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Trinity Saint David

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Student Name: Siyao Zeng	
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A Translation of Chapter 58 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

and Its Annotation by Shi Deqing

Student name: Siyao Zeng

SID: 1804385

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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，廉而不剝，直而不肆，光而不耀。¹

1.2 Translation

If politics is generous, people will be pure and honest. If politics is sensitive and calculating, then people will be crafty. Misfortune and blessing always arise from each other. Who knows the end of this? Are there absolutes about this? Normal can turn into odd, good can turn into aberrant. People have been lost for a long time. Therefore, sages are upright but not sharp, incorruptible but not harsh, direct but restrained, brilliant but low-key.

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

2.1 Original text – Part A

¹ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozi daodejingjie* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), p. 119.

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

This chapter talk about the harm of acting intentionally, and then gives directions of acting unintentionally. ‘Menmen (悶悶)’ means an appearance of unintelligent. This is why says ‘People can be guided, but cannot be clear about the reason to do so.’ Because ordinary people tend to pay attention to what they see and hear, if the government appear to be sensitive and calculating, it is what it mentions before that the more laws and regulations are established, the more robbers and thieves will emerge. Therefore, sages hide their deeds and keep their merits secret, to show an unintelligent politics and an appearance of knowing nothing. Then feelings of the people are not clear-cut, the fraudulent and the false will naturally not occur. This is why says ‘If politics is generous, people will be pure and honest.’ If politics is sensitive and calculating like the graduations on the scale, then people will be uneasy and crafty. Therefore, it says ‘If the politics is sensitive and calculating, then people will be crafty.’ ‘Queque (缺缺)’ means worrying personal gains and losses.

2.3 Original text – Part B

² Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozi daodejingjie* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), p.120.

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

Generally, the key to blessing or calamity depends on the germination of human thoughts. If motivation is good, then calamity can turn into blessing. If motivation is not good, then blessing can turn into calamity. This is the mutual concomitant of calamity and blessing. This is because human thoughts never stop arising, thus calamity and blessing are shifting and arising from each other like an endless cycle, people can hardly know the end of it. Therefore, this is the reason why Confucius said that ‘It is marvellous that one can be aware of one’s thought arising.’ But since calamity and blessing are circling like this, isn’t there a sage to correct this by 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

³ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozi daodejingjie* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), p.120.

However, with the degeneration of the world, people are not what they were in times past. Right and wrong are confused, good and evil are up side down. When sages show the right track to people, they think it is odd. When sages teach them to be good, they think it is strange. This is why say ‘If one is laboriously advising others without trust, then others will regard it as a slander.’ This is because of the long loss of heart, even if there are teachings of sages, it can hardly be corrected. Zhuangzi says, ‘In the company of three, if one of them get lost, there are still solvers. If two of them get lost, it is hard to change. Nowadays the whole world get lost, who can solve this?’

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。⁴

2.8 Translation of Part D

Therefore, sages travel the turbid world to influence people. It is important that they can soften their brilliance and share the same appearance with ordinary people perfectly and imperceptibly. Therefore, even though they behave with integrity, they will not get hurt by being too sharp. The Sino-gram ‘Ge (割)’ means cutting. It means that one is showing off like a cutting edge. Though they are incorruptible, they will not get hurt by being too harsh. The Sino-gram ‘Gui (剋)’ means being too harsh. Though they are direct, they will not get hurt by

⁴ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozi daodejingjie* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020), p.121.

being unrestrained. The Sino-gram ‘Si (肆)’ means unrestrained. Though they are brilliant, they will not get hurt by showing off. The Sino-gram ‘Yao (耀)’ means showing off one’s opinion. This means sages have their strengths and they can well nourish them. This is why say sages are revered by the whole world. And this is how they can influence the world with no intention, how they rest their mind in tranquility so that people can be at ease, and how they do nothing, people will then reform by them.

3. Commentary

That’s all for my translation of the original text and annotation of Chapter fifty-six of *Laozi daodejing Shi Deqing zhu*. Now I am going to share my commentary and self-reflection with you.

The whole text is translated with the help of Oxford English Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Collins COBUILD overhaul and FLTRP Modern Chinese-English Dictionary and Modern English-Chinese Dictionary. In the mean time, I drew support from Handian web side, which is a collection of Chinese dictionary online.

My translating process can be summarised into three steps. First, I would look up most of the Sino-grams embedded in the text in Chinese dictionary, and read through all the definitions of them, to see which is the most appropriate definition to a Sino-gram. Second, I would look up in English dictionary to find words or expressions corresponding to Chinese meanings. Third, I would review the original text according to the annotation of Shi Deqing, to see whether the two meanings are coincided to each other.

As an accurate understanding to both source language and target language is a fundamental rule of translation, I strove to understand the full meanings of the Chinese text, and also try my best to translate them into English.

4. Self-Reflection

In this module, we are learning and translating the version of annotation of Shi Deqing, whom was one of the four eminent monks in the late Ming Dynasty. He tended to explain *Daodejing* from the perspective of Buddhist thinking, combining with Confucius's thoughts, this allows us to learn the teachings of Laozi from a deeper and wider angle, also to see and practise the teachings in our daily lives. I think this is the beauty of the version of Shi Deqing.

When I was translating the texts, I found something that is worth to share. For what I have mentioned before, I said I have attempted to find out the most appropriate definition to the original text. However, sometimes, I found that there is no accurate or appropriate definition of a Sino-gram in one sentence. I mean, there is no right answer. How it can be defined depends on how I understand it. And how I understand is related to a lot of factors, such as my cultural background, thinking pattern, experiences, wisdom and the purity of mind. Therefore, I found it interesting that when definitions run into the circumstance of 'no right answer', I have to give my own opinion according to my comprehension and experiences. I felt this is an encouraging but dangerous process, because giving our own opinion is easy, but holding a humble attitude to our opinion, and, look on other versions with admiring eyes are not easy. In this process, I should be very careful to keep a humble and learning attitude towards my opinion. I told myself that I'd better detach from my version and let go of my effort. This might be a practice of the teaching of Shi Deqing that '虽光而不伤于耀', which I translated as 'Though they are brilliant, they will not get hurt by showing off'. What I mean

is that, if I regard my version as the better one than others and attach to the good or bad of it, then a mentality of competition arises. Once I pay attention on the comment of it, then gain and loss arise. In this case, my emotion would influence by external situations and my mind would no longer be at ease. No matter I am excited or upset, my heart have been bound by the attachment of myself. This is a harm to our mind. In addition, if I try to show off my work, there would be disgust and anger around me, which is also a great harm to me. This is how I would 'hurt by showing off'.

I have heard a phrase from my tutor that 'prison by one's own achievement', actually, I think, sometimes, it is not the achievement itself put one into prison, but, one's attachment to achievement. This awareness always remind me to be mindful of my thoughts, so that I could gradually free myself from my attachments of my work and further concentrate on my study, and occasionally enjoy peace of mind.

In conclusion, when I was translating the original text, I tried to follow Shi Deqing's meanings, to make sure my translation does not deviate from the main idea of him. However, as a young learner, my comprehension is very limited, it is hard to understand the thorough meanings given by the author. But I can feel the significance and wisdom behind the teachings, hence, I would keep learning and applying sages teachings in my life.

That's all for my presentation today, thank you for listening.

Bibliography

1. Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozi daodejingjie* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2020)