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Dissertation title: The Study on the Virtue of Soft and Weak from <i>Daodejing</i> 《道德經》柔弱之德探析		
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The Study on the Virtue of Soft and Weak from
Daodejing

《道德經》柔弱之德探析

A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

In fulfilment of the requirements for BA (Hons) in Sinology Degree

威爾士三一聖大衛大學

漢學文學學士

學位論文

Name: Yushi Ye

姓名：葉語詩

Student Number: 1902852

學號：1902852

Date: 3/2022

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Abstract

In the eighty-one chapters of *Daodejing*, there are seven chapters about soft and weak. It shows the importance of the virtue of the soft and weak in Lao Zi's simple philosophy. The chapter eight says: 'The highest good is like water. Water benefits everything by giving without taking or contending.' (上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭) The character *Rou* 柔 means soft, is opposite of hard. The Character *Ruo* 弱 means weak, is opposite of strong. Lao Zi advice to keep soft and weak instead of hard and strong. The essence of soft and weak is compassion, the form of it is water, and the soft and weak is the application. The virtue of soft and weak of Lao Zi has the characteristics of 'contribute to all things', 'modest and not competing', 'round outside and square inside', 'the soft and weak overcome the hard and strong', 'soft is a symbol of life', 'confirmedly keep on Dao'. It reflects the service and dedication of the outlook on life, soft and not strong attitude to work, the guidance method that rather plug than dredge, and deep accumulation of power. Those have profound influence and value for cultivating morality, working, communication, and governing country in modern society.

Key words:

Daodejing (道德經), soft and weak, hard and strong, water, compassion

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The Study on the Virtue of Soft and Weak from *Daodejing*

1. Introduction

Lao Zi 老子 was born in *Hu* 苦 township, *Li* 厲 county, *Chu* 楚 country of the Spring and Autumn period. His surname is Li 李, given name is Er 耳 and styled Dan 聃, who is the historical officer of Library in Zhou 周 dynasty.¹ Confucius once went to Zhou to consult Lao Zi about etiquette. Laozi said, ‘A noble person will effort to devote the society when he meets good opportunity. While if he does not in good time, he will hide himself to self-discipline and improve continuously. I have heard that a genuine rich man will hide his wealth deeply, just like ordinary people. A noble person with high virtue and wisdom, on the contrary, looks very dull. You should get rid of your pride, excessive desires, complacent looks, and unbridled aspirations, which are not conducive to moral cultivation. And that is all I would like to tell you.’(君子得其時則駕，不得其時則蓬累而行。吾聞之，良賈深藏若虛，君子盛德，容貌若愚。去子之驕氣與多欲，態色與淫志，是皆無益於子之身。吾所以告子，若是而已。)² After Confucius left, he told disciples: all creatures can run and fly free, but also be caught. But Lao Zi just like a changeable dragon who cannot be caught, directly

¹ By Sima Qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Zhang shoujie 張守節, *Shiji* 史記(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), vol.63, p.2603-2607.

² By Sima Qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Zhang shoujie 張守節, *Shiji* 史記(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), vol.63, p.2603-2607.

flying up into the sky to ride on the wind. Lao Zi is a wise and great sage whose wisdom beyond recognition in ancient China.

Daodejing was written by Lao Zi. He saw the declining of the Zhou Dynasty where the people cheated and did not practice morality, so he chose to leave. A officer of *Hangu* Pass 函谷關, Yin Xi 尹喜, who also learn to practice Dao. After observing a fortuitous purple atmosphere from the east, Yin Xi realised that a sage would go to the west through the Pass. So when Lao Zi left *Hangu* Pass, Yin Xi said, ‘You will live in seclusion, could you please write something for us.’ Because Yin Xi did not want the Great Dao to bury into ground, he asked Lao Zi to leave his true understanding of practicing Dao and virtue 德. Therefore, Lao Zi wrote *Daodejing*. There are eighty-one chapters in *Daodejing*, which includes thirty-seven chapters of *the book of Dao* 道經 and forty-four chapters of *the book of virtue* 德經.³ Lao Zi lived more than one hundred and sixty years old, for he learned and practice Dao which benefits for maintaining life.⁴

Lao Zi teaches keeping calm and purify, returning to simple nature with few desires. He explains the essence and application of Dao and how to practice Dao. In the eighty-one chapters of *Daodejing*, there are seven chapters about the soft and weak, including chapter eight, chapter thirty-six, chapter forty-three, chapter fifty-five, chapter seventy-six and chapter seventy-eight. It shows the importance of the virtue of soft and weak in Lao Zi's simple philosophy. Besides, *Daodejing* is not only research on text, but also a record of Lao Zi's true cultivation of Dao. Like he said, ‘My words are very easy to understand and very easy to put into practice. Yet no one under heaven understands them; no one puts them into

³ The classification of *Daodejing* about the book of Dao and the book of virtue according to: Annotation by He Shangong 河上公, proofreading by Tang Ziheng 唐子恆, *Laozi daodejing* 老子道德經 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017).

⁴ By Sima Qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Zhang shoujie 張守節, *Shiji* 史記(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), vol.63, p.2603-2607.

practice.’⁵(吾言甚易知，甚易行。天下莫能知，莫能行。⁶) So If we could not understand and practice what Lao Zi said, but only learn unconstrained behaviour and talking about the mystery. It is not the original intention of Lao Zi.

There are lots of annotations of *Daodejing* in past dynasties, and it is also the most widely translated classics in the world, which includes different views. So this article will pay more attention on the annotation of Shi Deqing 釋德清 on the basis of referring various annotation. Shi Deqing was born in the Ming Dynasty 明朝, who liked to read *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 when he was young. After learning Buddhism and deeply understanding the mind-nature, he chose to practice in seclusion of Laoshan 嶗山. At the leisure time, he read *Daodejing* carefully. Sometimes he realises one sentence in ten days, sometimes understands the gist of one chapter in one year. He started record from East Sea 東海 (today in Donghai township, Jiangsu Province 江蘇東海縣) to Nanyue 南粵 (today in Guangdong and Guangxi Province). It took fifteen years to complete this book of *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解.

