



# Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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| <i>For completion by marker:</i><br><i>Comments:</i>                                                             |                                |
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# English Oral Presentation

## Discussing the chapter 48 in *Laozi Dao De Jing*; 為學日益，為道日損

Good morning Pro.Luo. Today I am going to share with you my learning and understanding of the *Laozi* chapter 48.

Firstly, let's see the contents of my Oral Presentation:

Firstly, We will have a brief introduction about some key characters and terms in this chapter, in which so many scholars tried to explain through history. (Introduction)

Secondly, I will first thoroughly explain the meanings of this chapter based on Master Hanshan's explanation. We will learn the philosophical thoughts and core ideas from Laozi, and quote the sayings from other masters, like Confucius and Zhuangzi to proof Laozi's thought and interpret from other aspects. (Meanings Explanation)

Finally, we will enter the conclusion ; I will share my understanding, feeling and learning experience of this chapters. (Conclusion)

So, first of all, let's enter the introduction of the presentation:

Let's see the original text:

為學日益，為道日損。損之又損，以至於無為，無為而無不為。故取天下(under heaven)常以無事。及其有事，不足以取天下。<sup>1</sup>

In the text, there are three specific Chinese terms that today I would like to take some times to try to interpret, Dao 道, Wuwei 無為 and Tianxia 天下 respectively.

For Dao, it is hard to understand and explain clearly. Laozi said that: “道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名”，<sup>2</sup> Dao 道 is the thing that can not be named and defined in a concrete realm. And there

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<sup>1</sup> 明 Ming , Shi Deqing 釋德清: 《老子道德經解》 *Laozi Dao De Jing Jie*, (Chong Wen Shu Ju Press 崇文書局, 2015), page 94

<sup>2</sup> 明 Ming , Shi Deqing 釋德清: 《老子道德經解》 *Laozi Dao De Jing Jie*, Page11.

are so many combination like 天道, 人道, 大道 etc.(et cetera). It can be simply understood as “way”, not the way in physical. It is just like a law in the world, or more widely, in the universe that everything must follow. Therefore, Xu Yuanchong translated as “divine law”. It is quite appropriate.

Yijing 易經 describe Dao: “形而上者謂之道”,<sup>3</sup> it seems distant to us, so Zhuangzi said: “道不可言，言而非也。”<sup>4</sup>

And in *The Analects of Confucius*, Zigong once said that: “夫子之言性與天道，不可得而聞也。”<sup>5</sup>

But Dao is always in our life and never leave us.

Therefore, in 中庸, it said: “道不遠人”.<sup>6</sup>

Exactly, we cannot do anything without Dao, it is just like we cannot violate law, otherwise, the consequence is bad.

Thus, 中庸 said: “道也者，不可須臾離也。可離，非道也。”<sup>7</sup>

For Wuwei 無為, it is one of the most core theories and thoughts of Laozi. It can be simply understood as “non-action”. Laozi believed “無為而無不為”, simply it means: “If we do nothing, we do everything.” And I will explain in the later paragraph.

In terms of Tianxia 天下, it can be regarded as the concept of nation or world. But those are the oversimplified interpretation. In China, many people likes to use Tianxia 天下 in their statement. Therefore, it is appropriate to be understood as “under heaven”. Like the saying in Zhuangzi: “天無不覆，地無不載。”<sup>8</sup>

Let’s enter the main part, Meanings Explanation

Let’s explain the original text first, based on the interpretation from Master Hanshan. We will go through the sentence step by step.

為學日益，為道日損。

Master Hanshan explain:

“為學者，增長知見，故日益；為道者，克去情欲，隳形泯智，故日損。”<sup>9</sup>

It means: about learning or studying, it is the way to enrich our knowledge, so we have to make progress everyday. On the contrary, in the pursuit of Dao, it is the way of decrease, because we need to get rid of our desires and all the wandering thoughts from ourselves, finally we are able to remain our inner peace in life, and stay in an empty state.

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<sup>3</sup> 《周易經傳譯注》Zhou Yi Jing Zhuang Yi Zhu: (Beijing 北京, Zhong Hua Shu Ju 中華書局, 2018), Page 259.

<sup>4</sup> Chen Guying 陳鼓應:《莊子今注今譯》Zhuangzi Jin Zhu Jin Yi, (Beijing 北京, Zhong Hua Shu Ju 中華書局, 1983), Page 620.

<sup>5</sup> Zhuxi 朱熹:《四書章句集註》Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu, (Beijing 北京, Zhong Hua Shu Ju 中華書局), Page 79.

<sup>6</sup> Zhuxi 朱熹:《四書章句集註》Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu, Page 23.

<sup>7</sup> Zhuxi 朱熹:《四書章句集註》Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu, Page 17.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Guying 陳鼓應:《莊子今注今譯》Zhuangzi Jin Zhu Jin Yi, Page 169.

<sup>9</sup> 明 Ming, Shi Deqing 釋德清:《老子道德經解》Laozi Dao De Jing Jie, Page 94.

