是故也。然禍福循環之如此，豈無真人而以理正之耶。

2.4 Translation of Part B

For the key to misfortune and good fortune, the reason for it comes from the time when the thoughts in the mind just germinated. If people’s thoughts are good, misfortune will turn into good fortune. If their thoughts are bad, blessing would turn into misfortune. This is that good fortune and misfortune depend on each other. Because people’s thoughts never rest, the misfortune and fortune change back and forth and does not stop. How can people know when it will stop. Therefore, Confucius said if people can perceive the birth and death of thoughts, that's wonderful. That's the reason. The misfortune and blessing change in such way, is there no sages to correct it with the truth?

2.5 Original text – Part C

但世衰道微，人心不古，邪正不分，善惡顛倒。本示之以正，則彼反以為奇詭。本教之以善，而彼反以為妖怪。正所謂未信而勞諫，則以為厲謗。此人心之迷固已久矣，縱有聖人之教，亦不能正之矣。莊子曰，三人行，一人迷方，猶有解者。二人惑，則不能易。今天下皆迷，其誰能解之耶。

2.6 Translation of Part C

However, the practice of the world is declining to a low level, and people's minds are not as honest as the ancients. No distinction between good and bad. Confusing right and wrong. It was a positive truth, but it is considered to be a weird and bizarre truth by some people. Teaching them with good things, but they regard that this are abnormal things. This is so-called if you always give advice to people without achieving mutual trust, others would think that you are slandering them. This is because the people’s mind have been lost and stubborn for a long time, so even with the teachings of the sages, it cannot be corrected. Zhangzi said that three people walking together, one person lost, this still can be corrected, but if two people are lost, it is difficult for them to be corrected. Now people in the whole world are in a state of going astray, who can correct it.

2.7 Original text – Part D

是以聖人遊濁世以化民，貴在同塵和光，渾然無跡。故雖方而不傷其割。割，謂割截，乃鋒稜太露也。雖廉而不傷於劌。劌，謂刻削太甚也。雖直而不傷於肆。肆，謂任意無忌也。雖光而不傷於耀。耀，謂衒耀己見也。此聖人有所長，而能養其所長，故為天下貴。此所以無為而治，好靜而自安，無為而民自化矣。

2.8 Translation of Part D

Therefore, sages civilize people in this world, it is important to be able but modest and hide their light under a bushel. There is completely no trace. Although sage’s behavior is upright, they have never hurt others. The sinogram Ge 割 means cut, it means showing off too much. Although sage’s mind are honest and clean, they have never hurt others. The sinogram Gui 刿 means too severe and mean. Although sages are right-minded, they will not be brazen. The

sinogram Si 肆 means doing everything without restraint and fears. Although sages are honourable, they have never shown off. The sinogram Yao 耀 means showing off one’s conception. This is that sages have virtues and are good at cultivate their virtues, thus they are respectable in the world. Therefore, governing without exertion; keeping quiet and people will keep their nose clean. This is that doing nothing but people are naturally civilized.

3. Commentary

The above is my translation. Next I want to make some personal comments on this. This article I translated comes from the chapter 58 of the Chinese Taoist classic The Daode Jing. First of all, please let me give a brief introduction to Daode Jing. The Daode Jing, along with the Zhuangzi, is a fundamental text for both philosophical and religious Taoism. It also strongly influenced other schools of Chinese philosophy and religion, including Legalism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, which was largely interpreted through the use of Taoist words and concepts when it was originally introduced to China. Many artists, including poets, painters, calligraphers, have used the Daode Jing as a source of inspiration. Its influence has spread widely outside East Asia and it is among the most translated works in world literature.

4. Self-Reflection

I spend about half a week to translate this article. To be honest, translating this article is difficult and challenging for me. For some classical Chinese words and phrases in this article, actually, I could not clearly understand the exact meaning of them. But fortunately, I have many electronic dictionaries. So, through looking up these dictionaries and other reference materials, many problems have been solved. Next, please allow me to briefly introduce these

reference books I used. My Chinese reference materials include *Shuowen Jiezi*, Grand Chinese Dictionary and the Handian website. Whenever I am confused about the meaning of a particular word in the original text, I will look for the original meaning of the word in *Shuowen Jiezi* firstly. If I can't find the proper or relevant meaning in *Shuowen Jiezi*, I will use the Grand Chinese Dictionary to look up the meaning of the word, because this dictionary has more comprehensive interpretation of almost every sinogram. In addition to using Chinese dictionaries, I also use some English dictionaries to help me translate English words and phrases more accurately. Which include Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and Collins Advanced English-Chinese Learner's Dictionary. These dictionaries have all helped me a lot in the process of translation.

My translation method on specific is divided into 4 steps. The first is to understand the real meaning of the original text, here, is the classical Chinese text. The second is to translate these classical Chinese text into modern Chinese. The third is to search for the corresponding English words of the keywords in the original text, and compare multiple synonyms to judge which one can more accurately express the meaning of the original text. The last step is to connect the these words into smooth sentences, and reconfirm that the translated sentences are consistent with my understanding of the meaning in the original text. The above is all my translation steps.

In addition, I also encountered some difficulties in the process of translation. The first one is the vague understanding of the meaning of the original Chinese text, and the inability to accurately comprehend its real meaning. This often confused me. For instance, when I translate the sentence 盖祸福之机，端在人心之所萌, I was confused by the exact meaning of Chinese words ‘機’. What the specific meaning of the word ‘機’ should be in this

sentence makes me very confusing. In short, I was entangled in whether this word should mean ‘key point’ or ‘human’s mind’. The second difficulty is that when I faced with a couple of synonyms, after comparisons several times, it is sometimes difficult and confusing for me to select the most accurate and appropriate word. This always makes me in a state of entanglement when I translate it. The above are the two problems I encountered in translation.

5. Bibliography