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Translation 5

《道德經·第十二章》

五色令人目盲；五音令人耳聾；五味令人口爽；

馳騁田獵，令人心發狂；難得之貨，令人行妨。

是以聖人為腹不為目，故去彼取此。

Translation on Chapter 12 of *Daodejing*

The five colours¹ make people's eyes blind;² the five tones³ make people's ears deaf; the five flavours⁴ make people's palate numb.⁵

Racing, chasing and hunting in the field⁶ makes people's mind go wild with excitement;⁷ goods that are hard to obtain make people's action harmful.⁸

Therefore, the sages tend to the stomach, not to the eye,⁹ so they discard those and take these.¹⁰

¹ According to 陳鼓應, 五色 are green, red, yellow, white and black. 余培林 says, it indicates the various colours (調多種顏色).

² 目盲, 余培林 explains it as vision being dull, and eyes look at but can't see (視覺遲鈍, 視而不見).

³ According to 陳鼓應, 五音 are the five notes of the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale (宮商角徵羽). I choose 'five tones' for 五音, rather than 'notes'. In music, 'tone' is almost synonymous with 'note', but it also has the meaning of 'timbre'. The 'five tones' is a representative of varied music in this context, so the word 'tone', which has diverse meanings, is more suitable.

⁴ According to 陳鼓應, 五味 are sour, bitter, sweet, spicy and salty. 余培林 says, it indicates the various food (調多種食物).

⁵ 王弼 says, 爽 means 'to become deficient and loose'. They lose the use of their mouth, therefore [the text] calls it 爽 (差失也, 失口之用, 故謂之爽。Trans. Rudolf G Wagner). For the translation I use 'numb', which means 'unable to feel or react in the normal way', and it fits the meaning of 'loose the use of their mouth'.

⁶ 'Racing, chasing and hunting' is borrowed from Ursula Le Guin's translation, using one word for each of the character 馳騁獵, and it expresses the feeling well. Also, I add 'in the field' for 田 to supplement the meaning.

⁷ 心發狂, I use D C Lau's 'mind go wild with excitement', for it not only translates 狂, but also explains the reason of getting wild, which is 'excitement'.

⁸ 妨, 河上公 explains as 'to harm' or 'harmful', being full of desires in mind and never satisfied makes one's actions harmful and attracts disgrace (傷也。心貪意欲, 不知饜足, 則行傷身辱也). The translation is borrowed from Thomes Cleary.

⁹ Translation is borrowed from Brook Ziporyn. There are many different interpretations about 'stomach' and 'eye', one of them is that 'stomach' refers to people's basic needs and 'eye' refers to the endless desire.

¹⁰ I choose D C Lau's 'discard' and 'take' for 去 and 取, which is more active than Wing-tsit Chan's 'reject' and 'accept'. 'Those' indicates 'the eye', the endless desire, and 'these' indicates 'the stomach', the basic needs.

Translation 6

《道德經·第二十一章》

孔德之容，唯道是從。

道之為物，唯恍唯惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。

窈兮冥兮，其中有精；其精甚真，其中有信。自古及今，其名不去，以閱眾甫。

吾何以知眾甫之狀哉？以此。

Translation on Chapter 21 of *Daodejing*¹

The appearance of the great virtue² follows only the Dao.³

Dao as a thing is vague and indistinct.⁴ Being vague and indistinct, there are images in it. Being indistinct and vague, there are things in it.⁵

Being deep and dark,⁶ there is essence in it.⁷ The essence is very genuine and there is trustworthiness in it.⁸ From the ancient times till today,⁹ its name is never lost.¹⁰ The Dao is always there, to know about the beginning of all things.¹¹

How can I know about the beginning of all the things are like? From this.

¹ There are several versions of this chapter, and the translation here is based on the Wang Bi version.

² 孔，河上公 interprets as big, or great (大也).

³ 蘇轍 says, Dao is formless. When it operates, there comes De, and it has appearance. Therefore De is the manifestations and appearance of the Dao (道無形也，及其運而為德，則有容矣。故德者，道之見也). For the terms 道 and 德, I follow Wing-tsit Chan and Lin Yutang's method, using the common translation 'virtue' for 德 and transliteration 'Dao' for 道. Also, for 惟道是從, I use Hans-Georg Moeller's translation, 'follows only the Dao'.