⁷From this, we know that it is not easy to write a book, which needs effort, diligent and attentiveness. Some scholars of the modern academic circles hold a critical attitude towards Lao Zi's view of ‘the soft and weak’ and regard it as pessimistic philosophy of negative avoidance. The others hold a positive attitude, thinking that *Daodejing* is a philosophy of life conforming to the natural law.⁸ It is valuable in interpersonal communication and governing the country⁹, and has inimitable tenacity and persistence¹⁰. Therefore, this article intends to

⁵ Translated by Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*(London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968), p.230.

⁶ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.142.

⁷ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.1-2.

⁸ Wei Ying 魏穎, ‘Fanzhe dao zhidong ruozhe dao zhiyong laozi rensheng zhexue sixiang tanwei’ 反者道之動, 弱者道之用——老子人生哲學思想探微, *Xue lilun* 學理論, 14(2013), 41-42.

⁹ Guo Huiqin 郭惠琴, ‘Guanyu daodejing Zhong rouruo wenhua de jiazhi sikao’ 關於《道德經》中“柔弱”文化的價值思考, *Caizhi* 才智, 16(2017), 231-232.

¹⁰ Liu Heng 劉恒 & Mai Peng 買鵬, ‘Laozi de shengcun zhexue rouruo sheng gangqiang’ 《老子》的生存哲

have a thorough analysis on the virtue of the soft and weak based on different annotations. In order to realise the practicing of Dao from Lao Zi and benefit people's self-cultivate and country's governance.

2. The Study on the Essence of Soft and Weak

The eighty-one chapters all talk about the Great Dao, but what the Great Dao exactly is? What is the essence of the soft and weak mentioned in *Daodejing*? We will explore deeply as follows.

1) *Dao* is the essence of all things

The eighty-one chapters all talk about Dao. According to chapter forty-one: 'Dao begets one, one begets two, two begets three, three begets all things.'¹¹ (道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。¹²) Chapter one also says: 'The intangible and nameless (Dao) turned into heaven and earth. The named (heaven and earth) was the mother of all things.' (無名，天地之始。有名，萬物之母。)¹³ Lao Zi thinks that the essence of Dao is intangible and nameless which turned into the named heaven and earth, and all things spring from heaven and earth. So Dao is the origin of all things. Besides, the essence of Dao is intangible and nameless, so it cannot be talked of and named. If it could talk and name, it is not the constant Dao. Chapter sixty-seven says, 'The whole world says that Dao is vast and resembles nothing. It is because it is vast that it resembles nothing. If it resembles anything, I just like a

學——柔弱勝剛強, *Xiandai jingji xinxi* 現代經濟資訊, 14(2017). 367-369.

¹¹ I modified the translation, original translation from: Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.49.

¹² Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.96.

¹³ Translated myself. Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.64.

short-sighted person for long.’¹⁴ (天下皆謂我道大，似不肖。夫唯大，故似不肖。若肖久矣。其細也夫！¹⁵) Ordinary people think Dao is great. But it is not like any specific objects, there is no way to describe it with a specific name. Does Dao seem useless? In fact, it is because Dao is not like any specific objects, with single function, so it is infinite. Because Dao is non-existence, all things under heaven is existence. For example, a bowl was made by clay and clay is a specific thing. Although the bowl is made of clay, the empty part inside the bowl is truly useful for holding rice and water. So the empty part inside plays the real role though clay makes it. Chapter eleven says: ‘When there is something, it is beneficial; When empty, it is useful.’¹⁶ (故有之以為利，無之以為用。¹⁷) Existence provide the convenience, but non-existence plays the real role.

Although there are the names of existence and non-existence, Lao Zi also emphasis that existence and non-existence are one-entity. They rely on each other. According to Shi Deqing, existence cannot turn into existence, there must be non-existence which turns into existence. Non-existence cannot turn into non-existence, there must be existence to show the exist of non-existence. (有不能生有，必因無以生有；無不自無，因有以顯無。)¹⁸ Both are not existing apart. So chapter one says: ‘These two are the same but diverge in name as they issue forth. Being the same they are called mysteries. Mystery upon mystery – the gateway of the manifold secrets.’¹⁹ (此兩者同，出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，衆妙之門。²⁰) Therefore when existence and non-existence are observed simultaneously, they

¹⁴ I modified the translation. Original translation is from: Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.74.

¹⁵ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.136.

¹⁶ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.22.

¹⁷ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.37.

¹⁸ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.20.

¹⁹ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.5.

²⁰ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.19.

are one entity, so called ‘these two are the same’. Then they have different names, called existence and non-existence. But both give rise to each other, non-existence turns into non-existence and existence manifests non-existence, so says ‘diverge in name as they issue forth’. Though they have two names, the heaven and earth share the same roots, existence and non-existence are not two, so says ‘they are called mysteries’. In the last, the essence of the Dao has no such name as existence and non-existence, and has no sign of thought, either, so says ‘mystery upon mystery’. When we reach this state, we will be able to let go of our wondering thoughts and there is nothing that will not be wonderful, so says ‘the gateway of the manifold secrets’.

Although Dao is intangible and nameless, it is in everywhere. As chapter sixty-two says, ‘Tao (Dao) in the Universe is like the south-west corner in the house.’²¹ (道者萬物之奧²²) Ao 奧 is the southwest corner of traditional Chinese building. If there is a house, there must be a Ao. Because Ao is the orientation for ancient worship, though people do not know about it. House is like all things, Dao is like Ao. The southwest corner of the house must be Ao, so there must be Dao in all things. However, people live in daily life, do not know the existence of Dao. The chapter sixty-two says: ‘It is the treasure of the good man, The support of the bad.’²³ (善人之寶，不善人之所保。²⁴) For Dao is like Ao of all things, kind person learned Dao and regards it as treasure. While bad person still does not leave Dao for a moment, relying on it to keep their lives. Like what *the Great Learning* 中庸 says: ‘We cannot leave Dao even for a second.’ (道也者，不可須臾離也。)²⁵

²¹ Translated by Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968), p.218.

²² Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.126.

²³ Translated by Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968), p.218.

²⁴ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.126.

²⁵ Translate myself. Annotation by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2019), vol.60, p.1245.

2) Compassion is the Essence of Soft

The Great Dao is extremely great and intangible. It is so great bigger than heaven, and it is so vast that people cannot find a proper word to praise it. However, Dao is great, the practice of Dao is extremely simple yet. People do not know that. Ordinary people feel that Dao is "Far apart and unnatural"(大有逕庭，不近人情焉)²⁶. For it is so different from the general cognition of ordinary people and not close to real life, so that it is difficult to learn. They call Dao as 'brave, broad, leader'. But Lao Zi said: 'I have three treasures, Which I hold and cherish. The first is known as compassion, The second is known as frugality, the third is known as not daring to take the lead in the empire.'²⁷(我有三寶，持而保之。一曰慈，二曰儉，三曰不敢為天下先。²⁸)The three treasure Lao Zi holds and cherishes, contrary to what people advocates, are not courage but kindness, not extravagant but frugality, not contend but modesty. As Shi Deqing says, 'these three are the profound and subtle of Great Dao.'(以此三者，乃大道之要妙耳。²⁹)

The first treasure of Lao Zi is compassion. Like the nurture of heaven and earth for all things. According to *The Book of Rite* 禮記, 'Heaven cover all things unselfishly, earth bear all things unselfishly, and the sun and moon shine on all things unselfishly. (天無私覆，地無私載，日月無私照。)³⁰The heaven runs regularly, like the changes of four seasons and the given of sunshine and rain, to let all things grow normally. Earth also equally accept all

²⁶ Translate myself. By Wang Xianqian 王先謙, Zhuangzi jijie 莊子集解(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), vol.1, P.12.

²⁷ Translated by D.C.Lau, Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.74.

²⁸ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.136.

²⁹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.136-138.

³⁰ Translate myself. Annotation by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, Commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達, Liji zhengyi 禮記正義(Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2019), vol.58, p.1221.

things, including plants or animals, without any demand. Sages also follow the principle of the heaven and earth to help ordinary people with compassion and unselfish. So chapter forty-nine says, ‘The sage has no mind of his own. He takes as his own the mind of the people. Those who are good I treat as good. Those who are not good I also treat as good. In so doing I gain in goodness.’³¹ (聖人無常心，以百姓心為心。善者，吾善之；不善者，吾亦善之，德善矣。³²) What sages would like to do is to benefit people without any own desires.

The second treasure is frugality. For example, chapter fifty-nine says, ‘To rule people and serve heaven, nothing is better than frugality.’³³ (治人事天莫若嗇。³⁴) In other words, do not waste even own enough wealth. If we know how to be frugal in our daily life, our economy spending will be better off. We won't have to run out of savings, and we'll be able to cope with if something unexpected happens. It is also useful for modern society, if someone use out all salary every month, which means no savings. Maybe he has to make credit cards or even loans, which is a large burden. In fact, people's desires are endless. If we do not know to be frugality, our desires for material things will grow up continuously. Finally disaster will come. While contented people are truly rich and happiness. Like chapter thirty-three says: ‘He who knows contentment is rich.’³⁵ (知足者富³⁶)

The third treasure is not daring to be the first. For example, chapter sixty-six says, ‘The reason why the River and the Sea are able to be king of the hundred valleys is that they excel in taking the lower position... It is because he does not contend that no one in the empire is in

³¹ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.56.

³² Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.104.

³³ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.130.

³⁴ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.121.

³⁵ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.38.

³⁶ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.79.

a position to contend with him.’³⁷(江海所以能為百谷王者，以其善下之，故能為百谷王。……以其不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。³⁸)Someone who is wise but unambitious, it seems having no opportunity to be a leader. However, he will get supports from people, even being recommended to public. For he is virtuous and sincerely think for the people. Also, he does not compete with others for profit, which can avoid lots of disasters and hidden danger. The three treasures seem ordinary in daily life, but in fact there hidden the Great Dao. Because the Great Dao is in ordinary life, instead like a special or beautiful thing. That seems different from the common view, but is the true Great Dao.

Shi Deqing says, ‘Of the three treasures, compassion is the main one. Not only do we need compassion when learning Dao, but also governing countries under heaven in the same way.’³⁹ Lao Zi says, ‘Through compassion, one will win in a battle and the defence will be impregnable.’⁴⁰(夫慈以戰則勝，以守則固。⁴¹) The noble person who really treat people with kindness and sincerity, people would rather give their lives to help him and not leave. Lao Zi says, ‘If heaven save someone and something, it will protect them with compassion.’⁴²(天將救之，以慈衛之。⁴³) Because the great virtue of the heaven and earth is life. The heaven and earth are kind and compassionate, nourishes all things without any return. So if heaven help something, including plants or animals, protecting them with compassion. That is what Dao does so. Therefore, compassion is the core of *Daodejing*. The essence of the virtue of the soft and weak is compassion.

³⁷ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.73.

³⁸ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.134-135.

³⁹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.136-138.

⁴⁰ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.74.

⁴¹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.136.

⁴² Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.74.

⁴³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.136.

3. The Study on the Form of Soft and Weak

The character *Rou* 柔 means soft, is opposite of hard. The Character *Ruo* 弱 means weak, is opposite of strong. The most representative of the soft and weak in nature is water. Lao Zi often used water as a metaphor. Water is the form of the soft and weak. The chapters that are related to water is chapter eight and chapter seven-eight. We will also refer chapter forty-three to deeply explore and analysis the form of soft and weak.

