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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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Respected provost, Miss Deng , good morning. My name is Ruxin Zhang and I would like to share with you my translation of Chapter 58 of the daodejing and its annotation by Shi Deqing.

The presentation will be divided into four parts. The first part is ‘Original Text and Translation of Chapter 58 of the Daodejing’, the second part is ‘Original Text and Translation of Shi Deqing’s Annotation of Chapter 58’, the third part is ‘Commentary’, And finally, I will share with you ‘Self-Reflection’.

Let’s start with the first part.

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

1.2 Translation

¹ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *The Daodejing and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), p.119-120.

If a country's policies are lenient, the people of the country will be unsophisticated and kindhearted. And if a country's policies are very meticulous, the people of the country will be worried about their behavior. Happiness depends on disaster, while disaster is hidden in happiness. They are interdependent and transform with each other. Who knows where the cycle ends? Is there no one to correct it? People regard the right views as a strange sophistry, and they regard good behavior as an abnormal phenomenon. And people have lost the ability to distinguish these clearly for a long time. Therefore, the sages are upright, but they will not show their edges too exposed. They are honest, but they will not put forward too harsh requirements of others. They are straightforward, but they will not act recklessly and unscrupulous. They are talented, but they will not show off their opinions.

Now let's move on to the second part.

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

2.2 Translation of Part A

² Shi Deqing 釋德清, *The Daodejing and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), p.120.

This chapter explains in detail the harm of intentional actions mentioned in the previous chapter, and shows the rationality of no intention. The overlapping words *menmen* 悶悶 means the state of ignorance. It means that ordinary people can obey these policies, but they cannot fully understand the meaning. Because ordinary people pay attention to the words and deeds of the rulers. If they show their preferences to let people know, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the more numerous and stringent the laws of a country, the more thieves there will be in the country. Therefore, the sages hide their actions and make the people in a state of ignorance, as if they do not know anything. Then the social atmosphere does not pursue luxury, and few people do deceptive and false things naturally. Therefore, if a country's policies are lenient, the people of the country will be unsophisticated and kindhearted. If a country's policies are stipulated in detail and discriminated clearly, then most ordinary people will not feel stable. They sometimes worry about not doing well enough, sometimes they worry about doing out of line. Therefore said, if a country's policies are very meticulous, the people of the country will be worried about their behavior. The overlapping words *queque* 缺缺 means that people often worry that their needs are not met.

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。³

2.4 Translation of Part B

³ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *The Daodejing and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), p.120.

Perhaps the omen of disaster and happiness originated from the sprouting of people's minds. If their mind is good, then disaster will turn into happiness. If their mind is bad, then happiness will turn into disaster. This is the interdependence and transformation between disaster and happiness. Because ordinary people's mind of cunning and sophistry does not stop, the cycle of transformation between disaster and happiness will not end. Who among ordinary people can know where the end of this cycle is? Therefore, Confucius said that it is difficult that ordinary people can predict the subtle omen of things, so that's the reason. Although the cycle between disaster and happiness is like this, cannot those who have mastered themselves to correct it by explaining 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。⁴

2.6 Translation of Part C

However, the social atmosphere and the Dao gradually declined, and people's minds were not as unsophisticated and kindhearted as those in ancient times. They could not distinguish between false views and right views, and they reverse good and bad. The sages had taught the people the right views, but the people thought it was strange sophistry. They had taught the people good behavior, but the people thought it was an abnormal phenomenon. That is to say,

⁴ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *The Daodejing and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), p.120.

if you work hard to persuade and admonish others on the basis of lack of trust, the other people will think that this is a berate against him. Because people have lost the ability to distinguish these rights from wrong for a long time, even with teaching of sages, they could not completely distinguish it. The Zhuangzi said, three people walk together, one loses his way, and there are still people who can distinguish the direction. If two of them lose their way, they cannot easily distinguish the direction. Now ordinary people all over the world have lost the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and who can explain it clearly?