⁴ 恍惚，陳鼓應 says it is the same as 'to seem' or 'as if' (恍惚猶仿佛). Shi Deqing 釋德清 says, 恍 and 惚 refer to [something] as though there, as though not there, meaning [something] that cannot be pinpointed (trans. D'Ambrosio and Ouyang). For the translation, I use Ames and Hall's 'vague and indefinite'.

⁵ 物 and 象 are similar, they are things and appearance emerged from the Dao. I use 'image' and 'things' respectively to clarify the slight difference.

⁶ 窈冥，說文 says, 窈 means deep and profound (深遠也). 王弼 says, 窈冥 means deep and profound and cannot be seen (深遠不可得而見). Therefore, I translate them as 'deep and dark'.

⁷ 精，余培林 says it is the principle and essence of all the lives and substance (一切生命物質的原理與原質). Therefore, I use the word 'essence'.

⁸ For the words 真 and 信, I borrow Moeller's translation, 'genuine' and 'trustworthiness'.

⁹ The translation of this clause is from Brook Ziporyn.

¹⁰ 其名不去, I use D'Ambrosio and Ouyang's translation, which is a direct translation. 河上公 interprets 名 as 道, saying that from the ancient times till today, the Dao is always there and never lost (自古至今，道常在不). Therefore, I add this meaning in the later sentence.

¹¹ 眾甫，王弼 interprets as the beginning of things (物之始也). 薛蕙 says it refers to the heaven and earth and the myriad things (眾甫即天地萬物是也). Therefore, I translate it as 'the beginning of all things'.

Translation 7

《道德經·第四十一章》

上士聞道，勤而行之；中士聞道，若存若亡；下士聞道，大笑之。不笑不足以爲道。

故建言有之：

明道若昧；進道若退；夷道若類；

上德若谷；大白若辱；廣德若不足；建德若偷；質真若渝；

大方無隅；大器晚成；大音希聲；大象無形；道隱無名。

夫唯道，善貸且成。

Translation on Chapter 41 of *Daodejing*

When superior people hear the Dao,¹ they diligently practice it. When average people hear the Dao, they waver between belief and unbelief.² When inferior people hear the Dao, they laugh loudly at it. If they did not laugh at it, it would not be the Dao.

Therefore, there is the established saying:³

The bright Dao appears to be dim. The forward Dao appears to retreat.⁴ The smooth Dao appears to be uneven.⁵

The highest virtue appears like a valley. The greatest purity appears like disgrace. The broadest virtue appears to be insufficient. The vigorous virtue appears to be indolent.⁶ The quality of

¹ 士, I translate as ‘people’, because in this text, it is just about different reactions and attitudes of people hearing the Dao, so it doesn’t need to be a scholar or a student. For the three types of people, I use Bill Porter’s translation, ‘superior’, ‘average’ and ‘inferior’.

² The translation of this clause is from John C H Wu 吳經熊. 薛蕙 says, the average people have doubt in the Dao, for they cannot truly know it and believe it (中士則疑之，蓋未能真知而篤信也).

³ 建, 王弼 interprets as ‘to establish’ (立也). Therefore, I use Wing-tsit Chan’s translation for this sentence.

⁴ The first two sentences are better to be understood as the appearance of those who practice the Dao (‘Those who understand the Dao seems dull in comprehension. Those who is advanced in Dao seems to go backward’). However, to try and keep the original structure and be consistent with other sentences, I choose to interpret the first word of the sentence as adjective rather than verb, which is also a reasonable and common way of interpretation.

⁵ 類, 張舜徽 says: The Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 records: ‘Lei 類, the segments on a knot.’ A knot [on silk] has segments and is thereby not even, so this is extended to be the name for something uneven. (from 陳鼓應’s commentary, translated by D’Ambrosio and Ouyang)

⁶ 建, both 陳鼓應 and 余培林 quote 俞越’s commentary: 建 should be read as 健. Because the pronunciation of 健 and 建 are the same, so they are used interchangeably. ‘建德若偷’ says that the robust and vigorous virtue seems, on the contrary, lazy. (「建」當讀為「健」。……是「建」「健」音同而義亦

pure genuineness appears to be changeable.⁷

The greatest square has no corners. The greatest vessel has no completion.⁸ The greatest sound is silent.⁹ The greatest image is formless. The Dao is hidden and without name.