1) The Highest Good is Like Water

The chapter eight of *Daodejing* says: ‘The highest good is like water. Water benefits everything by giving without taking or contending.’⁴⁴(上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處衆人之所惡，故幾於道。⁴⁵)Lao Zi considers that the supreme kindness is just like water, which can benefit all things without contend. Water always flows downwards even to the lowest area, showing modesty, but ordinary people pay attention to what is high and strong. In fact, the virtue of not contending of water is close to Dao. Like Su Zhe 蘇轍 says, ‘Dao is in everywhere, and it benefits all thing. The water is the same as Dao.’(道無所不在，無所不利，而水亦然。)⁴⁶ Why does it using the character *Ji* 幾 in the sentence of *Daodejing*. Wang Bi 王弼 annotated that: ‘Dao is non-existence, and water is existence.’「道無水有。」⁴⁷ water arise from Dao but not fully equal to it. So water is just very close to Dao and we could realise the specific virtue of Dao from water.

⁴⁴ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.16.

⁴⁵ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.31.

⁴⁶ Translate myself. Annotation by Su Che 蘇轍, Prefreading by Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝, *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經注 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), p.8.

⁴⁷ Annotation by Wang Bi 王弼, Definition by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Laozi daodejingzhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校

According to chapter eight, it talks about seven good virtues of water: ‘The place should be low, the mind broad, the gifts kind, the speech trustworthy, the rule sound, the deed well-done.⁴⁸’ (居善地，心善淵，與善仁，言善信，正善治，事善能，動善時。夫唯不爭，故無尤。⁴⁹) Firstly, water can nourish all things but flows downhill. For example, the sea is the lowest place in the world, but all rivers converge into the sea. So we should learn to be modest and not compete with others. Secondly, the water is deep, pure and silent. We could see the tranquil of it no matter when and where. So we should also learn to calm our mind in any circumstances. Thirdly, all plants and creatures need water to survive, but water never ask for any return. Also water will flow from the full to the dry. So we should learn the compassion of water. Fourthly, we could clearly see the situation inside through water on the river, for it is limpid. So we should learn to honest in words. Fifthly, water can wash dirt, and it is clear and equal. So we should also learn to be equal and fair in governance. Sixthly, water could be round and square, changing its shape with different circumstances. It means that we should also learn to deal different things accord to different situation, without one-sided views and attachment. Seventhly, water changes adapting to season, flowing in summer and freezing in winter. It live harmoniously with nature without against the law of nature. It means that we should also learn to choose forward or backward, contribution to the society or hiding oneself in different situation. Even choosing the former, he becomes the first for he has no alternative, because he does not willing to compete with others. Like *Daodejing* says, ‘Without contention, a man is blameless.⁵⁰’ (夫唯不爭，故無尤。⁵¹) Because water benefits all things but not competing with them, everything loves water. In real life, if we do even

釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), p.20.

⁴⁸ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.16.

⁴⁹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.31.

⁵⁰ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.16.

⁵¹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.31.

good things people will blame us, for existing competition in fame and profit. We should learn from water. water does not compete anything with others, even does not have the sign. So it away from disasters with seven good virtue.

2) The Soft and Weak of Water

The chapter seventy-eight of *Daodejing* says, ‘In the world there is nothing more submissive (soft) and weak than water. Yet for attacking that which is hard and strong nothing can surpass it.’⁵²(天下莫柔弱於水，而攻堅強者莫之能勝。⁵³)Nothing is softer and weaker than water, but nothing can beat it. Because when we put tangible object into another tangible object, the space is limit and they will collide with each other. So there are interspace. However, if we put intangible things into the tangible object, there will be no any spaces and the intangible one could go to anywhere without obstruct. Water is the same as intangible one which can survive in any environment. For example, there is a bottle which full of stones. There is no space to put anything in. But water can still pour into the bottle, even the interspace in the bottle is very small. Besides, invisible force can penetrate visible things without gaps. Water is so soft. When it pours into a square bucket it becomes a square, when it is pours into a round bucket it becomes round. It stops when there is no way, and flows straight down when get rid of the barrier. So that it can adapt to any changes of circumstance.

Daodejing says, ‘So we should not make light of soft.’(其無以易之。)⁵⁴Ordinary people think that the weak water has no power and despise it. However, Shi Deqing says,

⁵² Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.85.

⁵³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.154.

⁵⁴ Translate myself. Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.154.

‘Although the soft and weak does nothing, it exactly corresponding to Dao. While ordinary people do not realise it.’(柔弱無為，乃合道之正言，但世俗以為反耳。⁵⁵) Water is so soft and weak, but it accords with Dao. We should not make light of it. Chapter forty-three says, ‘The softest thing in the world can penetrate the hardest.’⁵⁶(天下至柔，馳騁天下之至堅。⁵⁷) For example, water can surround mountains and drown hills. It can also slowly wear away the hardest copper and iron over time. As an old saying goes, ‘Rope can cut through wood, water can penetrate through stone.’(繩鋸木斷，水滴石穿) It seems impossible to use a rope cutting through wood. But if we do it every day, the wood will eventually be cut down. The water is so soft that it cannot do anything to a stone. But when the water drops on the stone every day, even it does not seem to change in one month. How about one year, ten year, and a hundred year? Over continuous persistent efforts, the stone will be penetrated eventually. Therefore, the seemingly small and weak strength can overcome strong things. Maybe water seems soft and weak, yet it has great power.

4. The Study on the Application of Soft and Weak

The chapter forty says, ‘Weakness is the means (application) the way (Dao) employs.’⁵⁸(弱者，道之用。⁵⁹) So the soft and weak is the application of the Great Dao. Dao, non-existence, is intangible and nameless. It seems soft, weak, and useless. However, they are the foundation of all things in the world. People in the world only know the manifestation of useful things, but they have no idea of the great manifestation of intangible Dao and useless

⁵⁵ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.155.

⁵⁶ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.96.

⁵⁷ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.97.

⁵⁸ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.47.

⁵⁹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.92.

soft and weak. Ordinary people favour strong and actions do with expectation. Why does Lao Zi instead favour the soft and weak? Why is the subtle soft and weak are the application of Dao? Details are as follows.