Thus, the tendency of both learning and pursuing Dao is different, and seemed orienting the opposite direction. This is what we need to pay attention to.

損之又損，以至於無為，無為而無不為。

Master Hanshan said that:

“初以智去情，可謂損矣；情忘則智亦泯，故又損。如此則心境兩忘，私欲淨盡，可至於無為。”<sup>10</sup>

It means: at first, we depend on our rationality to get rid of the desires, and then, it is not enough to just reduce desires, we also need to drop the rationality, because it is also a kind of thinking. When we are able to forget both the two, we are empty in mind, and can stay at “non-action” state. When we are in “non-action” state, there is nothing we cannot do.

Lin Yutang 林語堂 explain “non-action” that: “若以科學的眼光來解釋，便是「利用自然達成目的」”<sup>11</sup>

Zhuangzi think, action would be useless and unnecessary for situations, he analogized as: “以火救火，以水救水，名之曰益多，順始無窮。”<sup>12</sup>

We can feel that both Laozi and Zhuangzi were not aggressive, their standpoint seems so negative. But it is not, they just do not want to be the troublemakers to worsen situations.

Lin Yutang’s saying: “利用自然達成目的” is very appropriate and inspiring. We have to obey the law of universe, and see everything work by the law. Even though it seems we really do nothing from surface, everything works well without any interruptions and control.

This is the ideal state that Laozi prefer.

故取天下常以無事。及其有事，不足以取天下。

Laozi believe, the best way of holding under heaven place is being the state of “無事”, can be understood as “non-causing”

Why does being “non-causing” can hold the world? Master Hanshan said:

“無事，則無欲；我無欲，而民自正；民自正，而天下之心得；天下之心得，則治國如視諸掌，此所以無事足以取天下也。”<sup>13</sup>

Confucius also said: “政者，正也。”<sup>14</sup>

Laozi’s ideal state of politics is to back to the period of Yao, Shun 堯、舜. According to the Chinese history. Yao, Shun do nothing for the country when they were monarch, but the government worked well and the citizens lived in happiness. It is the way not to interfere people, and it is the best politics that Laozi advocated the most. This is the main political philosophy of Laozi.

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<sup>10</sup> 明 Ming , Shi Deqing 釋德清: 《老子道德經解》 *Laozi Dao De Jing Jie*, Page 94.

<sup>11</sup> Lin Yu Tang 林語堂: 《林語堂名著全集·老子的智慧》 *Lin Yu Tang Quan Ji, The Wisdom of Laozi*, (東北師範大學出版社 Dong Bei Shi Fan University Press, 1994), Page 202

<sup>12</sup> Chen Guying 陳鼓應: 《莊子今注今譯》 *Zhuangzi Jin Zhu Jin Yi*, Page 120.

<sup>13</sup> 明 Ming , Shi Deqing 釋德清: 《老子道德經解》 *Laozi Dao De Jing Jie*, Page 94.

<sup>14</sup> Zhuxi 朱熹: 《四書章句集註》 *Si Shu Zhang Ju Ji Zhu*, Page 138.

And let's move on the next part.

The conclusion.

By learning this chapter, I know the difference between learning and pursuing Dao. It is the contrary way. And I understand the simple meanings of Wuwei, non-action.

When talking about 為道日損 the decrease of the pursuit of Dao. I think about a story in Zhuangzi, which called “庖丁解牛”,<sup>15</sup>

The brief process is that: 庖丁 Paoding, a cook, enlightened the way, or Dao, of cutting up ox. According to his statement, he experience a decreasing process of self-cultivation. At first , he just saw a whole ox when cutting, then, three years age, he saw no more a whole ox. And finally, he was able to deal with the ox in his mind instead of seeing in eyes. His mind was activated and senses stopped functioning.

This is a vivid story of the decrease of pursuit of Dao.

I have the same experience.

The process of pursuit of Dao is to get rid of all our bad habits and desires. When I make progress to do in this way, I feel the true inner peace in mind, which is so comfortable. The less burden we have, the more happiness we get.

In terms of 無為, non-action.

I think about the history of Han dynasty. There is a period called 文景之治, which was the proof of the practise of non-action in politics. In that time, the government less interrupted people's life, and let them to recuperate.

In our life, we can also practise non-action. For example, we can reduce the action of interrupting or controlling others, we just do our best to make progress of ourselves. This is enough. Laozi also said: “我無為而民自化”,<sup>16</sup> we would not do anything but cultivate ourselves, others will be influenced, and change afterwards.

This is all I have learned from the class.

Thank you for listening, any feedback and suggestion will be appreciated.

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<sup>15</sup> Chen Guying 陳鼓應:《莊子今注今譯》*Zhuangzi Jin Zhu Jin Yi*, Page 106~107.

<sup>16</sup> 明 Ming , Shi Deqing 釋德清:《老子道德經解》*Laozi Dao De Jing Jie*, Page 111.

# Bibliography

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