Only the Dao is good at assisting all things and making them complete.¹⁰

得通。「健德若偷」，言剛健之德，反若偷惰也。Trans. D'Ambrosio and Ouyang with modification) The translation 'vigorous' and 'indolent' is borrowed from D C Lau. The definition of 'indolent' given by the Cambridge Dictionary is 'showing no real interest or effort', which fit the context well.

⁷ 渝, 薛蕙 interprets as 'change' (變也). 蘇轍 says: those who with the nature and spirit, change in accordance with the circumstances and do not lost its genuineness, seem to be changeable in the outside (體性抱神, 隨物變化, 而不失其真者, 外若渝也). For the translation of '質真', I borrow D'Ambrosio and Ouyang's 'quality of pure genuineness'.

⁸ 晚, 余培林 quotes 陳柱 to interpret it as 免, because the context is about the opposition of the Dao's substance and appearance. Interpreting it in this way can make it consistent with other sentences (無隅、希聲、無形), and it also corresponds to Laozi's spirit: the greatest vessel has no fixed shapes or fixed uses.

⁹ Chapter 14 says, that which one looks but does not see is named 希 (聽之不聞名曰希), so I use John C H Wu's translation 'silent'.

¹⁰ 貸, 陳鼓應 interprets as 'to give' (施與). The translation of this sentence is mainly from D'Ambrosio and Ouyang.

Translation 8

《道德經·第四十九章》

聖人常無心，以百姓心為心。

善者，吾善之；不善者，吾亦善之；德善。信者，吾信之；不信者，吾亦信之；德信。

聖人在天下，歛歛焉，為天下渾其心，百姓皆注其耳目，聖人皆孩之。

Translation on Chapter 49 of *Daodejing*¹

The sages are constantly without a mind.² They take the mind of the people as their mind.

To good people, I treat them well;³ to those who are not good, I also treat them well; thus, goodness is attained.⁴ To trustworthy people, I believe in them; to the untrustworthy people, I also believe in them; thus, trustworthiness is attained.

In governing the empire,⁵ the sages restrain themselves from subjective viewpoints,⁶ and make people's minds return to simple and natural.⁷ The people all focus on their ears and eyes,⁸ and the sages regard them all as their children,⁹ and help them return to the simple state as an infant.¹⁰

¹ This translation is based on the 陳鼓應 edition, which makes three emendations to the received version.

² The received version is 無常心. 陳鼓應 changes it to 常無心 according to 馬王堆帛書, and cites a range of scholars to support his idea, which makes the meaning of the text clearer. According to him, 無心 means no personal interests or subjective prejudice. Since 心 has many meanings (feeling, thinking, intentions, thinking of oneself, and so on), I translate it literally as 'mind'.

³ The sentence pattern is from D'Ambrosio and Ouyang's translation.

⁴ 德, both 陳鼓應 and 余培林 says it is the same as 得 (to gain, to attain, to receive), since they have the same pronunciation and are interchangeable in ancient times. Also, the translation is borrowed from Wing-tsit Chan.

⁵ 天下, literally means 'all under heaven', but in this context, it is about a place the sages are governing, so I use 'empire' which is from Wing-tsit Chan.

⁶ 歛歛焉, 王弼 interprets as heart without a master (心無所主也). 陳鼓應 interprets 歛 as weaken or restrain. Here it means weakening one's subjective intentions (歛, 收斂, 指收斂主觀的意志. Trans. D'Ambrosio and Ouyang).

⁷ 渾, 陳鼓應 interprets as transforming one's thoughts and mood to return to what is simple (使人心思化歸於渾樸). The translation 'simple and natural' is from a definition given by A Modern English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary (外研社《現代漢英英漢詞典》).

⁸ 王弼's commentary on this sentence wrote, each (of the common people) use their intelligence (各用聰明).

⁹ Learning from Lin Yutang and Robert Henricks, I add 'their' in front of 'children' to make it sounds slightly more tender and warmer.

¹⁰ There are two main interpretations of 孩之: to regard the people as children; to help them return to the state of a child, which means simple and unsophisticated. I double translate it.

Translation 9

《道德經·第七十五章》

民之飢，以其上食稅之多，是以飢。

民之難治，以其上之有為，是以難治。

民之輕死，以其上求生之厚，是以輕死。

夫唯無以生為者，是賢於貴生。

Translation on Chapter 75 of *Daodejing*¹

The people are starving: It is because those above eat too much tax-grain² that the people are starving.³

The people are difficult to keep in order:⁴ It is because those above are too forceful and rigorous in their governing⁵ that they are hard to keep in order.