1) The Soft and Weak Overcome the Hard and Strong

As mentioned above, the virtue of water which is soft and weak can overcome hard and strong, like *Daodejing* says: ‘The softest thing in the world can penetrate the hardest.’⁶⁰ Water is the manifestation of the soft and weak. Water is supreme soft and weak, gold and stone are extremely hard and strong. However the soft can conquer the hard, the weak can conquer the strong. Is it impossible? We can see the examples above of water penetrating through stone. So water can conquer what is strong and hard, going to anywhere. According to Su Che, ‘Solid weapon strike solid weapon, both breaking off and into pieces. Soft things strike solid one, the soft will not be hurt, the solid will not break off, either.’(以堅御堅，不折則碎；以柔御堅，柔亦不糜，堅亦不病。)⁶¹ Because if a solid sword attack against another one, for they are too sharp, finally both will be hurt even broken off. Like an old saying says: ‘A bow string that is hardest will break first, while the sharpest knife is more likely to be hurt.’(從來硬弩弦先斷，每見剛刀口易傷。) Because everyone knows the knife is very sharp so it will be used for cutting harder objects, leading to destruction. However, the soft and weak strike the hard and strong, the soft will not be damaged, but can virtually conquer the strong. For example, if a good arrow can shoot through a target ten meters away. But if putting it into the deep water, the arrow could not shoot out, losing its power under water. So chapter eleven says: ‘When there is something, it is beneficial; When empty, it is useful.’⁶²(故有之以為

⁶⁰ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.96.

⁶¹ Annotation by Su Che 蘇轍, Prefreading by Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝, *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經注 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), p.55.

⁶² Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.22.

利，無之以為用。⁶³)The power of hard and strong may work in a short term, but not for long. On the contrary, the power of soft and weak could make it useful and endless.

The principle of that the soft and weak can overcome the hard and strong not only useful in nature but also in human relationship. Chapter forty-three says: ‘There is no space but the matterless can enter. Thus I see the utility of doing nothing. The teaching by saying nothing and the utility of doing nothing are seldom known to the world.’⁶⁴(無有入無間，吾是以知無為之有益。不言之教，無為之益，天下希及之。⁶⁵)Invisible forces can penetrate objects that have no space, then we know the benefits of doing nothing. In daily life, we should be soft in heart and in speech and have compassionate, forgiving, and tolerant heart, to be soft inside. Then we can get along good and harmoniously with other people. To be honest, the soft is from the sincerity of our bottom heart. Besides, keeping weak could make it avoid unexpected disaster. For example, every year there are many cases of armed robbery. If a student only would like to protect his money when he was robbed, he may not realise that protecting their life is more important. Because it will result in scrambling. For the desperado, who can shoot for one hundred pounds. But the student who is robbed may die. So if we know how to be weak. In the time of crisis, what we should do is giving money to him instead of showing strong. It seems weak that we lose the money, but we can avoid the disaster in life.

Daodejing says, ‘The teaching by saying nothing and the utility of doing nothing are seldom known to the world.’⁶⁶(不言之教，無為之益，天下希及之。⁶⁷)Sometimes saying

⁶³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.37.

⁶⁴ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.96.

⁶⁵ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.97.

⁶⁶ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.96.

⁶⁷ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.97.

nothing is more powerful than many words, doing nothing is more benefit than actions do with intention. If someone is firm and uncompromising, it is difficult to change him with tough style. Because confront the tough with tough is hard to be effective. However, if we use soft style, instead can move him. Sometimes such influence is invisible, without words, do not have intention, but can touch people. For example, Zi Lu 子路 is a brave man whose behaviour is inurbanity. The first time Zi Lu meet Confucius, he did not believe in the Dao what Confucius said. Then Confucius said: ‘the wood can be straight with the adjustment of rope(a measuring tool). People can be wise with the advice from others...so a noble person has to study.’(木受繩則直，人受諫則聖，……君子不可不學。)But Zi Lu reply: ‘I heard that there is a kind of bamboo in Nanshan 南山 that is originally straight without any artificial processing. I can cut and use it. The bamboo is so sharp that it can pierce through the leather of a rhinoceros. Seen from this perspective, why do I need to learn?’(南山有竹，不揉自直，斬而用之，達於犀革，以此言之，何學之有？) Confucius did not deny him, but said: ‘what if you add iron to the tip of the arrow, add feather to the tail of the arrow, and sharpen the top of the arrow? Will it be able to shoot deeper and more accurately?’⁶⁸ Zi Lu was a strong and firm man, but he was subtly affected by Confucius. He realized that a person could not live well under heaven only by his power and strength, but he needs to learn Dao and culture. The reason why the soft and weak can overcome the hard and strong is that compassion is the essence of the soft and weak. The soft and weak is the application of compassion. Therefore, under the soft appearance, there is a heart of compassion and love, like what Confucius did to Zi Lu.

⁶⁸ By Wangsu 王肅, Definition by Zhang Shuye 張樹業 & Wang Xiujiang 王秀江, Edit by Beijing daxue ruzang bianzhuan yuyanjiu zhongxin 北京大學《儒藏》編纂與研究中心, *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語, *Ruzang* 儒藏(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 2014), T.180, Vol.5, P.95-96.

The principle is also useful for military politics. People are ashamed of weakness and despise it. However, Shu Xiang 叔向 says: ‘the weak one will win accord to the law of nature. So if two armies fight, the soft one can conquer another one. If two foes compete for profit, the weak one will get it.’(天之道，微者勝。是以兩軍相加，而柔者克之；兩仇爭利，而弱者得焉。)⁶⁹In fact, if we carefully observe the history, no matter in China or foreign country, there are too many battles that an army with a small number of soldiers defeats an army with a large number of soldiers. For example, in the late Eastern Han Dynasty 東漢末年, the Battle of *Chibi* 赤壁之戰 between the army of Cao Cao 曹操 and the army of Liu Bei 劉備 and Sun Quan 孫權. Cao Cao own an army of eight hundred thousand soldiers. When the army reached the border, the former and bottom of those boat connect to each other, and the boat line extended thousands of miles. Even the flag on the boat can block off the sky. However, the supreme powerful army was burned up by the east wind. The powerful army was defeat by a small army of Liu Bei and Sun Quan. After that, the army of Cao Cao retreat to Xiangyang 襄陽, and the situation gradually become that the world was divided into three parts of Wei 魏, Shu 蜀 and Wu 吳. They reason why they fail is complicated, but it is a natural rule that ‘a pride army will be defeat’ (驕兵必敗). The mind that the army is very powerful is what the weak one can plan of. So the strong one is arrogant and imprudent, the weak one plans carefully. That is why the great army fails in the end. Therefore chapter sixty-nine says: ‘No danger is greater than making light of the foe, which may lead to the loss of my treasure. When two fighting forces are equal in strength, the wronged (weak) will win the victory.’⁷⁰(禍莫大於輕敵，輕敵幾喪吾寶。故抗兵相加，哀