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。雖廉而不傷於劇。劇，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，謂銜耀已見也。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。⁵

2.8 Translation of Part D

Therefore sages travel around the secular world to educate and influence people. Their value is that they can blend into the world, and they can do the same things as ordinary people. They mingle with the secular world without leaving a trace in their mind. Therefore, although they are upright, they will not show their edges too exposed of hurting others. The character *ge* 割 stands for cut, which means that people's sharp edges are too exposed. Although they are honest, they will not put forward too harsh requirements of hurting others. The character *gui* 劇 means that people are too demanding of others. Although they are

⁵ Shi Deqing 釋德清, *The Daodejing and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing* 老子道德經解(Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), p.120-121.

straightforward, they will not act recklessly and unscrupulously of hurting others. The character *si* 肆 means that people do things recklessly. Although they are talented, they will not show off their opinions and hurt others. The character *yao* 耀 means that people show off their opinions. This is that sages have their own advantages but they can hide these advantages, so they can be respected by people all over the world. That's why sages govern the world with no intention, they like purity, and the people are stable naturally. And they do not need to do things with intention, the people are educated naturally.

Now let's move on to the third part.

3. Commentary

For this oral presentation, because the original text of chapter 58 is related to the original text of chapter 57, I have repeatedly read and studied the original text of these two chapters. In this process, I used the Wang Li's ancient Chinese dictionary, the modern Chinese dictionary, and the web of *handian* 漢典 to check the meaning of Chinese characters. For a character, I will write the meanings found in different dictionaries on paper, and then compare and choose the most appropriate meaning.

In this process, it also exists that the meaning of the original text can not be well explained after querying the dictionary. For example, the word '不鑿' in the sentence '民情不鑿' means that rice did not need to be shelled. But if I use this meaning to explain the original text, its meaning will be difficult to understand. So I extend it to the social atmosphere of not advocating luxury, which can form a reasonable logic with the following sentence '奸偽自然不生'.

Moreover, it is sometimes necessary to refer to chapters 56 and 57. For example, the translation of ‘由百姓皆注其耳目，若示有知’ and the ‘耳目’ here needs to refer to ‘耳目’ in the original ‘不事耳目之玩’ in Chapter 56, to interpret it as the words and deeds of the ruler. The sentence ‘若示有知’ needs to refer to the paragraph ‘法令滋彰，盜賊多有’ in Chapter 57 and the related explanation, especially the explanation of the sentence ‘天下多忌諱，而民彌貧’. Therefore, I interpret this sentence as that rulers cannot let the people know their preferences. And sometimes it is necessary to combine the contents of the whole chapter to choose the most appropriate meaning. For example, the character 方 in the sentence ‘而示之以無為之方也’ can be translated as methods or suitability. So, after reading the full original text carefully, I think it is more appropriate to translate it as the rationality of no intention.

In addition, in the process of translation, I found that the original text also involved other classic sentences, such as ‘民可使由之，不可使知之’ in *the Analects* 論語, and ‘三人行而一人惑，所適者猶可致也，惑者少也。二人惑則勞而不至，惑者勝也’ in *the Zhuangzi* 莊子. Therefore, I also refer to some books to help me correctly understand and translate the original text.

Let’s now move on to the last part.

4. Self-Reflection

In the process of translation, I have a lot of feelings about the sentence ‘未信而勞諫，則以為厲謗’. Previously, I thought that persuasion after trust can help people better accept suggestions. But in the process of translation, I realized that this is actually a sincere

consideration for others, and really wants to help others understand problems and get rid of bad habits. Otherwise, if you make suggestions blindly without considering the basis of trust, it will make it difficult for the other party to accept these suggestions, and even cut off the opportunity to make suggestions to the other party next time, which is a great pity.

This is my presentation, if there is any mistake in the content, any suggestions and advice would be appreciated, thank you very much.

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