The people take death lightly.⁶ It is because those above so avidly seeking to enrich their own lives⁷ that they take death lightly.

Only those who do not act for the purpose of living⁸ are wiser than⁹ esteem and nourishing life.¹⁰

¹ This translation is based on the 陳鼓應 version, which makes one emendations to the 王弼 version.

² 食稅之多, Wing-tsit Chan, Arthur Waley and Lin Yutang all translate as ‘eat too much tax-grain’. It perfectly expresses the idea that, in ancient China, the common people are mainly farmers, so taxes are often in the form of food. It also translates the word 食.

³ This sentence format is borrowed from D C Lau, using a colon to separate the first clause.

⁴ 治, I use Arthur Waley’s ‘keep in order’, for it sounds more passive.

⁵ 有為, 陳鼓應 interprets as: Policies and regulations are rigorous and harsh; intensive and rash actions (政令煩苛；強作妄為). The translation ‘forceful’ is borrowed from Bill Porter.

⁶ Take death lightly (輕死) could further interpret as not afraid of causing oneself death by doing something illegal. Therefore, Brook Ziporyn double translates it as ‘The people’s disregard of the threat of execution is indeed due to a deep neglect of death’.

⁷ 陳鼓應 interprets this sentence as ‘it is because the rulers foster [their own] luxuries’ (由於統治者奉養奢厚). Also, I use Brook Ziporyn’s ‘so avidly seeking to enrich their own lives’, which vividly expresses the idea of pursuing their own luxuries.

⁸ 無以生為 shares the same idea of ‘put their own persons out of mind yet find themselves taken care of’ (外其身而身存) in chapter 7. 陳鼓應 interprets this sentence as ‘Not taking esteeming life and luxuries as goals worth going after. It means not esteeming life, and that life should be lived quietly and contentedly’ (不把厚生奢侈作為追求的目標。即是不貴生；生活要能恬淡). The translation is borrowed from Robert Henricks.

⁹ 賢, 薛蕙 interprets as better (愈也). The general meaning of this word is wise, virtuous and able. Therefore, the translation ‘wiser’ can express its meaning better.

¹⁰ 貴生 means basically the same with 生生之厚: esteem life and carefully nourishing it.

Translation 10

《道德經·第七十九章》

和大怨，必有餘怨；安可以為善？

是以聖人執左契，而不責於人。

有德司契，無德司徹。

天道無親，常與善人。

Translation on Chapter 79 of *Daodejing*

To resolve¹ a great hatred is sure to leave some hatred behind. How can this be regarded as good?²

Therefore, the sages hold the left half of the contract,³ and do not demand payment⁴ from others.

Virtuous people take charge of⁵ the contract,⁶ and those without virtue take charge of taxes.⁷

The way of Heaven⁸ is impartial.⁹ It is always with good people and helps them.¹⁰

¹ 和, 薛蕙 interprets as to resolve or reconcile (和解). The translation is from Bill Porter.

² The translation of this sentence and the second half of the first sentence is from Wing-tsit Chan. It perfectly expresses the original meaning and is very difficult to modify.

³ 契 is a written agreement. It is equivalent to what nowadays called a contract. In ancient times, contracts were carved in wood and cut apart in the middle, with each of the parties holding on to one half, so that the contract could be authenticated by matching the two pieces. The right side is superior and is held by the one creditor, and the left is held by the debtor. Therefore, the one with the left needs to give rather than request. (This interpretation—on the current sentence and the following one—is from 吳澄, 薛蕙 and 余培林.)

⁴ 責 means to demand or exact payment (吳澄：取財物於人曰責).

⁵ 司, I use Ames and Hall's translation 'take charge of' to express both the meaning of 'responsibility' and 'control' in the two clauses.

⁶ This refers to the previous passages 'the left half of the contract'. It is an analogy that the virtuous people always giving and never demanding.

⁷ 徹, 余培林 interprets as the name of a tax system in Zhou dynasty. It is also an analogy of those who are lack of virtue only demanding from others and never giving.

⁸ In the book of Laozi, the way of Heaven (天道) often refers to the natural way or some translate as self-so (自然之道).

⁹ 親 means personal favour or partiality (余培林：私也). The translation is from Lin Yutang.

¹⁰ 與, 余培林 interprets as help (助). It can also be interpreted as 'be with', so I double translate it.