⁶⁹ Translate myself. Edit by Beijing daxue ruzang bianzhuang yuyanjiu zhongxin 北京大學《儒藏》編纂與研究中心, *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Ruzang* 儒藏(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 2014), T.181, Vol.10, P.702-703.

⁷⁰ Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.154.

者勝矣。⁷¹) The treasure that nearly lose is Dao, also the compassion. So the weak one fighting with powerful one, yet the weak will win finally.

2) The soft and weak are the symbol of life

The chapter seventy-six says: ‘Man is born soft and weak; dead, he becomes hard and stiff. Grass and wood grow soft and supple; dead, they become dry and withered. So the hard and strong belong to death; the soft and weak belong to life.’⁷²(人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強。萬物草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。⁷³)A man's body is soft when he is alive, but stiff when he is dead. Plants are soft when they grow. But when they die, they become dry and withered. For example, a weapon which is too sharp will break up. A strong tree will suffer the axe. Even in a stormy day, fierce wind can snap the big tree, but the soft grass still alive though they sway in the wind. In this chapter Lao Zi tells us that soft and weak is a symbol of life, yet hard and strong is a symbol of death. It is the same as what Chang Zong 常縱 told Lao Zi when he was ill. Chang Zong opened his mouth. His tongue is still alive, but the teeth have all fallen out. The reason why tongue still alive is soft. The reason why teeth have died is hard.⁷⁴ So the strong belong to death, and the weak belong to life.

Besides, Confucius once said: ‘Zi Lu has a firm and strong personality.’(子路，行行如也。)⁷⁵ Confucius also predicted that: ‘For Zi Lu, he will not come to a natural end.’(若由

⁷¹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.140.

⁷² Translated by X.Y.Z., *Chinese-English Edition the old master modernized laws divine and human* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), P.168.

⁷³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.152.

⁷⁴ Edit by Beijing daxue ruzang bianzhuan yuyanjiu zhongxin 北京大學《儒藏》編纂與研究中心, *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Ruzang* 儒藏(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 2014), T.181, Vol.10, P.702-703.

⁷⁵ Translate myself. Annotation by He Yan 何晏, commentary by Xing Bing, *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol.11, p.164.

也，不得其死然。)⁷⁶ Because Zi Lu is firm and uncompromising, and he may act on impulse. So it is hard for him to pass away peacefully. Then when Confucius heard that civil unrest broke out in Wei country 魏, he consider that Gao Chai 高柴 can come back safely, but Zi Lu will died in the crisis. Because Confucius understand his discipline. Zi Lu is strong and uncompromising who would rather die than runing away. But Gao Chai is dull-witted and respectful. He will decide according to changing situation, so he can back peacefully and safely. In fact, Zi Lu had the chance to live. Before he went into the gate, other people advise that ‘the gate has close please go back’, but he did not accept the advice. As well as, he was so angry that he revile to Kuan Kui 蒯聩. So finally Kuan Kui command to kill him and cut him into meat paste. So Lao Zi said that ‘What others teach I also teach. ‘The violent will not come to a natural end.’ I shall take this as my precept.’⁷⁷(強梁者不得其死⁷⁸) That is a wisdom based on natural law. Too strong will lead to death quickly. In daily life, it is easy to be angry, especially in adversity, one may show overweening confidence in force and act impulse. However, the soft and weak teach us to be more patient and wiser, which is the wisdom in the long run.

What is more, Lao Zi also teaches people how to maintain our vital energy 精, breath 氣 and spirit 神. Like what He Shangong 河上公 says, ‘When one is alive, there is a breath of harmony 和氣, which contains full spirit. So it appears soft and weak. While when someone is dead, the breath of harmony has used up, and spirit will also be lost. So appears hard and strong.’(人生含和氣，抱精神，故柔弱也。人死和氣竭，精神亡，欲堅強也。)

⁷⁹Chapter fifty-five says, ‘The mind with wandering thought makes one’s breath not well,

⁷⁶ Translate myself. Annotation by He Yan 何晏, commentary by Xing Bing, Lunyu zhushu 論語注疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol.11, p.164-165.

⁷⁷ Translated by D.C.Lau, Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.49.

⁷⁸ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.96.

⁷⁹ Translate myself. Annotation by He Shangong 河上公, proofreading by Tang Ziheng 唐子恆, *Laozi*

which is called strong. Things too strong will become old, which is against Dao. If something against Dao, it will come to an early end.’(心使氣曰強。物壯則老，謂之不道，不道早已。⁸⁰) Because wandering thoughts of desires could run out of our spirit, and too strong will become old. If not follows the nature, it will lead to death. Shi Deqing says: ‘the reason why people could alive rely on the vital energy, breath and spirit...besides, for the three, the spirit is master, the vital energy is defend, and breath is guard.’(人之所以有生者，賴其神與精氣耳。……且此三者，以神爲主，以精爲衛，以氣爲守。)⁸¹ so in daily life, one should keep his mind calm and not have too many desires. The calm in mind leads to peaceful breath, the peaceful breath leads to firm of vital energy, and the firm vital energy leads to tranquilization of spirit, which helps to practice the true and constant Dao. However, if we do not realise the principle of maintaining one’s spirit, which will leads to go to the way of death quickly.

According to *the Book of Changes* 周易, ‘The great virtue of the heaven and earth is life.’(天地之大德曰生)⁸² Heaven has the virtue of maintain all creatures’ life. So if we could also protect people and animals’ lives, we will have the same virtue with heaven and earth. On the contrary, if we are attached to kill lives, we just go against the virtue of heaven and earth. The soft and weak lead to life, yet hard and strong lead to death. So the Great Dao will restrain hard and strong, but help soft and weak. This is the natural law under heaven. For example, Cao Bin 曹彬 make war on the Southern Tang Dynasty 南唐 to vindicate

daodejing 老子道德經 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017), p.56-57.

⁸⁰ Translate myself. Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.114.

⁸¹ Translated myself. Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.114-116.

⁸² Translate myself. Annotation by Wang Bi 王弼, Commentary by Kong Yingda, Edit by Shisanjing zhushu zhengli weiyuanhui 十三經注疏整理委員會, *Zhouyi zhiyao* 周易正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol.8, p.349.

authority. What he hope is that Li Yu 李煜 choose to surrender. Because he do not want to kill all residents of the conquered town. Besides, he told all the generals that he is ill. Only all of them take an oath that they will not kill even one person's life when they conquer the town, then he will recover. Because of his kindness ad modest, the ordinary people could survive in the war.⁸³ On the contrary, Xiang Yu 項羽 was strong and powerful, however, was arrogant and self-righteous. During his time in command, the Qin army in Xinan 新安 surrendered, but he still killed more than two hundred thousand people in one night on the south of Xinan.⁸⁴ The dead are just ordinary people, only hope to live in chaos and protect their family. But what Xiang Yu did is so strong and unkind. So finally he also did not come to a natural end, suiciding beside the Wu River 烏江. Therefore, we can realise that soft and weak favour maintaining life, which is the way to life. The hard and strong like killing lives, which is the way to death.

3) To keep soft is strong

The chapter fifty-five talks about the born baby 赤子: 'Its bones are weak and its sinews supple yet its hold is firm... This is because its virility (vital energy) is at its height.'⁸⁵(弱筋柔而握固。……精之至也。⁸⁶)Baby bones and muscles are weak, but the fist can hold very firm, even adult find it is difficult to open it. That show the rich vital energy. Also, He Shanggong thinks that the reason why baby can hold so firmly is that they have determined

⁸³ By Tuo Tuo 脫脫, Songshi 宋史(Beijing: zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1977), vol.258, p.8980.

⁸⁴ By Sima Qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Zhang shoujie 張守節, *Shiji* 史記(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), vol.7, p.396-397.

⁸⁵ Translated by D.C.Lau, Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.62.

⁸⁶ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.114.

mind which will never change.⁸⁷ Laozi takes baby as a metaphor, meaning that we can imitate the firmly hold of baby, following the right way with determined mind. Then keeping the right way and not being moved by any situation. So the chapter fifty-two says: ‘To keep soft is called strong.’(守柔曰強。)⁸⁸ The ability to hold the soft is called strong. The soft here is the virtue of the soft and weak mentioned above. For more deeply, it is the ability to hold *Dao*, which is the real strong.

But how to keep soft? How to keep *Dao*? According to chapter thirty-two: ‘He who overcome others has force; He who overcomes himself is strong.’⁸⁹(勝人者有力，自勝者強。)⁹⁰ The changing environment, the ups and downs of life, is not easy to overcome. The inner material desire, people’s own weaknesses, are also not easy to conquer. To conquer one’s own weakness, which is the most challenge. A general can command an army of one hundred thousand, but it still difficult for him to control his desires. Su Zhe says, ‘Going forward to what he desires without any hesitation. He may consider himself as a strong person, yet he is not actually strong. Only it called strong when he knows to dread facing his desires.’(趨其所悅而不顧，自以爲強，而非強也。唯見悅而知畏之者，可謂強矣。)⁹¹

So here Lao Zi offer us a method. The chapter thirty-six says:

If you would have a thing shrink, You must first stretch it; If you would have a thing weakened, You must first strengthen it; If you would have a thing laid aside, You must first set it up; If you would take from a thing, You must first give to it. This is called subtle discernment: The submissive(soft) and weak will overcome the hard and

⁸⁷ Annotation by He Shangong 河上公, proofreading by Tang Ziheng 唐子恆, *Laozi daodejing* 老子道德經 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017), p.42.

⁸⁸ Translate myself. Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.109.

⁸⁹ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.38.

⁹⁰ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.79.

⁹¹ Translate myself. Annotation by Su Che 蘇轍, Proofreading by Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝, *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經注 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), p.63.

strong. ⁹²(將欲翕之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之；將欲廢之，必固興之；將欲奪之，必固與之。是謂微明。柔弱勝剛強。 ⁹³)

When we would like to close it, we must open it first. Because it starts to shrink until it gets to the extreme. For instance, if we want to close the umbrella, we need to open it first. A bird must spread its wings before it gathers its wings. So if we want to weaken something we could strengthen it first. The chapter forty says, ‘Turning back is how the way (Dao) moves; Weakness is the means (application) the way (Dao) employs.’ ⁹⁴(反者，道之動。弱者，道之用。 ⁹⁵)Lao Zi explained that success and fail are by turn, disaster and happiness are by turn, fortunate circumstances and adversity circumstances are by turn. Everything continuously in a circle, it is the nature of heaven and earth. It is also the ‘changeability’ characteristic from Xiong Hanhong 熊捍宏. All things under heaven and earth are dynamic and changeable. ⁹⁶Because the sun is burning in midday before it goes down to the west. The moon is full before it become crescent moon. The candle is extremely bright before it is extinguished. Someone is extremely strong before he failed. It will turn over when something develops to a extremities. This is a natural tendency and the principle can help us to get happiness and avoid disaster.

Therefore, when we meet powerful people. There is no need to use violence to control violence or weaken them on purpose. Let him do as will. When tendency reaches the extreme, he will weaken naturally(物極必反). Besides, if we would like to weaken the desires. Do not have to force, like the principle of regulated the courses of rivers, would rather plug the river than dredge it. For example, if a person likes to eat litchi very much, just

⁹² Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.41.

⁹³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.83-84.

⁹⁴ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.47.

⁹⁵ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.92.

⁹⁶ Xiong Hanhong 熊捍宏 & Wang Weila 王維拉, ‘Daode jingsuo yunhan de rouxing siwei fangshi chutan’ 道德經所蘊含的柔性思維方式初探, *Heihe xuekan* 黑河學刊, 2(2010), 43-45.

let him completely eat them entire day. Let him keep eating when he doesn't want to. Then he will have no appetite seeing litchi later. Also, he eat so many litchi that he may have to be sent to hospital, then he will not eat naturally. Beside, a person who likes playing computer games very much. Advice is useless and forced withdrawal may even lead to resistance and confrontation. It is better to let him play games naturally. After playing for a long time, he will feel empty. Or he will scared when he saw someone stay up late and die suddenly beside him. If he figured it out by himself, he would voluntarily change and choose to return to normal life, which would be very different from the result of force action. Therefore, we should be able to calm down and follow the trend of nature. When it comes to the time, it will weaken naturally. There is no need to use force, because when tendency reaches the extreme, he will weaken naturally. This method works best, but it needs patient to wait for the proper time.

The chapter thirty-six says: ‘The fish must not be allowed to leave the deep; The instruments of power in a state must not be revealed to anyone.’⁹⁷(魚不可脫於淵，國之利器不可以示人。⁹⁸)The soft and weak is subtle and discerning wisdom, like the deep river is advantageous to fish. Because they are safest in the water. Once they are away from the deep river, there is nowhere to hide. The soft and weak is like the deep river. If one can live in soft and weak, he can win completely.

What is more, the soft and weak is not equal to cowardly, like Liu Heng 劉恆 says: ‘It has boundless vitality and indomitable character.’ The soft and weak is not what Confucius said ‘*Xiangyuan* 鄉願’ who obeys everything no matter good or bad. The virtue of soft and weak is round outside and square inside (外圓內方), in other words, gentle outside but resolute

⁹⁷ Translated by D.C.Lau, *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching*(New York: Penguin Books, 1963), P.41.

⁹⁸ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.83-84.

inside. So in fact it was determined to the right way and the Great Dao with firm confidence. But it is soft and changeable depend on different situation, waiting for proper time. Like *the Mencius* 孟子 says: ‘Do not indulge in wealth. Do not change because of poverty. Do not yield to power’(富貴不能淫，貧賤不能移，威武不能屈。)⁹⁹ Regardless of good or bad situation, not affecting by external circumstances. Maintaining a calm mind and harmonious breath, confirmedly keep on the right way. Therefore, Lao Zi taught us to be soft and weak. Although it seemingly weak, it has the firm confidence on Dao. So just steady and determined protecting the soft and weak that is the country's weapon.

5. Conclusion

Lao Zi learned Dao and virtue 德 diligently throughout his life, and what his education pays much attention to hide oneself and nameless, so he away from disasters. Lao Zi says: ‘My words are very easy to understand and very easy to put into practice. Yet no one under heaven understands them; no one puts them into practice.’¹⁰⁰(吾言甚易知，甚易行。天下莫能知，莫能行。¹⁰¹)The Great Dao that Lao Zi teaches us is his true harvest of practicing Dao, which can make into practice in daily life. It is a pity that if we only use it for academic research, and it also failed to live up to the compassion of the ancient sages for later generations. So if we truly learn and practice Dao, it can benefit to cultivate morality and govern country under heaven. Like what Emperor Wen 漢文帝 and Emperor Jing 漢景帝 did in the Western Han Dynasty 西漢. In sixty years, the social moral and social customs

⁹⁹ Translate myself. Annotation by Zhao Qi 趙岐, Commentary by Sun Shi 孫奭, Edit by Shisanjing zhushu zhengli weiyuanhui 十三經注疏整理委員會, *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子注疏(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol.6, p.193.

¹⁰⁰ Translated by Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*(London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1968), p.230.

¹⁰¹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *Laozi daodejing jie* 老子道德經解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2019), p.142.

becomes kind and honest, all people are simple and happiness. (五六十載之間，至於移風易俗，黎民醇厚。) ¹⁰²

Confucius consult Lao Zi about etiquette, before he leave, Lao Zi told him that: A man who is smart and observe deeply is often threatened with death, because he likes to talk about others. A man who is plausibility and knowledgeable is often be harmed, because he favours to say other people's demerit. (聰明深察而近於死者，好議人者也。博辯廣大危其身者，發人之惡者也。) ¹⁰³ This is also the forgiveness 恕 of Confucianism, being tolerant to others. It has the same principle with the virtue of soft and weak of Lao Zi. The essence of the soft and weak is compassion, the form of the soft and weak is water, and the soft and weak is the application.

Ordinary people like power and action do with intention but have no idea of the great manifestation of the soft and weak. The soft and weak seems to have no strength but can overcome the hard and strong. Also it has rich vitality. Like in the changing seasons, flowers wither and fall. But actually, their roots are deeply buried in the earth, silently gathering strength, waiting for bloom again in the next spring. Therefore, the soft and weak is a silent but powerful force! The virtue of soft and weak of Lao Zi has the characteristics of 'contribute to all things', 'modest and not competing', 'round outside and square inside', 'the soft and weak overcome the hard and strong', 'soft is a symbol of life', 'confirmedly keep on Dao'. It reflects the service and dedication of the outlook on life, soft and not strong attitude to work, the guidance method that rather plug than dredge, and deep accumulation of power. Those

¹⁰² By Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), vol.5, p.153.

¹⁰³ Translate myself. By Sima Qian 司馬遷, Annotation by Zhang shoujie 張守節, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), vol.47, p.2314.

have profound influence and value for cultivating morality, working, communication, and governing country in modern society.

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